



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

Desmond Cox
Interviewed by Anne Austin

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Interviewee's forename:	Desmond	Sex:	Male
Occupation:		Date and place of birth:	1955, Wolverhampton
Date(s) of recording:	25 th May 2005, 6 th June 2005, 6 th December 2006		
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Name of interviewer:	Anne Austin		
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Tape 1 Side A [Track 1]

It's 25th May: Wednesday. My name is Anne Austin and I'm interviewing Desmond Cox, at my home in Selly Oak, in Birmingham. OK. Welcome again then. [laughs] I'd like to talk to you a bit, first about p'raps your early and so on: but p'raps first, can you just tell me, when and where you were born?

I'm originally born in Wolverhampton: matter of fact I know that I was born in the old women's hospital, which is no more. It's the West Park Hospital now. I was born in 1955; 27th November.

Right: and what are your full names then, Des?

Oh my name is Desmond Alexander Cox

And do you know why they were chosen, those names?

Because, my first name actually was from the Irish priest that they baptised me, because they couldn't think of a name for me, [both laugh] so I got his name: Desmond, and the rest is part of the family.

And what about your family? How old were your parents, when you were born?

As far as I've known, they were in their early twenties, thirties, when they come to this country. My dad came first, in the late forties, early fifties, and then me mum followed, with the rest of other people that came from Jamaica.

So you came from Jamaica?

Yeah, my parents. I'm the first one, of the family born 'ere.

And brothers and sisters then?

Yeah, I've got five brothers, one sister. Two brothers born in Jamaica came later, and the rest are born after me, years later: so I'm the first one born 'ere.

And what early memories do you have of your father for instance?

A good one, I always tell 'im is something that I've always done since: reading. I can remember 'im, sitting on the bed. I must 'ave been in my mum's arms, and I remember tellin' 'im to move, and 'e 'ad the paper: the evening paper, and that's my earliest memories of 'im. The evening paper, reading. Strangely enough, I've got the habit of reading anyway from that. Yeah.

And his work?

Pardon?

His work: what

His work, he'd done many but the main one is the building trade, which he's now retired from. Yeah.

And what about your mother?

My mother's not around now. She passed on about 20 years ago. She did a number of jobs, the main one was in the local 'ospital, and I think it's called 'domestics': the floors, with electric stuff and all that sort of job, they used to do.

And she has died now.

Yeah.

What do you know about your birth, Desmond?

What I know, I've been told a lot, but I don't... What I was told was... she might of caught a germ: might of, because since it was winter, she might of done, and from that, oh, she was they were told later on that I'd caught cerebral palsy: later on: 'cos most of my disabilities 'ave come on later on, as I've got older: it was mainly the legs, when I was born.

So they didn't, they discovered... later on you had c.

Well, it... touch and go because back then, people were not told straight away, if somebody had something wrong with them. It's only at later on, as they get to be [???] and ask medical people what is wrong, that they slowly learnt some of it: but not all of it all at once.

And what advice were they given?

It's a mix really. Some of it was helpful and some of it they just had to work it out, as they went along at first.

What have they told you about that? Have you got any...

They told me that... they contacted various doctors, and they then advised them to send me to boarding school, earlier, so that they could, at that time, get more help for me, 'cos there wasn't anywhere local in those days, in the early fifties, for somebody like me, so my earliest memories is going away until holiday time...

Mm.

cos that's my earlier memory.

Do you have any memories of seeing doctors?

Mixed really. One of them is, a one about, it must 'ave been a certain age when most kids are test, on shapes and words, and I used to get bored, because they'd show me books, and after a while, I'd get bored of 'em, and they used to ask me questions, and I used to get bored of havin' to answer; and that's my early memory of that.

They were the same sorts of questions were they, or

Some of 'em were... same and some of 'em were... a bit odd to me, cos they used to ask me questions like, 'Can I see that shape?' 'Can I write this?' 'Do I know what that is?' and I used to think, 'Well it wasn't necessary to ask, some of that.'

Because it was too easy.

Some of it was a mixed easy, and some of it was borin',

Mm hm.

because I knew sometimes of what though the next person was gonna ask me, at that time.

And did the doctors, well how did they, help you with your legs?

They recommended, from a very early age, hip callipers. It was one from the hip, to the boots: double at first: double callipers, and as I got older, from six onwards, I think, they got smaller, to single ones, down to a leg iron now, on one leg, but that's a lot of... callipers and pain [??] that's the word, [??] of certain exercises they'd give me.

Can you tell me about that?

They used to make me hang from wall bars, claimin' that was to focus strength in your arms, which I got at that age extra strong, from learning to pull a chest expanders,

to help me walk about, and standing up and all that sort of thing, and a strong man tryin' to straighten my legs, which gave a lot of pain, but they thought that would help my legs: but they learnt later on, when I was older, to do operations on my legs. Mm.

So things improved, later on?

Improved, yeah, because I've had a mix of the schooling, people at the school, and at home, being encouraged, gradually, to do things for meself. It took a while, cos some time I'd do it and sometime I'd give up but I gradually learnt to do them.

And do you remember what memories do you have of your, the reaction, of your parents and your family, to your disability?

The reaction is what I still get towards some families and friends, who've known me from the past. I'm classified as 'the sick one', whenever they come. I was the sick one. At first it used to annoy me, but now I laugh, because I know some of 'em don't know better, because some people don't know me, myself, they automatically think, that because I'm the sick one in their head, I don't do anything; but that's the way it's changed over the years.

And that was, that's the non-family members was it, or?

It's a mix: some family members and some non-family members. If they've known me from a childhood, they automatically have that sentence: if they remember me, I was the sick one. [Laughs.]

And when did you realise yourself you had c.p.? Do you remember?

When I used to talk to kids, who lived at my first, near my first school in Southport, boarding one, and they used to come round and talk to us, over the fence, like at the back of the school, and one day, one of them actually said to me, 'Don't you walk funny? Isn't though the way you move a bit odd?' And after a while, it got to me,

because back then, earlier, nobody 'ad, they'd made it so nice that you're not aware of your disability at first, 'cos my first school, it was all kind of, disabled children, all put together in one school, back then: all together, all kinds.

So you weren't aware of, that you were

At first, no.

our particular disability.

No: at first. It must 'ave been about 10, 11, when I, when they started to, try and sort out what they could do for me, which led up to the operations: that's when I really started to realise, I was disabled, from that age.

What memories do you have of being looked after, by your parents, by your mother or father?

Ooh, a lot really. I can remember when they used to take me somewhere, and because I couldn't move around much, I had to use a push chair or a, anythink, to get me around at first: and it used to be a case of, 'Don't go in,' and then I'd be followin' after, and then I'd sit there, listenin', so that's the earliest memories of it.

Were you separated from your other, your brothers and sisters?

No, strangely enough, because my dad and mum 'ave always encouraged me, to be part of them, but because I couldn't move as quick as them, I've learnt to adapt, to be, like followin' after them: like if they go and play, my ability was to join them and watch, and talk to the other kids, so that's the way I learnt that.

And how were you expected to behave towards your parents? Did they treat you in a particular way?

When I was younger, it was a bit more easier, but as I got older, it was expected, to do, in some things, as well as I could: because at first, my dad more than me mum, didn't quite fully understand it at first, but gradually over the years, just like mum, he's learnt [??] slightly different.

Did they treat you differently from your brothers and sisters, do you think?

Sometimes, but not always. It's a case of, when I was younger, for instance like if, in my original home, we didn't 'ave a built-in toilet, it was outside, and I used to use it as an excuse to not go out, but then they said 'Well, if you got your stick, and your coat, go out and do it: or leave it,' it was that kind of choice sometimes, so it was half and half.

Did they have particular ways, what did they think was important in life? What kind of manners, or [talking together: inaudible.] others.

Oh yes, always good manners. Respect your elders, try and do the best you can. If you can't do it, try and do it. It's my mum took it more easier than my dad, because my dad had an image, which is something that's striped [??] black and white, there isn't an in-between: you either can do it or you can't do it, which has helped sometimes.

What about discipline at home? What if you did something wrong?

Well, it wasn't done often but, I was told right from wrong, but it didn't that often happen, but I soon learnt somethink, yeah.

What would happen if you did something wrong?

Well, not often, but I'd get the same as everyone else would. It was, sometimes, I could use my disability as an excuse, [Anne laughs] but not always.

Can you remember an example of that?

Because I used to use, to go upstairs on all fours, and we used to 'ave to get certain times of food, but I used to go and get something, but then I'd say, 'It'd take me longer to get back up than them,' but sometimes it didn't work: [laughs] so that's the sort of thing I remember. On the whole it was a good, sensible way of growing.

How did you get on with your mum and, mother and father when you were young?

OK really. Because I was away a lot at boarding school, I sort of had what I still have: I'm the fortunate one in the family, who's had what's called, I can keep two kinds of friends. I've had an English upbringing, and a Jamaican upbringing, so I've seen two sides of family, life, so it's been, when I come 'ome, I've had to learn two ways of living; like the simple knives and forks. When you're a little kid, you learn to use a knife and fork. At home it's spoon and fork, when I was younger, and I used to get mixed up with that, because I had to learn two ways of living, and eating: that's how I've, my parents have been fortunate there.

And did you, would you share your anxieties with them? Or worries with them?

Just like most kids: sometimes, and sometimes not. It's just like most kids. When you go, when you're growing up, some things you wanna know, and they won't tell yer, and some things you 'ave to go and try and find out for yourself, cos I found, because I love reading, I found my disability, or what it meant, for myself. I did, because I've always been a member of a library, since I was young, I knew that I 'ad to go and look there, to find out, what's wrong with me.

It wouldn't be talked about much?

Yeah, but not in a mean way. It's just that some people would do it, and they wouldn't realise I was there. It was like, 'What's wrong with 'im?' and 'He's the thick one,' and you, I'd sit there and listen to it, but then, sometimes it'd bother me,

and sometimes it wouldn't. I just learnt to... more or less grow up and accept it, cos not everybody understands it.

And what memories do you have of spending time playing, when you were little with your parents?

Playing: half and half. My memories of them was a mix of, sometimes we'd play: because I was fortunate, that I went to school, and I got toys and then my birthday and Christmas, and I'd get other toys, I was very lucky, 'cos I've got brothers and them, who would get me books and comics regularly, so that's my memory of that, of always havin' records and comics to read: so they helped me in that way: encouraged me to learn to read and whatever.

And what memories do you have of big decisions, being made in your family?

Oh dear. Early, well there's many: there's one when, if they were going somewhere, it'd have to be decided sometimes I wouldn't get to go, because it would be difficult to take me. When I was younger, I couldn't understand that at first. I used to think they were doing it on purpose, to leave me out, but as I got older, it was some places where I'd go, and there wouldn't be a way to get me in the house, or it would be according to them, too far to go, and because I couldn't exactly keep up with them, it would be some time I'd be left to stay, and then hear them come back and tell me about it. It used to be a bit awkward; I didn't used to like it at first, because I felt I was being left out but, like I said, as I got older, I realised it wasn't their fault sometimes; it's just the situation, of what, of where they had to go: I couldn't go.

It was too difficult to take you?

Yes sometimes: either too far, or too difficult to get me into that person's or family's house, 'cos some of the houses, some of them, of the semi-detached would be too small, with massive steps and no, not enough chairs, cos I have to sit down, no matter where I would go, and some places don't 'ave enough, seats, or that [??] or some

people used to feel a bit odd, if I was there, because it made them feel uncomfortable. I still get it sometimes now, but not as much. They feel uncomfortable because I'm there, [talking together: Anne inaudible.] They feel they didn't wanna behave normal. They had to pretend a certain way if I was there, but I'd know: that's part of growing up.

You knew it was you that they were

Uncomfortable, 'cos some of them didn't understand it: so, but that's how it was. [??]

And you were still a youngster then?

Yeah: yeah, 'cos I found each, I found I had sometimes more sense than what they give me credit for, sometimes: but that's how it was.

What people influenced you most in your early years, do you think?

Ooh. Because I was at boarding school, and I couldn't come 'ome as often as most kids, even though they come and see me sometimes, [coughs] excuse me, the nurses and teachers like some people would take me on: like there used to be a certain lady, one of the teachers, Mrs Downs, and she adopted me in a way, lookin' at it now, as part of 'er family, and I used to go regularly to them, and visit them and get to know them, and enjoy their life and, stop over and so on: so that's where I learnt the English side of tea, breakfast and all that sort of stuff.

And your feelings towards her?

Mixed really, because I was, to me, I still 'ave memories of them, because they, like, because I couldn't come 'ome too often, it was like a second family, in a way, 'cos other people there would take me to their families, and take me out, and I got used to that: so those people would help me to learn, like there used to be another Irish

woman who taught me, we used to have records regularly on a Friday, and that's how my interest in pop music comes from: from that.

And what about your own brothers and sisters? Can you just tell me a bit, you, you were the third in the family...

I'm the third oldest in the family, I've got two older brothers: I've got two older brothers: Neville and Eddy, they're the older ones that came over in the late sixties. I'm the first one born 'ere, and then I've got me older brother a year older than me. I mean younger than me: Errol, Dennis and Trevor, and then my sister, a long gap of maybe nine years or more: Janet, so they 'ave feelings of being, mixed at first, 'cos they couldn't understand at first but gradually, even now we're close, because they try and include me in, as much as they can, but it's a mixed feeling, when you're younger...

[Talking together] How

'cos they used to, couldn't understand why I could do, get certain things, and they couldn't, but as we get older, we all learned to help each other up and down: now, [??] but we are close.

How did you get on then? When you were younger?

When I was younger, it was a case of, because they didn't understand at first, they used to argue about it, if I'd get something and they didn't, or do something, and they got told off when I didn't, but, as they got older, like things, they could get me comics and stuff, because they found that certain things I could share with them. Because I couldn't move, I've learnt to either, read and talk about it, because I like checking ideas and knowledge, so I've managed to share that with them.

You didn't actually play much with them?

Playing a bit, but because I couldn't run like them, the playing was mainly like the television or the odd reading, the sharing of comics and things like that, or toys we've 'ad, or I've 'ad and we'd share 'em, but, and there's not often playin', it wasn't, that, because they'd play with their mates who I got to know, so over them [??] in between though.

And are there particular members of your family that you used to get on with better, or fight with more, or?

Well I don't... at the age now, we are close, because they understand, but when we were younger, it wasn't a fight, it was a case of, because they didn't see me so often, because of boarding school, it was half-and-half at first, because they didn't know how to handle me at first, but when, there were times when they went to play like, imagining houses, with what the other kids, I'd follow slowly behind, and then they'd try and include me, but it was, you know, half-and-half.

And you said you went to school when you were quite young?

Yeah, I believe I was sent at the age, between three and four.

That is very young.

It was. Because even though I don't know it, the joke was that my mum sent me in a, because they didn't have the benefits like now, and they weren't told about clothes benefits and stuff, my dad and mum 'ad to work extra hard, to get the money to get me a suitcase of clothes to go, but they weren't told then that they could claim certain benefits: all that came later on, so they didn't send me with lots of clothes they'd got themselves, and my memories were a suitcase of clothes going regularly.

You don't remember the decision being made, or

The first school, no: no I don't remember that, but I do remember, like there used to be, somebody would drive me there, every, after every holiday: I'd go and stay with the members of families until they'd come for me, in the car, and then I'd have long drives, to various, to the house, because it was a long way back then, they didn't have the motorway, so I used to go to the house, have a drink break, and then we'd go on, to Southport, through [laughing] the big gates of the school: yeah I remember that, the long driveway: mm. The school's not there anymore, the first one: Bradstock Lockett, it's not there: so I went there for, what, from the age of maybe three or four 'til eleven, I went there.

[End of Tape 1 Side A]

Tape 1 Side B [Track 2]

We were talking about the first school you went to: do you remember its name?

Yeah, Bradstock Lockett. It's not there, cos I've tried to find it on the internet: not there at all. It didn't classify. [Laughs] I believe it went in 1966, so it's not there, but I know roughly the area where it was: Moss Side. Mm. I remember goin'. It was nice, because I got used to it. It was big. It had a long driveway, double doors, a balcony at both ends. The girls on the left, and way down the corridor, the boys, and a balcony there, and then classrooms at either end: no, in the middle, one in the middle, and one at the end: the infants at the end, and the... Yeah, infants at the end, and the juniors in the middle. Yeah, and the staff upstairs, livin'.

And what about the sleeping ... the dormitories?

Oh the sleeping were... dormitories, like they had the old-fashioned, well I call it 'gas fire', boiler maybe: old-fashioned, in the middle of the dormitory, the boys' and then you'd 'ave the toilets leading off, to the left, and the wash rooms, and further up, the bathrooms: the old sort of white bathrooms, on the left [??], and the staff, who would come and wake us up in the morning: I remember that.

What were the dormitories like?

Mixed. No, mixed-feeling because they were like, because some kids had to sleep with lights on: I didn't like that, I always got from an early... cos like I've said, I've always had that strange sense: I couldn't understand things like why have lights on, [laughing] if you're going to have to close your eyes? So I used to have the habit of covering my 'ead, back then. I used to turn off my light, and they'd turn 'em back on, because they thought I 'ad to be like all the other kids. [Laughs] And I remember the old painting of the famous Lancashire artist of a factory over me bed. Yeah, I remember that. All that sort of thing: and then we 'ad lessons, in the day time, and that.

Tell me a bit about the kind of lessons.

At first it was like, we 'ad three teachers, and it was sort of normal lessons which, some of them I like, but some of them I've always struggled with like Maths, or stuff like that, but I used to love places like travelling, or History or anything, and I used to listen to the radio, to school plays and you learned to listen to them and write about them. I remember learning the clock from the time of, they used to do school programmes, and we used to be in one room, and we'd all learn to read the, count down the clock, and read, and tell the time and all that: yeah. I've 'ad mixed feelings about that, 'cos some lessons were good and some weren't. I enjoyed it [inaudible] but certain members of staff I got to know well.

Tell me about, because if you were, you were with them quite a long time.

Yeah, Mrs Downs was one. The nurses were called 'aunties', so I used to 'ave one called 'Auntie Sue', and she'd take me to 'er family, and I remember the old man showin' me paintings and stuff like that. 'E'd talk to me, I can't remember some of the stuff, but they'd try and include me, in the garden and all that sort of thing, and I got to know the seaside at Southport, and all that sort of thing.

So you got to know them as well as your own family?

Yes, in some ways, yes: some of them, yeah: and because I, they 'ad a little library, I used to enjoy the school library, and the town library: from as early as I can remember, I've always been a member of a library, 'cos my earliest memory of that is knowing, the moon landing: the pictures of it, before they actually did it, and they taught, I remember learning Current Affairs, the morning papers: so those things, I've carried on since in a way; influenced me.

But you went when you were, as you said, three or four.

I s'pose I've been told, yeah.

You can't remember the [talking together. Inaudible.] at that time.

I can't remember that part, but I remember later on, like going back, it must have been about seven or six maybe: goin' in the, they used to have various people who would take me from home, 'cos I used to live, not where I live now, in Ewan Street, and they'd take me the long journeys, all the way to Southport: cos I can just vaguely remember, the old trams in Queen Street, lookin' up. Yeah. I used to get used to that, because I used to get mixed up, I used to like there, the school more than home, because I spent time away, so to me, it got natural, normal for me. It was only later on I realised [laughing] it wasn't the normal thing.

What were your feelings when you left your family?

Mixed. Sometime I didn't, I'd look forward to goin', 'cos to me, I'd been so used to, goin' up there, and seein' Southport and Liverpool and all those places, it became a bit like second nature to me, cos I didn't used, I can remember I didn't used to have worry about goin' away, it became normal: something I'd look forward to: going and then comin' back. Mm. 'Cos I used to get confused like, different manners and things, and eating, 'cos like I said, I 'ad to learn two ways of eating, two ways of growing up and talking, so that's why I'm the only one that talks very English. I can understand proper Jamaican, but I can't talk it. [Laughing] I've tried, but I can't.

And the rest of the family?

They can talk it both ways: proper Jamaican and English. I can understand people talkin' it, you know, but I can't do it.

[Talking together] You don't.

[Inaudible] in my 'ead.

You don't fall back into it when you're, when you go home?

No I don't. I don't, for some reason, it must be the way I've grown, I can't talk it as they can. I can understand anybody's sayin' it, but for me to do it, it's a bit like, somebody said, 'It's a bit like an Englishman tryin' to talk Jamaican.' It doesn't work.

Does that make you feel separate at all?

It did at first

Or: yeah.

It did at first, because I thought, 'Well why can't I talk like them?' but I've learnt to accept that. As long as I can understand it, it doesn't matter: because when I went on a holiday, recently, as soon as I got off the plane, it felt natural, hearing it, but as soon as I opened up my mouth, they knew I'd [laughing] come from England, but everybody else, they didn't recognise it, because they'd got it into the normal way of talking, but me, soon as I opened up me mouth, they knew I'd come from England.
Yeah.

To go back to school again,

Yeah.

Can you tell me a bit more, what, tell, describe a typical day for me at school.

I've been to three schools.

Yes let's: well which one do you want to talk about? What would you want to?

[Talking together] Let's talk about Liver...

Well a typical, what the first or the second?

The first one for the moment.

OK, in the first one: a typical day would be, I'd get up, it must 'ave been around, seven or eight o'clock. The staff, or as we called them 'the aunties', the nurses, who didn't use a uniform. It was, I suppose it's their way of bein' friendly and nice. Would wake us up, we'd do a bath or a wash, at the sink. I'd use a chair, 'cos I couldn't stand up long: still can't, and then we'd 'ave a wash, and then we'd get into our, partly uniform, but not proper school uniform, but smart, and then, and then we'd have morning assembly at one end of the school, and then we'd go to our... who, what class, well, three classrooms, and used to have various lessons and then, when the bell went, we'd 'ave to go to a different lesson. Some of it was as I've said, good, but was bad. I enjoyed music and all that sort of thing. Some lessons I loved; Maths and English sometimes used to get me.

What would happen if things went wrong at school or,

You'd 'ave to go to the headmistress, if you were naughty, or something wasn't right: Mrs Kirkby, into 'er office: you'd wait outside and then to, 'I want a chat with yer', and try and explain to yer, what though you're supposed to be doin': and it wasn't bad.

And what contact did you have with your parents while you were at school?

It was, we were encouraged to write letters home; the odd phone call: I don't remember doin' phone calls a lot but, learning to write letters at home, every so often, maybe once or twice a week, and you'd write what you were doing, at the school, and outside the school had taken yer, and then you were encouraged to write home about it, and send the letters: 'cos that's the first school. You were encouraged to write.

So that was your first school: tell me about when you moved on, and what, what [talking together. Inaudible.]

When I was 11, 'cos I failed the Eleven Plus, I still say it was them didn't give me the right knowledge to pass it anyway, but that's then, because back then it was a mixed attitude, I got towards that, so I was luckily, very, I remember going for interviews for various schools I could go to, it was just happened to be one in Coventry called Exhall Grange, which is just outside the main city of Coventry: it's supposed to be one of the largest in the country, and we 'ad different houses, about seven of 'em, and I went into one called 'Canterbury'. That was... non-grammar: I was in the non-grammar section of the school, for those that didn't pass, and that memories were, you'd get up for about seven or eight, you'd get your school uniforms on: done by the house maids, ironed and done, you'd be checked by the house master, Mr Barham and his wife, and then you'd, for me, you'd 'ave to, I'd 'ave to always leave 15 minutes before the others, 'cos the walk from the house to assembly was long, so I took time to walk, 'cos, 'cos then I 'ad to leave 10, 15 minutes before them, to get to assembly, and everybody else'd catch up after me, and then we'd go in for assembly, and then we'd listen to what the headmaster and the teachers said, and then we'd go to, another long walk to our classrooms and different lessons, and for that I used to always 'ave to, time, leaving two minutes before everybody else, to get to the next lesson: up ramps and so on.

And was it a school for physically-disabled children, or?

It was a mixed: it was for physical handicapped, and for people, I'd say, colour blind, and, you know, they 'ad eyesight trouble. I can't remember the full word, but some of them 'ad colour blindness. They used to wear dark glasses, some: shaded glasses and stuff: but some of them were normal in other ways, and moving about. They 'ad a small bunch of disabled people,' 'cos there wasn't a lot of them. They used to outnumber us than, than them, and if you were clever enough, they'd move you into the grammar. [Coughs.] 'Scuse me. As they did to one or two, they found out later on: the grammar. Yeah.

I'm interested that you took the Eleven Plus.

Yeah.

Did everybody in your first school take the Eleven Plus?

I don't know, but that I remember personally,

Mm.

having to take it, but I didn't pass, I said, because I always felt, some of the questions and stuff on the paper, I hadn't been taught that, so when I looked at it, I thought, 'Well what's this about?' Nobody 'as told me,' so, in that part, I don't feel I would 'ave passed that, 'cos my knowledge isn't as good as that, but I've never been at the bottom of the class, I've always been in the middle, because my school reports used to say 'E could do better.' [Laughs.]

And what, when you changed schools, how did you feel about going to the second school and leaving the first school?

A bit sad, because I'd been so used to Southport, and suddenly going from Southport to Coventry, another boarding school, it felt a bit weird, going there, and having to, relearn friendships, and 'aving to wear this time a school uniform, every day, your cap, your jacket, your tie every day, I had to wear that [talking together. Inaudible.]

Can you tell me about...

always like that. You have to wear the jacket, you have to wear the cap, and then in the evening, you'd take them off, and put on some what they'd call 'casual clothes', and leave that. We'd go the rest of the house, of the boys, 'cos the boys had three houses, I think it was, and the girls had three houses.

And was it, were they more homely than your first school? You talked about the dormitories there?

Not really, because we 'ad small rooms, and we 'ad about three or four boys to a room, and you got to know them, and they were part of your room, and the head master, or the house master, sorry, and his wife would be in charge of each house, and you'd get to know them at meal times: certain meal times, like breakfast, lunch and tea, and then you'd get to know the prefects, the boys who were old enough and sixth formers, to get to know them, you know, so,

And you made friends: do you remember friends from your own

Yeah.

room or, how, how did you get on? [talking together.]

Yeah, I remember friends.

Mm.

Richard... I remember 'im well, 'cos I've met him once or twice at Walsall, since. I've written to one hopefully who remembers me, from when he was younger, but the most of them, I don't remember. I remember part of the school: certain teachers like Mr Howell, the art and music teacher, people like that, but I don't always remember their names, but the various lessons.

Can you remember some of the activities, p'raps you got up to?

We had to learn swimming. I got up, we'd use the inside pool, what I got up to, I think the bronze level, 'cos I remember 'avin' to get my pyjamas and go down to get a brick, and all that sort of stuff. We were encouraged to join clubs and discos at weekends in the school. I used to enjoy that because I found my way of gettin' to know them was havin' a laugh with them, cos I couldn't move around much, so I'd sit there and talk to them, or try and do the odd movement: and then I joined cubs and

scouts, which I'd got all the badges as a cub, cos I took a photograph three years ago. I did 'em all.

What kind of badges did you do?

I think I did most of the cub scouts stuff, apart from camping, 'cos I used to enjoy the different leaders or different people telling me how to make something, or do something, and I'd learn it, and then I'd get a badge sewed on. I used to enjoy that.

Did you... you never went on camps then, you didn't?

At that school, they taught you all the things about it, but they never actually took us. I thought it was unfair really, but we actually learnt how to put up a tent and everything. I passed that. [Laughs] Yeah.

What memories then of, you said you went to discos and so on, [talking together] at the weekend?

Yeah, well my memory, because I always liked the sound of the sixties and seventies, I felt my memory was, I've always been able to make older kids or others laugh, and joke, and with their, I suppose early love lives of some of them, I'd make jokes with 'em and get to know them, 'cos that's the way they used to know me: and I'd walk round and get to know them.

But what are some of the best moments you can remember about that?

The best moments was, I found that, if you told the girls a laugh and a joke, they'd always ask you next time, to tell 'em another one. [Laughs] Yeah.

And the worst moments? [Talking together] What were your worst moments?

The worst moments was when the older ones would try and tell yer to not enjoy yourself. Because the older ones seemed to have more... rules and rights, they'd try and send you out early, the older ones, because I remember once when [??] would take us outside, and dump us, but that's sort of the worst thing. Yeah.

And what things were supposed to be important at school: apart from, perhaps the subjects, was it being punctual, or... What kind of things were important in that school?

I noticed for me, because I was a slow walker, timing had to be right, or gettin' from one, 'cos the school was big, and I didn't use, I wasn't encouraged to use a wheelchair a lot back then, even though I did 'ave one, they encouraged me to walk, and I was encouraged to leave three or five minutes early before everybody else, and it used to be irritating that. If you got there before everybody else, you'd 'ave to wait until everybody else come, so that was important and it was to help everybody else as well as yourself: being well-behaved and so on.

And what subjects were you taught at school? Were they?

Most of the ordinary ones, as well as you could get up to. We were taught most of them: History, Pottery, Maths: any other subjects they 'ad, and then they'd try and make you understand, some of them I understood, and some of them I didn't. I used to find that awkward, as though I didn't understand, and sometimes the teachers wouldn't have time, for you, to explain it good. They explained it once or twice and that was it, so often people didn't get it.

What subjects did you dislike?

Maths mainly. I've always found numbers awkward. I'd sort of 'ave a habit where, they'd explain it, I'd learn it and then they'd think I'd deliberately forget the next time, I'd learn it, answer the question on the board, and then the next time they asked me, I'd forget it, so I'd never like Maths, I used to try and avoid that if I could, but I never

[laughing: inaudible] much. Yeah, I liked the English and that sort of thing, and the pottery, the woodwork, things like that, to use my hands: those were the subjects I liked.

And you talked of the weekends: did you not go home at the weekends, at school?

Because that was a boarding school. Some of them who lived within a easy reach could go 'ome, and for me, it wasn't easy, I'd go 'ome 'oliday time, so again, I'd get to know the staff, but the staff wasn't as close as Southport. To them, it was like, they sort of had to do it, it wasn't as friendly as Southport: it was a case of well, if you're there in the school, they're goin' to have to look after yer and take you somewhere, so I'd learnt to get to know activities outside the school, like, at a certain age I learnt to join a youth club called PHAB, and we'd meet once a week, and I'd learn to get on the bus and go to Coventry Cathedral, the basement nearby, and go there, and come back, in the evening: that sort of thing.

What are your memories of that youth club then?

I liked that because it taught me, first, to get on a bus, and learn to get somewhere, and even though I was slow, everybody else would go ahead and get there before me, and then what I enjoyed was, the other kids from other schools, and older kids, would enjoy talking to me about things of interest at the time, 'cos I used to enjoy talking to different people, I even do now, about things of interest,

And did you...

Because I couldn't move, much.

I'm wondering whether you made particular friends at that, at youth club: can you remember any of the people there?

Well it's been such a lot of time since I've seen them, I'd say, 'Whoever they were friendly to me, the boys or girls, I'd get to know them,' and we'd meet, once a week, of things of interest, it was because they taught me most things of kids of that age learn, about life, love, magazines, all that sort of stuff. [Inaudible.]

So the school encouraged you to go out into town?

Yeah: yeah, certain ages, and they'd allow certain people to go out, so I was lucky that they'd allow me, 'cos not always all the kids'd do it, 'cos there was either the discipline or the handicappedness would stop them from goin' into the town, but I was encouraged to do it, so I'd get to do it, you know.

And what memories do you have of any school trips or events that you all went to?

I went on trip, but like I said, I developed, because I couldn't keep up with everybody else, I sort of devised my own way of gettin' round that trip: sort of think of my own way of handling the day: of walking round slowly, and learning it, and then, like everybody else on certain trips, you 'ad to come back and write about it, because I developed the habit of doin' it on me own and memorising, I'd write about it, because I'd know, more than, like most kids run around and dash about, because that seems to be something that I've learnt to do: sort of, go on a trip, enjoy it but learn it and then come back. I enjoyed those trips: well me personally.

What are your feelings when you think about that? That you were always encouraged to walk, even if it meant you made a very slow progress?

There were times when it'd get frustrating, because I couldn't keep up with them, but, when I got to about 13, 14 onwards, it became something that I'd do anyway, and I'd take my time and enjoy walking slowly on my own to get there and back, because it became something that though I had to do, because I wouldn't be always a kid, 'ould wanna join me, see, so I'd learnt to do it: it became a habit. I just did it, [laughs] after

a while. If you had to go to a classroom or some activity, I'd put on me coat, or whatever and get there on me own, and then come back, because I

[End of Tape 1 Side B]

Tape 2 Side A [Track 3]

My name is Anne Austin. I'm interviewing Desmond Cox in my home in Selly Oak in Birmingham, and today is 6th June. Well welcome back. I was wondering how you felt about... some of the things we talked about last week?

What I found was, it got me thinking a mix of things of past and present, of the things that I 'ave achieved and done, over the time. To me, it seemed to be normal to do some of them,

Mm hm.

but when other people hear about 'em, they find it a bit odd or are amazed that I've done it.

Can you give me an example of some of the things you've found to be normal?

Well, for me, the normal is, when I was a kid I learnt, because I couldn't ride a bicycle, they used to have tricycles, and they gave me one, with a boot on the back, which helped me to get to the local post office, or anywhere of interest near the school at the time; and to play on it, in, near, in the playground next to the big sandpit, which was built near the veranda, with the folding doors; and that was a good memory for me, because I could, able to move my legs, a bit faster but not much, to get about and join the other kids, who either, outside the school 'ad come to see us, the able-bodied ones, or the disabled ones, in the school who were all different disabilities in the school; because at that time, as I've learnt later, we were all lumped together: it wasn't like schools now, where some disabilities are not sent to the same special school: so that was a nice memory for me: and I've always 'ad a love of reading, as I've said, and I've tried to over the years, learn to try and read or write, which I've learnt later on, in joining creative classes.

So you first began to learn at, at that first school was it, or, was it just for young children?

That school was for, as far as I know, infants up to, juniors: eleven-year-olds, and they were three classes: the infants was at the far end next to the boys' dormitory, which I remember, clay-making, 'cos I've always liked using my hands: reading, listening to the radio, for school plays, and the middle class was the other lessons, which some of them I liked, some of them I didn't, but it was like, you had to learn as much as you could. I found in some cases, because I'm a slow learner, by the time I've started a lesson, it'll be over, but I've found years later, [??] to go back to an evening class to try and catch up on that.

So you've been doing that more recently?

Well I've been doing it a lot in the last, ooh more than maybe 18 years, on and off, of different colleges I've been to; because it's, I'm almost like a regular because, when I go, if they know I'm there, they say 'Oh he's back again,' so that helps...

[Talking together] But it

over the years.

But you were very young when you first started,

Yeah.

you must have, I mean I wonder what your memories were of being with other children, what friends you made and I s'pose what games you played?

Yeah, I made, I found I can make friends, because I like to have a laugh, and some of them share my interest in comics or writing. What I used to remember was some kids come from Liverpool, or other places, and there used to be a kid called Jeffrey. He'd

got the ability to write very well, and I seemed to have the ability to give ideas, and 'e'd write them down and I'd try and draw them: so that sort of thing, and we'd do a bit of playing, and talking and watching telly: so that's the way I related to most kids, at that school.

And you remembered watching television at that stage?

Oh yeah I do. Because I've got a habit of watching telly, they used to have two tellies in that school. Looking back, it was a rare thing, and they were on two separate channels, back then, and you could go into each room and watch a certain show on either telly, and because my interest had been, science fiction, football, and documentaries and similar, I used to have sometimes a chance to watch in either room, including school programmes, which must have come later on, on the tellies, so they were used for both: school and leisure.

And, you spoke about the children from around:

[Talking together] Yeah.

children who weren't disabled coming in and, [talking together] and mixing?

Oh yeah. For some reason, because they were houses built nearby the school: I'm not sure if it was a built-up area or not, but the side road it was on, the kids would come through the back gate, which led into the driveway, to the kitchen, and they'd stand at the fence, or the gate, and talk to us, and get to know us, then, 'cos that's part of the reason when I found out later on I was disabled, because one of them 'ad mentioned it: before that, nobody had told me I was disabled. It's like, when you grow up, in that sort of environment, nobody makes you feel different, so you're not aware that, though you are slightly different from most kids. But they were good, 'cos I got to know some of 'em well then. I 'aven't seen them for ages obviously. It was [??]

And when you came back home, what about the activities then? What did, kind of things did you do?

Because my brothers went to school, it was a like a mix of, I'd be there with them in the entrance where the old houses are, the semi-detached, with the long 'tunnel' I call it, with the old cellars, and I'd be there watching and, we'd go into the big garden. Mum and Dad would grow things, and I'd talk, and I'd laugh and play games of marbles and stuff like that: but because I was fortunate, they went to the shops, they'd bring comics, which I got to like, American comics, to read. [Talking together: inaudible.]

Can you remember any names?

Oh, Super Hero mostly. I was fortunate that I got to read most of the comics, of the time really, because at the school there was a man from the local comic factory, he brought comics like Sparky, Dandy, Beano, and you got to read them: so that's my interest in comics and reading, in that way.

And can you remember much about the, you've just talked about the houses: what, can you remember what, some of the places you've lived in were like?

Well me I 'aven't moved much. If I have moved, because at that time I was too young to even know. I've been told I've moved maybe three times in my life. The first one I didn't know was near where there used to be a police station, but it's now a blocks of flats, the area, 'cos that's where they used to live with a lot of other families. Everybody didn't have the right of their houses then, so most families got together, and some of them have known each other from Jamaica, so they know each other now some of them, who are alive and some of them, they remember if they've gone, so my earliest memories was Ewan Street, which is near Fiveways in Wolverhampton, which has been made into a big, shopping complex, I think for tools and building trade. I remember that because it was a quiet road, and not many cars used to go up it, but there was traffic down the bottom, and traffic down the bottom: at the end, sorry, and it was like a main road with lots of houses, but that's all gone now. Yeah.

And were they mainly black families who lived there?

No. Ewan Street was, I used to call it years later, 'a United Nations road', because every nationality nearly, of the town, used to live on that road. Every country possible was there, and some of them still know each other now. I've seen some, some of them are adults and they remember me, more than I remember them, really, which is nice of some of them to do that. Yeah. Different because, I've stayed there for a long time, 'til I was in my early twenties, and then we moved to where we live now, which is three times, so I've moved maybe only three times in my life: the first time I didn't really know about it, 'cos I was too young, but the other two times I do, do know.

And what can you tell me, what are your feelings about, being a black disabled person?

It's been, to be honest, a bit of both. I've had a good and bad, but luckily for me, I've never been bullied, because I've always 'ad the ability, even back then, to stand up for meself. I wouldn't say 'get into a fight' because I'm no good at that, but I used to 'ave the ability to answer back to any of the kids that felt like you wanted to, push me about, so, in that sense, it's been OK. But being black, I've been on day trips and I'm the only black kid there. At first it used to scare me, but there've been funny incidents over the years, where people 'ave moved, because I'm the only black, they all stared at me, but to me I just treat it as normal, 'cos as soon as I'd talk, they'd think, "'Ow come 'e's here?" and then some of them get to know me and some of them don't: it's their choice.

And when you were at your first school were you the only black child?

At first.

Mm hm.

In my case, I was the first black kid at both schools. The first school, I was the first black kid, and then the second school, I was the first black kid at Exhall Grange; then others came.

And what impressions did you get? What experiences did you have?

Because we are young kids, some kids say things, which in some ways is honest, but it's the way their parents has told 'em. The usual rudeness or, some of 'em get friendly and some of them don't, 'cos I've realised it's their parents or older adults, who give them the impression that it's good, but most kids don't know it. It's only when somebody older tells them, they get these racist attitudes. I didn't 'ave it often though luckily, in my case.

Mostly, your experiences were good, were they?

Yeah, because, like I said, I've always 'ad the ability, to laugh with 'em or make a joke of it, I'd usually go along with them, say, 'OK, I am: so what you gonna do?' and they usually, some of 'em, can't give an answer, but it is how people have told them to think. Some of 'em are OK, later on.

And the adults around?

Oh, some adults have been downright awkward. Some of them 'ave been absolutely scarin', but you learn to, like leave it, or just let them get on with it, and then, once they've got it out their system, it's gone. Sad really, 'cos some of 'em, it isn't necessary: because they've been told something, they actually believe it, some, if, they'd got to know me, some of 'em, it wouldn't 'ave needed to 'ave been said or done, really; but I've been fortunate: yeah.

Did you encounter any... differential treatment at school from adults or children?

Like I said, children not too bad, but adults, one or two would be a bit ... awkward, but then, because it's part of their job, they've had to do it, like, if they give me new uniform or something, or something that they've gotta give me, some of them would be a little bit awkward at first, but then, it'd 'ave to give it.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Like, if you were supposed to get a new green jumper, someone would make it a little bit long for yer to get it, to make you wait: or tell you to come back. Didn't need it, but that's the way it was.

So you encountered some prejudice?

But not a lot, I was lucky. I've looked back on it, even though people have told me, I've been lucky that I've never had it heavy: maybe because of my attitude, towards people. Some people would take it, a bit more worrying, but I don't much. Funnily enough, I'm not roused. [??]

You've told me a bit about your father, coming over to England,

[Inaudible.]

In the early, late forties, early fifties:

Yes.

can you tell me a bit about what he has told you about his experiences?

His experiences of being... that he had, obviously refusal of work sometimes, or certain young teddy boys at the time would try and take it on 'im, because he was a black man being in a white place, some of them would try and get rude or irritating, and he'd had housing problems, of getting somewhere to live, because there used to

be about maybe eight or more people in a house, and you'd have to share beds, to do a shift for working, and things like that, or the cold weather: he's had funny experiences of suddenly realising how cold it was: coming to England, and the rooms were very cold back then. It wasn't heated like now, some rooms. If you were lucky, you'd 'ave a little stove, a gas stove, to warm yourself, but, as 'e said, over the years, he's learnt to accept some of it and keep goin', so 'e gradually saved 'is money, get a house, get a car. He liked cars, he doesn't 'ave many, and that's helped him enjoy his life in England, 'cos it's better now, in the last 20, 30 years, to when 'e first came, because it wasn't really... It was like a wrong impression given. He was told back home, 'You're welcome,' but when you get 'ere, some of it wasn't there, but he's learnt over the years, as he said, to accept it and enjoy the life.

And whereabouts did he land, and where has he lived?

He's been around a few places, even to Wales, but he's mainly set himself in Wolverhampton, but like I said, when he was first in England, he had to move around to get work, like in the crane, up in the tall, those building sites, things like people, he's done that sort of job, but mainly, all his workin' life has been the building trade, 'cos he's learnt how to do the certain jobs. He'd learnt back home way of building, and then he learnt how to build 'ere, a different way, so he's done that most of his workin' life.

And he landed up in Wolverhampton?

Yeah, well that one, he always says is 'a good one.' He 'ad a friend who was on the train and mainly the friend said a different name, but he thought it meant Wolverhampton, so he followed him on the train, not knowing where, and when the taxi man dropped him at a row of crowded houses, that's where he thought he meant, so at the end of the day, after travelling around, he set his life and my mum, then, to live in Wolverhampton, and bring us all up eventually, one, one of us, there were four [??] at the time.

And did your mum have any experiences to tell, about her journey over here, and so on, [talking together] early days?

My mum, from what I remember, my mum 'ad always kept it a bit quiet, 'ow clever she really was. She had passed a couple of exams in Jamaica, but because back then, you weren't allowed to do your qualification jobs at first, she settled for more what they called 'domestic work', and kit and build up, but for some reason, she never lost that sense of working in hospitals or something like that, 'cos I've always thought years later, she could 'ave gone for a better job, but she never really wanted to do that, so 'er way was to help us learn and to write letters for different friends and family members. She was very good at that: writing letters for people and helping.

And do you remember any stories she told about her early days here?

Her early days were a bit rough, because she didn't get all the help straight away she'd thought, of bringin' up me and the other kids, so it was a case of havin' to work, come home and work for late hours til late at night, and then go back to bed and then, sort of work again: it was like a continuing work, but she seemed to enjoy it because she had liked listening to music, going out to various friends and coming home, in between all that, and learning to drive and all that.

And there's a big enough community in Wolverhampton to be settled in?

Pardon?

There's a big enough community in Wolverhampton of black people, Jamaican people, to settle in?

It wasn't at first, but it gradually over the years, it has grown, from more people to come in, and get to know each other. Some of them 'ave known each other from as I say back home, the Caribbean, and some of them 'ave got to know each other here, and they've worked out different clubs and organisations and so on. In that way, yeah:

it is a community, but it's changing as younger people 'ave changed it a bit, but the older ones 'ave got it, it's still there.

I want to just to talk a bit about your memory of early operations and so on. You told me a bit about, how the doctors advised your parents to send you away to school,

Yeah.

and you told me that, later on, there were operations that could help you:

Yeah.

can you remember, can you tell me anything about the hospitals and your experience with the doctors?

Yeah, I went to a place called Coldesly [?] outside Coventry, I've been told. The operations were mainly for my legs, 'cos the ones that were supposed to be for my left arm, they didn't wanna risk it, because as long as I could straighten it out a little bit, not as straight as my other arm, the full straight-out length; as long as it was strong enough, it didn't matter, the legs were the main thing they wanted to do, and I remember, maybe around the age of 10 at the second school I went to, Exhall Grange: no sorry, Wicket Hall in Wolverhampton, there was, a gentleman 'ad come, the physio man, and they one day had me, down to my underwear, walking with my sticks, up and down, to film me, and there were people watching, but I didn't understand the reason for filming, but it seems like, later on, it was to give them an idea of my ability to walk at that time, and work out some form of operation to take, on me, so I delayed about, after 11, 12, 13, I went to Selly Oak Hospital, and the intention was to do one operation on one leg first, my left one, and wait for three weeks for the other one, but somebody, unknown to me, some surgeon, decided that 'Why not have two legs in less than two weeks, one after the other, and operate them both, put me in plaster up to my hips, down to my foot,' and the pain was enormous, and I realised later on, it was a 50:50 chance of it, of workin', 'cos somebody else in

the ward had had the identical operation, and his failed, but mine somehow, because they said I was extra strong, took the pain: I didn't take the pain easily, because I remember each time, they 'ad to keep wakin' me up, in the night and day, 'cos I wanted to sleep a lot, and they wouldn't let me sleep, because they said it was dangerous, because of the two operations done so close together: you see. It was though a risky chance they'd taken, of doin' them so close together. I remember, my legs up in the air: I remember, that, I remember thinking I'd get away from school, but I found at that age, you'd still gotta 'ave lessons, even in hospital. That was interesting, because I got to do things like, I remember, Geography, and English and that stuff, but it was strange because you're in a ward and other kids there, and some of them would try and sleep to make it look like they didn't do their school work, but I 'ad the silliness of being naïve then, to just carry on working: but it was part of schooling then: but the operations were hard, and I had to learn to walk, altogether three times. The first time obviously, when you're a little babe, the second time at Bradstock Lockett in iron callipers on the hip, and the last time was after the operation, so it's three times I've 'ad to learn to walk: but each time it's been tough, but I've managed to get there, because different people have told me, good ideas of doing it, or else I would 'ave been in a wheelchair permanently for life, even though I do use a wheelchair for long distances.

And how did you feel about the doctors and the nurses and so on?

The doctors due to get on me nerves sometimes, because they'd wake you up and you'd have students around yer, and they'd be talkin' as if you weren't really there, and they'd ask somebody a question, and they'd ask you to undo your shirt and all that, your pyjamas I mean, and tell you to move your arms, try and move your legs, and all that sort of thing. Some of the nurses were friendly, and some of them were a bit awkward, but that I suppose is part of their job. Yeah. We 'ad, I 'ad a bit of fun in gettin' to know the kids, and havin' a laugh with, on our own, and so on, but it was a strange experience being, that the parents, that my mum and dad would come now and then, but because of the distance, it wasn't easy.

[End of Tape 1 Side A]

Tape 2 Side B [Track 4]

We were talking, I think it was last week, about your experiences of being, of having both an English education, or an English upbringing and a Jamaican upbringing,

Yes.

and switching between them,

Yes.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Because I was sent to boarding school, in Southport, in the late fifties, sixties, they were various members of staff, the ladies who we called 'aunties', and two people kindly took me into their family, if you like, adopt me, for holiday periods or weekends, whenever. They were Mrs Downs and Auntie Sue. Mrs Downs was the teacher for the infants, and she took me to the local area, to 'er family in a small ... not a small house, she had a fairly large house, and it was like her son, her daughter and her husband who worked in the police force back then. He became, I think, a superintendent: Mr Downs, and they kindly let me sleep with the son in the bedroom, on a bunk bed, or a camp bed I think: yeah, sometimes, and they used to give me, they gave me meals like an English breakfast, with cereal, bread, all that sort of stuff, cups of teas, and sort of, and then lunch like, toast, baked beans: hot pots for tea: all that sort of soft drinks, and it was like sort of setting out the table, which they used to do, and then we'd go into the garden, the kids: we'd 'ave a laugh and a little joke and play: well what they had, and then we'd come back for the meal and then we'd eat, and then we'd go back to school, so that was Mrs Downs, and Auntie Sue, as they were all called, the nurses, as I've said, took me to another part of Southport which 'ad a very big 'ouse, and she had more kids who lived in, and I think a member of 'er family, and we used to have a glass that was given to me, like it was my own special mug, to use, and the old man would tell me, stories about his family, and so on, and I'd have

similar meals there and play, so, when I went 'ome it was a bit unusual, because, sometimes you'd 'ave to use a spoon at fork at home for some meals and in the English family when it was a knife and fork, and the table certain ways, and a spoon and everything, so I used to get a bit confused, when I was younger, because I used to tell me mum, I've been told that, when they give me a spoon I used to say I wanted a knife and fork, because I'd learnt that way, and to me it seemed to be the normal way of doing it, but obviously as I got older, I realised I can do both, and it was like, simple things like honey, jam and stuff, I didn't always 'ave them at home at first. It was sort of a treat, and something different: like breakfast times. Obviously, later on we'd do that and then, Jamaican meals like most people know, rice and peas and curried goat and so on, is at home, so I had the taste of Jamaican food what, when I went 'ome: things like yam and banana, and then I'd go back to sandwiches, to spread 'em, to do 'em, like at meal times I'd 'ave to spread the bread and butter, and get out the cups and so on, and the milk, and then I'd sort of had a bit of both, because I knew I could do one life at the school and one life at home, so I had two ways of living for, for what, a number of years. It was unusual.

How did you feel about it, or how do you feel about it now, looking back?

Looking back on it, it was... a bit unusual because, looking back on it, I 'ad to remember certain ways of eating: sort of like at home, at that age it would be just a simple spoon or fork, or a simple meal and then it's done, but at school, it, you had to set out the tables, you 'ad to come in a certain time, and clean up and wash up and all that sort of thing: so it was a bit of backwards and forwards, switching, so, there were times when I wondered if I was eatin' or usin' the right things to eat with, or doing both.

Any other ways in which you felt you led a double life? [Laughs]

Getting to listen to people. Obviously, even though to some people: as I've said, certain Jamaican people talk a certain patois in a way, and you listen to them, and you listen to the how they tell you to behave, and then when you go to the, as I call 'the

English side of living', it's another way of behaving, of getting dressed, going out, doing things in a certain manner, so I had to switch sometimes back, backwards and forwards, in between both sort of older people telling me how to behave, and dress and think, so it was fortunate that sometimes I'd understand their way of thinking, and then I'd try and learn the other one, to combine both, really. Looking back on it, it was a bit unusual.

Yes: yes I'm sure. Yes, I wonder what, yes, I wonder what your feelings were?

My feelings were, for instance at home I'd use, let's say, in the English family, a cup of tea in a saucer, and you'd pour the cup of tea out, and everybody had a nice cup of tea and sandwich: right. Now I'd go 'ome, and that would be a mug, sometime: a cup of tea at any time you want, the bread any time you want, I could go and get it meself, I wouldn't 'ave to always 'ave to ask: it'd be there for me to go and get it meself, and then mealtimes is like, we'd have sometimes trays, of our meals, and then there'd be bananas, yam as I've said, and there'd be like a spoon, sometimes a fork, and then you'd 'ave sometimes be like soup, then the meal, and then done, but in English families it's usually sometimes it was a soup, and then the meal and then a pudding: so it'd be like that, so it was different, so sometime I'd 'ave it at home and sometime I wouldn't, a pudding, so it was like [laughing: inaudible] yeah, because I remember more than once asking if there was pudding afterwards, but that's something that was... As the years went on, it gradually changed, but, as you're younger, your mind had to go backwards and forwards: well mine did, in between the two ways of living.

And was there any effect on the way you learnt to talk and the way you...

I think so; I think those had, because even now, as an adult, I can't talk the proper Jamaican. I'm called 'the English one' or 'the sick one', because everybody knows in the family, as soon as I open my mouth, I'm the one that talks the clear English, and everybody else either puts it on, or talks their normal way. Some of 'em don't talk the, some, some of 'em have what's called 'two voice'. You talk to certain people one way and then, with family and friends, you talk another way. For me, I've only got, if

you like, 'one voice'. I can't change, to their way but I'm fortunate that, I can understand it, more than talk it, so I'm lucky in that way.

What would be spoken in your family at that time?

Different people... how can I put it? Certain people would say things, and you're allowed to be in the room: or certain things you have to sort of listen, to have the sense to leave the room, or certain words they'd say which you're not supposed to hear, so you'd try and learn to forget it: sort of like that, and in an English family it's a sort of daily gossip and different subjects, so it was like, there was times when I had, the English view of foreigners and the Jamaican view of foreigners, and I'm sort of in-between, listening to both, you see, of though, how each side live, and how each side thinks, so I've been a little bit fortunate, to sort of hear, personally, both sides of the argument. Mm. In many way so, in a way, I've grown up to hear, if you like, to watch separate voices of life... of people around me.

Yes. Can we turn p'raps now to, we talked a bit about Exhall Grange last week,

Yeah, that was my last school, yeah.

and that was your secondary school. Can we look at the way, well, p'raps go over some of that, but also look at what was beginning to happen as you were looking to leave school: yeah?

Oh yeah. [Inaudible.]

So I mean you went to Exhall Grange when you were

About, I think it's got to be 11, 12, 'til I was 16.

Yes. And what are your memories of that school?

A bit of both. I was, it's like most kids, good and bad. It was interesting that, if you weren't certain levels of cleverness, you were put in a mainstream of it, so in a way, I'm tryin' to make up a little bit for it since. I'm tryin' to do different courses and pass them, which I've found good. [??]

What options did you

Pardon?

What options did you have towards the end of school?

Well if you weren't in the grammar section, no matter even if you came, as some of 'em did, a little bit, I'd say, 'clever', they weren't given that choice. It wasn't handed to them.

You weren't offered to take exams?

No: in my case I wasn't; so in a way I've tried to make up, and tried to learn other things since. The teachers kind of told you about careers. I had very little guidance at that time about it. A lot of it come from my ability to look for information on my own, so in some ways, I helped a bit of myself, to find where, I might be able to go after school. It wasn't like now, kids are very lucky to get that guide in career guidance more, than what though I did for.

And so what options did you discover?

Well, at first they gave me the options of just going to the day centres. Yeah, the first thing they offered me was day centre! They didn't do like most kids now: 'Do you wanna learn a career' but though because I was determined and curious, I managed to go to the job centre in Wolverhampton, and they put me onto called 'an assessment centre', when I was 16. [Laughing] And, that one, it was, I call that 'a sink or swim show' because they dropped me in, nobody'd given me pre-lessons on how to spend

money, as what, a young adult: look after yer own clothes, decide how to go out: they just like said, 'Fill in this form,' explained to me where I was gonna go roughly, at Preston, and sent me on the train: see. Yeah, I went on the train, they met me there, and then it was like a short lecture, and then you daily had like 'Gettin' up and learn to work in the real world.'

Can you tell me where this, where was this?

The first one I went to was, I think it was Lancaster, the first one. Yeah, to an assessment centre.

And you had to get there yourself?

No, they helped me, the job centre got me in, and it was like, they got there, I think it was... yeah, I think I went on the train at that time, 'cos on the second time, my sister went to the other one, Preston with me, but that's later on. The first one, I went on the train, they met me there by minibus, took me to the assessment centre. For the first two days you had what's called 'Introduction classes', people telling you different stuff, throwin' at yer, tellin' yer different rooms, you gotta go to different places to work, and because I'd never, nobody 'ad sat me down at school and said, 'This is what you've gotta learn, this is how you spend money,' I had to learn it as though I went along: literally. Each day, each week I'd learn somethink new, because I'd never done a lot of it before, 'cos when they gave me my first wage pack, I was amazed, I'd never had that done before: someone had given me more than £10, in me hand, and they said 'Well this is yours, to spend how you want,' and I had learnt very quickly, how to not blow away the money, because at first I thought it was great! You just buy this, buy that, but I learnt, I asked members of staff and other people, how to order your laundry, work out your money for meals, goin' out on the bus: those things I learnt has, as I went along, 'cos nobody 'ad, after that little introduction, explained it to me.

And it was a residential centre or?

Yeah it was, because I went there, and the first one, I stayed there until certain weekends, and you were allowed to come 'ome for the weekend and then go back.

Was this over a year, or?

Pardon?

Was it, this for a year, or six months, or?

I think, I think I went for, if I remember, I think I did about maybe three months on that one. The last one I only did a month, because they'd made up their minds I 'ad to leave sooner, on the second one for some reason, because they'd given me the lessons like, you clock in, you learn woodwork, engineering, counting pencils, all that sort of stuff, and then they'd ask you questions like 'Can you do this?' or what I used to find irritating, even now, years later, the people'd tell you wouldn't know your ability, it would be them tryin' to tell you what you want to do, and they wouldn't listen to me 'alf the time. I'd tell 'em 'I want to sit down,' I'd tell 'em 'I want to use my hands,' and they used to give me jobs which I've learnt, I've never used. I've learnt all these skills but never used them: but that's how it was. So that was, I went to two assessments, Lancaster, and Preston, to learn different jobs, and I've done little training things, over the years, locally.

And at Preston, where they told you to go,

Yeah.

did they give you any options about, moving into work, or what, what did they...

It was, I call it 'a lame help.' They'd tell you they'd find work, but it used to be the classic run-around. They'd keep you waiting and waiting, and tellin' yer something's been sorted, and then when they did get some work, the employer wouldn't be willing

to take me on, because they hadn't been told the right way to, if you like, include me. Some of them I never got an interview, because as soon as they hear the word 'disabled', it was gone, they never even met, met me some of 'em, which I call, years later, unfair. If they'd met me and given me a chance, I might have started sooner, and that's how, though, it went.

So then you went home in the end, or?

Pardon?

So you went home again, after...

Yeah, well after the assessments, I've done, like, different training schemes, different places like engineering, like electronic engineering, C&C, all that sort of thing. I've, like I've said, I've learnt a lot of skills which at the end of the day, because certain people wouldn't employ me, I've given them me head but never used them, which is very awkward: 'cos I can still remember the electronics, I used to, I spent a year tryin' to learn all that, and the diagrams, and then the employer made out an excuse that 'e couldn't, angle the fire rules, or so on: so that went: yet in between some of the employers would do it, some of 'em wouldn't, 'cos of the rules and regulations. I was lucky that I got, later on, Carvers let me stay for four years, the building company: I was very pleased with them, and I've done about a year at the games company, May Games, doin' the circuit boards, for about six months.

Is that your main employment then?

No, my main employment, funny enough, is the [mobile phone rings] building trade. [Break in recording] Some of it was helpful; the job centres have been back a few times over the years. They've got various people, the DEA, for the disabled, some of them are helpful, and some of them are not. Some of 'em just, I even 'ad one that literally told me to sign on and go to the day centre. 'E wasn't very 'elpful, but others 'ave been helpful in gettin' me to go to college and so on but, he was awkward, he

was. He literally interviewed me and said, 'Sign on and go to local the day centre: go back to it.' I didn't like 'im much,

Mm.

but they've been 'elpful over the years, in tryin' to get employment. At the moment I'm tryin' to go in a different direction from factories, to maybe a simple office, like.

Tell me about your employment, we were beginning to talk about that,

Yes. I've only had full-time, if you like, employment twice: all the others have been placements, unfortunately, because at the end of it, the employers feel that they can't take me on for reasons of their own. I've been to May Games, which is a game company, making the games that you see in pubs and clubs: the inside of the circuit board, which is like a case, and they've got all these small circuits, and I had to sit on a bench, sharing with another gentleman, who I forgot 'is name, sorry about 'im, and we used to check, if the little transistors, if you like, were working, and then if they weren't, we'd put 'em aside, and then somebody would move them, and then they would, the right ones were put in like into a double case, and it's like a little box, and then the person would take them to the production line and they'd put 'em at the bottom part of each machine, which helps to make the games work, because that sort of gives 'em the extra power, to make all the numbers go round. I enjoyed that, and I learned a bit of soldering, but they didn't let me do that much, funny enough, even though I'd learnt how to do it, but that was OK but, then they found that they couldn't take me on because of certain rules; so that could 'ave been my first full-time job: and then I had a long gap,

So when was that one: can we just?

Ooh, I s'pose about the eighties, late eighties, or I think that: May Games: if I'm sure, I'm not positive, and then the Carvers, the building trade company, took me on for a six-month trial: no, six-week trial at first, and then I got the job, 'cos the original

owner believed in disabled people working, so I was there for four years, doing a bench, self-assembly work, which they'd made me, or partly changed a room, but joined onto the store room, to enable me to do my work, like someone'd bring in all the different boxes of tools and nails and I'd weigh 'em on the scale: so certain kilograms or ounces, and then they'll 'ave different tools, which you had to take out the box, write them up, pack 'em and put 'em, and I'd got a habit of makin' out a list, so that I wouldn't 'ave to keep askin' everybody, which one to do, and then I'd 'ave me own list, so if anybody brought me in the work, I'd know which one to do, and then I'd put 'em back into the assembly line. I did do well at that, I thought, but then, I'd, they call it 'progress', everything became already packed, so that job went: so I was made redundant twice, so that's my full-time work done, but my replacement 'ad been some which I've forgot like, electronics, C&C's... pencil pack, oh no, no, sorry: cardboards: a company which did... like, they'd fold up the cardboard to make into a box, and somebody else would use the machine to make 'em the right strength or whatever, and I used to have to count them and do a different way, so that's been my placement, mainly, like I'm doin' now, is the replacement of the mobile library, seein' behind the scenes of doin' the books and dischargin' the old ones. Well that's my latest placement, at the moment: tryin' to go a different way from the factory line. It's not been easy,

No.

Because, as I've found over the years, employers will not take you on if you're a disabled, and some of them will not interview you, even though it's supposed to be the rule. They just hear the words, just like I said, and say 'No,' but it's been there, I've kept going, because I've wanted to: I've been more than once advised to go back, but I don't want, the routine life, of what a day centre, 'cos for some of 'em they can't 'elp it, but if you've got the ability, keep out, I always does.

Have you been to many day centres?

Yes, I've been to two: the Morton Day Centre twice a week, and then I went to the old Spastics Centre, which is now Scope, for three days a week, on the Tettenhall Road, and they were mainly craft, education, and one or two did drama for a while, and it, what else is there? Yeah, games, if you want, indoors, but I got out because I was gettin' bored, after a while. I'd learnt all the jobs they were, but they didn't, after a while, certain people wouldn't let me make or do the things I wanted to make, so that's why I mainly left, 'cos I wanted to make things like a xylophone [??] in woodwork, and they wouldn't let me do it, because they said it was too hard: so things like that: and craft work, I found that good. I used to do the lettering, in doin' printing cards, but that didn't update.

The, can you say that again?

Christmas cards and invitations: I found I was only one of three people who could do it, 'cos I got the ability to put the letters in the blocks, backwards, and print 'em, and 'alf of 'em couldn't do it. I like that sort of thing.

Mm.

It was good, the day centre done me well, but I wanted something different,

Yes: yes.

because there 'ave been, I'd know within, it became so routine, I'd know a week in advance roughly what I'd be doin' next week: doin' this, it's different every week.

So that's pretty much your working life.

[End of Tape 2 Side B]

Tape 3 Side A [Track 5]

[Throughout the interview, voices can be heard in the background.] I'm interviewing Desmond Cox at the Scope house in Wolverhampton: Ferndale House, and it's Tuesday, 6th December, and my name's Anne Austin. I just showed Desmond a picture of the school he was at, called Bradstock Lockett, yeah?

Yeah.

What does, how, what does that make you think of?

As I've said, it's the picture instantly gives me many vivid memories of it. One of my popular ones is when I used to use the school tricycle, 'cos I couldn't ride a bike, and I remember in this picture, the end which it shows of the girls' dormitory, where they'd sleep on the veranda, and in the middle was the vast double doors, and at the other end, there's the boys' dormitories, and the classrooms next to it, but you can't see the ramp, and the sandpit at the other end: but it's a lovely image of... how it was, in my memory, of the school. [Talking together] Yeah.

Does it bring back good memories?

Yeah, I've had mixed memories good and bad, but mostly a lot of good ones, 'cos I can think of all kinds of things, like the bicycle shed, at the other end, talkin' to the kids who lived on the main road near the dead-end road, which the school was built on, and the people who came to visit: memories of times on listening on a Friday to the top ten's of the day in the library: so that's where my love from pop music comes. Yeah, it brings many memories: teachers and staff, [talking together] and other pupils.

And you were there from quite a young age.

Yes I was. I was told I went in, ... towards the late fifties, and I left about '66, because they couldn't sort out the next school for me at the time, so I was there a little bit longer than normal: but that's how long I was there for.

I think it closed soon after that actually.

Yes: yes. I did hear rumours that it was closing in '66, but according to this, '68, so I wasn't told too far out, 'cos the last head was Mrs Kirkby. She was the last one to be there as head: so I vaguely remember 'er, but a funny enough, she lives in a place near Liverpool called Kirkby, so that's quite a strange name of 'er. That's why I remember, and other people. That was good really, seeing that picture, 'cos I've been lookin' for it for ages meself. [Laughs.] It's nice to see it. Evidence that I did actually go to that particular school, of all mixtures, disabilities at the time, all lumbered together, in one, big school, I thought to me at that time; of all different disabilities, all together.

Were they mostly physical disability, or?

It was a wide range, from people who I call 'had double heads' and heads, helmets on, to stop themselves bangin' their heads to people with very fragile bones, which they went to the hospital regularly if they fell down: I did see moments of that, various people falling, and I learnt about that, and disabilities which weren't many of mine: cerebral palsy there, and all disabilities, and intelligence of, learning abilities: a wide range of people's abilities there, all lumbered to one, so it was interesting. Good and bad and exciting in a way, of knowing it. Mm.

A couple of names Desmond. You went to, is it Coldsley, near Coventry?

Yeah, Coldsley I went for my double operation, in the hospital there, when I was a teenager. I think it's around 12 or 13, around there. I may be wrong, but it's around that age I went for the double operations on me legs, to straighten 'em.

And you've had a recent experience of being in hospital.

Yes. My recent experience started this year in 2005 around July. It started off with a small meal, of havin' bad gammon and it's, because of my diabeticness, I must 'ave had body reaction, which triggered off all kind of other illnesses, which ended up

from being one week to about five months in 'ospital. New Cross first, and then later on as I recovered slowly to the West Park Hospital in Wolverhampton, so I've done some time in bed too long.

And I'm wondering, how it was for you as a disabled person in hospital?

I found that a lot of medical people, like doctors and nurses were a little bit ignorant, because it took 'em a while to work out I was a disabled person. They thought, because they classified it as a symptom of stroke, most of my body, 'specially my arm, my right one, 'ad been caused by the stroke, and it was a bit of a mix up for them to sort it out really, but eventually everything got sorted out, and gradually one by one, most of the illnesses went, and then they helped me with a few months, few weeks of physio, to get me back fit to goin' out, home to carry on the good work that they've done for me.

And their attitudes towards you?

A bit of both. Some were a bit awkward about it, and most of 'em were generally very 'elpful, 'cos they gradually understood of what was wrong with me, and sort out most of the problems, of the doctors and nurses.

I'm wondering whether it reminded you of previous times you had [talking together] been in hospital?

A little bit, but in a sense that, when you're in a ward with lots of other people, it takes time to get used to them, and some of 'em accept yer and some of them don't, and you learn to get to talk to some and get to know 'em well, and some, it, it, you never get to know at all really, so it helps in that way. Sort of gettin' to know them, and my family comin' to see me, and, and visitors, so it was, a bit of mixed memory of the past.

Do you think ways of treating people, and attitudes have changed since, when you were young?

It varies; it all depends on the individual person. Some people accept it, and some people still 'ave that bad attitude towards it, so it still takes time for some people to accept it.

So you're not sure whether attitudes towards disability in general have changed a lot?

It's changed in the sense that it's been more... mentioned, but not on the side of disability, of my disability, cerebral palsy: it's more dominating in mental handicappedness, more in the media, than disability of people who can talk better and think. They always put the worst attitude to put on telly, and it does annoy me sometimes, but that's how the media 'ave done it.

Have you got any examples you can think of then?

I can think of the Americans have got a very good way of doing it, that if they're gonna show a film of anybody, they pick somebody who's got very slow ability, to understand the authorities around 'em, and it's always like a case of, in the end, it's somebody who's able-bodied takin' that disabled person in, and the sympathy becomes a little bit patronising and the film ends there. It doesn't really tell the whole story: that's how they sometimes do it on telly. Sad really: even on British telly they do it, which is wrong: 'specially soap operas do it. If there's anything of disability, it's gotta be the worst, never the ones that can talk themselves, but it'll change I 'ope gradually.

And do you have any experiences of your own that have been like that?

I've been on day trips, and I've been the only disabled person there plus, the colour of my skin being background, and I'd stand out, when it's [coughs] excuse me, it takes me back a bit until they get to know me, in that place, but it's been interesting, 'cos

it's learnt me to... stand up for meself, excuse me. [Coughs] Excuse me. [Drinks.]
Yeah.

And you've recently had your fiftieth birthday.

Yes I did, yeah. I 'ad that on 26th, because the real, the proper day's a Sunday, but not many family members from far and wide, like Birmingham, Leicester, one or two I've found, new family members in Birmingham, and one from places like Wales and everywhere couldn't come, on a Sunday. [Coughs. Break in recording.] So they came and we 'ad it at the local pub, The Black Horse in Parkfields Wolverhampton, and over 100 or more family members came and friends. I got over 36 birthday cards, loads of lovely present, and loads of money: more than fifty quid, to put it safe! [Laughs.] It was nice to see that. [Clears throat.] [Coughing] [inaudible. Break in recording.] As my dad said, a lot of the people who I was directly related with, come from one district of area of Jamaica, and we're all related in some way, which is extraordinary, because it could be a scary case of people marrying into each other and don't know it: but it's interesting every time over the last few years, I've been learning more and more about my own family background in Jamaica.

And how does that make you feel?

Pleased, because [coughs], I'm the only disabled person in the main family. Most people call me 'the sick one', so it's interesting to know [coughing. Inaudible] with everybody's [coughs. Break in recording] I've found that I might have one relation in America might be disabled, but I'm not sure if 'e's directly related to me, because he lives in New York, but as I've said, I'm the only one in this country that is disabled in the family, so I'm lucky. [Coughs] So I'm a caring family, 'cos they look after me. [Drinks. Coughs. Break in recording.]

So you were telling me a bit about your relatives that you were beginning to meet, and know about.

Oh family, yeah,

Mm.

'cos I didn't know I'd got family in Birmingham even: that close, so I've been to Birmingham, and I might 'ave passed people but I 'adn't realised and they might be related to me, because that's why part of the birthday thing was to get to know as many local people or family members, which I've said 'ave come from Manchester, I 'ad one from... Wales, and I might 'ave relations in Scotland, because once, because my family have found the larger branch is multi-racial, and 'ave married into different, backgrounds, so it's interesting to know they're all linked to me, in some way.

And did they follow a pattern a bit like your parents, when they came over in?

Some 'ave; some 'aven't: some of 'em have had to go through the early days of people who didn't like the idea of mixed marriages, and some people still say the white and black, marrying, and that, and they've gradually 'ad to get the approval of the young lady's family to accept them. Sometimes some of 'em do it; some of 'em don't, but they usually end up likin' the grandchildren, more than them, so it works out mostly. It's nice to 'ave seen that 'appen, and hear about it.

So you met people you didn't know, at this, at your birthday party?

Yes I did, because many come up to me and they'd say, 'I'm so-and-so from Wales, or Birmingham or Manchester or other places:' some of them I forgot, but 'opefully I haven't really 'ave. I'll see them again, and some of them will tell me because I've got, my brothers and sister have got a good memory that they'll come, and they'll point out to me. I'm hoping to keep in contact with all of them, and gradually get to know more: because I really would laugh to say that one, on one side, we might 'ave to go to Scotland and find out if they belong to a clan, and we don't even know it, [laughs] so it's that sort of thing that makes it a family background interesting, 'cos I've always wanted to know my family more, gradually over the years I 'ave, like my

once-in-a-lifetime chance to go to Jamaica: I did see what I like to call 'the tourist side and the real side of Jamaica' in my short fortnight over there, and I still remember it even now: amazing experience. As my dad said, 'He came here with nothink,' and I said on the plane, 'You've come to England with nothink but you've took back your five sons with something,' which is a lovely idea really.

Mm. Would you like to either stay there longer or live there?

I'd like to stay there but, for a disabled person like myself, it's too rough for me, 'cos I found certain journeys and certain weather conditions far too hard for me, because my body's got so used to this country, out there would be too rough for me,

Mm.

but if I could get a chance to go to America, I'd like to do the same thing, 'cos I've got an uncle and family members over there.

And did you meet any disabled people over there?

Only one, I've only got, well she's not disabled, she's classified as 'learning difficulty': her nickname's 'Sister', and I saw 'er there over there, so it was a marvellous experience, of two, of, so the [??] in three different countries, and I'm the luckier one, I say of the lot, because I was able to think and do things for meself, 'cos in those two countries, it's either in Jamaica it's not know so well as 'ere, it's just startin' to learn, about disabilities in Jamaica, and in America it's a bit forward, but it's still behind, but Britain's way in front, but, 'catch up the rest of the world' I say: so it's good. Yeah. I've learnt a lot from it.

Mm. So when you look back at the age of 50, Desmond, what do you think about some of the changes that you have known?

The changes I've known is being able to get about, to be at different places, like transport: the general public's attitude towards me has mellowed a bit but not total, it's a bit like the odd pocket of people who still find it difficult to understand, but, from when I was a kid, most youngsters, it's only when you're a certain age, the adults tell 'yer, because when you're young, most kids don't notice the difference of disabilities, it's the adults that tell 'em, like the one I wrote in a poem where the mother pulled away a child, from me, to walk the other way, even though the child looked at me and smiled, and, that's the sort of attitude that'll gradually change.

And that happened to you, that?

Yes, that's why I put it in one of my poems, because it was something that stuck in my mind, in the shopping centre. The child wanted to know but the mother was scared and pulled away the child, so it was that sort of thing that they will gradually change, but as I've said it's gonna take time, but it's good.

And what about, you were talking about mixed marriages, mixed relationships,

Yeah.

that you've noticed in your family: what's your view about that?

My view bein' like a bit on the fence, because I'm lucky to 'ave been in like both camps. I've grown up in the, what they call 'the chocco background', because some people call me 'chocco' because I'm sort of like dark on the outside but white on the inside. [laughs] Yeah. Even my voice, when someone hears me on the phone, they think I'm a normal straight English until they've seen me, and it has shocked employers like that: it's took 'em back, because my voice doesn't always match the personal image of me, so I've been... half and half. I think it's good and bad, but it all depends on the people really.

Have you had any girl-boy relationships?

I've been, in my case, even now I tell my family members, I found it awkward that when I was young, I didn't meet many... Caribbean girls of my background, during my teenage years, so to me it was normal to be white, white, a white girl friend, and it became a normal thing, but as I got older, from people have mentioned that joke like chocco, it sort of comes to me but it, to me, I just take it, if they don't accept me what though I am, it's their problem: but it's there, I've always seen all the time, both sides of the fence.

And, but you don't have any strong feelings about going out with white women?

It's changed over the years but I don't mind on the coloured ladies as long as they like me but I've been, in my case I've been pulled more on the white side of dating, more than the Caribbean dating, because I didn't have a lot of that when I was a teenager: it's only now and in my twenties and, late forties, that that come in, and it's still a little bit awkward, but it's there.

So have you had significant, important relationships?

I've 'ad lots, I've 'ad some strange ones but nothing significant. I've 'ad people who've 'ad, who've been in the media themselves, but I didn't know at the time, but later on, I did, and it's been interesting, of knowing 'em. Yeah. It's good.

Do you, how do think that changed, has changed you as a person?

It's made me, in some of them, lucky, to not having their sort of illness, because I've been fortunate that I 'aven't had to go through very serious operations and stuff, or illnesses, but I've only known them for what that young lady's given me in happiness and friendship: and I've seen them go onto happy marriages and other relationships, so it's been good because I've always, because I'm a kind person by nature, I still know 'em, know some of them, so it's good: seen them change and so on.

And do you think that your, that disability, your disability has affected your relationships?

Some of them, but not always. Because I've got this attitude of handling things and laughin' about meself, and others, some people find that helpful to them: it changes their sort of attitudes to disability, so it's made me a good, a better person there.

Would you like to have married?

I've always said, 'For someone to marry me, I'm a very hard person, because I'm always lookin' for somebody that matches up to me,' and I've found that different, there's not one woman, as far as I've learnt that does matches that, 'cos each one's got a bit of me, but none 'as got, the whole me: that's why, in that sense yes, but I've seen my family married, and 'ave kids so it doesn't worry me, because I've got that personality to know a young lady now, and 'ave a laugh and fun, so the main thing is goin' away and just have relationships, for me.

And do you have much contact with other disabled people?

Fifty-fifty really, I'm sort of, in both camps, just like growing up. I've met other disabled people, some of 'em disabled and some of 'em mental 'andicappedness and able-bodied, so I've mixed a whole wide range, and I get to under, get to know some and learn their problems and so on, so it makes me a more, broader-minded person, really.

Right: and I'm wondering whether you've been involved in any organisations of disabled [talking together] people?

Oh I 'ave. I used to be a member, well I was a member of one: the main one in the country what was PHAB Club. I started when I was a kid of 13 at Coventry, and then by luck they opened up a branch in Wolverhampton, and I was one of the first members in that group and helped, I'm a sort of idea man; I'm not very good at

organising things, but I'm very good at comin' up with ideas, and I've always done well with that, even with the club, that now I go to now: I'm sort of idea like, there's a Happy Society, which came from one branch of PHAB Club because we didn't like the leader at the time, so we made our own group called 'The Happy Society' and I was

Can you say that again? The Happy Society?

It's the nickname 'Happy Society' because the young man that helped to start it was always smiling, and nobody couldn't think of a name for the charity number and the person suggested 'Why not call it 'Happy Society'?' because we've got a happy members, and we're all there, so that's how it become The Happy Society.

And that still exists, do you?

It still exists, but it's temporary stopped because certain members are not well at the moment, but all being well, we're back again next year. Yeah, and I come 'ere on Monday night on the socials club: the Monday night club which I've been comin' 'ere for more than [sound of knocking on door.] I were 14, 18. [Break in recording.] Yeah. That's been going on for roughly 10 years, this year. We started because some of the ex-members of PHAB Club, which 'as finished: Physically-Handicapped and Able-Bodied finished. I think in some parts of the country folded up, and some parts of the country it's still goin', but we broke away and we meet once a month, where we sometimes meet at a local pub like The Alby Arms, and we sometimes have a little transport, and we go on different day trips to Wales and Blackpool and so on, and nice holidays we've been on.

And you organise this, these in your group do you?

Yeah, yeah.

Mm.

Yeah, and I like givin' ideas just like

[End of Tape 3 Side A]

Tape 3 Side B [Track 6]

What kind of activities do you like doing then?

We socialise, we 'ave indoor games like cards and dominoes, and skittles, and we visit different, other clubs, and 'ave little discos, but mainly we socialise together, sometimes at the weekends, on a Saturday. It's been doin' well because we've managed in 10 years together [??] years, so after [??] help from different organisations like charities and pubs raisin' money for us, we've done well really. Rather good really. It's helped me and others to get out at the weekends, which is the sort of thing I like doin', I like going in the week to Good Years, to the disco and to meet other different disabilities, and Winterland [??] we'll 'ave a good laugh and a good joke. It breaks the monotony of watching telly too much, and home games and stuff, so it's good.

And then do you do any other activities yourself?

I'm in the middle, well I was in the middle of doin' colleges to try and learn typing skills, tryin' to do literary, with my English and my, with help from the lecturers and family members, to do poetry, because I've found I've rediscovered it from school, the joy of tryin' to write poetry and stories, and because my bad grammar, I get people who can correct my English, but the main idea is mine, I never let them change the ideas of the story or poem: just help me with my spelling, and I like sort of goin' on the computer, playing, and using the internet and so on, and learning other things on it: and listening to the radio, that's the other thing I do. It's good: keeps me busy.

[Laughs] You spoke about other members of your family having children: what contact do you have with the, do you have any nephews and nieces?

Close, because I've come from a close family as I say, I meet many of them regularly, they come around regularly, and we meet, and me Dad's and them lot phone us, so sometimes they come down from Manchester or Leicester, or the ones that live in

Wolverhampton come and see me regularly, and because the kids 'ave grown up, to see me as I am, and they do ask, it's more, more natural for them, but it's funny of, of the way they've said things like 'Is your leg gonna [??]' sort of stuff, and it's easier for them, because my niece and nephew(s) 'ave seen me more than what outside kids, so it's easier for them to accept it: good really.

And how do you get on with them?

Well really, because I've always had, I always love tellin' them to do well at school, because I've got a computer for the younger ones I like to log onto an internet called 'CBBC' and others, and education and help them with their learning. I like to say 'Well, if I can help them learn and tell the time,' just like I've helped my sister years ago to learn to tell the time, I like to pass on my sort of uncle-ness towards them, and they like it, because they look forward to it: of me doin' it. It's good.

And what about your relationship with your, those older than you: your father's still alive, yes?

Yes.

And others of his generation?

It's just like most young adults: good times and bad times, but it's great, when he tells me about back 'ome and families all over the place, and it's nice to hear them talk about their days, of how it was back home and how they come to England, and it's fascinating to link it up to how they've come and have helped the second generation, the third to understand here, because I keep being reminded, we've got it easy, from what they did, but it's good. I've learnt a lot from me dad and the older generation, about it.

And do you remember your, I can't remember whether I asked you, do you remember your grandparents or not?

I never met them, because my grandparents never came to England. I 'ave seen photographs of where they lived, and videos and where their grave is, because I'm surprised they lived at the turn of the century one, or one of them did, 1906 I believe and all that sort of thing, I'm thinking, 'God! They've known all that far back,' yeah I've found things like that very interesting. Different members of family tell me, so I've learnt more, as the years have gone on.

Do you think your family have changed in their attitude towards you, over the years?

Yeah, because, even though they've always encouraged me to do my own thing, they still get a bit frightened of when I'm willing to do something on my own but it's still, it's nice to know that they care and that they let me do things, just like I've seen with friends, I'm look, I've managed to do things, that most of their parents and family would never allow them to do: I've 'ad a lot more freedom than most, and sometimes now I 'ave to be careful when I'm going out, or arranging anything, to try and fit in with them, and their families, because they don't always 'ave the freedom I've got: so I've learnt a lot from it.

And is that something that's got easier over the years?

Fifty-fifty, because I've found some families are frightened of their son or daughter, no matter how old they are, of tryin' to express themselves, and I've learnt to hold back, because it's not fair for me to think of them, like me: but as I've always said, I've been very lucky to have been able to do a lot of the things I've wanted to do: go out at night, visit places, stay out late, all that sort of thing, but most of them have never had that freedom, and luckily, I have.

Have you done a lot of visiting in different parts of the country or?

Yeah, with family and with clubs I've been to, I've been lucky to go all over the different parts of England, and see different areas, and it always amazes me, I'm

watching a show on telly, and thinking 'God, I've been there,' I've done like things like this youngster who did... underground caving, and he suffered, but I've managed to do it on sticks: climb up mountains and all that sort of thing, I look back and I think 'I've done crazy things,' but at the time, I didn't care. I've walked at the side of mountains like Devil Mountain in Wales, and I've been over a 40-foot drop down one end, and at the time, I didn't care. I just used my stick and put a rope round me, and just did it, now I wouldn't do it, but then I didn't 'ave that attitude. I've changed a lot, but I've still got that adventure in me: I wanna keep doin' things, 'cos that's why I'm glad I've got this four-wheeler, it'll help me to go further afield.

What are the kind of things you'd still like to do?

I'm hoping to, when I've done my Pass Plus next year, to learn to go on the motorway, because I didn't do it in the normal test, which I thought was a bad idea, I wanna go to different places with tourist interest, like I'd like to go to visit my brother in Leicester, and then visit the space science centre nearby: all that sort of thing I wanna do, on my own or with friends, in the car: 'cos the new thing is better than the Invacar with three wheels. I was limited, but I only could go to Birmingham in that: now I know about the pleasure of bein' able to go to Wales on me own eventually. It'll be nice.

And your... Do you feel OK about going places on your own?

I've always found that an easy thing to do. I've always been willing to go somewhere on me own. I used to do little pubs, social clubs and discos on my own. To me, it didn't seem to be anything strange, but as I've got older, it's a bit wary of it now, but then I didn't care, I just got into my Invacar and went: and, and enjoyed it, of doin' my own thing: of tryin' to live a reasonable life.

And are there any things that you haven't been able to do, that you would have liked to have done?

I don't, fifty-fifty but it's part of life, isn't it? Because for financial reasons or whatever, I've not been able to do it, but I've learnt over the years to leave it alone, eventually, because something that you can't always do: but I've been fortunate in many things, so I can't really grumble of some things I've not been able to do.

And mostly the physical access doesn't stop you doing?

It hasn't too, in some things it has but mostly it hasn't, 'cos I've always 'ad, if I've got the way, and a way of [??] I can hopefully do it, so it's been good.

And have you, have things changed, have they improved, do you think, since?

Yeah well, I've 'ad things change because I 'aven't 'ad, been able to get full employment, to get that extra money, so there's certain things that I've 'ad to leave, but in general, I'm OK, just like most adults want to buy their own house, I've never had a job which is long enough to able me to get that kind of money to do it, but I'm lucky that I'm livin' at 'ome, still, because some people that are livin' in a flat, and stuff, and I don't have to do that, I've been lucky, that I have to do that.

You live with your

Dad yeah.

Yeah. And you've always done that?

With family yeah.

Mm.

Because I did, at one time, when I was younger, thinkin' that, I'd 'ave to move, but I did mention it, but the family told me kindly, I don't need to do that: as long as I've got a good family and a good home, and a little bit of money coming in, I don't need

to move, so most people 'adn't had that choice, so I'm glad in that sense: so I've got a choice.

And what about religion, Desmond? Do you, have you been a church goer ever?

Yeah, I 'ave been, I can't say I've been as much as I used to normally do, but I was brought up Catholic, and I remember Sunday School, learning the Bible, and I've got a belief still, in thankin' the Lord and everybody that helps me daily, so I wouldn't say, just because I didn't go to church that I'm, don't believe in Jesus but, [sneezes], 'cos, 'scuse me, because I've 'ad many things that 'ave happened when I've stopped and said, 'If it wasn't so-and-so 'appened, I wouldn't be sitting here today,' just like the recent five months, I was told I was that bad, that they actually thought they were going' to get the black ties out, because they thought I was that sick, but luckily, as the vicar said, 'the angel was there and kept me in me body,' so I'm here today, so I'm glad to say that, [sound of car in distance], so religion is with me, and I hear it on telly and everywhere, yeah. I believe in it: yeah.

And do you never feel that your impairment is unfair?

I can't, I 'ave to admit, I 'ave 'ad times when it's been that, but I've looked, I've managed to, I've done what most people would do, moan a bit, then look back on it and think, 'Well what things 'ave I managed to do so far that other people 'aven't done?' and one of my brothers says, 'You can do anything you want, it's just up to you, to make up your mind to do it,' and so far, I've been lucky to do that. It's, in my case, I've 'ad a family that's pushed me a lot and I think that's helped my personality: of doing things. Encouraging me, even when I've sometimes thought 'Well I don't wanna do it,' which has helped a lot.

What about politics? Are you involved in politics?

I'm not involved in politics heavy, but just like most people, I do the voting, and I listen to the politics on telly, but I really see, as I say take it with a pinch of salt,

because some of the MPs are funny, and it's all part of the job in it? Because they tell you one thing and then they sometimes mean something else, but it's been interestin' to... listen to it, but I'm not a very heavy, political person. I just like it lightly, part of the rim [ph] so I listen to it.

And you don't think there's a responsibility to make things better for disabled people?

I've listened to that side of that and I've tried to do something, but I've found that, it's not always our problem, it's the politicians, they don't always want to listen, even when they wanna some, to change something: it's not always in their personal interest, to change it, but I'm glad certain things are [knock at the door] improved. [Break in recording.]

OK. [Voices in background]

[End of Recording]