



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

Alan Counsell
Interviewed by Dean Thomas

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Occupation:		Date and place of birth:	1937, Blackburn, Lancashire
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Tape 1 Side A [Track 1]

... Tape Side 1, interviewing Alan on the 26th of January, 2005. Right. So Alan, I wondered if you would tell me a bit about your early days. How far...

back

How far back do you remember?

How far back can I remember?

Yeah

My goodness. [pause] I don't know. A long time. [interviewer laughs] I suppose I can remember back to three years of age.

Is it?

Yes, I have done.

Yeah.

I have four brothers and one sister.

Okay.

And they played a big part in my childhood and some of those memories are of my early childhood. So maybe three years of age I remember being fed and carried by my brothers and sisters. My sister used to feed me, more than anybody else. She was, she's 12 years older than me, so I think I became her doll.

Okay.

And because Mother had younger children, my sister, whose name is Olive, kind of adopted me, so, she fed me and looked after me. Not that Mum didn't, Mum was always around, but...

So it was quite a big family

Yes.

How old were your other brothers?

My brothers, [laughs] I know that I've got two older ones: one is three and a half years older than me and one is about eight years older than me.

Okay.

And my sister is 13 years older than me, and I have a younger one who is four years younger than me, and a little one who is seven years younger me: and the little one is 6'7" tall.

Goodness!

That's why I call him my 'little brother' you see.

[interviewer laughs] *Okay*

You know, we had a big family, and that's my salvation, because there wasn't time to mollycoddle me or...

No

So I had to rough it with all the other kids.

Where did you live?

I was born in Blackburn, in Lancashire

OK.

With cobbled streets and terraced houses. All the neighbours cared for each other, and they cared for each others' kids: and it was a wonderful way to grow up. My Father was a crumpet baker and he was the fourth generation of crumpet bakers and we used to live next door to the bakehouse, and my dad used to bake from the very early hours of the morning, and deliver his goods during the day. So Dad was always there to see us off to school, and when we got home from school, and we all had our jobs to do in the bakehouse and it was a wonderful time. My Grandfather also worked in the bakehouse, so we saw Grandfather every day. So.

So was it a family business?

It was a family business, yeah.

Okay. So, Alan, the business was big part of your life?

Well, the family were a big part and still are a big part of my life, yes. I think, I think, because it was a family business. Yes, the bakehouse was central to our lives.

Yeah.

Umm.

And what about your Mum?

My Mum worked in the bakehouse with Dad, but she didn't start work until four o'clock in the morning.

Oh God!

And she'd go in the bakehouse at four o'clock, and then she would pop in another house. She'd get my sister off to work and my brother off to work and then come back and get everybody off to school and... so, she had a busy time.

Yeah. But what work did you do in the bakehouse?

Sorry what were the...?

What work did you do, in...

What was something of the bakehouse? Can you explain?

Facilitator: What work did you do?

Oh what did *I* do? [laughs]

Yeah.

Well, if you talk to my brothers and sisters, my main job was annoying them.

[Interviewer laughs.]

Yeah, yeah. There were all kinds of things I got involved in; and crumpets are made from batter. Father used to make batter in great big earthenware mugs.

Right.

Really big: and, these mugs had to be washed every day, and they were easily washed in the sink, you know, and when I was small, they used to put water in the mug on the floor, so that I could wash it on the floor...

Yeah

...on my hands on knees: and, because of my balance, which was never efficient, once or twice I fell in. So the whole family tell these stories about how they saved me from drowning, because I fell in the mug...

Oh God!

...in the bakehouse. They really were colossal...

[interviewer laughs]

... containers, so my job was to wash...

Yeah.

... maybe just one mug, it used to take me hours, but I was involved, you see.

I see, yes.

Or I would sit there eating crumpets.

[Interviewer laughs]

And the more I ate the less there were for other people to pack. So I had my uses.

Yeah. And did you do that every day?

Did I do that every day?

Umm.

Yeah

Wow!

Yeah. Maybe I fed the cats and... but I was involved...

Okay, Yeah.

...so I ...

What sort of memories have you got of your parents, and your brothers and sisters?

Lots and lots.

From a very early age?

I always say 'I wish I could be like my parents'. They were tremendous people: I mean, I don't know how they coped, but they were really good, really... loving and kind, but not overprotective and really strict. Really good. Of course, they had the support of the extended family. I had lots of Aunties and Uncles around so they used to come and help Mum and the neighbours were wonderful people. And they used to come and take me out of Mum's way [laughs]. And wonderful memories.

Tell us a bit about how you first found out you had cp.

I'm sorry I didn't get that: oh, how I felt about cp? Right. Right, Dean, this is really hard to tell. We had a family doctor called Dr Cowell and he had took care of Mum through all her pregnancies. Now I was baby number five. I had one sister who had died early in life, so I was baby number five. So the Doctor didn't bother too much about examining Mum, when she was pregnant, because she'd done it so many times before, the Doctor thought, 'She knows what's what, and if there's anything amiss

she'll come to me', and in those days, every time you went to the Doctor you had to pay, so maternity care was not like it is today. At about seven months, in my pregnancy Mum fell down the stairs, and, unknown to her, obviously did some damage. So that when I was born it was a very difficult birth, and I had to be resuscitated three times, in the first 24 hours, and Dr Cowell knew and suspected that I was going to have brain damage, but didn't say anything. And I didn't know, and my parents didn't know, that I had cp until I was 18 years of age, because Dr Cowell used to say, "Leave him alone and he will grow out of what's wrong with him and he will become better, the older he gets": and he never put the name 'cp' or 'spastic' or anything, to what I had: so, that wasn't in my vocabulary as a young child: so at the age of five, I would be five, all of my older brothers and sisters had gone to the same school, and I remember that, for some reason, I hadn't gone, and then, some time ago I wrote my life story, as you know. I went home to Mum, to ask what I should put in this book, you see. So she told me this story, of how the school wouldn't take me as a pupil. They said I had too many problems, and wouldn't take me, so Mum kept me at home, and this one particular day, the School Inspector came to the house, to see why I wasn't going to school, and, the story is that, as he knocked on the door, Mum was in the back of the house, bringing coal in for the living room fire. We didn't have central heating in those days. And as she entered the house, she put the bucket of coal down and went to answer the door, and as she walked back in the room, I had got from the chair in one corner to the coal bucket and knocked a lump off coal off and gashed my hand, and she told me that because that was the first time I had moved that distance on my own, and the School Inspector had come to see why I wasn't going to school. Fortunately, I think, while he was in the house, my Dad came home from work and my Grandmother also came to visit the house, so this Inspector was confronted by...

[Interviewer laughs]

... my Mum and my Dad and my Grandmother: and they told him that the Headmistress at the school had refused to take me, and my Grandmother was formidable, absolutely formidable, where I was concerned: and through that visit I got

to go to school, with the rest of the family; and my brother, can you imagine this, I thought nothing of it until I got older. I was five; my brother was about nine. He did, he used to carry me on his back to school in the morning. Came for me during playtime, that means he carried me around because I couldn't walk; carried me home at lunchtime, carried me back after school after lunch, and carried me back after school in the afternoon. That's a bit much, you know, for a nine-year-old, to carry a five-year-old, and he did that every day and never complained.

Crikey.

So I don't know how I felt about cerebral palsy.

No.

I just felt... one of the family.

So was it ever made an issue of?

Sorry?

Facilitator: Was it ever made an issue of?

Yeah.

Was it ever made an issue of? Yeah. Time and time and time. So much so that I still have problems today because of those issues. I remember once an issue was made: I think it always, always, always came from the Headmistress, and when I was seven, I remember it vividly, when I was seven, it was 'suggested' that I went to a school for retarded children. Because this mainstream school couldn't cope with me. Well, I remember that vividly, because my Dad used to fly into a rage [laughs] and then Grandmother would get involved and she was... [laughs] and I was kept away from school for 18 months, and Grandmother paid for a lawyer and he took the case to a

tribunal, and I remember, I think it may have been our first ride in a car, this particular morning.

Yeah.

Dr Cowell came in his car, and my Dad and I had to go to Manchester, to meet this tribunal, whoever they were, and my Dad was here, and Dr Cowell was here, and all of these people were sat around, firing questions at me: and they couldn't understand what I was saying. I couldn't speak at that time, so my Dad and the Doctor acted as my interpreters. That's better, etc.

[Interviewer laughs.]

And at the end of that tribunal, I got a certificate to say, that I had been found of 'above average intelligence, and of sane mind' [laughs], and, when we got home in the car all the neighbours and Grandmother, [laughs] they were all there, yeah, and a cheer went up.

[Interviewer laughs]

So I remember that bit, and I remember that argument between my Dad and my Grandmother. Because my Dad said, and I remember it so vividly, 'Wait till I go and show that Headmistress this certificate. We'll show them, I'll rub her nose in it' you see, and Grandmother said, 'No, you won't be doing that. You've got your work to do. I'm going to take him...'

[both laugh]

... and my Dad said, 'Oh no you're not. I am', and Grandmother said, 'No, no you're not. I am. I want to go'. So Mother said, 'No, I'm going to go.' So Mother went, and I returned to school. But I can remember one ... six months later, my Mum and Dad got a letter from the Headmistress again, and this letter said that she had invited a friend of hers to visit the school, and this friend had met me and talked to me etc, and he was

a Doctor, who had been an army doctor, and he would like to meet Mum and Dad, because he thought it would be better if my right arm was amputated, and I had a false limb. Well, this sent my Dad into orbit. It, well, and so I remember that. And then I had to go and meet this orthopaedic man in the local hospital; and there were issues about that, because, apparently, he talked to me like I was mental, and Mum and Dad weren't having that. So those were the issues I remember.

What about your, within the family?

I didn't think there were any issues in the family. They were absolutely great, and still are. I mean, now [laughs] they put me on a pedestal, and quite right too! So, I'm a bit like royalty [laughs], they go to visit my family. I'm very special [laughs]

Are they all still in Blackburn?

They are all in Blackburn.

Yes.

I've only got one brother and one sister left, and the family say they both died young because they had me as a brother you see, and I wore them out. [laughs]

I'm sure it's not true! Sorry, later on, when you were at school how, how did you get on with the other kids?

That's a difficult one. It's a long time ago! [laughs]

Sorry.

I think I've been really fortunate because, and maybe I already had a personality, and that may have seen me through. I always had at least one friend in whatever class it

was in school; but there was a few people who were unkind and, awful, but, they don't matter: and then maybe, it's good to meet that kind of kid...

Umm

... because I learned a lot from them. I learned how to cope with them: awkward, grotty adults, because of the people I met as a child. But I always had friends. Yeah, one or two friends, who...are still friends. I'm still in contact with people that I went to school with, at the age of five. There's still two of them, still email me, so obviously I made relationships.

That's good. So what, did you have any after school activities, or whatever?

No...Did you have...?

Any after school activities?

Er?

Facilitator: After school activities.

No, after school I went home to my family: that was the best activity I could ever...

Umm.

... have. Having said that, though, yes, we did have after school activities, yes: some of them, you don't want to know about.

[Interviewer laughs]

Oh go on.

We used to play out. We never played in the house. All the kids in the street used to play in the street, and there was always at least one adult watching us, and all the neighbours were just like our parents, so if you did anything wrong, you got clobbered, and...

[Interviewer laughs]

... you know, they didn't say 'You know my kid, so I'll tell your Mum and Dad', they dealt with it there and then. So we played together and, we did all kinds of things, that we shouldn't have, like: we used to have gas lamps, and on every gas lamp you had a bar under the lamp, you see, and people used to climb up and swing on this bar, and if you got caught, you got...

[End of Tape 1 Side A]

Tape 1 Side B [Track 2]

Side Two, okay Alan?

Yeah. So I've been left, hanging from the lamppost...

[Interviewer laughs]

for the past five minutes.

Yes

[laughs] So, [sound of chair? creaking] my brother used to put me up there and let me hang, you see: because they wanted me to do whatever they did, but, if an adult come, you see, they were able to drop down, and run.

[Interviewer laughs]

And I wasn't. So if an adult comes, they would all run, and just leave me hanging. So a neighbour would have to get me down, and then there'd be a ... right to-do, because all the kids in the street would be got together, and all the mum and dads would get together, and one of the neighbours would tell everybody how dangerous it was, to leave me hanging from a lamppost, because I was a bit different to them, you see. But nobody paid any heed because, the day after, I'd be put up the lamppost again.

[Interviewer laughs.]

At the bottom of the... where we lived, we had a church and a churchyard, and if we weren't watched, we like to climb over the railings of the churchyard and play among the trees etc, etc. Well, they used to have policemen who patrolled the streets, and if you were caught in the churchyard, you could get really told off, so if a policeman appeared, and patrolled the churchyard, everybody would run, climb over the railings and just run, you see: but I wasn't able to do that, so they used to hide me, behind the

bush and tell me to be quiet, and when the policemen had gone, they would come back and get me. So, those kind of things were my after school activities, right? Yeah.

So...

We used to do all kind of things like that.

Okay

They used to play knick knack, you know? They used to knock on people's doors, and run off, so that people'd open the door, and there's no one there. So...

[both laugh]

... they used to get me to do that because, they said, 'People don't think you could knock on the door, so you knock and just sit there. They won't blame you; they won't know who it is.' You see, they used to do all kinds of things like that. Really good fun.

And what about games?

Yeah we used to play marbles and hopscotch and football, and all kinds of street games. I used to sit and watch, cos I weren't able to walk, and I just watched, and joined in the fun and I was always there with my brothers and the other kids in the street, and even though I couldn't join in, I was there with them.

Did you get on better with any particular brother or sister?

Yeah, I got on well with all the family. I was really fortunate. I had my own family, and we were really a happy family, looking back, a happy family.

Umm.

And, I think, as with every family, we used to have our squabbles and arguments, but today, my brothers and sisters tell me, that they would never, ever win an argument with me. I used to get my own back. I have very shaky hands, and to this day... my brother died last year and at his funeral service, he asked that I would speak at his funeral service, so I did, and, part of my speech was about our childhood together: and if anybody [laughs] did anything at me, like they said, I used to get my own back. But very deviously: for example, I've got very shaky hands and feeding myself was very difficult, and I use to have a spasm.

Yes.

So I'd get a spoonful of potato, and it would just go, you see, and it would always hit somebody round the table...

[Interviewer laughs]

...so my brothers always said I did it on purpose, because they argued with me. Well, and so I would I do that on purpose? So all of their lives, they asked, they said, 'Did you used to throw your food at us on purpose?' And all I would say was, 'Would I do a thing like that?'

Course not.

So at my brother's funeral service, I gave this talk, about the story of feeding at the table, well my sister and my remaining brother, were sat on the edge of their seat, thinking I was going to confess: and I didn't.

[Interviewer laughs]

And I just said, you know, how disappointed I was that he thought, went to his grave, thinking that I could do a thing like that on purpose...

[Interviewer laughs]

... and that then he would never ever know now, would he? *[both laugh]*

That's great.

Wicked, I am. *[Facilitator laughs]* Or because I couldn't walk, you see, I used to shuffle about on my bottom. I couldn't crawl either, so I had my own way of getting around, and they argued with me: according to them, as they walked by me I would take my foot out and trip them up; and they'd say I did that on purpose because, they'd argued with me. Well I'm not that kind of person.

Course not.

No, and I believe you've got to take advantage of disability.

Well, yeah, why not... Okay, what happened when you went over to, erm... when you started secondary school?

What happened to my childhood home? Is that what you asked?

Facilitator: What happened when you started secondary school?

Oh dear.

Mm

Well, my first school was attached to my secondary school, you know, it was all one campus, so the kids who went from my first school to the secondary school, they all knew me. So I'd gone to school with them since I was five, so they were all used to me. I didn't have much trouble with that group, but the secondary school was bigger, so about four other primary schools fed into it, and many of those children had never ever met anybody like me before so I was a very interesting character.

Umm.

And they poked fun at me, and they did all kinds of things. Very painful memories of my secondary school.

What are your happiest, what are your happy memories?

I don't know whether I have or not: happy memories of my secondary school. I don't know. [laughs] I s'pose my happy memory is that, is three, yeah, three of the members of my family had gone there before me, and the Headmaster knew my family well: and he really cared, so he would try to stop the nasty things happening to me, and he would spend time with me, take me into his study... almost once a week and just talk to me, and make sure I was happy, and he was a wonderful guy and tried to support me at secondary school. That was good, and, I had friends in secondary school. And I did make a new friend, who turned out to be a very special person in my life, and she was really really big; really big so, I s'pose that, that made problems for her, so we kind of joined together, and became good friends, and went everywhere together and did everything together and I think I can truthfully say that it's through her that I learned to speak the way I do today. So that's a happy memory of my secondary school.

Good... How was your family? How did they react to your...erm...

I'm sorry, I didn't get that.

How did your family, erm, support you, throughout that period?

And do you want me to tell you? [laughs]

Please.

Well, my older brother, he was, what, nine years older than me, so he would be working. So I'm. I can say he was great. All my family were great anyway. He, whenever he could, he used to finish work early and come and meet me, at the school gates, and he sorted out a few kids, on my behalf. And then, my next older brother, he would always be there as well. So they were kind of my protectors, as I walked home from school, and if I could tell them what had happened during the day, and who had done what, then something would happen to the teaser. So that had, they were very supportive. They came and protected me, and did nasty things to certain individuals and never got caught [*laughs*]. And my next door neighbour, at that time was... I don't know, I've forgotten: they were related to the school caretaker, whether they were brothers or cousins, but they were related: and I think my next door neighbours knew that I had problems in school and I weren't very happy, so I think they had a word with the caretaker. He was always around, and he was always there. Sometimes I used to spend playtime in his little cupboard, talking to him and, so, I think lots of things happened without me knowing it.

Umm. Your friend that you were talking about early earlier, how close were you to her?

Earlier I was talking about who?

That girl.

Oh the girl, Eileen. How close were we?

Yeah.

Really close, really close. We shared a lot together and, she had a singing voice. I think she must have been 14. We left at school at 15. During the last year at school, she went to have her voice trained. She took singing lessons, and, [*laughs*] so got really friendly with her singing teacher, and I never found out the conversation she had with her singing teacher about me but, one day she asked if I would go with her,

to her singing lesson, and so I went with her, knowing that this was a ploy, for her singing teacher to meet me: and this woman was a teacher of elocution, as well as singing; and, from that meeting, a great thing happened, because Eileen took a big interest in my speech and we use to practise speaking for hours and hours: trying to get my speech clearer and clearer, and then, when I began work and I had my own money, I went for elocution lessons, and this woman really helped, really helped, because, in those days, you know, in the dark ages, I never knew a speech therapist.

No.

So Eileen and I were very close, always were, always were.

So, did you have any specialist support at school or not?

Did I have any other support?

Yeah.

From other people I went to school with? No.

Or any specialist support?

I didn't have any social workers, etc, etc.

Yeah.

Between the ages of 10 and 11, I had physiotherapy, and that was great, because my Mum had to take me down to the school clinic, for this physiotherapy, with a decree from my Father, that if anybody dare treat me like an imbecile, I would not go again. So I used to go and have this physiotherapy every Friday morning and on the way back, Mum would always, always, take me [*laughs*] for a treat: and she used to say, 'Right, what are we having today? What treat are we having?' So it might be a sandwich in Woolworths, or a bag of hot chestnuts, or roast potatoes. We use to have

vendors in the street, selling roasted chestnuts and hot potatoes, and things like that, you see, so every Friday, after physio. I would get a treat. And then I used to enjoy that, because when we got home, I used to tease the other kids, you see, because they never got the treats I got, you see, so somehow I used to, let them know that I'd had a sandwich in Woolworths, or a bag of hot potatoes.

[both laugh]

Etc etc. So no. No support.

Yes.

The neighbours were my Mother's support network. While I was off school for 18 months, I had a maths teacher, and I use to call her 'Mammy Brogden'; she was a surrogate mother to me and she use to take me into her home, and she used to teach me maths. And then I had a 'Mammy Buck', another surrogate mother, who was a neighbour, and she used to take me into her home and she use to read with me, and help me to write and spell. And I had another neighbour called 'Mrs Heap', and Mrs Heap would take me into her home, and she, oh!..., the patience that woman had. She would teach me to do things I couldn't do, like tie my shoes. Nobody else could ever teach me to tie a bow...

[Interviewer laughs]

... but she did, and it took hours and hours. And she'd stick at it, and never got ratty, or bad tempered... she just... And I tied me shoes with Mrs Heap, and she taught me to use a knife and a fork, and things like that. So all the neighbours supported each other.

Great. So, how did you celebrate special events like Christmas or birthdays?

Sorry? I didn't get that.

Facilitator: How did you celebrate special events like Christmas and birthdays?

Oh, every day was a special event in those days. I remember the War ending. We had a big street party; so I'd be, what, about seven?

Yeah.

Well, we always had a birthday party just the whole family, we didn't invite anybody else, and when you, when we were 21, we always had a big, big family party, you know: hire a hall, with a band, and we were a very family-orientated people, you know, celebrated within our own family.

What, were you a religious family?

Boy, oh boy, how do you answer that? *[both laugh.]* Erm... I can't tell you what I can't know My Mum and Dad were religious *[laughs]*. I think I can confirmed my Dad! *[laughs]*. At the moment, I know we weren't! I think Mum and Dad were religious: they met in a church setting. And when my Dad was 17, he wasn't even 18, he went to war. Mum and Dad knew each other before then. They were young, young kids together, in the church, and he went to war at 17. He said he was 18, to get into the army so he shouldn't have gone when he went, but ... and when he came home, he... he'd seen the most horrendous things: so religion to him wasn't there, but my Dad's family, my Dad's sisters, and brothers, use to take us to church, all of us: and my brothers were all choir boys, and so we all went to church, with my Aunties and Uncles, but not Mum and Dad, because of my Dad's experience in the War: but, my Dad was a very moral person and he would lay the law down, about how we should behave: and, and I think his morals were based on religion.

Was he political?

Pardon me?

Facilitator: Was he political? Was he political?

[laughs] Was he political? [laughs] He had a political opinion, [laughs] but no, he wasn't actively political. I think he should have been. He should have spoken for England.

[Interviewer laughs]

He had political views, yes.

Yes.

And I think I learned a lot from listening to him.

Umm.

And maybe I still remember the things he said, and they influence me today, in the ways I that I do things.

Yeah.

I often think, 'Cor I sound like my Dad!'

[both laugh]

Yes.

I think we all say that don't we [Interviewer laughs]

And I'm a chip off the old block, I think.

[Interviewer laughs]

And what about your Mum?

You're going back almost 70 years, Dean. My Mum was a woman of her time. She was industrious. She had a role in life, and at that time woman did not dabble in politics... [tape ran out]

[End of Tape 1 Side B]

Tape 2 Side A [Track 3]

Tape 2 side 1. Okay Alan, you were talking about your Mum.

Yeah, my Mum, I mean, she would vote, she use to go and vote: but never tell anybody who or what she voted for. Like most women in those days, they were wives. Very loyal to their husbands. They had a role. They were wives and mothers, first and foremost, so they didn't voice their opinions. I s'pose they were... more passive: a different kind of woman than you get today.

Umm.

So political opinion coming from me Mother, you would never hear.

Okay, erm, you spoke a little bit about your

Yes.

You spoke a little bit about your Father having firm moral...

Yes.

Principles.

Really. Yeah, I think... it was grossly unfair, that my father worked in the bakehouse from the early hours of the morning. He might begin work at 1 o'clock in the morning, which was all well and good, but, a policeman used to patrol the streets, and they would call into the bakehouse to get warm. So all the policemen knew my Dad, so when we were out and about, if we did anything wrong and the police talked to any of us, my dad always heard about it, because the coppers would visit him in the night.

[both laugh]

Very often we would say, 'How does he know about that?'

Umm.

And it was people visiting him in the night, so we use'd to get clobbered twice. But it wasn't just that. It was the way he dealt with it: he would get a lecture, about being talked to by the Police and, you know, his morals would come out there. It was the stigma to... being caught by the Police etc. Not like today. We didn't do anything serious: I mean, at one time, I went out with one brother and a few friends, and, there were some roadworks, surrounded by cones: and all I did was pick up a cone and put it on my head you see, acting daft.

[Interviewer laughs]

And not knowing that this policeman was behind me, you see, so I got told off for removing the street cone. You know...

Yeah.

... a silly little thing, but that was repeated to my Dad. So you got a lecture about why you had street cones and...

[Interviewer laughs]

and things like that, yeah.

Cheers, but what form of punishment did you get?

It depends what you did. If Dad thought it was serious, you'd get a good hiding. If it was... you might get your pocket money stopped, or you might get a few more jobs to

do, or you might not be able to go out. So it depends what you did as to what you got.
But, yeah, you got a good hiding now and again.

I see, yes.

Because of some misdemeanour.

Yeah. And was there a lot to do, around where you live?

Was there a lot of?

Facilitator: Was there a lot to do?

A lot to do?

Around where...

More to do, than today. We made our own friends, our own entertainment. In my childhood, there was no television, so, we had a big park not far from where we lived and, made good use of that, and, always, always out in the street, playing with the other kids: and, Saturday morning we used to go to the cinema. It used to cost a penny, I think, in the old money. We used to go in there. It was a special Saturday morning thing for kids that they use to have then. Cowboy films and, in the interval, you would have competitions, and all kinds of silly things like, who could knit an inch of knitting the quickest; and I don't know why I remember that but I do. All kinds of things...

[Interviewer laughs]

So, Saturday morning all the kids would go to the cinema. So ... and on the way back, we would go and visit Grandma, who always had a treat for us.

Good old Grandma.

Yes. And Grandad. Yeah. Grandad had a bird called 'Mickie'. He was a canary, and they'd had this canary for years and years, and a bath [?] that had been so old it wasn't true. And his cage was on a high cupboard and Grandad's chair would be under this cage kind of thing, and he always, always made a fuss of this bird. Always talked to it. Grandmother said he talked to the bird more than her.

[Facilitator laughs]

But when we appeared, you see, his attention would be given to us, and not the bird, and, Saturday morning was bathtime, for the bird, and Grandad put a birdbath on the cage, so that this bird could bath itself, and when we went from the cinema, and we always called in, Saturday lunchtime: maybe have lunch with them, you know, and this bird... Grandad would give us all his attention, and this bird, every time we went, would splatter him with water on his bald head, and Grandad said, 'He only does that because I'm talking to you. If you weren't here, I wouldn't get wet.' And Grandma would say, 'If they weren't here you won't be talking to me would you?'

[Interviewer laughs]

So, that's a memory I have.

Can you remember what sort of films?

Do I remember films? I remember...

At the cinema.

Did you say, 'did I remember films?'

What? Yeah. What sort of films? [both talk together]

As a schoolboy?

What sort of films were on at the cinema? [both talk together]

Facilitator: What sort of?

[laughs] Huh. Laurel and Hardy. Charlie Chaplin. Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, Roy Rodgers and Trigger. I can't remember, oh, Tarzan; we used to enjoy Tarzan. So way back before your time, Dean.

*Yes, I can remember films. [Alan coughs] But not from the first time round. [laughs]
So when did your parents get married?*

When did they get married?

Yes.

You've got me, you really have. Right. [Chair creaking] I think they got married... now, where are we now? 2004. They must have married about 1922, and they married in Blackburn in a Church, but really they surprised me. I do family history. I'm disappointed in myself but, I didn't know what date. [laughs]. And they got married in a church in Blackburn. That I really didn't know.

Yeah.

The way I've come to do research...

Yeah.

...most of my mother's family, for generations, have attended this church, so all of my mother's family records are recorded in this church, St Thomas's Church, in Blackburn, but I never knew that, till recently.

Right.

Really interesting.

Yes. How far back have you gone?

How far back have I gone?

Yes.

[Facilitator sneezes]

Seventeen hundreds?

Really?

Umm.

That's good.

Yeah, yeah.

Have you found anything unusual?

I found out a few things that are unusual, shocking, erm, skeletons in the cupboard

[Facilitator sneezes]

Yeah, really fascinating.

So you were born, just before the war?

Yeah, in 1937.

Yeah.

So I do have memories of the war. We had an air-raid shelter in our backyard, so when the sirens went, in the Second World War, my Dad was an air-raid warden, so he used to patrol Blackburn, out looking for bombers and fires and...

Yes.

Whatever air-raid wardens did, so he was never, ever with us, in the air-raid shelter: so when the sirens went, Mother would gather the children together, and we'd go in this air-raid shelter and we could hear the bombs and the guns and everything. And, next door to us, we had a couple, Mr and Mrs Earnshaw, and they shared our air-raid shelter, and Mum would gather up all the kids and go in this air-raid shelter. Mrs Earnshaw, who had no kids, she would make chocolate and collect goodies, and [both laugh] and I remember that, you know, [background noise] going in this air-raid shelter, during the war.

How many times?

Oh very often, very often.

Yes.

I don't know why Blackburn was such a target, but it was. And I remember a big, big bomb going off, not far from our home.

Right.

Yeah.

So was your Father out of work quite a lot, after the War?

No, my father and my grandfather carried on the family business.

Yes.

When Dad had to go out on duty, Grandfather would be in the bakehouse working, and even though the sirens went, Grandfather would continue to work.

Oh.

And Grandmother used to say, 'He'll be all right. He's too ill to die. Nothing'll kill him so don't worry'.

[Interviewer laughs] Crazy!

We had a cat that kept the bakehouse free of mice, and this cat, well, it was a real character, and it used to walk up the street, in the middle of the night, to meet Grandfather, and the cat would walk back down the street with Grandfather to the bakehouse. So every day, he used to come at a certain time, and this cat knew. It used to go and meet him.

Weird, yeah.

Yeah. Grandmother always said that Grandfather saw more of the cat...

Interviewer laughs

... and the bird, than he did of her, and he used to say, 'Well yes. They treat me much better than you do.'

[both laugh]

Did your Grandma work in the bakery as well?

Grandmother never worked, but women didn't work in those days.

No.

They were kept by the men you see.

Yes.

Grandmother was a very unusual woman. She used to sing in pubs, at weddings, at funerals. She had a really good singing voice, and she use to be a medium, a Spiritualist, so she could see things. But nobody else in the family shared her religion. She was, erm, an unusual character.

Yes

Very flamboyant, very... formidable. Nobody would ever get one over on her.

[Interviewer laughs].

Very protective of all our family.

And how many children did they have?

Oh dear. I think about 10.

Okay.

She had... I think she had two sets of twins, who died early, you know.

Yes.

I'm trying to think now. One, two, three, four, five. She had five. No. One, two, three. She had six that survived, and these two sets of twins who died: so 10 altogether.

Oh.

And she used to protect them like nobody's business. And my Dad was the only... son to have any children, so Grandma used to protect us as well, as kids.

Yes.

She was terrible. Nobody could ever say a word wrong, about any of us, or she'd be in there. She used to walk with a walking stick. And I'm not sure she ever needed it to walk, I'll tell you.

[Interviewer laughs]

She was terrible.

[Interviewer laughs]

'Don't you dare talk about so and so like that'. Oh boy. Yes.

Yeah.

And she used to come to school: I had difficulty eating and drinking etc, etc, and she would appear at the school every day, with a big towel and a bottle of milk, with a teat on it, and she use to give me this bottle of milk through the school railings, every day, and my brother, Joe, would help her. He would be on the school side of the building, and he would tie this big towel around me, so I didn't make a mess, and Grandma would pour the bottle through the railings. Yeah, because she didn't want me to miss out on any nourishment. Yeah.

Did you all live quite near?

Yeah, we were all, very, very close. I think, what, five minutes' walk, and you always had auntie or an uncle, or, whoever.

It's not like that...

[both talk together]

Yeah, we all lived in one area.

It's not like that any more, is it?

No, more's the pity.

[pause]

You can tell he went to Coventry, can't you?

[Interviewer laughs]

Yeah, big gap. Big gap says 'Coventry University'.

[Interviewer laughs] yeah, okay, okay

[Interviewer laughs]

I went to Cambridge, you see.

We'll come on to that next time.

Sorry?

Facilitator: We'll come onto that next time. University.

Well yes.

Yes.

[laughs] I may not want to tell you about my university. Carry on. [laughs]

Yes. Can we just please talk about, talking about any highlights? Have you got any highlights or good memories you've got of that period?

You want the highlights of what?

Of the first 10 to 15 years of your life.

Any highlights?

Yeah [laughs].

I think the highlights were having that certificate to say I was of above-average intelligence, and of sane mind, because my grandma and grandad would use it, my grandma and dad would use it, and they would say to people, who trait [phon. for 'treat'] me like they didn't want me being treated, they would say, 'Have you ever been proven sane? Do you have an above-average intelligence?'

[laughs]

Because he has a certificate to say, 'Now, I really question your sanity, but you can't question his. So don't talk to him like that.' That was a big, a big highlight, I think, that they could boast about my intellect, you see. That's a highlight. Another highlight was that, when my sister got married, I don't know how old I'd be? I'd be 10: 10 or

11. I wasn't much to look at, at that age. It was obvious, at that age I had cerebral palsy; and every member of the family had been found, something to do at this wedding; usher or a groomsman, or whatever. But, there was no role for me, because I didn't walk, I didn't talk, you see: so the family debated, and bec... I didn't care. I didn't bother. I don't think I was that much aware, that I'd been left out: but, all the family got together and debated this, this wedding, and what I could do. Nobody wanted me to be left out, you see, and they were all trying desperately to involve me and come up with a job and there really wasn't a job I could do: but from that wedding [laughs], from that discussion, a big argument arose that made me laugh, even today: and the argument was between Olive, my sister, who was getting married, and John, who was the oldest brother, the eldest son. And the argument was that when mum and dad died, Olive would take care of me. I would go and live with Olive. And John said: 'You will not. I will have Alan. I'll take care of Alan.' And these two were arguing about my care in later years. And I thought that was quite something I'd never thought about. But they [were] both disappointed because I've never needed care. So that's, you know, a big highlight.

Can you remember when that happened?

Can I remember what happened?

Can you remember that, when that happened??

Facilitator: When that happened?

When that happened: that happened just before my sister got married, when...

What I mean is: do you remember it taking place?

Facilitator: You can remember the discussion taking place?

Oh yeah, yeah.

Wow.

Yeah. I remember that well, yeah. I remember Olive being 21. How was I, how old would I be then? About seven? Seven, I think: and, this would be, maybe just after the War I think, yeah, yeah. So... Olive was 21, so, traditionally, there was a big family party where all the aunts, uncles, cousins, you know, friends, a very big party, but, at that time you couldn't buy clothes. You had to have clothing coupons, and I think there was just enough clothing coupons for your minimal needs and Grandma decided... I know it was Grandma decided that, Olive could not have a 21st birthday party without a special dress. But you couldn't buy a special dress because you couldn't get clothing coupons, and somehow Grandma, got enough coupons [laughs] enough coupons, to buy Olive this dress.

Yes.

It was a blue satin gown, I remember it well, and, so all the family, you know, there was lots of conjecture. How did Grandma get these clothing coupons?

[Interviewer laughs]

And my own opinion is that she used to sing in pubs, now and again...

Umm.

...and I think she got them from people in pubs. Maybe bought them from people, or...

Yes.

I don't think she would do it illegally. I'm sure it was all legal and above board, but this blue satin gown, I remember that, and there was a right to do in the family. Yeah. But that was Grandma: we always had to have the best.

Yes...

[End of Tape 2 Side A]

Tape 3 Side A [Track 4]

Tape 3, with Alan, on the 16th February '05. Thanks, Alan, for meeting me again. I think last time, we left off when you were at school.

I'm impressed. But I guess you only know that, because you've listened [interviewer laughs] to the tape before going...

Yes.

you came, right? Yeah we did. We talked about my schooling, I think.

Mm.

But, thinking back, I wonder if, erm ... I gave the right impression. It was very difficult to go through to school: in a mainstream school, it wasn't easy, and although I coped with it, looking back, really horrendous, compared to what's on offer today: and meeting all the medical people during, throughout my school years has left me with attitudes and prejudice towards doctors [laughs] still today. I don't trust them. You know, I met doctors who wanted to cut off my right arm and hand, and who said I was mentally deficient, and that leaves scarring: so it wasn't easy. However, we're going to progress are we?

Yeah, hopefully. Is there anything specific you want to say about all that before we move on?

I think I realised that because of my speech difficulty, which was horrendous when I was young. It was very isolating, so making [talking together] friends wasn't easy:

Mm.

And my family was my salvation, because they were friends as well as brothers, and that helped a great deal, and if I didn't have them I would have been really isolated.

Well, what happened around the time when you left school?

Oh boy. Well, we had a career advisor called Mr Jolly, and he's one of the people I would love to meet today. He must be dead now; he must be long gone. But he gave no hope: me in work? You know, and then all, everybody in my form at school had got jobs, but not me, and so... I don't know what you'd call it [laughs], I had a relapse. I became really obstinate. I refused to get out of bed, and refused to feed myself and I was in a right mess; and my mum, she must have been very brave, she knew a fellow from her past, who was some kind of a boss in a cotton mill, and she went to visit this man. She hadn't seen him for... 20-odd years, but she went to find him and he gave me a job, and I got this job as a warehouse boy, in a cotton mill; but not because of the career officer: because of my mum. So that kind of spurred me on and I resumed eating and walking and all that, you see.

For how long, before you got that first job. How long was it?

I was 15 when I had to go and work, and I got the job about six weeks before I left school.

Yeah.

The best experience I could ever have had, looking back. It was a finishing school for me: it was wonderful. I worked in a big warehouse, I was a warehouse boy, and my job was to fold and stack the material that had been woven in the mill, and to go on messages for inspectors. Well when I began work, to my surprise, one of my aunties and one of my uncles were weavers at the same factory, so that was a boost for me; and when I walked into the warehouse most people said, 'He won't be able to do this job' because you had to lift heavy bundles of material: but I did it.

That's good

I did it. And... the weavers were paid on the amount of material they wove. They didn't get a standard wage; they had to work for their money. The more they produced, the more money they got at the end of the week. So they couldn't be mucked about, and they treated me like any other person,

Mm.

because they were in business to make money, and I think they made me mature, they made me grow up. They wouldn't stand any nonsense: so, did me good: and I worked with two other lads, about a year older than me, and I don't know how they did it, they were... magnificent, and I still keep in touch with them today. That's... 53 years, and it was as though somebody had explained to them the problems I had, because they both took me under their wing, and, and taught me a great deal. For example if someone said 'Good morning' to me, I might nod at them but I didn't speak, 'cause no-one understood me anyway. So one of the lads called Arthur said to me one day, "Do you know how stupid, and ignorant, and stuck-up you appear when you don't say 'Good morning' back?" I never thought of that, you see. So it's little things like that. They really taught me a lot: and I'd no desire to go out with girls, or make friends, but these two, they wouldn't leave me alone. No. They took me out with them, and they got me dates with different girls and they really made me grow up. And I'd been in the mill just under a year, and Eileen came to work there. Do you remember Eileen? My friend from school.

Yeah.

She was really big.

Yeah:

She had

Yeah:

something wrong with her glands.

Yeah: yeah.

I meet her...and me, and she came to work in the mill, and she worked in the warehouse, where I worked: and she took singing lessons, and I think I mentioned this before,

Mm.

and she introduced me to her singing teacher, and I went for elocution, and my speech improved tremendously: and with my speech, my thought processes changed and, I think, if you don't speak, you think differently. Do you know what I mean?

Mm

So I think I became more alive and more... well just more human;

Yes.

and it was really great, to be able to speak to people, and have them understand what I was saying. That was excellent.

That's great, yeah.

It was fantastic. And everybody in the cotton mill, everybody I worked with, would comment, and would be happy for me, and, and it was just a wonderful experience.

Sure, so did you, did you carry on having elucution, elocution [both laughing] when you were at work?

Yes. [laughs] Well, my elocution teacher was a bit eccentric actually, but wonderful anyway: and she wanted me to go twice a week. It was actually very costly, so notes were taken round: 'I never told you this before but I know who you are,' she said. 'I know your dad. I know your dad's family very well,' she said, 'so why don't you come one, no, come and see me twice a week, but only pay for one lesson, one session: and the other session you can pay for in crumpets.' [Interviewer laughs] Because my dad was a crumpet maker, you see. [Interviewer laughs] I used to take her a dozen crumpets, in payment for one of the lessons. [Talking together] So,

Wow.

I had elocution for three years.

OK. How much were you paid?

in the cotton mill?

Yes.

I started on about £1.75 a week, young man. It was actually a pound and ten, but in today's money...

OK.

It was about £1.75.

Yes.

And then I progressed, and became what they call 'a cut-looker', and that's a cloth inspector.

A what?

A 'cut-looker'. So the weavers would cut their cloth. It'd be on the roll, and they would cut it to their, a certain length and that was going to cut, and then they would send it to me and I would inspect it for faults, etc, and if the fault could have been avoided, I would have to send for the weaver and tell them what was what. I went to night school. I studied textiles for three years, and got a City and Guilds before I could progress: and that was fun. We had to do all kinds of... stupid things [laughs] like take a loom to bits. Do you know what a Jacquard is?

No. What is it?

Can't see anything here. Like that tablecloth is woven with a Jacquard. It's a bouquet. The pattern is woven in the material, rather than printed on, like the curtains.

Yeah.

So, a plain material is woven on a 'dobby' and though they're complicated enough, I could get my head round the dobbie, and I could use a dobbie, I could weave on the dobbie; but a 'Jacquard': something else. They're, it's like a music box. There's cards and there's holes, punched in the cards and, to get the pattern in the fabric: and these cards might be five foot long, and they hang up and they go round with the rim, you see, and in order to push those down, they had to make a 'Jacquard'. Oh boy, it's so complicated, really complicated: and Arthur and Raymond, the two warehouse lads, we all went on the course together; a three-year course. Well, they had the hands and their strength, I had the brain, but when it came to 'Jacquards', somehow my brain didn't work, [both laugh] and we got in a right pickle, a right pickle, but we got there in the end!

How are they made?

Sorry?

How do you make them?

How do I...?

Make them. [Facilitator]

Make Jacquards?

Yeah.

On the machine. You know, you've got to move the cards around

Yes.

and press the different buttons for different holes. [Interviewer clears throat] I suppose today it's done by computer,

Yes.

I think.

Yes.

I don't know.

So you went to night school.

I went to night school. It's called a 'Technical College'. I went one day a week, day release, and two evenings a week, for three years to get City and Guilds. They made you work in them days!

And how was it?

How was it? All right. Because I had Arthur and Raymond with me, and I got on all right I think, because these two accepted me well, other people did.

Yes.

And because my speech was much better at that time, I think it was easier for other people to communicate with me.

Yes.

I did all right.

Did you have any problems, getting on the course in the first place?

Not that one, no. No.

That's good

Not on that one. And I don't know why I was so readily accepted. We had different tutors, and, you know, two of them had problems with me, because they'd never met anyone like me in the technical college, but I think they saw that I was willing to work and willing to try, so, eventually they became very helpful.

Mm, that's good. Did you get to know many people in the factory?

I don't remember having any enemies in the factory. They were really, really good to me. Really. Really good.

Oh, good.

At first it was difficult, but, I don't know, they were just really nice people, basically. Everybody, everybody was so nice. I used to have to go round... I'm going back a long time, [laughs] 1960, to be correct.

Yes.

I used to have to go round the factory at about 11 o'clock and say, 'Did anyone want anything warming? I'm putting the oven on.' They had a great oven, a great big one, where all the workers could warm their lunch if they wanted. They didn't have a canteen or anything like that, you see, and I used to have to collect all their dinners, all their lunches, to warm in the oven, and this one man, every day used to say, 'No I haven't, I've got sandwiches'. He said, 'I wish I had a hot lunch. I'd sooner have a hot lunch than sandwiches,' so I used to pull his leg and say, 'You know, you ought to be the boss in your home and tell your wife to pack you [interviewer laughs] something warm,' you see. So I went to him one day and he said, 'It worked. I've got a warm lunch.' I said 'What have you got?' 'I don't know but put it in the oven. It will be a surprise,' so I took this package from him and just put it in the oven, and then they used to go and get their own lunch, so, during the afternoon, as I was passing this man I said, 'Did you enjoy your lunch?' And he says, 'I'm gonna bloody kill 'er. Wait 'til I get home, I'll kill 'er.' I said, 'Why?' He said 'Do you know what my warm lunch was? No,' he says. 'Mustard sandwiches!' [All laugh] I'll never forget that [laughs]. So we used to have some laughs.

You were popular.

Yeah [laughs]

Oh, god...that's good. I bet she's never given any more.

I know, I bet he's never asked for one [They laugh] again.

Then from the mill, I became allergic to new fabrics: nylon and Terylene and man-made fibres. I developed asthma, so I had to leave the cotton mill, so I got a job with 'Action For ...' now what was it? 'Action For The Crippled Child', something like that. I forget. I've really no idea how I got this job. Well, you know, first of all, I had to go to the job centre, the Unemployment Exchange, and they sent me away eventually to train as a gardener's labourer. Oh, I hate gardening. I was away from home for three months, and when I came back they couldn't find me a job anyway, so I found my own job, basically.

It was a guide for this charity, 'Action for Crippled Children'; and what I had to do was I went to London and they trained me to do this job, and I had to meet lots of people from different countries, and take them round England, and show them how we cared for, educated, treated children with... they called them 'crippled children' in those days, so I got to meet lots and lots of people: and that lasted about 18 months, and then I got a job in a hospital. I was therapy assistant, so I used to work with occupational therapists, physiotherapists, etc., and became a nurse in a 'Sub-normality Hospital'. And, er, that frightened the life out of me, because, had the authorities had had their way, in my early years, that's where I would have ended up, and that was terrible.

What was the hospital called?

The hospital was called 'Calderstones' and it was down in Whalley, in Lancashire, between Blackburn and Burnley.

Yes.

So it used to be a military hospital, in the First World War, and they converted it into a 'Sub-normality Hospital'. It had 2,000 patients.

So you had to train to be a nurse?

Yeah, erm, I, the medical superintendent at the hospital was... something else. He was wonderful. He was called Doctor Robinson. Robertson; and I used to be aware that he was watching me, you know, when I was working with the therapist, I was often aware that he was there, and I thought, 'What is he watching me for? Is he going to get rid of me?' you know: very negative thoughts. I didn't think he was thinking, how good I was, you know. So eventually, he called me into his office, and the chief male nurse was with him and they offered me a student nurse position. I was so shocked: so I became a student nurse: and the first time I had to wash a dead body... oh boy. There was two of us [laughs] and we had, you know, a staff nurse came and said, 'Could you wash the body, and take it to the mortuary?' We'd only been student nurses about three weeks, and it wasn't like today. You went right into the wards, and you spent one day a week in school. Well, no-one told us anything about dead bodies, and we were washing this dead body and we moved it round. The noise this body made. We both ran, and hid behind the [inaudible??] [both laugh] and we got told off. [both laugh] Oh well, that's how you learnt to be a nurse in them days. [both laugh] And then from, then in my second year as a student, I had to learn how to measure medicine and how to give injections, but because of my shaky hands, it just wasn't possible, so after the second year Dr Robertson called me in again,

[End of Tape 3 Side A]

Tape 3 Side B [Track 5]

He called me into his office. There was a new law had come out, whereby many of the high grades, we had high grades in those days, many of the high-grade patients had to be rehabilitated, and got out of the hospital, somehow, somewhere; and he wanted me to set up a rehabilitation programme, so that's what I did. It was really, really exciting. I loved that job.

So what sort of hospital was it?

What sort of...?

Hospital. [Facilitator]

Hospital? It was 'sub-normality'. What they called 'sub-normality'. They call it 'learning difficulty' today.

Yes.

You know. I, I, that two years as a nurse really taught me so much. I mean, the staff were not used to having the likes of me as a nurse. They were used to having the likes of me as a patient.

Yeah.

And the way they treated me was terrible, so I had to be really assertive. But Dr Robertson and the chief male nurse, they used to back me up and they used to come in, and help me knock down these non-disabled [laughing] staff nurses.

I suppose it was quite forward-thinking for that time?

Dr Robertson was very forward-thinking. I got into trouble one day, big trouble, and I was absolutely furious because of my own experience. I couldn't stop thinking that...

had the education authorities have had their way, when they said I was mentally defective, I could have ended up as a patient in that hospital; and that was a rather daunting thought: and they had a block, a ward, called 'H Block', and, you know, they had ABCD wards. H was a ward for low-grade patients; that meant their intelligence was very low, and they also had behaviour problems. Many of them had to be restrained for a time; every student had to do at least one month on H Block, and my first day there I just lost it. I went into orbit, oh, terrible. We had to feed the patients, and the staff on the ward got, er, a main course, and a dessert and mixed them both together, and fed it to the patients. I couldn't do that. I kept thinking, 'This could be me', you know, 'this, this could be me'. There's no way I'd want my food like that: so I refused to do it, so I was reported to the chief male nurse, for not doing what I was told. You know, a Charge Nurse was like God in them days. [Interviewer laughs] So when I had to go before the chief male nurse, he said 'What have you done now?' [Interviewer laughs] 'What have you been up to now?' So I told him, and he said, 'They don't do that?' I said, 'They do.' 'Right,' he said 'just go back to work,' and I went back to H Ward; oh, and the treatment I got on that ward was terrible, and then, the following lunchtime, when lunch had been served, the patients were being fed, the chief male nurse appeared, so he could see for himself. Well, my name was mud, because they were told that had to stop. They had to feed a main course, and then a dessert, so all the staff blamed me, and it was me, but, and I just could not mix ... Terrible [talking together] practices, terrible. Terrible.

Awful.

So I used to get in trouble [interviewer laughs] with things like that, you see.

So, erm, what was the rehab project you were on?

Right, first of all it was really complicated, maybe because I'm a bit thick, [Both laugh] but, first of all, all of the people who went into rehab, first of all had to be, had to go to tribunal, because many of these high-grade patients had come through courts, rather than through the health system. They'd done that, and they'd broken the law

and the courts had found them to be, to have learning difficulties, so they'd sent them to hospital, rather than to prison, so before these people could be rehabilitated, there had to be a tribunal:

Mm hm.

and I had to represent them at the tribunal, so first of all, I had to get to know every patient, then I had to visit their home and speak to Mum and Dad or, whoever, and that was difficult, because when I arrived they didn't expect a disabled guy, [laughs] and that had its problems. So that's how we began. We began by getting to know their background better, and presenting that background at tribunal, and then, from there, we had to do a career analysis, kind of finding out what kind of work they might be eligible for, or interested in or... you know, what aptitude they had, for what jobs: and then I'd go to their home area and find an employer who might employ them, and find out what they needed to know to do that job, and go back to the hospital, and teach them the skills that they required to do a job: as well as... personal hygiene, day-to-day living, that kind of thing: and I loved it, it was really good. A five-year programme. Really good.

So was all that done through the hospital?

Yeah. Yeah. I was employed by the hospital, and I had about... 14 members of staff working under me. Can you imagine my parents? [laughs] They could not believe that there was, yeah. [Phone ringing in background.]

No: but how long did it take for you to get to there, from working in the mill?

Ooh: '53? About 12 years: 12 years.

Erm, you, you...

It's not my intellect; it's my personality, and charm!

[laughs] Of course, yeah I can see that!

And my good looks [both laugh].

So let me get this right. Did you leave school with any qualifications?

No: no.

And all the training you did on, at work?

Yeah, yeah. Then I... got married. [laughs] I got married and...

You fool!

No; no, the best thing I ever did. [laughs] It is coming up to 40 years. I've been married almost 40 years,

Wow.

and it worked for me: and we'd been married about, what, two years, maybe a bit less, and my wife became pregnant. That was smashing, but every day I went to work, and my rehab unit was next to the school, the hospital school, so every day I saw these kids with mental ... problems, learning difficulties, and I, n,..., because of my own disability it became really hard. I was sure that my baby would be born with some kind of disability, and that really bugged me, and I couldn't talk to my wife about it, I didn't want to upset her: so I must have bottled it all up, and when the baby was born, it was smashing. Not quite as handsome as I am but, you know, passable.

Yes.

And I had time off work, after my wife came home from the hospital, and when the time came to go back to work, I got up to go to work and I vomited. I didn't know

what was wrong, and I went to the doctor and he said, 'Have a few more days off.' Fine, I was really well, got up to go to work and I vomited, and never went back to work, because, you know, it was traumatic, thinking I was going to have a disabled baby: and that really shook me, because what was wrong with having a disability? But I didn't want my kid to have one. [laughs] So that really made me ill: and Dr Robertson was so good. He wrote to the psychiatrist, obviously, so good. He said 'Right, all right, you're not coming back,' he said, 'but I'm not going to let you go'. He said, 'I want you to apply for college, and become a teacher: a teacher of the mentally handicapped.' He said, 'You won't come back to work here,' he said, 'but we'll support you while you're at college'. So I applied to become, to go on this course for teachers of the mentally handicapped. Terrible. I went for an interview, and this man called Mr Feetny, [ph] he became my enemy. He said, 'There's no way you could become a teacher of the mentally handicapped. Why do you think you could do it? How are people going to cope with your speech? A teacher, and they can't tell what you say.' That really made me angry so I said to him, 'I've just been sat in the waiting room, next to an Asian man, and I can't tell a word he says. Are you going to stand up to him when he comes in for an interview?' And he went really red; yes, and I wouldn't let it go, I made a right fuss because I thought, 'They're not going to accept me anyway' so I was really bolshy and cheeky! [laughs] And I got a place.

Oh, good

And the first lecture I had was this Mr Feetny. I was sat on the front row. He walked in and 'Oh God!' he said, 'I'm frightened to death of you,' and he turned to the class and said, 'This man is absolutely formidable,' he said, 'never cross him. Be careful what you say to him, because you won't win.' [Both laugh] So there you go. So after that, I became a teacher at Meldreth Manor School, for the Spastics Society.

Yes. Where did you do your teacher training?

Oh yeah, well, I did that in Preston, at the Harris College.

Yes.

But I also had to train to be a rehabilitation officer, a social worker rehabilitation officer. I did that at Manchester University at a college called 'Bretton House', but that was a social work... thing.

How long did all that take?

My social work qualification was a three-year programme, you know: part-time not full-time.

Yeah.

And my teaching, teaching thingy whats-it, I think was two years.

Yeah. That's a long time.

While I was in Calderstones Hospital, I also worked with Margaret Morgan: and if you don't know Margaret Morgan you're not educated! [Interviewer laughs.] Margaret Morgan was the Employment Officer for The Spastics Society, and we had many people in the hospital who had cerebral palsy...

Yes.

So I contacted The Spastics Society, about the rehabilitation programme, and met Margaret Morgan, and she used to have me, about three times a year, I used to go on assessment courses, where we would take people on, from all around the country: people from Delarue, [School] for example, would come on an assessment course; a week-long assessment course; and we would assess them for employment. So I had been involved with The Spastics Society before I went to work for them, full time.

Well, I want to hear about how you met your wife, and all that.

You don't want to know how I met my wife.

I do.

No you don't.

Yes I do.

Rubbish!

But did you meet your wife when you were working?

No. They used to call me 'Casanova Counsell'. [Interviewer laughs] because I liked dancing; I used to go dancing. At the hospital in particular they used to have dinner dances, almost every week, a staff dinner dance, and now I'd never been known to go to a dinner dance with the same girl, so I had a different girl every week, you see. Either one of the nurses, or someone from outside, you see, [interviewer laughs] and Catherine attended the church I attended, and that was, that's where we met, and I took her to a dinner dance one week at the hospital, and then I took her again the week after, and everybody in the hospital said, 'You've had it. You're going to marry her! Bringing her to a dance two weeks on the trot! [Both laugh] This is very serious.' And, yes, I ended up marrying her.

Cool.

The best thing I ever did.

So you carried on, taking her to the dinner dances?

Yeah. Yeah. We've really had a wonderful life.

Sorry, sorry, I'm going a bit all over the place but there's so much you can tell.

Now who's all over the place: him or me?

I am. I am. I'm all over the place.

And you're supposed to be a professional. You're supposed to keep me on track. And keep me focussed.

I know. Right. Can you tell me a bit about courting your wife, and then getting married?

Why do you want to know about that?

People want to know. [Alan laughs.] People will be interested.

You reckon?

Yeah. Well, I...

Well. I don't know what to tell you.

I only ...

We went out for... oh I don't know... three or four months, and I knew she was the one I was going to marry so I asked her to marry me. I think our first date was September. I mean, we'd known each other before then but not as girlfriend-boyfriend you know.

What year?

What year. Don't you ask some awkward questions? We married in '66, so we courted in '65. So, I got on well with her mum, and her dad, and then Katherine got on well with my family: but her brother: oh. Her brother is a very famous man as well, in educational circles. He just did, could not accept me, and he thought that Katherine should not marry me; and all kinds of things came from that, you see. He even told relatives, and wouldn't, like, let people meet me, and make their own minds up, he kind of coloured their thinking, so Catherine had a bit of a hard time; but nevertheless we married, and... so...

That was good.

Mm.

Very good.

Yeah, we got married, and one of the things I regret; it was oversight, I just never thought: we got married and we had a big, a big wedding really, and came out of the church and everybody was thronging round us, and then this big man came and gave me a hug, and I didn't know who it was until he let me go: and it was Dr Tyler, the doctor who delivered me.

Wow.

And I hadn't seen him for years because I'd then moved out of my home, my parents' home. I lived in a flat of my own in the next town, so I had to change doctors, but he was there, outside the church, and that really took my breath away: and he gave me this bear hug and he said, 'You... never invited me,' he said, 'but I wouldn't have missed it for anything.' They don't make them like that any more, do they?

No.

That was just wonderful. Mm.

Did you keep in touch after that?

No. I never saw him after that. I knew that he had died because my family read it in the paper. Mm. We'd only been married four years when we moved to Meldreth. We had a school house at Meldreth [Manor School].

That was your first job, when you were working for the Spastics Society? Was that your first teaching job?

My first teaching job, yeah.

Yeah.

And when I went there, it was a Mr Crabbe, who was the head teacher, the headmaster. What a wonderful man: a wonderful man, and I really enjoyed it. Been there two years and Mr Crabbe retired, and we got a new Principal called Mr Brown, and Mr Brown, wow! Wow! [laughs] He was like a second father. He was ... wonderful; wonderful. He really... I don't know why, but he just... took a shine to me, and I was promoted, and all my ideas were put into practice, and it was marvellous, and the deputy head was a Trevor Jeavons, who came from Delarue. And Trevor and I, well, we're still friends; we still get on so well. So through Mr Brown, I did all kinds of work at Meldreth, and, aww, wonderful stuff: things that had never been done before.

What?

I used to take the kids camping. Can you imagine 30 kids,

Yes.

all with physical and mental problems? I took them camping every year, at Knebworth Park. Now Knebworth Park belongs to Lord Linton; Lytton; Lord Lytton, and at that time it was the dad, Lord Lytton was the dad of the family.

[End of Tape 3 Side B]

Tape 4 Side A [Track 6]

Thank you.

[Both laugh]

Don't say you're cold; we had to put him on a diet.

[Doorbell]

I'm not going. [Laughs] Katherine can deal with it.

[Laughs] Ok, so what sort of, what other things did you do?

Oh yeah, I was telling you about camping in Knebworth House, yes.

Yeah, yeah.

I became friendly with David [Lyn Tutor Boyd] who... is, and was a jousting knight. He used to joust on horseback.

Oh Yeah.

And my kids used to love to go and watch, you see, and David became aware that I was there every year with these kids, so eventually we became friendly and he said, 'How would you like to have a go at jousting?' and I said 'No, I wouldn't,' because, you know, it would take me all my time to balance on a horse, never mind be hit by him: [both laugh] so I declined: so one night, one evening, David appeared with another man, who turned out to be Lord Hesketh from the race course at Towcester: and they said, 'We've come to take you jousting.' [Interviewer laughs.] I said, 'No, I'm not, you won't get me on horseback.' 'No', he said, 'No, we've got something better,' he said, 'you come with us,' and he said, 'The kids can come and watch,' and

I said 'No, [laughing] I'm not coming!' And they'd got two... quad bikes: you know the bikes?

Yeah.

And we jousted, all on quad bikes! [Both laugh] Obviously all the kids were cheering for me.

Excellent. Oh, I bet that was lovely.

and then he came, David, he lived in Cobham. At Knebworth House, they had Chipperfields Circus winter quarters, and when we went, there were still some animals and artists remaining, so David got the kids involved with the circus animals, and these... the people, including Mary Chipperfield: really, they couldn't do enough for the kids. We had a fantastic week. And every year we had a school fete: every year in September, a Saturday in September: so Mary Chipperfield brought animals to our school fete, to raise money for the school, so we had... tiger cubs in one back garden, we had chimpanzees in our back garden. [Both laugh] I think everybody, everybody was scared. I was afraid that these monkeys would get over the fence, you know, but they didn't attempt to escape.

Yeah.

So, we really, we had a good time. And then we had... a pupil: I'm trying to think of her name. Anyway, we had this pupil... Jen, Joan [??] I've forgotten her name. Anyway, they owned a boatyard, longboats, and they hired them out for holiday... hire, so I got friendly with this student's parents, and they used to take four longboats up the canal, twice a year. Can you imagine wheelchairs on the roof of a longboat?

Oh boy.

And that caused a real sensation. Now we're going back to the seventies.

Mm.

And people who use the canals are really friendly people, so we used to get so much attention, so much help. Wonderful times.

That's really good.

And in Cambridge I became a member of the Lions Club. Do you know what the Lions Club is?

Yeah.

So we had different projects around Cambridge to raise money for people in Cambridge, you know. But when the Lions Club found out about my canal boat experiences, they arranged for Lions Clubs around the canal to come and meet us. Wonderful it was. We met one man, I forget where we were, but this man was, I think he was outside a lock, he met us at a lock, and he wore his badge, and he said, 'Are you Alan?', so I said 'Yes.' 'Well I'm a Lion,' he said, 'and I wanted to get here before you cook your evening meal,' he said, 'because I'm taking you out for fish and chips,' and I said 'I'm not sure you've got the right information,' I said. 'There are 30 kids and eight staff.' He said 'Yeah. I've got a 44-seater coach waiting for you and I've booked a fish and chip restaurant,' and that kind of thing happened

Wow.

all the time. Oh, wonderful. And Trevor Jeavons used to come with me, the deputy principal, and we used to go to visit a football club. I've forgotten which one it was now, but one night, on our canal travels, we'd been invited to a football club, through the Lions, and they'd put on a buffet meal and entertainment, and the kids had a whale of a time, and they'd never done anything like that before, you see.

Wow. So how often did you do that sort of thing?

We had one camp a year, and two canal trips a year. That's all I could manage. [Interviewer laughs.] But then I had volunteers. Meldreth village: and I got people from the village to volunteer, and they used to come in once a week, or they used to have kids in their home once a week. Because it was a boarding school, I was concerned that these kids never got to see a home. Many of them went from Meldreth to a holiday home: they never saw their own home, so I got lots of volunteers in the village, who would take the kids, and let them cook lunch or prepare tea or whatever, and I got them involved in the village Guides: and my wife became the Guide leader through that. She became the leader of the village Guides and, yeah, we used to get involved in all kinds of things, yeah; and that had never happened before Mr Brown went there. Mr Brown was a very unusual character. He had a heart attack, and he had to cut down on his work. He used to go out, speaking a lot to raise funds for Meldreth Manor, but when he had the heart attack he used to send me in his place; and I had to go one night to, I don't know where it was, or who it was but, I know I had to [laughing] borrow his dinner suit, because I didn't have one and it was a bow tie job, you know? So I went in his dinner suit. I can't remember what organisation it was, but the guy, there was a guy there who was, he lived in a thatched cottage, and his garden backed onto the school grounds, so we could speak to him over the school fence, you see. So I went along to this function, and talked about the school and fundraising, and why we needed money and, you know, all that jazz, and the day after, this man appeared in the principal's office to speak to Mr Brown, and I got a message, 'Could I visit the principal's office urgently?' [Interviewer laughs] And I thought he was ill actually, but I went up and this man, I've forgot his name, was sat in Mr Brown's office, and Mr Brown said, 'I want you to talk to this man,' and this man was really embarrassed, and I said 'Why? Why, what's the matter?' He said, 'Well actually', he said, 'I'm annoyed and angry with this man'. 'Really,' I said 'Why? What's the matter?' And Mr Brown said 'Well, he is going to apologise to you.' I said 'Why?' [laughs] You see, I wasn't aware of what was going on. He said 'Well, honestly Alan, I think he owes you an apology.' I said 'Why?' and it turned out that this man had gone to Mr Brown and said, 'You know, that man who came last night; he was excellent. He was a really good speaker. He was excellent', he said, 'but when he arrived, I was rude to him, because I didn't believe he could do the job,'

and Mr Brown was offended by that, offended on my behalf. He made him apologise. That kind of thing didn't affect me. It happened all the time, so, and before he left the office, [laughs] Mr Brown said to this man, 'Can I tell you a secret?' So this man said 'Yeah. What's the secret?' He said, 'Well, I know Mr Counsell. I know him really well: and he doesn't approve of people like you. And he doesn't accept people like you,' he said, 'so while you are not accepting of him, just remember, [interviewer laughs] he does not accept you either.' He said, 'You can go now Alan'. [Both laugh] But he was that kind of man: really nice.

Mm.

And then one day he called me into his office, and I will never ever, never ever, be as grateful to anybody as I am to him. He called me into his office and he said, 'Alan,' he said, 'I've had it. I've got to go.' I said, 'Where are you going?' He said 'I've got to give up work; I've got to retire.' He said, 'But, before I do, I want to see you are all right.' I said, 'Well, I'm all right.' He said, 'No you're not, no. You're not qualified enough. I want you to go back to college, and get a teaching qualification, yeah, mainstream,' and I said, 'Well, where do I go? [laughing] So I applied here, there and everywhere. No-one would accept me. So I couldn't get a place in a teacher training college. Then Mr Brown said, 'I've got to go and give a talk. Will you go for me?' 'Okay, you know I will,' and this talk was at Cambridge University, so I went along and gave this talk, and told them about my experience of applying to teacher training college,

Yeah.

just to show them that there were discrimination at Cambridge University, so the following day, after this talk, 10.30 in the evening, 10.30 I got this 'phone call: from a Mr... forgotten his name now, who said, 'Alan, I was at your... talk last night', he says, 'and I work at the Homerton College.' He said, 'I've been to work today, and I've been talking about you, and we'd like to offer you a place.' I got a place at Homerton College, and while I was at college, Mr Brown retired and we got a new

Principal; a woman, who shall be nameless, and one of her first jobs was to call me into her office and say, 'If you come back to work here, you will be a classroom assistant, that's all I can offer you. People like you don't teach in my school.' So I went to the NUT [National Union of Teachers], and they were going to take up my case, but Trevor Jeavons got a headship in Milton Keynes and asked me to go with him, so I got a job, teaching in Milton Keynes. Not only did I get a job, I was a newly-qualified teacher really, you know, at a mainstream: I got a Scale Two: instant promotion. [laughs] A new school, and I became a teacher [?]. Yeah.

Wow!

Really, dead lucky, I am.

I was going to say, it seems as though you've been in the right place at the right time.

In the right place at the right time, but I've also got the right personality.

Yeah.

Charisma: charm:

Yeah.

good looks.

[laughing] Sophistication.

I'm not sure about sophistication; I'm as common as muck! [Both laugh]

Oh yeah! Oh, that's cool. When you were Meldreth, how did the pupils and the other staff get on with you?

Smashing. Absolutely great. I had trouble with some members of staff, but they don't matter. I just ignore them.

Yeah.

I got on with a physiotherapist there who was an older woman: like, not too old, but older than most, and she was actually my next-door neighbour, and I learned a lot from her because, I'd never had... that kind of physiotherapy for myself, you see,

How?

but she also learned a lot from me, because she treated kids, and I was an adult

Yeah.

and she'd never met an adult with cerebral palsy,

Wow.

so it was really interesting.

Can I ask, what was her name?

Her name was Pat Pettit, and she used to be a physiotherapist in the RAF, and I think her husband had died, and so she'd come into Meldreth. Really good. [Coughs.]

Did you know a lady called Mrs Cotton?

Cotton?

Mm.

What was her first name?

I don't know. I only ever knew her...

I have a sneaking feeling it was Elspeth.

Elspeth.

Elspeth Cotton; it sounds right.

OK.

Yeah.

So you'd got a place in a mainstream school.

Yes, oh boy, oh boy [Both laugh. Someone coughs.] We had to... I tell you, it was dead fortunate... we, I had to do teaching practice in mainstream, and I don't know why that bothered my tutors, really bothered, it didn't bother me, so they chose a village school for me to do my teaching practice in. It was a doddle, because it was such a slow school, and the kids were lovely: middle class... yeah, absolutely lovely, [interviewer laughs] compared to what the other students had gone to, you know. I was away with them for six weeks, and I got to know the kids, and I chatted to their parents, when they came at the end of school, and, not thinking I was doing anything... special, or... The last day I was there, and I didn't know anything about it; the last day I was there in the afternoon, the head came and he said, 'Oh,' he said, 'Can you go and help out in the hall, ' he said, 'What a kerfuffle.' I said 'What kerfuffle?' [Interviewer laughs.] 'Go and sort them out,' he said. You know, I wondered what was going on, and all these parents had congregated in the hall to give me a sing-along.

Ahh.

You know, really nice: and the tutor said, 'We've never had that before.' I said 'Well, there you go.' [Interviewer laughs] Personality. [Both laugh] And I got complimented by the School Inspectors. Fancy being on, in a teaching practice and the School, the School Inspectors! [laughs] And I had to do the lesson on... human reproduction. [Interviewer laughs] Oh dear. And I've got really strong morals and principles, and you've got to follow a handbook. Sex education is standard, taught throughout the country, and I can't teach it, the way it's written in the handbook, because I don't think you should teach kids about sex and having babies, etc, without taking about marriage. So I did. I just went ahead, and did this lesson on sex education and talked about marriage: and talked about homosexuality and, you know, the whole caboodle: not thinking anything about it, and, after the lesson, these two inspectors turned to me and they said, 'That was marvellous. Never, ever, have we heard sex education taught like that: so sensitively. Really good.' Yeah.

Wow.

So, of course, I must be good, [Both laugh] but, you know, people don't talk about..., and I was aware that some, maybe some of them kids, they might grow to be gay or lesbian, you know: so we talked about that, quite openly. Talked about marriage, and... you don't do that, you see.

*No. You've got to have an open mind. My sex education in school was rubbish...
About what time was that? What year did you go to Milton Keynes?*

I went in '76-'78,

OK.

I qualified ... yeah, I qualified in '78

Yeah.

so I left college in June

Yeah.

'78, and started in Milton Keynes,

Yeah.

in September.

Okay, well, I think we'll leave it there for today

We'll leave it there for today?

Yeah.

Are you sure?

Yes. Very good.

I've bored you enough, have I? [laughs]

No, well, there's an awful lot of information there, and we're coming to the end of the tape, [both laugh] so...

All right.

Thank you very much.

You're welcome.

[End of Tape 4 Side A]

Tape 5 Side A [Track 7]

I'm with Alan on the 23rd February. OK. Alan: I think we left off last week, where we were talking about your time in your first mainstream school.

Right.

In Milton Keynes. Is there anything else you want to add to that?

I dunno. I can't say any more on the subject really. [Interviewer laughs] Something rather significant was that the head teacher of the secondary modern school; a really nice, well-respected guy, and I was down to teach a class, every week, and they were horrible. You didn't need a degree in teaching; you needed to be an animal trainer. They were absolutely the pits: and that first week I just... despaired of it. The second week, I was determined that I was going to win them round, so I kind of picked out three or four ring-leaders, and got their names, and said 'I'm going to write to your parents; but for now, you can go,' and I kicked them out of the class: and I did write to their parents, and the third week, they all filed into my class, and dead quiet; followed by the head teacher, who whispered in my ear, [whispering] 'I'm so sorry. You should never ever have been put with this rabble,' and then he said, 'Why are they so quiet? This class is notorious. How have you got them so quiet? How have you got them to respond to you?' 'My personality,' I said, [interviewer laughs] and he walked out: and I thought that was very significant, that non-disabled teachers found them really hard going, but after the second week, they were no trouble: none whatsoever; and whether that's anything to do with my bolshiness, [interviewer laughs] or my disability, I don't know, but I won that one.

Good.

Yeah, and other members of staff commented, 'How do you do it? They don't behave for us.' And those four parents came to the school. They were irate that I'd picked on their little darlings: [interviewer laughs] and, they, you know, a little bit terrifying for

me to meet them: but I talked to them, and one dad said, 'How did a guy like you ever become a teacher? You must have some guts.' I said, 'Yeah I have, to deal with parents like you, saying that,' [interviewer laughs] That was a good experience, to sort the rabble out.

And what did you teach them?

What did I teach with that form?

Yes.

General science, with that lot, and you need discipline to do that.

[Talking together] Yes.

You know, when you get on to experiments,

Yeah.

it can be dangerous.

So how many years were you at that school?

That's difficult to say because, after two years, I got a county job, where I travelled around the county, integrating disabled children into mainstream secondary education: so: and so I worked for Buckingham[shire] County Council for about nine years, all told; and I around many, many schools.

OK. So your job obviously became more varied?

My job was an integrating officer.

Right.

It was really difficult,

Yes.

because many teachers in mainstream had awful attitudes. They didn't want disabled pupils in their class, and I found that hard to cope with. I haven't been had needed to change their way of teaching. It's not the disabled people; it's the teachers.

So what period was that?

Sorry?

What period was this?

What period was that? About [interviewer clears throat] '82 to '89

Oh, OK.

I think.

Yeah. So are you in favour of integrating in mainstream?

I'm in favour of both segregation, and integration.

Yes.

But not in the way people think. There are people who are not disabled, and need to be segregated; and maybe for a while... you know, people who are bullied need to learn how to cope with that: and people who are bullies need to learn how to cope with that, and I believe if we can segregate those people with that kind of problem, we take away the mystique of special schools, special units: so, integration and

segregation is not all about disability, it's about individuality, and there are many individuals who really gain a lot from the segregation. Oh yes, there's room for both.

Well, you've had first-hand experience of both.

Yeah, yeah. I also feel that we need to look at the adult, and not just the kid, and if you segregate, I don't know whether we are setting up problems for later life that are not to be learned in mainstream schools apart from the three 'r's: social things, making friends, dealing with problems. They all come into mainstream, very often a special school or unit is so protective, that people don't learn the other things, apart from the three 'r's.

Yes. You're not always even given the three 'r's. [laughs]

No, that's right: that's right, yes.

OK.

I think that people ought to be educated appropriate to their ability, not according to a curriculum.

Do you think you would have got where you are now, if you had gone to a segregated or special school yourself?

It's hard to say now. I mean, when you talk about special education and disability, etc, etc, nobody links it with their personality, with character, with background, and I owe a lot to my background. My family were tremendous, and I don't see how I could fail in life, with a family like mine. They encouraged, they pushed, they held back when they needed to; they bullied when they had to: and nobody else, apart from my family, had any expectation for me, and that expectation, it was really important, and it always has been; and, even today, I think that my family expect me to live a certain way and I'm gonna do it.

Yes.

So I wasn't mollycoddled, ever; ever, and I think, with such a big family, there weren't time to mollycoddle, [interviewer laughs] so I think I might have got on in life because of my family, whether I went to mainstream or not.

Yes.

I think I learned a lot from going to mainstream that I may have missed out on, going to special school.

Yes. Mm. So, do you think your drive was mainly your own expectations and those of your family?

Very complicated. Outside of my family, looking back, I was always put down. It was obvious that I wasn't accepted the way I were.

Yes.

I always had to improve. The head teacher was always, always having me seen by doctors, unbeknown to my parents: and in my family, I was never put down. They only gave me credit for having intelligence, etc, etc. Now I could have taken the word of the outside world, and been nothing and nobody, a poor pathetic creature, sat in the corner and done nothing. I think that's what the world expected in my younger days; or I could have taken what my family said, that I had intelligence, I was bright, and been all right: so, it was very confusing.

Yes.

[clears throat] My dad always, always reacted to other people, mainly the medical profession, and he has always said, 'Come on Alan, we'll show them,' and I find that

I'm saying that to this day. I will say, when things go wrong, or whatever, I will say to my wife, 'We'll show them' [interviewer laughs] and mainly that's been the message all through my life.

To get to where you are now, to overcome the various barriers that have come up, what do you think has kept you going, given you the determination, or, the va-va-voom [energy] to carry on?

I now have an ambition: and my ambition is to see you in my position, and to help, have you cope with your questions. [Laughs] I don't know what kept me going. I think my family now put me on a pedestal: I'm superhuman, and that helps. I think I have to go back to when Katherine and I got married. We had many, many discussions, about our future life, but when we got married, we talked about having a family: and I said, 'No, no, we're not having kids, no way are we having kids,' because of many, many things. I didn't think I'd cope as a dad. I didn't think it was fair to inflict me... on kids, you know. I just thought that any kids would give my own kids a hard time because of what I was: and my wife talked me out of these silly ideas, and we had three kids: and my kids are absolutely wonderful. They are amazing. For example, I could always feed my son, he was the first baby; I could always give him his bottle, no problem, but when it came time to wean Grant, boy, it was very difficult to feed him with a spoon, because my hand was really shaky. Now he would be... four months old maybe. What did he do? Amazing. He grabbed my hand with both of his hands, to get the spoon in his mouth, as though he knew what was needed at that early age. Absolutely amazing, and they've been like that all of their life, that they just know what's needed. I had... an awful situation...; well I thought it was awful. As a teacher, [laughs] particularly at Christmas, you have to produce school concerts and nativity, and things like that, and I do have the talent for producing shows, etc., but this particular Christmas, there was no-one to relieve [??] the music, and I found myself having to conduct the singing, stood up there conducting Christmas carols, and, yeah, I can do that, I'm quite good at it, but I had no baton, and I needed a baton to conduct music, so this individual who shall be nameless, wrapped a paintbrush, a long paintbrush, in silver foil, for me to use as a

baton, and that, as I was conducting the singing, this tin foil just... flew off in pieces, [interviewer laughs] and I felt a right twit, a real twit, and my family was sat on the front row. Katherine plays the piano, and she was playing the piano for me, and I felt really foolish. It didn't matter, because I knew everybody in the hall anyway, but when I came off I went to my three kids and I said, 'I'm really sorry if you felt embarrassed by it for me, I really am sorry,' and my son said, well, and he'd be around nine or ten, 'Why should we feel embarrassed?' I said, 'Well, what did you think, when I was up there?' And he said, 'I thought, look at that. That's my dad!' And that really shook me: and things like that keep me going. That's why I am where I am today, because of my family. They expect it.

Could you go back to when you decided to have kids? Did you discuss it with anybody else, outside the family?

I didn't even discuss it with them. [interviewer laughs] I discussed it with my wife,

Yes.

and that's all: and we decided that, if we were very open with our kids, and if we told them... everything about me, when they were ready to understand it, things would be all right, and that's what we did. When they said, 'Why do your hands shake Daddy?' We would deal with that, and we would answer it,

Yes.

So, they were always encouraged to ask questions, and we tried to answer their questions, at their level, so that they've always accepted, and my oldest daughter, when she'd got a bit used to my... awkwardness and bolshiness, [interviewer laughs] and she has been known, several times when she was a kid, to say to other kids, 'Don't you pick on my dad, because if your dad was like my dad, he wouldn't cope. [voices talking in background] He'd sit in a corner and do nothing,' and I thought that was wonderful.

Sounds really good.

Well, my family, my mum and dad, I now think, they couldn't wait for our, our first one to be born. It really was... amazing. My dad was gassed in the First World War, so his heart and lungs were damaged, and as he got older, he had heart attack after heart attack, and when he had these heart attacks, if it was being a bad one, he would ask for his grandmother, so we'd all rush home, and we'd all be round the bed, and he'd rally round and he would say, 'What are you lot doing here?' And he swore a lot, and then he'd say, 'I'm not gonna die you know. I'm not gonna die until I see that bugger married,' and that was me. I was the last to marry in my family, and so, when, when Katherine and I got engaged, I went home and I said to dad, 'Right dad, your time is up. I'm getting married.' 'Oh no', he said, 'no, no, I won't go until I see your first child.' I said, 'Well you'll have to wait a long time,' I said. However, and Grant was born, and ten days later my wife came home from the hospital. We lived in the next town to mum and dad at that time, so, as Katherine came home with the baby, so mum and dad arrived for tea with us, to see this baby, and when they were sat at the table, having a meal, my dad had a heart attack and had to be taken home: and, the following weekend, we went to see him and as we entered the house, he had a bed downstairs at this time, as we entered the house he shouted, he didn't say 'Hello Alan' or 'Hello Katherine', he shouted, 'Where's that baby? Bring that baby here,' he said, and so we did. Went in his bedroom, and I said 'Oh you don't want to know me do you?' and he said, 'No, I want the baby!' [interviewer laughs] So we gave him the baby, and he inspected Grant from head to toe, and then said, 'You know Alan, there's nothing wrong with him.' I said, 'I know that dad, no, he's all right.' 'I'm really happy now', he said, and in 48 hours he was dead, and it just seemed as though he hung on, until I had my first son.

Wow.

'Cause Mum and Dad thought, nobody else had ever had a baby, you know. It wasn't ever 'Our Alan's wife is having a baby'; they would never say that to the neighbours,

but [would say] 'Our Alan's having a baby'. [They laugh] Then they were really proud.

Yes. Can I ask how old you were?

How old. I was what... it's 36 years ago, work it out for yourself! [laughs] I'd be about 30.

Yes: and how old was your father?

Seventy-two, he was.

Good. I think we'll have to stop there because the tape's coming...

[End of Tape 5 Side A]

Tape 5 Side B [Track 8]

Four [tape five], Side B. OK. Do you want to talk about Margaret Morgan?

[Creaking noise.] What can one say about Margaret Morgan? I was a young man when I met Margaret. I went to her because I developed allergies to fibres in the cotton mill, and I had to leave the cotton mill, so I went to Margaret Morgan, hoping she could help me find work. She was the Employment Officer, and... [laughs] she was fantastic. She said I was 'too mature': they didn't need to get people like me going to the Employment Department. I was too mature: and she would rather I worked for her. Then, she looked for a job for me elsewhere: and so... it became very complicated. [interviewer laughs.] I didn't feel I could leave home at that time and live in London, and I didn't fancy travelling from home to London, that often, so I went to the, it was called 'the Labour Exchange': it's now the Employment Service, the Job Centre, and they were absolutely useless, and all they could do is to put me on a rehabilitation programme, which meant, I left home for...well, it was supposed to be 16 week ... I left home for 16 weeks and they would rehabilitate me; train me for a job. Well, when I got there they were useless, and all they did was train me to be a gardener's labourer: and I hate gardening. Still do [interviewer laughs.] to this day, my garden gets the minimal work required; so after about 12 weeks, I kind of walked out: I was wasting my time, and I did get a job in London, with... an organisation called 'Action For The Crippled Child' (something like that), and... I found that difficult. But Margaret Morgan was always there, while I was in London, she really was a good support: really helpful, and, I had to travel round the country for 'Action For The Crippled Child', usually showing foreign visitors what we had to offer to our... crippled children. You know what I mean? And between tours, I worked for Margaret Morgan. I worked for The Spastics Society. I think I've said this before. We used to assess people with cerebral palsy for work, and Margaret Morgan was always there, and I learned a lot from her. She's dead now, of course.

Yes, so when did you move to London?

When did I move to London? I'd be about 22, I think.

Yes.

Maybe about 22.

And what...

I only did that job for about 18 months at the most, and then I went to, on to become a student nurse, and rehabilitation and all that jazz.

But all the experiences you gained.

There you go.

By working for the Spastics Society and for the Crippled Children.

Yes, I gained a lot of experience, and one thing that that taught me was how tremendous and how intelligent my family were, because everything I saw with, in working for 'Action For The Crippled Child', I thought, 'That could have been me,' and what they had to offer was nothing like what I had at home, and so that made me really appreciate my home and my parents, and how difficult it must have been for them: not just my parents, but my siblings as well. They were tremendous; tremendous. My brother, who was only four and half years older than me, used to carry me around before I could walk, so when I was five, my brother would be nine, going into ten, he carried me to school and back, and never once do I remember he complained about it. Not only did he carry me to school and carry me home, he came to the classroom at break time, took me to the toilet, and never once did he complain. For a 10-year-old child to do that is... tremendous, and you just take it for granted. It's only when you get older that you begin to think.

Yeah, right.

And then, when I could walk, my other brother; what would he be, he'd be nine years older than me, and I didn't learn to walk until I was 10 or 11 so he'd be... actually, he'd just come back from the army, so he'd be 20, 21. On a day like this, he would be there, and I don't know how he did it, because he had a job of work, but as I had to walk home from the school, or walk home from work in the snow, or the ice, he'd be there, and I don't know how he did that, and he had this fear that I would fall and hurt myself, and so he would get time off work just to see me home, [interviewer laughs] you know: it's funny, and then he'd be, I don't know, he would just be there.

Yes. And what about your sister?

Oh, my sister: she's 80 now, 80 years old. She's smashing.

Did you carry on having the same kind of relationship with her when you met your wife?

[Laughs] You don't want to know about that do you?

Yeah.

Right. My sister and her husband, [laughs] they're very special people: always have been, and in my teens, I used to spend a lot of time with them, particularly when they had, my sister had one son, and I used to go on holiday with them, and I always used to be at their home: likewise my brother, John, the one who's nine years older than me. When he married, it's so, so fortunate, to get on with their partner so well, and we were very, very close; very close, and my brother, John, [laughs] my sister, Olive, used to argue like mad. They would argue, and the argument was, 'When mum and dad go, when they die, Alan is coming to live with me,' and my sister would say, 'No he's not; he's coming to live with me. I've always thought that I would have Alan living with me, when mum and dad weren't here: so forget it. You're not having him, I am,' and this argument was ongoing, even before they got married: and they used to

argue all the time: because I'm, me, my sister and I still giggle like school children, we get on so well together, and my wife complains that we're both idiots. We can't help it, we just enjoy being together, you know. [interviewer laughs.] So when I turned out to be independent, and married, [laughs] they were gobsmacked, you know, and they never expected, but they've always been very supportive, really.

And what kind of support did your sister give you?

You name it, she, [laughs] she gave it to me, in every way. For example, my sister and her husband were really good ballroom dancers, and I like ballroom dancing, and you know I told you about the hospital dinner-dances, then they would come as well, so, all these dancing partners, they would say, 'She's not for you,' you know, or, 'We like that one,' [interviewer laughs] you know, and when they met Katherine, my sister said, 'Hey, there's something really special going on between you two isn't there?' And I said 'No.' [They laugh]. No, I went to live on my own, and got a flat on my own, [creaking chair] and I realise now, it must have been really difficult for my mum to let me go. She didn't know whether I'd manage on my own, you know. Really hard.

How old were you?

How old would I be? Twenty two-ish.

Good.

And Mum and Dad didn't come to visit my flat for about four months, [interviewer laughs] because Mum was afraid of what she might find, [interviewer laughs] and she was afraid that I would think she was interfering and all kinds of things, but Olive, my sister, would ring up almost every day and say, 'Are you all right, brother dear, of mine? What are you eating today?' And, you know, just [laughing] make sure, I was doing the right things, etc, etc: but never came over, she would ring: and so when it, when I found it easier, when I got into the routine of living alone, my sister rang up

and I said, 'Right, when are you coming over?' And they couldn't wait for that invitation, so she said, 'Well, when do you want me to come over?' I says, 'Now if you want.' I was nine miles away from them; but they were there in about 10 minutes! [Laughs] And obviously liked what they saw, you know, and saw that I wasn't falling to bits, and things like that, [interviewer laughs] and so, that kind of support; just keeping in touch, and being there and,

Yeah.

you know.

Yeah.

Even now, we ring each other, oh, twice a week, at least.

But what made you decide to move out?

Well... my parents were cramping my style. [interviewer laughs] I needed independence and privacy.

OK. So did you decide off your own back, 'Right, I've got to get out of here'?

Yep.

Can you talk a little bit about how you did that?

How did I do that?

Yes.

Well, I worked in the hospital at that time, and one of the women I worked with lived in a place called Padiham, the Smokehouse. It's near Burnley: P-A-D-I-H-A-M: and

the, this women, who shall be nameless, [laughs] was quite a gossip, and she was gossiping one day about this man who lived in this flat over Charlie Webster's butcher's shop, [laughs] and this man had been up to all kinds of things, you see, so, he had to be evicted. Now, for me to get to Calderstones [the hospital] from home was two bus rides, but for me to get to Calderstones from Padiham was a 10-minute bus ride. You could almost walk it actually: so, hearing this woman talk about this flat put the idea into my head so I went to meet Charlie Webster about the flat, [interviewer laughs] and I took the flat on.

Good.

Right in the centre of this small town. Really great.

How much was it?

Yes, I was just thinking. Think I paid one pound, 30 shillings a week, rent.

Yes. Right.

And this flat had been a ballroom. It was very big.

It was what?

A ballroom.

Oh.

And, you know, they'd just... partitioned the rooms off, so it had a bedroom, a living room, kitchen and a bathroom. Very, very nice, very big, and no central heating.

No?

No.

So it was a bit cold.

Well, yes, but I was young and tough.

But did you rent it off the guy privately?

I rented it from Charlie, the butcher, who used to look after me. I used to go in there, to buy meat and he would advise me what meat to buy. It was great. I enjoyed it. For example, the first time I invited Katherine over for a meal, I cooked her a meal, you see, and Charlie said, 'Well, if you've got a special girl coming round, I'll have to find you something special,' and he did. A roll of beef, and wrapped an ox tongue around it, and told me how to cook it, and loaned me one of his electric knives, so that I could slice the tongue, and I had another of tongue with beef in the middle: really impressed my wife. [both laugh] I didn't tell her that I knew nothing about meat [they laugh]. He was great. I used to pay my rent, and he used to say, 'Now what are you doing this weekend? Have you got anyone coming, or what?' And he used to supply me with meat, so I may have got my rent back in the meat! [Both laugh] Anyway...and his daughter was a hairdresser so she used to come up and cut my hair.

Yeah.

I got a good deal there.

Yeah, you did.

Yeah.

So, did you know him for quite a while before you moved in?

I didn't know Charlie at all before I moved in, no. I'd never been to Padiham in my life. It was just convenient to work.

So he was quite all right about it?

He was, yeah. I met him and I said, 'I'd like to look at your flat upstairs,' and he said, 'Right. I'll give you the key,' and I went to look at it, and I came back down, and this woman I worked with knew Charlie and she was with me, and he said, 'Right. If you want it, it's yours.'

Wow.

I think, had I not been with this woman, it might have been a bit different, but: no problem: and we developed quite a friendship, and when I got married and moved out, well ...when I got married, Katherine worked in Accrington, which is where her parents lived, and the butcher's daughter worked in Accrington, so Katherine and this daughter got very friendly, because they travelled to work together, and that friendship continued, when Katherine and I moved out of the flat, so I must have been good at making relationships.

You must have. But did you stay in the flat?

I was there about four years, if not more.

And then did you move out, when you got married?

Well, when we discovered that Katherine and I were going to have a family, we bought a house in Accrington: and that was good... we got a terraced house, and when we went to the estate agent, to buy this house, my solicitor, he wouldn't look at me, he wouldn't speak to me, all his comments went to Katherine, and in the end I said to him, 'Why are you speaking to my wife, and not to me?' And he didn't know

what to say. I said, 'Well, you need to very careful because I have all the money. She doesn't have any.' [They laugh]

Did Katherine work at this time at all?

Yeah. Katherine worked in Curry's, the electrical people.

Oh, Curry's

She worked for Curry's.

Yes.

That's about the only job she's had: and she went there when she left school, up until having our first child.

Did she... has she worked again since?

No, my wife has always been home for the children, then... when Emma, my youngest daughter, went to school, she became... a classroom assistant in Special Ed [Special Education], and she was there for a long time: maybe 10 years?

Yeah. So, can you tell me again when your three kids were born? Over how many years?

Oh, I don't know.

They're your kids. [laughs]!

My first, our first one was born in 1968, and our last one, '75: so that's three in seven years.

Yes.

That was easy to work out.

Yes. So John was the eldest?

Grant. Grant is the eldest,

Yes.

and then Marcia, and then Emma.

Grant, Emma and Marcia.

No, Grant, Marcia and Emma.

Okay, so, well...

Grant is married, and they discovered that they couldn't have children, because they tried to adopt: they tried to adopt. Now I'm going back... not very long: I'm trying to think how long? About '99, I think, 1999 they tried to adopt, right, and, as you go through the adoption process they look at your parents. Her parents and Grant's parents: so Grant obviously must have said that I had a disability and two things happened. The social worker said, 'Ah, this is going to be very difficult because we do need the support of parents.' I did ask if I could meet the social worker, [interviewer laughs] but my son said, 'No, no, no,' and then I discovered that I knew him, or I knew his father, you now. He's still living, but only just: and then, the second thing that happened was that, Grant and Helen, Grant's wife, were offered a brother and sister, both of whom had disabilities: severe disabilities. Now, disabled children had not been mentioned, until Grant told the social worker that I had a disability, so Grant came to me with the paper work on these two children, because

I've done a lot of work around disabled children, and as I read the bump they'd been sent, they wanted my opinion, which is very...

[End of Tape 5 Side B]

Tape 6 Side A [Track 9]

Side one, with Alan. OK.

So I had to point out that Grant had to make the decision, about these children. They were going to adopt them, not me: but they wanted my opinion. I was reluctant to give it, really, but, as we looked through it, I kind of read between the lines, and I said, 'Now what you need to do is, go in and see the children, and look out for A, B, C, and talk to the foster mum, and ask her A, B and C,' and I don't think they would have done that without having spoken to me first, so they went at the weekend, and they came back to me and told me what they had found, etc., and I said, 'Well, these kids deserve a mum and dad, you know, and I don't see why you can't be their mum and dad, but you need to think about it. Are you going to be parents, or are you going to be carers? Because it seems to me that they are in need of care, more than parents: so just go away and think about that; that, you know, I'd love to be their grandfather, you know, but they were kids.' So they went away, and had the social worker come back to them, because they wanted to ask more questions, and Helen said to the social worker, 'Why have we been offered two disabled children, when we don't have any experience, when we didn't know anything about disabled children?' And the social worker said 'Well, we thought that, because of granddad, Grant would know all about disability, and he'd be able to cope with them', which is stupid. So when Grant told me this I said, 'Please arrange for me to meet the social worker.' [Whispers] 'No dad, no. It would be too embarrassing.' So that they haven't adopted. That experience really put them off, and that's tragic really, because they would have made really good parents: they would. So, that's all because I have cerebral palsy. It's not on, is it? The social workers should know better.

So were they not offered any other children?

No, they were offered another disabled child, and the child looked really well on paper, but I said, 'Go and visit and talk to the foster mother,' so they did on my advice, and they went... they got lost actually, and they arrived at this home, at meal

time, and they saw this boy, it was... They saw this boy eat his meal, and then vomit it back all over the table, and the foster mother said, 'He does that every day.' And my son, he couldn't cope with that, so yes, they didn't get that.

And did you ever meet the social worker?

Yes. [They laugh]. He had that pleasure to come.

[laughs] OK, so your other...

My daughter, Marcia, had five kids. Five of the most adorable kids you could ever meet: absolutely wonderful grandkids. I wish I had had my grandkids first, [interviewer laughs] because they're far better than our own kids. Yeah. Less demanding, less of a responsibility.

Yeah, yeah.

Just real good fun.

Mm. And you get on with them?

I get on with them? Yeah. They think I'm wonderful. We have a Hiram; he got my name in the middle, Hiram Alan Counsell, and Hiram was five, a week on Monday, and Hiram is very fond of Butlins, and Katherine and I, along with some other friends, are going to a special week at Butlins for older people. It's called 'Yours Live' [??] and your, all the old pop stars from my young days will be appearing, [interviewer laughs: Alan inaudible]. And I met Hiram on Saturday, at his birthday, well, Monday, so I said to Hiram, 'I'm going to Butlins in a few weeks.' [whispered] 'Oh Granddad, Granddad, can I come? Are you taking me?' And 'Sorry Hiram, no, it's all for older people.' 'But Granddad, I'll be older on Monday.' [Both laugh]

Aww.

That was really cute.

Facilitator: How do you spell it?

H-y-ram

Just to explain, do they all live quite near here?

Sorry, I didn't get that.

Facilitator: Do they live near here?

No, they live in Kettering, which is about an hour and a quarter away from here, depending on how heavy my right foot is.

[laughs] Yes, and what about Emma?

Emma is a teacher, and she teaches in a first school. She teaches nine- to ten-year-olds.

Ah ha. Is that around here?

Milton Keynes.

Oh.

I go in and mingle with her class now and again, and I do work for Emma on disability projects: and I love it, I love it. She's got a really nice class, and they really respond to her, you know, she's really dedicated.

And has she got any children?

Oh no, she's not married. She's looking for a husband. Well, I'm looking for a husband for her, and he said, she said 'I have a poor choice.'

[laughs] That can't be true.

Well, according to her, according to her, it is.

[laughs] Yes. Can we talk a little bit about what kind of experiences you had when you were working for the Spastics Society and for Action for the Crippled Child?

Well, yeah, we, I have lots and lots of fond memories of working with Miss Morgan, before I became a teacher at Meldreth Manor I don't know how, but we always ended up in tears, through laughing, and all kinds of things happened. For example, we went on an assessment course to Boughton-on-the-Water, and there's a railway station at Boughton-on-the-Water, and you know how efficient the Spastics Society, really efficient. So Margaret Morgan and I met this group of students, about 20 of them I think, we met them at a station in London, I forget which one, and we all had reserved seats on British Rail, or whoever it was at that time, and we got on the train, found our reserved seats, but then discovered that this efficient society had only booked seats for the students. Margaret Morgan and I didn't have a seat, so either Margaret or I had the bright idea that it was silly to stand, when we had wheelchairs in the guard's van, so we left our little darlings, on the trip, and we went to sit on these wheelchairs in the guard's van. Neither of us had been to Boughton-on-the-Water before, ever, so, when the train stopped, one of us would get up, out the wheelchair, and go and check on the students, and check where we were actually, because we had no idea where we were: so, this time the train stopped, Margaret got up, went down to see the kids and while she was gone, the door of the guard's van or whatever, a great big door, a whole side of the van, opened, and this little head popped up and kind of grunted: and I could see that we weren't at a station. There was no platform there, so I just... remained in the wheelchair and there was all this clatter going on outside, and it was dark as well, and suddenly, this man appeared in the guard's van and began to push me down this ramp,

me in the wheelchair: and I'm protesting and he said, 'You're all right, you're here. You'll be all right; relax.' I didn't want to be pushed in a wheelchair, and when we got to the platform we were at Boughton-on-the-Water. Well, Margaret Morgan just [other two people laugh] collapsed, and I said, 'Why didn't you come back and tell me we were here?' And she said, 'I don't need to now, do I?' [They laugh]. So, we got out at the station, onto a coach from, Moreton-in-the-Marsh to Boughton-on-the-Water, and we stayed at the Holiday Fellowship Hostel,

In Boughton-on-

in Boughton-on-the-Water, and we got there and they'd put all the lights on in the house, and all the lights on in the car park and, you know, people came out to meet us and to make us welcome etc, etc., and it was hustle and bustle, and our students were getting out the coach and we were waiting to get on to help those who needed help, and suddenly, this person gets out of the coach, and fell at our feet, in an epileptic fit, and I looked at Margaret and I said, 'No-one told me we had anyone with epilepsy,' thinking that they'd travelled unsupervised really from London, to Moreton-in-the-Marsh, and Margaret said, 'I didn't know we had anyone with epilepsy,' and obviously we couldn't leave them there, we had to deal with them, and it wasn't one of our students: it was the gardener from the house, [laughs] and he'd come to help!

Oh!

And so we laughed. [laughs] All kinds of funny things happened to us. In Birmingham... [Laughs]. Oh, an assessment course in Birmingham, and each day everyone travelled together in a group. We used to congregate in London, and everybody, you know, we shipped out at once, but on the Birmingham course, we had people going to London, people going there and people going there. However, I had a mini van: 12 students, to get from Selly Oak to Birmingham New Street, to get this train to London, and I thought we had plenty of time but, with roadworks, etc, we were quite late arriving at the railway station. I was on my own with 12 students and a driver, of course. We got to New Street and it was time, really time for the train to

go, and, you know, some of these students were rather slow-moving, and they all had luggage, so I ran to the platform, got the guard... and I'm going back, way back, in the time of steam trains: not diesel, it was all steam, and I explained to the guard and the guard said, 'Well, you get your people on this train, as quick as you can, then tell me, and we'll go. We'll wait for you, but be quick,' [interviewer laughs] and these students really struggled to carry their luggage and get on the train, so I said, 'Look, drop your luggage here and I'll put your luggage on. Get yourself on and I'll pass the luggage to you, and I had to help some of them on the train anyway, and the driver was really helpful, but he had to go because he was parked illegally. On me own with all this luggage, so we get the bodies on the train, and I start throwing the luggage on, you see, and then I said, to the guard, 'Right, they're all on.' 'Right', he said, 'we're going, 'and a steam train pulls out very slowly at first, you see, so I'm waving, waving to these students... there's one more bag! I said, 'Oh golly!' So I picked the bag up and ran down this train shouting, 'Open your window, quick! Open your window!' and I heaved it through the window, and, as I let go, this woman said, 'What are you doing? That's my case!' And it wasn't one of ours; this woman on the platform. [They laugh.] Well, I was absolutely horrified. I didn't know what to do. I didn't what to do. I was horrified. And because I had really exerted myself, getting students on the train, getting bags on the train, running with this bag, I was exhausted, and when I'm exhausted I shake a lot more, my speech is worse, so this woman obviously thought I was a madman, [other two laugh] and backed away from me, and I'm following her trying to explain, and there were people on the platform, and every time we passed somebody she said, [other two laugh] 'He threw my case on that train. He threw my case on that train!' And I'm trying to explain, and the police came, the railway police, and took me away, and, oh, it was terrible, terrible! [Interviewer laughs] So, I explained what

Oh.

what had happened, and they had to ring wherever I'd come from in Selly Oak, and then they must have realised that I was quite genuine, that I wasn't mad or anything else, so they said to this woman, 'How come your case was where it was, and you

weren't near it?' 'Oh', she said, 'I just left it, and I, and we'd gone for cup of coffee, when he ran off with it,' and this copper said, 'Well, we are quite sure that what this man is saying is true: it's a mistake.' He said, 'Where are you going?' to this woman. She said, 'Well, I'm going to Scotland,' somewhere in Scotland, and this copper said, 'Well, I think you'd better go via London and collect your case first,' and that was it, and so, I was let go, and it wasn't funny: [interviewer laughs] not funny at all, and I can't remember why, but I went from this train station, to the bus station, to get a bus, from Birmingham to Leicester. I remember I was going there, I can't remember why, so, I sat on this bus, waiting for it to go for quite some time, and I began to relax, after this ordeal, and suddenly, it all became very funny, very humorous, like a comedy film, and I began to laugh, and could not stop [interviewer laughs] laughing, and the conductor came through for my fare and I couldn't tell him where I was going, because I was laughing, and so he said, 'What you laughing at?' 'What is funny?' So I said, 'Well, I'll tell you what just happened to me,' and, and that was really hard, I couldn't stop laughing: [interviewer laughs] so I told him what had happened anyway, I said, and the whole bus was in an uproar. [laughs] And I never did pay my bus fare, he said, 'No, you're not paying,' he said. 'I've never laughed as much in my life!' [They laugh] But it wasn't funny at the time.

No, gosh, If that had happened today, you'd be...

If that happened today, oh, I think I'd die!

[Laughs] Yes.

Miss Morgan used to, Margaret Morgan used to work for Lucas in Birmingham, I think.

For what?

She ...Lucas, a company called Lucas. A really big company. She was their personnel officer before she joined The Spastics Society, so she had many contacts

with this company called Lucas, and they employed many people with cerebral palsy, through Miss, Margaret Morgan. Wonderful set-up.

[background noise] When you were going round with all these people, what kind of places did you go?

What, you mean the assessment courses, where did we go?

No, when you were working for Action for the Crippled Child

Oh right. We went to different residential homes, and treatment centres, and day centres.

Yeah: so how did you acquire that knowledge? Or where?

I saw the job advertised in the national newspaper, and, I think, out of desperation, because I was fed up of not having a job, I wrote to them, and obviously my letter impressed, so they invited me to interview, and that's it. I got the job.

But how...

Obviously I'm very hard to compete with!

Undoubtedly. Mm. And...

And then, and then, I spent about six weeks, in training. They gave me all the knowledge I needed in that six weeks: but living away from home for the first time, that was an education.

Was it?

For example, one time I ordered a taxi, and it never came, and somebody else rang up for me and said, 'He ordered a taxi and it hasn't turned up,' and this woman said, 'Oh, when did he order it?' So, you know, I said, 'Half an hour ago,' and she said, 'Well, somebody did ring up for a taxi, but I thought he was drunk, so I didn't send one,' and that was early in the morning, about nine o'clock, so that kind of, hit me, you know.

Yes.

And things like that. Yeah, I used to go to places for the first time, and people would say, 'Are you're from head office?' and things like that, because they were not used to a person like me,

No.

having that role: but I showed them!

I bet you did.

I'm as good as them, if not better.

Yes. Did you ever encounter...

Did I?

Did you ever encounter real aggression?

Yeah, yeah, I think we did, all the time. In my case, and then, what, Katherine and I were saying this week actually. Many people... I call it jealousy. They've seen me getting on with life, and enjoying life, and being successful, and they struggle, and they, I think they think, 'If he can do it, then why can't I?' and, but sometimes they become very nasty. I think it's jealousy. That's their problem, not mine.

Yeah, absolutely. [Creaking sound] Do you think attitudes have changed, or...

Do I think things have changed...

... over the years towards people like you?

I think they have changed a great deal, but I think we still have a long way to go. The medical profession which have changed considerably, on the surface, and they do confront a lot more, but I'm not sure that underneath, they're still the same, that, if they can't cure it, they don't really want to know.

No. What...

I think employers, and I work a great deal now with employers, I think employers have changed, because of the Disability Discrimination Act, but sometimes I wonder if there is a little bit of resentment, because they've had to change,

Oh yeah, I'm sure.

and ...

[End of Tape 6 Side A]

Tape 6, Side B [Track 10]

So I ... are you ready?

Yeah.

So I was saying, that I feel that... people don't like having to make reasonable adjustments:

No.

and they do work. I think people resent it, and then again, people will say, 'Why should she have a chair like that, when I have this chair?' Things like that, you know. So I think we are... in a transition period: but things are getting better, but I think, in general terms, people have not accommodated the change as well as they should, and that will come with time.

Mm. Have you noticed disabled people in the street?

Right. What a tremendous difference. The people I worked with in the 'Sub-Normality Hospital' are now out in the community. A much better quality of life, I think.

Yes.

Much better, and much more regularly accepted, in shops and clubs and cafes and places like that, so yeah, that's much, much better: but in terms of employment, I think we have a ways to go.

Yes.

We've made a lot of progress: we still have a lot more to make.

So, in terms of your own work...

My own work...

...what, in general, for the last...

We haven't talked about my work today yet, have we?

No.

Maybe we'll leave that 'til next time.

Yes, next time.

That's an eye-opener.

So you carried on being a teacher?

I taught until 1990,

Did you?

and then I had to retire: which is... another story, actually, I mean, I worked, for 12 years, without having a day away from work. [creaking noise.] I ran towards the end of my teaching career, I ran a Continuing Education Department. I was stationed in one school, and I took pupils from all kinds of schools, who wanted to continue their education, but didn't fit into... a mainstream course. [voice in background] Does that make sense?

Mmmm.

So my Continuing Education Unit was for individual education programmes for people who couldn't take CSE, GCSE or these traditional things, they came to me and I worked out a programme for them. Now, 12 years, not a day off. In February, I felt... ill: I, well I can't tell you how I felt. Went to see my doctor, and he said, 'You must take time off work,' and, not knowing what would happen, he said I was exhausted: I needed to take time off, so I took time off: and that time became four months, and I've never been away from work that long, ever in my life, and I think at the end of four months they said, 'You must think about never, going back to teaching because you've had it, you're absolutely exhausted, in every way, you need time to recover.' Well, that was really hard to take: but I had to accept that I would never go back to teaching, and I began to think why I worked for 12 years without having a day off, you know. I would push myself, but still do, and the, I'd got the holiday habit to get out off, so, I decided the doctor was right, and I couldn't go back, and so I went into school to tell Trevor, Trevor Jeavons, who was the head of the school I worked at, that I wouldn't be coming back; I had to retire: and he absolutely shook me, I couldn't believe what he said. He said, 'Well, if you're not coming back, I can't go on without you. I, too, will have to retire,' and I realised how much I'd been doing that wasn't really my job, and I wondered why I had done that.

Mm.

And looking back, you know, I felt at that time I had to prove myself, [voice in background] because of certain personalities in the school, and I wish I had of seen it before: maybe I wouldn't have needed to retire: but you don't think, do you? You just carry on with life. So...

Well that's... yes.

So there lies another story. Right, so, at the end of nine months, and this is a good one, this is a good one, at the end of nine months, I decided that maybe I could become a trainer, in disability issues, and at that time there was a government scheme, called 'Enterprise Allowance', whereby you could claim an allowance, of £40 a week,

for one year, to start up your own business, so I went to apply for this Enterprise Allowance at the local Job Centre, and I had to see a Disablement Resettlement Officer. What a revelation! [interviewer laughs] I had to give her my business card, and she said, 'You're being totally unrealistic. How could you do this work? You have a speech impediment.' D'you know, I didn't know that until she told me.

I bet you didn't!

Here am I, I was about, what, about 50 years of age, and I didn't know I had a speech impediment, and she said I was a very sarcastic individual, and that there was no way I would get Enterprise Allowance: so I left this woman, feeling very down, and as I came out, another woman in the Job Centre, and I remember her name was 'Smythe'; I've forgotten her first name, but this woman was called 'Smythe', and she called me over, and she said, 'Mr Counsell, I hope you don't mind, but I overheard your conversation in there, and I am appalled, I'm absolutely appalled. What are you going to do about it?' I said, 'Well, I am going to go home and think about it, and I am going to do something.' She said, 'Well, if you need any help, will you come back and have a word with me, and I'll help you all I can,' so that kind of gave me a bit of courage, you see, so I came home, and I thought, 'I'm not going to give up because of that woman,' so I wrote a letter to the manager of Disability Services, and their office was in Sheffield, and I wrote this letter, all about what I wanted to do, and how I had been treated at the Job Centre, and within a week, I got a letter back saying, 'We have received your letter with interest: and we have set up an appointment for you to go and see... John, John somebody, at your local TEC – Training and Enterprise Council. Would you ring this number, and make an appointment to see this John?' I've forgotten his second name. So off I went, to the TEC, and met this John who said, [voice in background] 'You write a good letter.' He said, 'How would you like a day's work, every week for one year?' I couldn't believe it, when he said that. 'Now let me tell you,' he said, 'you have got the Enterprise Allowance. There's no argument about that: you're going to sign up for that today. You've got Enterprise Allowance, and we are offering you at least a day's work a week for one year,' and that's how it all began: so this one day a week, I began, and I got such remarkable

feedback; I didn't know I was so good: that I got more than a day a week, you know, so the Employment Department had set this up and they got me going in business. In my second year, oh, the most delightful course I ever did. I had a phone call from a charity; I forget what charity it was, to do some Disability Equality Training for them, so I turned up for my first day's work for this charity: I had 18 students. Well, not quite. I had 17 students, and the DRO [Disablement Resettlement Officer] who'd turned me down for Enterprise Allowance. [interviewer laughs] The DRO who educated me about my speech impediment. [interviewer laughs] Absolute delight. [facilitator laughs] A pure delight, it was: and she struggled, absolutely struggled when she saw me. Well, I just treated her like any other student, until the last half hour: [interviewer laughs] and then I said, to the whole group, and I said to the whole group, 'I really want to know something. I am aware of my speech impediment. I hope it hasn't been a disadvantage to you today,' and they all responded, and they all said, 'Oh no, no, no, no. Your speech impediment is an advantage really, because we have to concentrate, and listen hard, and that's really made it better.' I said, 'Really? Really?' looking at this woman: and I, and that kind of thing went on for a half an hour, so, it's like me, putting my tongue out. [laughs] So after this course, I rang this man at TEC called John and said, 'Guess what happened to me today.' He said, 'I don't need to guess. I already know. You had Elsie Howard on the course,' and I said, 'Yeah, I did.' I said, 'Did you know she was going before I... you know, got here?' and she said, he said, 'We sacked her, because of what you said about her. We had her investigated, and you were not the only one. You're the only one to tell us,' he said, 'so she lost her job with the... Job Centre because of your report, and I knew that she'd gone to work for the charity, and some time ago, this charity rang up the TEC and said, 'We want someone to train us in disability,' so this John had given the charity my name and he said, [door? creaking in distance] 'When I put the phone down, I thought, oh! he's going to get that woman on the course!' So he knew what was happening. And that's how my business began.

Wow!

Yeah. 'You have a speech impediment. How are you going to cope?' I taugth for about 30 years; how did she think I was going to cope? Stupid woman.

[Laughs] They have no idea, absolutely no idea.

You can get courses all about disability equality and did I get equal with her! [They laugh] Wonderful stuff.

Thank you for that. Well, we've done enough for today.

Yeah?

Yeah.

Yeah, well you're coming again on Thursday, apparently, for the next one.

I'll just check. Thank you for that.

[End of Tape 6 Side B]

Tape 7 Side A [Track 11]

Right, this is Tape Seven, with Alan, on 30th March of 05...Okay, we haven't met for about four weeks, I think?

Mm. Is it that long?

That long.

Mm.

So how have you coped without us intruding your house?

Sorry? Say that again.

How have you coped without us?

Really well: really well. [both laugh.] I've had a busy month actually.

Oh good. Well, erm, today, I think we should be able to cover erm, whatever else we need to cover, really, and then what will happen is that all the tapes will be sent off and put into transcript, and then, if the Library feels there are any gaps, or we need to go over again on something again....Are you happy?

Yeah, you can come back any time.

Thank you.

Now, will I get a copy of what you've done?

I can't...

This is not a request from me, [both laugh] I have a grandson named after me, and we have a box,

Okay.

because now I've done quite a lot in my life, and had television, and press, and, all kinds of things have happened to me, so my life is in this box [both laugh] to pass on to my grandson, and he is saying, 'If you're doing this thing for the British Library, will it be in my box?'

Yeah, well I really can't see any reason why it wouldn't be.

Can you put in a request? [Laughs]

Okay. I can ask for you to have a book, a written copy.

Yeah, a written copy, that will do, wouldn't it?

It that what you'd like then?

Yeah.

I'll get it off. We are meeting next week, sometime?

Yes.

I'll get back to you on that. Right, erm, we've covered an awful lot of ground on you,

Yeah.

but is there any story or any aspect of your life [left?]

I don't know what we haven't covered, and we've got next week as well, haven't we?

Yes.

Or were you saying this week might do it?

Yes.

Right, well,

But I hope this... I can't actually come next week.

Right, well we'll see how it goes.

Yes.

You were asking' about the pictures on the wall which have been removed, [both laugh]

Yeah.

About that one

Yeah.

And that, this picture here it's called a temple, and that's in Surrey, and it's called 'The Mormon Temple'.

Right. Sorry, I

I belong to the Mormon Church. People call it 'The Mormon Church'. Actually, it's a Church of Jesus Christ, of the Latter Day Saints, and that temple is where Kath and I

were married, and, we don't marry as other people marry. If you go to a wedding, they are married 'until death' parts them: we are not married that way, we are sealed for time, and all eternity, so we believe marriage, and family, go on, and on, and on, even after this world,

Right.

so that's what that picture is.

Wow. Yeah, wow.

And, in following a religion, with cerebral palsy, there are issues there and I've had to stand up and, and fill a few ears, because, you know, people are so petty, I think,

Mm.

and get the wrong idea, or... You know, for example, if I believe in Jesus Christ, why am I like I am? [Creaking chair] Why can't I be cured? I must not have any faith.

Mm.

Well, people like that are still living, but only just. You know, so, wherever you go, you get comments and, discrimination and patronisation, even in religion.

Right. And how long have you been part of that Church?

You know my mathematics are not that good: 1960, so 45 years.

Yeah. Can you just tell me again, where it is?

Pardon?

Can you just tell me again where...

It's near... Lingfield.

OK

Between Lingfield and East Grinstead.

Yes.

And now we have one near Preston. And then we will have two pictures, right

Yes,

We have quite a new one,

Mm.

near Preston, to make that two.

And how did you get involved with the Church?

I think an aunt and uncle introduced me, to it.

Was that when you were a child?

When I was in my... well, in my teens, in my twenties.

Okay.

Yeah, how old am I? [both laugh] Yeah, it was early twenties.

Okay...Okay...And then how...would you say that it's a big part of your life?

Oh yeah. Yes. I don't think I'm a religious fanatic, but I like to live it right, you see, and I believe in morals, and values and things like that.

So does all your family go?

My wife and children are, but my brothers and sisters, they're not.

Yeah. And has that caused any issues?

None whatsoever.

Yeah.

My family have always been very supportive, and still are,

Okay.

whatever I do.

So do...

No problem whatever.

And was your wife happy?

Yes, we married, we met in the church, and we married in the church.

Oh.

Yes.

Yes...You know...I forgot to ask you, but, if need be, are you, would you be happy to lend some photographs or whatever, that could be used, to go...

Maybe...Maybe. [Both laugh.] Yes.

Because I don't know what they're after.

Have you ever seen me in the book I wrote 'So Clear in My Mind'? I'm only just thinking, the British Library, and my autobiography should be in the Library, and there are photographs in there, but, if they need more, they can have more.

Oh great. Okay. Thank you.

With reservations, of course. All the photographs have got to show me to my best advantage! Yes.

I didn't know you had a bad side. [Both laugh.] Oh dear...Yeah. But, can you talk a little bit more about your grandchildren?

My grandchildren?

Yeah, and how much you're involved.

My grandchildren, they are lovely, I tell you; they're smashing. I have an 11-year-old grandchild. [Pause.] Twelve-year-old grandchild. [Both laugh] Yeah, apparently, one year is very important. [Both laugh.] I got told off on Monday. 'Grandad, I'm 12!' [laughs] And he is quite something. I think he's very, he's very close, to me, and so, for the duration of his life, he has been fascinated by his Grandad. You know, why am I different to [laughs] other people, and this, and that and the other, and we discuss it very openly and then maybe he knows about, more about, my brain damage than anybody else,

Mm.

but because he's the oldest, and because we have this relationship, when the other grandchildren ask any questions, I never ever answer them: he does, so he's become my spokesman [interviewer laughs] in that family, you see. Yes. 'Grandad, why does your hand shake?' and my 11-year-old will tell them. [Both laugh.] That's really good.

Yeah, that's great.

And, one time, I think he'd be about seven or eight, and I had to pick him up at school, and I don't know why he asked me to wait. He came out of school and said, 'Will you wait? I want to do something.' I don't know what he did, so he ran back in school, and came back out, and said, 'Granddad, I've just had an argument about you.' I said, 'Really? Why did you have an argument about me?' And this other boy had made a comment about me, and he said to this eight-year-old boy, he said, 'Look you, if your granddad had what my granddad has, he'd just sit there all day and do nothing. I'm very proud of my granddad. Don't you say anything about him, because he's really great: better than your own granddad,' [interviewer laughs] and walked off, and I thought that was really good. Made me feel good,

Yeah.

Yeah: so all my grandkids understand, this is my 11-year-old, really good.

Yeah. How often do you see them?

Oh, at least, at least once a week,

Really?

if not more, yeah

Wow, that's good.

Yeah, they couldn't live without me. [Interviewer laughs] We have our things. We have a... I have a coin press, that I keep in the door of my car, and I never pay for anything with coins, I always use notes, so I get change, and all the change goes into the press in the car, you see, so when I go to visit my grandkids, one of them will always say, [whispers] 'Granddad, what's in the car?' [Interviewer laughs] And we have this game, you see, and it's who asks first, gets to go and [laughing] spend the money, in the toy shop. [Interviewer laughs.] So my five-year-old on Monday, said, 'Granddad, what've you got in the car?' I said, 'Oh, why? You've got to go and look, because I don't know,' but then my three-year-old bashed him: three years of age and she said, 'I was gonna say that!' [both laugh] so for the first time, there was an argument [clears throat] about the money in the car. [Both laugh] They don't, they don't spend it on themselves: they spend it, on all five of them.

Oh right.

You know, they share it.

Oh.

They go to the sweet shop and buy that for such-a-body, and that such-a-one, and [interviewer laughs] they're really good.

And do they all get on well together?

They all get on really well, yeah, yeah.

Mm.

Yeah.

Mm.

I think the three-year-old is... the bossiest,

Yeah, is that so?

and they suspect that she has mild cerebral palsy, whatever that may be: you've either got cerebral palsy or you haven't.

Mm.

The manifestation of it might be mild, but, you know, you've either got it or you haven't.

Or you haven't: yeah.

So, my daughter was referred to a paediatrician by the health visitor, and this paediatrician was... interviewed the doctor [?], so my daughter said, 'Well, I hear what you're saying, but I'm not happy, because you are telling me what my daughter won't do, and can't do, and that's not what I want to hear, and, next time I come, I'd like to bring my father with me, so this paediatrician said, 'Your father, not your husband?' and my daughter said, 'Yes, I'd like to bring my father as well,' [Interviewer laughs] so I went with her, on the second appointment, to this paediatrician, who was really uncomfortable, when he met me, and knew why I'd gone, so ...

Yeah, cool.

The standard conversation began, you know: 'Your granddaughter will not...won't...' and I said, 'How can you say that, because I was told, at a very early age that I would

never, ever walk. Did you see me walk in here?' 'Yeah, I did.' 'Well, look, I have been walking for about 60 years, but somebody like you told my parents I'd never walk', and, 'How do you like my speech, because I was told that I would never speak, and do you know, I've been to University three times, and yet, I was told I would never be able to be educated, and here you are, telling my grand-daughter what she will and what she won't do, and it's not on,' so, he went a brilliant crimson, and he said, 'But I have to cover myself.' I said, 'What, at the expense of my grand-daughter?' I said, 'Do you know, there are parents, who believe every word you say, and if you say to some people, 'Your child won't walk,'

Mm.

they will not allow the child to walk,

No.

like my parents, it was only because I was bolshie and strong-willed, they told me off for trying to walk many times, you know, so we had this awful conversation, and when we came out, me daughter said, 'You know Dad, I feel really good: I could never have said all that, it wouldn't have been credible,' so, you know, when we were going away, the doctor said, 'Well, we'll just have to wait and see, how she develops' I said, 'Why didn't you say that the first time?' You know. [Interviewer laughs] 'Why couldn't you say that the first time,'

Mm.

because I think she's a great developer,

Mm.

you know, and that's all:

Yeah.

so now she goes to ballet: a wonderful start.

Yeah.

Because now when I go, she teaches me her ballet lesson for that week, [laughs]

Wow!

And I can do good toes and naughty toes, [both laugh] and ...

Wow. And is that the three-year-old?

My three-year-old, yeah.

Mm.

Now, it took a year for her to see a paediatrician. A year. Ridiculous, isn't it?

Do you think all that stuff has got any better, or worse, over the years?

[Laughs] Oh dear, Dean. [Dean laughs.] Has it got better or worse? I don't know, let me tell you. Oh dear. Where are we? [Pause.] Maybe 18 months ago: I think. Yes. I'd been going for ages. I've had pain in my neck: really bad pain, so I went to the doctor, and the GPs are hopeless: you know, 'Well, what do you expect at your age? Or is it brain damage?' and he wanted me to take pain killers. Now, I don't live on pain killers, and I want to know why I'd got pain in the neck, you see, so, he arranged for me to see this, apology for a neurologist, and I went and saw this neurologist, who... I didn't get on with at all, not at all, and I went back to my GP's surgery [coughs]. Right, I didn't like him at all, I'd like a second opinion, and he said, 'Well, let me read to you the report that he sent to me,' and this report said that,

because of the deterioration, because of my brain damage and my age, I have a short life expectancy, so I'm going to kick the bucket any day, so I said no'. I mean he put me on tablets, which made me a lot worse: a lot more shaky, and, etc, etc, so I really insisted on having a second opinion, but my GP said, 'You will have to go private. You've seen the best neurologist I can find: if you want to see another one, you'll have to go private.' I said 'Yeah, I will, and if I'm paying, I want to see somebody who has lots of experience

Mm.

with cerebral palsy,

Mm.

and not some idiot, who thinks he knows about cerebral palsy.' Well, I went to Scope, and they couldn't recommend anybody. I think I went nation-wide, and could not find a doctor, who specialised in cerebral palsy: I just couldn't, so I went to the Derbyshire Coalition for Disabled People, to see if they had any knowledge of... you know,

Mm.

and they recommended that I saw this doctor, who my G.P. had referred me to, and, you know what doctors are like, you get... erm, one mister, and his minions under him; well, I hadn't seen the main doctor, I'd seen one of his junior doctors, the ones who [??], so I rang this... I've forgotten his name: Mister Whatever, and spoke to his secretary, and I explained that I had been referred to him, on the National Health, but, hadn't seen him, I'd seen one of his doctors, and I wanted to go privately, but before I did, I really wanted to know, or needed evidence, that he was experienced in dealing with cerebral palsy, and back came the message, 'I am not the person you should be seeing. I don't know anything about cerebral palsy at all,' [phone rings in background] so how could he accept a referral from my G.P., and then say that to me,

Mm.

because I wanted to go privately? It's not on, is it? So this doctor said, 'There is a man that maybe could help you, at... Nottingham, in the Queen's Medical Centre,' so he gave me his name and address, and I rang him and made an appointment, and went to see him, and I told him about going to see this other neurologist, etc, etc, so when I went to him, he had got a report, the same report as this doctor sent to my G.P., and he said, 'Well, I can see why you want a second opinion.' He was absolutely fantastic; really fantastic, and they treated my neck with Botox: wonderful stuff, and they had a scan

Mm.

and my, my neck etc,

Yes.

and this scan shows some damage, to the spinal column, and my spinal chord is trapped and pinched, etc, so I need an operation to free it, so this neurologist referred me to a neuro-surgeon. By the way, he refused to do my Botox privately. He said, 'No, why should you pay? I'm going to transfer you to the National Health,' so then I had to go and see this neuro-surgeon, and again, on the National Health, not privately, he said 'You shouldn't be paying: you should go on the National Health.' I waited three weeks for an appointment. Incredible. So, again, I didn't see... the mister, you know, and so on.

[End of Tape 7 Side A]

Tape7 Side B [Track 12]

Side B of Tape Seven, with Alan. Okay.

Right. So, this doctor said I needed surgery on my neck. Frightens me to death. I find it horrendous, and they were answerable to my doctor's surgery.

Mm.

I mean, if you look back at my experience, I saw a doctor who wanted to amputate my right arm and hand,

Yes.

I saw another doctor who wanted to... put me away as a mental defective, etc, etc, and now I'm supposed to say, 'Yes. I'll have an operation, you know: just on their say-so,' and it's not on,

Mm.

so I refused to have surgery, so, about a week later, I, and I couldn't believe it, I got a letter, from the mister, you know.

Mm hm.

A real, caring... a lovely letter, asking me to go and see him, because he is quite concerned that I am very vulnerable, and he wanted to see me; so I went to see him, three weeks ago, and he was... magnificent. He brought out the scan, the X-rays, he explained everything, he ... really good, so now I'm on a waiting-list for surgery but, had I accepted that first doctor, who didn't understand what he was looking at, [interviewer laughs] I'd be sitting here, waiting to die. You know: it makes me angry,

Yeah.

that that kind of thing can happen: and where are all the doctors who used to specialise in cerebral palsy? When I worked for The Spastics Society, they had a doctor: not one, several, and you'd to go and talk to them about cerebral palsy. They seem to have disappeared, and it's not every neurologist who, who understands cerebral palsy. I proved that from my recent experience.

Yes. Gosh. You'd expect

So, see what you've got to come, Dean!

Yeah, I'd better get... [Alan laughs] But I mean, you said you've had good and bad experiences of, er...

Yeah, I mean, I can't say I've had bad experiences all my life.

No.

I'm a very healthy person. I've kept away from doctors most of life, and I suppose I am damaged, because of my childhood experiences.

Yeah.

I don't trust doctors.

No.

Never have, and never will, you know: [Dean laughs] and they must hate me, because I'm, I've, well, [laughs] I just, they have to justify [creaking furniture] what they're saying, you know. I don't accept, even on my behalf of my grand-daughter.

Yeah.

It's not on. They're very powerful people,

Oh yeah.

and they should be more careful, how they use that power.

Mm; mm.

They... not long ago, right, before my neck began, I wanted to take up horse riding; something I've never ever done, so, just casually one day, I was speaking to my G.P. and said, 'Oh, I'm going to take up horse-riding,' and he said, 'Well, you are not! That's the last thing you should be doing.' I said, 'Why?' 'Well, what about your balance?' etc, etc. 'What about my balance?' You know. I've had what I've got all my life, [Dean laughs] I'm sure I'll be all right,' and totally ignored him, and went to find a riding school, I could learn to ride. You've no idea what problems I had. Many people would take me on, but, they couldn't insure me, and none of the riding schools around here, could find the insurance, to take me on. This is 2005. What are we doing?

Yeah.

Terrible. Luckily, my neck started, so I kind of backed off, but when I've had my operation, [interviewer laughs] and I'm a bit more stable,

Yes.

I shall turn that one up again. So watch out, insurance agents.

[Laughs] Very good. I'd like to pause it there. [Break in recording.] First. I'll ask you...I don't know how up you are on what's going on within Scope, but it might be quite interesting.

Well I get... information.

Yes.

Do you know Cat Stephens?

Yeah.

I don't her. Who is she?

I think she's one of the P.R. people.

Really? Well, she's friendly with a friend of mine, so Cat knows Sarah, and Sarah sends them on to me.

Yeah. Well, what do you think of the way they're going? I bet you think...

I've always had an issue with having a Chairman who is non-disabled. We have many, many people with cerebral palsy, who are really intelligent and with-it, and I would rather see a person with cerebral palsy as Chairman of the organisation. Nothing wrong with the Chairman we've got, he's great,

Yeah.

but he hasn't got cerebral palsy, and he is paid a real whacking salary, and if I donate money to a charity, I'd like it to go to [Dean laughs] a person with.

Yes. So are you... what are your thoughts on where they're going now?

It doesn't matter what I think [?], I mean, we've all got to change, as the world changes, and I think they're doing a really good job.

Yeah.

I mean, in my day, they did what was politically in vogue, and what was needed, and today, they're doing the same.

And what about the whole thing about keeping a focus on c.p. and trying to rebuild on all the knowledge and expertise?

I don't know what to think. Long ago, early in my life, I met Bill Hargreaves, for example. You won't know Bill Hargreaves.

No, but I've heard of him.

Right: well I worked with Bill, and I met... about eight parents, who helped to form The Spastics Society. The Spastics Society was formed through parent pressure,

Mm.

and now I look at the parents of kids with cerebral palsy, and I'm not sure, and I really am not sure, that they are being looked after, the way that the initial

Mm.

parent group would like them to be looked after,

No.

... and I always go back to that parent group, who really must have pressurised and worked really hard to form The Spastics Society, and I just wonder what they would think about today, because The Spastics Society cannot meet all the needs of every person with cerebral palsy, and I do like the way that the, that Scope are campaigning politically. You can't fault that, can you?

No.

They're doing a good job, making the politicians aware of the issues and the needs, and, long may that happen.

It's interesting to hear different people's views, and you being someone with considerable experience over a period of time, would have seen far more changes [Laughs] than what I have

In my day, when I was a child, I was growing up, there was no social workers, there was no doctor... I didn't have a, a doctor, a hospital doctor: I had a G.P. and that was it. No speech therapy: nothing like that, and the neighbours, really: they were tremendous. They were wonderful. They supported my mum and dad, they supported me. I could never have had a better upbringing, and I wish we could get back to that, because today I think there are far too many people who think they are experts, and call themselves 'professionals', and really the parents are the people who know what's what: they have to live with the issue 24 hours a day, and, I prefer the way I was brought up, to what happens today.

So... Okay, to get back to your point about parents, the group. How do you feel about disabled people themselves more of an input into decisions? Do you think that, well, assuming you agree with that, do you think more could be done in that area?

Who knows? I have a comparison between my own upbringing, and the Sub-Normality Hospital, and Meldreth Manor School, where I taught for, what, nine, ten years. Every child is individual. I saw children at Meldreth Manor, and I just knew,

they would perform better, and progress better, in the family setting. I just knew, if they had have had my upbringing, they would have progressed more. Children need to feel wanted, they need to feel loved. They need to have time from Mum and Dad. You can talk to any child you want. You never ever find a child with anything bad to say, about Mum; or Dad, particularly, as every child loves Mum and Dad, and they're very loyal to Mum and Dad, and I'm not sure there's a substitute for Mum and Dad, so I would like to see more individuality in the treatment of young children with cerebral palsy, and we can't do that because of economics. You know, we have services, and the child has got to fit into the services already there,

Mm.

and we can't afford to say, 'This child needs...' and supply what it needs.

Mm.

What we say is, 'They can have that service, or that service, or that service,' and they may not be what the child needs: so I would like to fit the services around each individual child rather than the child into existing services, and I got that with the neighbours, because they saw what I needed, and they fulfilled that need. They were wonderful.

Do you think that will happen again?

Oh, how I wish! How I wish! I look at my own kids, and... my son has lived at his present address for the past five years, and he's spoken to his neighbour once in five years. My daughter has lived where she is now for nine years, and doesn't know who her neighbour is on one side. You know, the way I was brought up, neighbours, and I don't mean, on each side of the house, if you understand me: the whole street, were involved in each other's lives, and the neighbours looked after my mum's kids, and my mum looked after the neighbours' kids, [Dean laughs] and they all had the same

values, and they all just clubbed in together, and, and did whatever was necessary, it was smashing.

So, why doesn't it happen?

Why doesn't it happen today?

Yeah.

I think we have a transient population. People move about so much. My own kids don't live anywhere near us. They're scattered around the country, and, whereas, when I was young, people didn't move. You know, we had neighbours whose kids lived next-door to them. They got married and moved next-door to Mum and Dad, and, you know, I think we had closer communities, and I think people cared more about each other; and maybe the War had a lot to do with it. Yeah. I had a wonderful childhood.

You can't really play out any more can you?

Pardon?

You can't let kids play out every evening any more.

No, not like they used to, no.

It's really sad...erm, okay.

You know, I have memories that are still with me today. Sometimes I tie my shoes and think, 'Cor! May Bringly taught me to tie shoes.' That was a neighbour, and she'd spend hours and hours, [interviewer laughs] just learning me to tie a bow in these shoes. What patience! No, not Mum and Dad, but a neighbour. Then, because my spine was damaged, my right hand wasn't working like it used to work, you see,

and I had a spell where eating was quite... quite difficult, because I couldn't hold my knife in my right hand, so, maybe I had to learn that again. I thought... well, 'Mammy', 'Mammy Buck' taught me to hold the knife, and I had to go back to that, you know, and 'Mammy Buck' was a neighbour, and she used to take me to her home, oh three or four days a week, and she used to practise and find a way that I could cut my own food. What patience! And nobody asked, 'May Bringly' or 'Mammy Buck' to teach me to tie me shoe or cut me food, they did that off their own bat. You know, I didn't need therapists: they were there: they were there. Wonderful stuff: but my mum had, well, six of us, so Mum spent a lot of time with me, but she couldn't neglect the others, so the neighbours would step in, you know. They were wonderful people. We had a neighbour called 'Robert': 'Uncle Bob', [laughs] and he used to make toys for me, and these toys were all designed so that when I played with them, it made me use my hands, so that I would get better hands for instance. I'd like to know who taught Bob how to make these wonderful toys. He must have spent hours, thinking about what I could play with, and what would make me use my hands:

Mm.

you know, and he was just a neighbour:

Yeah.

and nobody asked him to do that; he just did it from his own bat: you know.

Do you remember what the toys were like?

Sorry?

Do you remember what the toys were?

I...

Facilitator: What toys were?

I didn't hear get that either.

Facilitator: The toys: do you remember what they were like?

[Laughs] Some of them, yeah. I had a spinning top, which was... Oh, my brothers had spinning tops that they used to hit with a whip,

Yeah.

you know. Well, I wasn't up to that, so I had a spinning top, specially designed for me, and it was all made of wood, and it was the contraption where I had to spin a knob, you know, and this knob, it was big; at first, I had to use two hands to spin it, and this top would spin, inside this contraption, and... Bob used to say 'You've got to blow', because he thought blowing would help my breathing, and if I could breathe better, maybe I'd speak better: so this top involved me using my hands, and blowing.

Mm.

By spinning the thing with two hands, the top would spin, and if it dropped through, the top would leave the contraption, and spin, on the tile floor in the kitchen, and he invented that: you know. Wonderful. A genius, and then as I got used to it, this knob, this big knob I had to spin with two hands got less and less, so that I ended up supporting it using a single thumb. It was wonderful stuff.

Yes.

And then we had, made a wooden frame with balls, where I had to hit the balls with a bat. Very simple

Yeah.

but, it made me use my arms, you see: and he would hold my left hand down, because I always used my left hand. He thought I should use my right hand, that's why, and [Dean laughs] that made me use my right hand: and Bob was not a therapist. He was a weaver, you know. [Facilitator coughs.] Amazing. They were wonderful: wonderful. I mean, I was off school for 18 months, and I think I was better educated than those who went to school, because neighbours, they used to take me, arithmetic with one neighbour, reading with another, writing with another, and nobody, and nobody asked them to do that. They did it, you see, off their own bat.

Yeah. So, how long did you, did you stay in your neighbourhood for?

Well, I didn't leave my neighbourhood, I lived in the same house, I was born there, and I left at 23 years of age. I stayed there 23 years,

Mm.

and many of the neighbours had never changed: a very stable community. [Talking together] Yes.

Mm: mm. And they all...

And all the shops, they never changed hands, so everyone knew me, they'd seen me grow up, and it was very good.

And that was in Lancashire, wasn't it?

Sorry?

That was in Lancashire.

That was...?

Facilitator: in Lancashire.

In Lancashire, in Blackburn.

Yes.

It was in Blackburn. I go home now, and I can't recognise it. Everything's changed. Everything.

How often do you go back?

Well, I still have brothers and sisters there, so I visit three, four times a year,

Yeah.

and my sister was 80, last... in December: I did go home for that.

Yeah.

And my brother, my younger brother, my little brother, he's been married 40 years, this weekend.

Right.

Oh, I'll be going home for that.

And all your family still live in Blackburn.

Yeah, all my family never moved: I'm the only one who ever moved. [Interviewer laughs] I often get comments about that.

[End of Tape 7 Side B]

Tape 8 Side A [Track 13]

...in time for them coming home.

Yeah. Right, it does still happen in some places,

Mm.

and in some families. For me, my grandparents brought me up a lot.

Yes: yes. Round here, it's...wonderful, I love living here, because they're older people round where we are: even older than I am.

Mm hm.

Next door, they have their grandchildren every day,

Yeah.

because their kids work, and so all the... grandkids come to grandparents, and, so next-door, come at the back. Without their parents, I wonder what would happen, you know: and my daughter is a child-minder, and she minds... seven kids, and she's got five of her own, [laughs] so I think, you know, times have changed: and lots more mothers go out to work.

Mm. I mean

I'm just grateful I was born when I was born.

Yeah.

I'm sure I got a better deal than they get today.

Yeah, and what about that community spirit? It's there in some parts of the country,

Mm.

but as a rule, it's very, very seldom for, what I feel it invariably is [?] for the kids growing up today, but a lot of them don't actually spend more than a few hours at a home every day, because

Mm.

they go out to school early in the morning, and, due to parents or whatever working,

[Talking together] That's right.

they end up being at school, or somewhere else, like all day long.

Mm. We have a friend in the village that has five kids, and very often, maybe one day a week, they ring up and say, 'Could you get the kids from school?' This has happened, and that has happened, you know. We don't mind that. I love having the kids here, but they hardly ever see Mum and Dad, you know: hardly ever, and that's their life, and that's their world, and they cope very well with it, but...

Mm. Mm.

But I think they need mum and dad around more.

Yeah.

And they...

It's really difficult...You said that all the men went out to work. What sort of hours did they work, and how involved were they in bringing up the kids?

[Clears throat.] Men had a different role than they have [Facilitator coughs] today,
and women had a different role than they have today,

Yeah.

but, my dad was really involved in bringing up eight kids. He went to work, he worked hard, and he worked long hours, but he was always there for us: and when he was home, most of his time was spent with us, [rustling noise] and very often, you would go and knock on a neighbour's door, and say, 'Is such-a-body coming out to play?' and the mum would say, 'Not today, because Dad's at home,' so they, obviously they were involved, because when Dad was home, the kids stayed with Dad,

[Talking together] Mm.

you know: in most homes, you know. I've never thought about it before, but, yes, they would be involved, because they would say, 'Dad's at home today, not playing out,' [interviewer laughs] and we had a public park, not far away. Very often, on their days off, Dads would take their kids to the public park, and leave Mum at home to do the cooking and the housework. [laughs.] But, today it's different, i'n't it, you know?

Well,

I don't think Dad ever did housework, or shopping, or things like that,

No.

but they, I think they did spend time with their kids.

Mm. But they say, 'What goes around comes around.'

Well, yes, but I wonder if we could ever go back to that: I mean, really. The world is so different, economically, and in every way. We were just recovering from a war, and I think that was a big element of what was happening. Then as a teenager, I, you know, in the fifties, and sixties, there was so much progress, in the fifties and sixties.

Mm. Mm.

Yeah: amazing.

We haven't talked much about your hobbies, or your interests.

My hobbies and interests...

Yeah.

You don't want to know my hobbies or interests [Interviewer laughs.]

Go on.

Oh dear! [Both laugh.] Let me tell you some of them. Oh, my dear, what does he get on [??]... See that there glass bowl?

Yeah.

Any idea what it might be?

Is it an award?

Yeah.

Yeah.

That's the... erm, erm, oh, who was it? [Interviewer laughs.] Can't think. I got a
Lifetime Achievement Award

Oh right.

From... the Leonard Cheshire Foundation.

Okay.

Presented to me by... the actress, and then the cook, erm [pause.]

Facilitator [whispers] Delia?

Ginger hair?

Facilitator: Oh yes: Asher: Jane Asher? No. Yeah.

A wonderful experience, yeah.

So, what are...

So my hobbies: my hobby for years, and years, and years has been genealogy: tracing
back my family tree,

Mm.

and it's been really, really interesting. For years, and years, and years, I've looked for
my... great grandfather, who is reported to have been a teacher in a village called

'Nether' [??] in Derbyshire. I can't find Nether in Derbyshire, and coming to live here, I travel from here,

Mm.

to Manchester, well, now and again,

Yeah.

and, lo and behold, and on my way, through Cheshire, I found this signpost, 'Nether', and I've been to visit Nether in Cheshire, and found out that the border between Derbyshire and Cheshire had been altered, so Nether used to be in Derbyshire,

Oh.

now in Cheshire, so I found my great grand-dad, and the birth [??] stone in the, an old church school house, and my grand-dad, my great grand-dad lived there, and on the stone, and it was

[Talking together] Wow.

really fascinating. I knew he had been a teacher, but to see it in stone,

Yeah.

was something else. Really, really interesting.

How long did that take you?

How long did it take me,

Yes.

to find my grandfather? I think I'd been looking 30 years. [Interviewer laughs.] Had I looked at the county boundaries, you know,

Yes.

and checked whether they'd changed,

Yes.

I would have found him years ago, [Interviewer laughs] but I never thought they'd changed county boundaries.

I...

So that was interesting: and then, and then... This is really exciting: I don't know where it is, but I think my son might have borrowed it: maybe not: anyway, when we moved in this bungalow, and we needed a new kitchen, so we got estimates and, you know, as you do, and chose this company to put our new kitchen: you know, picked everything from a catalogue that we needed, and the day before the workmen came, this kitchen was delivered, and on the boxes was 'Howarth's of Mansfield', and 'Howarth' can be spelt a number of ways, and my mother was a Howarth, so, to cut a long story short, I've contacted this company of Howarth in Mansfield, and they've sent me their family tree, and lo and behold, their family tree and my family tree meet up, and this,

Wow.

this company ... wow! They are so big and so wealthy. They even have... a forest, a woodland in Canada, where they grow their own wood.

Mm.

They have their own dock, their own ship. I just found it so exciting, and they sent me a book (and I can't see it) and so I tied up this information with my information, and two brothers run this company. Now... and I can't work out the relationship. I think my great grandfather was the founder of this company, which is now in Mansfield, and these two brothers... my great grandfather's brother would be their great grandfather...

Oh right.

So work it out for yourself. Can you? [Interviewer laughs.] And I wrote to the company directors, not knowing who they were, and, you know, and I said 'Thank you for sending me [clears throat] the book,' you know, they'd sent me, and of course they didn't know anything about it, so I sent them how my family linked in with their family, and they were so excited, they came to visit:

Oh wow.

So now I have found two long-lost, far-removed cousins, who live just down the road. [Wow!] Really... exciting. [Laughs.] I get really involved [talking together]

Oh, too good!

by family history, and before I came to live here, I taught an evening class

Right.

in family history,

Wow.

at Milton Keynes, so that's my great hobby: then I like gardening, I like reading, and, and ballroom dancing: so.

What sort of dancing...

Pardon?

What sort of?

What?

What sort?

Ballroom. Quickstep, foxtrot: authentic.

Yeah. [laughs]

We do a bit of Latin American as well.

Yeah.

Samba, Rumba, Cha Cha.

Oh yeah, I remember you saying you, you used to go to... the work dances.

Sorry.

Facilitator: You used to go to the work dances.

Yeah, the works balls.

Yeah. We danced at least once a week.

Yes. It's good exercise.

Sorry?

It's good exercise.

Well, so they tell me.

[Laughs] So, tell me about the Award.

I can't tell you much about it. I was absolutely flabbergasted. I, erm... till 1990, I ran my own company, which was all about disability and employment, and people paid me enormous amounts of money for me to go and waffle on about, [chair creaking] how to employ disabled people, you see. Well, somehow, I became involved with Customs and Excise. They picked upon me. They employ loads of people, and what they found... this was '91, and what they found was that, although they employed disabled people, most of their disabled employees were on the bottom grade: they didn't get promoted up, you see, so they asked me if I could do some work with disabled people in the department. Well, I'll do anything for money, so I had a go, and it was a rip-roaring success, and it still is: still is, and... hundreds of disabled people I have met and trained on this training course, and it was some of those people that nominated me for that Award,

Right.

so that came from my work in Customs and Excise, but the, the, do they call it a 'citation' that goes with it? It's tremendous.

Right.

You read it and you think, 'Is that really me?' [both laugh] you know, because I've done, I've always worked with disabled people throughout my life, and they got all kinds of people, from the hospital where I worked, from Meldreth Manor, from Milton Keynes, all kinds of people had made comments about the work I'd done. I didn't know I was so good till I got that. [Interviewer laughs.] No, really good.

Oh. When were you given it?

When? 2000. February, 2000.

Oh.

By Jane Asher, and she and I got on really well. [Interviewer laughs.] It was a pity my wife was with me. Yes.

Oh, well, probably a good thing in the long run...So, what are you going to do? How long do you intend carrying on working for?

How long do I intend going on working for? I don't know. [All laugh.] I'm... It's awkward: at the moment, Customs and Excise, and the Inland Revenue, are amalgamating, so from Friday, this week, April 1st,

Yes.

there will be a new department,

Okay.

and it's something like 'Revenue and Customs':

I didn't know that.

something like that, and, because of the formation of this new department, my work with Customs and Excise is on hold, but rumour has it that they want me to work for them again, in September, so, and if they want me, I'll do it, you know; it's very rewarding to have disabled people coming together, and then go away and say how marvellous it was, and, how much better they feel, and I don't know what the magic is, I don't know what I do, but, I'll carry on doing it, while they pay me.

[Laughs] And do you do that freelance?

Pardon?

Do you do that freelance?

Yeah, I do that freelance.

Okay.

And at the moment, I'm doing work for Birmingham City Council,

Right.

...and it's wonderful to see, and all my work with Birmingham City Council is commissioned by one of my former students. She has a visual impairment, and about 1992, I did a course for Birmingham City Council for employees with disabilities, and the object of this course was to do a career action plan, so that they at least applied for promotion, and this woman has been promoted several times, and so now she's commissioning me to do work with for Birmingham City.

[Laughs] Yes, right.

And it's really, really good to see, you know, really good to see.

Yes: excellent.

And I meet lots of people who have been on my training courses,

Mm.

in the past, and, I love it; it's incredible.

Yeah. Have you got any other ambitions?

Have I other ambitions? Oh dear. Yes. Hoping that my wife can't hear me.

[Interviewer laughs.] All my family, my brothers and my sister, and my kids, they all have good singing voices; there's only me who can't sing, and so I'm... two things: in November, Kathleen, my wife, has a significant birthday, so I'm throwing a big party for her, and I'm taking singing lessons, so that at the night of the party, I can sing to her, in public,

Oh wow!

and in a voice that is, you know: acceptable. So, that's one ambition. Right, so, again, after my operation, I hope to take up horse riding, so I've got loads of ambitions really. And the publisher of my autobiography would like me to do an update. He wants it by October, and I said, 'Yes, good. Fine; yeah,' but I didn't say October what year. [Both laugh.] Yes, so... [Facilitator coughs.]

But is that something that you would like to do?

I don't know whether I would or not. Obviously, if I wanted to do it, I think I would have started it by now.

Yes.

So maybe I'm not that keen.

No.

Or, maybe... other things are

Mm.

more of a priority.

That's it.

We'll see how it goes.

You've got...

Maybe if I could get started, I would be more enthusiastic.

Mm. So what, can you remind me again, when the last one was written?

It was published in 1982,

Right.

and it was called '*So Clear in My Mind*'.

Okay. I read a summary of it.

Sorry?

I read a synopsis of it.

Facilitator: He's read a synopsis of your book.

Oh right. How boring for you. [Both laugh.]

You've got to do a bit of research.

That happened quite by accident. I had a friend, I still have a friend, who lived in America,

Mm.

and he was over here for quite some time, and that's how we became friends, and he went back, and I think it was his father-in-law was the principal of a school just outside New York, and my friend was talking to his father-in-law, and his father-in-law said, 'I want that man to come and work for me. Tell him to apply'. They have different names for people, a 'deputy principal' would be what we would call it, so I had to write all about myself, so I did, and my wife said, 'That is so interesting, you know: you could turn this into a book,' and I did, and that's how the book came about, so I didn't really sit down to write a book,

Yeah.

It began it as an application for a job.

[Laughs.] Yeah. What sort of feedback have you had?

Sorry?

Facilitator: What sort of feedback have you had?

On the book?

I still get feedback from my book.

Oh, Yeah.

I still get feedback.

Do you?

And I have to be very careful, you know, because... the book is very positive, and I know obviously that people will think that I was a success, from reading the book, and I get so many mums contacting me, you know. 'My son or my daughter has cerebral palsy, and I've read your book, etc, etc,' and you've got to be very careful that you don't give false hope,

Yeah.

so I kind of have a standard reply, you know: [Interviewer laughs] that 'We are all individuals, and that I don't really have a disability: I have a way of life; and their son, or their daughter will have their own way of life,

Yeah.

... and we've got to value that way of life:' so, I don't give any hope: do you know what I mean?

Oh yeah.

But I think that encourages people. People write back and say, 'I've never thought of it as a way of life, and that really helps me,' you know, so, obviously, I say the right things: but I do, I have a way of life, I have my own culture.

Yes.

I live my own way; I can't compete with, erm, these...

[End of recording.]