



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

Gordon Taylor
Interviewed by Anne Austin

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Tape 1 Side A [Track 1]

[The interviewee uses a facilitator and her words will be used except where she and Gordon diverge.]

I'm interviewing Gordon Hartington-Taylor at Kenilworth Grange Nursing Home. Today is Tuesday 13 September 2005. My name's Anne Austin and I have Mary Noon who is a friend of Gordon, who is going to voice Gordon's words. I'd like to begin Gordon by asking you when and where you were born.

Right. My father lived in Brixton in London and he was one of several brothers and two sisters and they lived in the basement of an old Victorian house and the upstairs rooms were either bedrooms or weren't used at all. It's a situation that wouldn't be allowed today because of overcrowding.

And when were you born Gordon?

April 13, 1924.

And I was wondering about your names and why they were chosen – Gordon Hartington-Taylor. Can you tell me a bit about that?

My mother was brought up in a different environment altogether.

[Mary whispers, 'Carry on.'] [Break in tape.] [Telephone rings.] [Aeroplane flies overhead.]

Right. My mother, she did not divulge who my mother's father was, so she kept it dark all her life. The reason for this we do not know. The only reason I can think of is that she was a prostitute. There was a brother and a half brother, eight years older.

How did this affect your mother do you think – not knowing who her father was? Did she talk to you about it?

She asked several times who her father was but her grandmother never divulged any information. When my mother was three weeks old she was sent to a place in Gloucestershire, until she was 12. [Telephone rings.]

What kind of a place?

By this time my grandmother got a job and looked after her herself.

What early memories do you have of your mother? [Pause.] What do you remember about your mother when you were a small boy?

Good and bad. She was very kind to me when I was good but she did beat me about a lot. This was done quite a lot in those days.

And your father? What memories do you have of him when you were small?

My father never lifted a hand to me. No. Always loving, never lifted a hand to me. He was very loving. He loved me more than my mother did.

Did he have more to do with caring for you than your mother?

Actually my father was very ill at one time because of the First World War.

How old were you, 24, 22? [Under breath.] Was he ill, do you remember him being unwell?

He got lung trouble in the First World War. He was in the front line and was gassed.

Can you tell me more?

And when he came back he was a broken man. He was never very well after that.

[Break in tape.]

My mother knew very well what she was taking on but she didn't bank on me being disabled.

What do you know about your birth? When you were born? Did they speak about it?

My father had the idea that I was dropped during my birth, therefore I was brain damaged.

How did they discover or when did they discover you had cerebral palsy? Did they get a diagnosis?

They didn't mention it. They just thought I was disabled. They didn't mention it and my mother didn't know about it until I was about nine months old and couldn't sit up. My mother had to get me to hospital every day for a bath and electrical treatment. After about three months they got me to sit up but no improvement in my legs at all. I couldn't move them at all. My mother asked them when I was about three and couldn't walk. I remember it very well. My legs weren't strong enough to bear my weight.

What advice was your mother given or your parents given by the doctors? Was there any particular medical advice they were given?

[Mary questions Gordon, 'What did the doctors say to your parents?']

They just said, 'Wait, he will walk one day.' Yeah.

Do you have any memories of seeing the doctors? Do you remember seeing the doctors at the hospital?

I can remember when I was about seven years old. My father was very ill at that time, therefore my mother was at wits' end to know what to do. There was no home help in those days, [talking in background] therefore we stayed at the hospital for six weeks; observation they called it. They just looked after me for six weeks; there was no actual observation. I can remember that it was a horrible time; I'm not going to say what hospital it was.

Can you tell me a bit more about what it was like? You say it was horrible. Can you tell me a bit more about what the hospital was like – what it was like being there?

You were woken at about five in the morning and were on your bed. No bottles in those days, so you were sat on the commode on your bed, on a pot, all different sizes. I was sitting on a very big pot, so big that I went right to the bottom. [Laughter.] It seems funny today but not then. And every time you wet the bed you were smacked on the bum.

By the nurses?

It must have been winter-time. I remember it being cold in the ward. I can remember getting something from off the tree. I can remember the ice on the trees.

[Break in tape.]

Can you remember anything else about the hospital?

About 50 people in the ward, a very big ward. Every time they brought the chamber pots round there was a horrible noise. I shall never forget that, at about five o'clock in the morning. [Laughter.]

And you stayed there about six weeks was it?

On one occasion they sat me on the pot and left my willy hanging over the side and you can imagine what happened. [Laughter.] Absolutely true, that's absolutely true.

Having cerebral palsy, how did it affect you when you were young? Is that difficult?

I don't think I realised what was wrong. I just thought I was normal.

When did you realise you had cp?

When I came back from the hospital because I couldn't get on my feet. And I couldn't get to the table in the dining room.

End of Tape 1 Side A]

Tape 1 Side B [Track 2]

What reactions did other people have to you when you were young?

They just looked and laughed.

And can you tell me about your family, did you have brothers and sisters?

No, there was no one at all.

So it was your parents who helped you?

I tried to pull myself round the table and my father said I could walk if I tried.

[Break in tape.] [Whispering.]

Do you remember about the effort it took and difficulties?

Not really. I can remember when I stood without holding on. I would be about eight and after that I started walking. Not very well at first and I would fall over and I could not hold my head up, so I bumped and my knees were in a dreadful state because I kept falling over.

Did you have a calliper or boots or sticks?

No, they brought a chair, which was the only one available in those days. It wasn't nearly big enough for me. They used to take me, walk me up the road and take me shopping, so that I could gradually get used to walking. I was 12 before I could really do that. I used to walk for miles. The only trouble was I used to wear my shoes out and oh I knocked my knees together when I walked. I would wear a pair of trousers out in about six weeks and they cost my father quite a bit of money because there was nothing from the government for years.

Nothing at all? Was your father in work? I mean was money tight then to buy you new trousers?

He had a good job before the War and could afford to keep me. Otherwise he'd know, he would know what would happen.

And it sounds as though it was your parents who encouraged you, not the doctors in the hospital?

The doctors did nothing. They didn't know how they could help me.

But your parents encouraged you?

There was no help in those days at all.

[Break in tape.]

So you were the only one at home? Yes?

Unfortunately.

Unfortunately.

One thing I do regret.

Were you expected to be polite to your parents? How were you expected to behave?

[Mary repeats the question to Gordon, 'Were you taught manners? Were you expected to behave?']

Definitely. I got a smack every time I was naughty. On the back of my knee. And it hurt. [Laughs.]

What...?

And it didn't make any difference, I still misbehaved. [Laughter.]

What kind of things did you do that were naughty?

Not very much. When she called me up I was expected to be there right on the dot and when I wasn't – smacked bum. [Laughter.]

So punctuality was important?

Very important in those days. I had to have leather on my clothes, so that they didn't wear out so quickly and that was very hard.

What other values did your parents have? What other things did they consider important?

Good behaviour, I suppose that's one thing. My father would let me get away with lots but not my mother. My mother was more strict. She would certainly let me know. I got sent to bed quite a lot without any tea. [Laughter.] 'That'll teach you', she said.

Have you got any...?

But it never did. [Laughter.]

Have you got any memories of playing or doing things with your parents when you were small?

When I was about 15 they took me out but I don't remember going out before that. After the Second World War they would take me out quite a bit but before that it was much too difficult. No help at all in those days.

What do you remember about Wartime? What was it like for you?

The house we lived in was bombed and it was uninhabitable. So we all had to sleep together in one room, in one double bed and one single bed, which wasn't very comfortable. We did that for about two years until it became unbearable and then my father went down and insisted that they repaired the house. Just in time for the flying... just before the flying bombs started.

I've heard about them; I don't know much about them.

When it stopped, when the flying bombs stopped, you knew that they were coming down to you and that was it. So the Germans didn't get... Yes, the something started after that. They didn't get you, thank God.

And after... [Telephone rings.]

You spent most of the time in Wartime, sorry. You had to go out and get the food, queue up and that wasn't easy.

Were you frightened? Was it a difficult time?

[Mary asks the question, 'You weren't frightened? You weren't frightened of the bombs?']

One night an aeroplane came over and I was very frightened. It dropped about nine bombs and each bomb came nearer and nearer. I got a bit scared.

You were with your parents then?

Yes.

How would you celebrate with your parents, your birthday or happy events?

Oh what...? My mother used to give me parties – Christmas Day and birthdays – in the old house in Brixton. They drank beer all the time. My grandfather was a drayman. He would... hmm.

What did he do?

My grandfather drove a wagon with the shire horses and the barrels of beer. About half past five in the morning to get the horses ready. So he'd come home for his breakfast and then go out again.

Did he live with you, your grandfather? Did he live with you?

He lived with his daughter. Oh, he was 91 when he died.

And your grandmother? Do you remember her?

[Mary repeats question, 'Your grandmother, on your father's side?']

She died about a year earlier. She had a stroke and didn't get over it.

What do you remember them when you were young? Did they come to see you?

Oh yes, I can remember. I was very fond of my grandfather but my grandmother was a very stodgy person. She wouldn't let me out of the house at all. She used to go out at eight o'clock in the morning to get my grandfather's breakfast, a lovely big beefsteak.

[Laughs.]

For breakfast?

[Mary speaks to Anne, 'If you see somebody coming in with his tray you'll have to...']

[Telephone ringing.]

*And did they influence you a lot? Here they are. I'm sorry I think we better finish.
Shall we finish Gordon today? All right?*

[End of Tape 1 Side B]

Tape 2 Side A [Track 3]

I'm interviewing Gordon Taylor. Today is 27 September 2005. We're interviewing at The [Kenilworth] Grange [Nursing Home] and my name is Anne Austin. And Mary Noon – Gordon's friend – is voicing Gordon's story.

Now Gordon there's some things from last time I'd like to ask you if that's all right? One of the questions...

I can remember certain things in the very early days.

Can you tell me about them?

On one occasion, I can't remember when...

[Mary questions Gordon, 'You fell down the stairs?']

I fell down the stairs. I was about four and I fell down the stairs, right from the top.

And what happened?

[Mary questions Gordon, 'You got a beating?']

I fell down right from the top but I relaxed, so I didn't hurt myself.

And how old were you then?

About four, maybe five.

Did you fall down a lot in those days?

Yes.

[Mary questions Gordon, 'You can remember a railway arch? I didn't get the first part Gordon.']

[Break in recording.]

OK, sorry.

I didn't like going anywhere near the railway, I had a horror of it. I used to scream the place down when my mother wheeled me under the railway arch and I got a smack for that. [Laughter.]

Was this in Brixton still? Was it when you were young in Brixton?

I can't remember where it was, every time we went, there was a shop Mum used to go to every time. Why? I can't tell you why.

Can you tell me also about the shops and places you went to with your mum?

My mother was very fond of going shopping, not to buy anything, just to look round and she took me with her.

And did you like going shopping?

I had to go.

Do you remember what shops were like in those days? Were they different from today?

A lot of them aren't there now. There was the *Home and Colonial*.

[Mary questions Gordon, 'The new?']

The newspaper place, yes I can remember the newspaper place.

[Break in recording.]

Scroggy. That was a funny name.

Did you buy sweets or do you remember getting papers at the paper shop?

I can remember buying my dad a newspaper quite a lot in those days, the *News of the World*. Oh, very old-fashioned.

Were there any magazines for children then? Do you remember having anything yourself?

What?

To read.

I can't remember having any sweets; I weren't very fond of sweets. I was frightened of getting fat I suppose. [Laughter.]

Can you tell me a bit about your house?

What I do remember, the number of horses and carts in the street; they were all horses and carts. The baker used to come every day and the milkman used to come all with horses and carts and the greengrocer. Today you never see a horse and cart. A lot of people saw me in my chair and wondered what was wrong with me. A lot of people didn't know in those days. I found out the reason why a long time afterwards. There was hardly anybody at home. They were all forgotten about in those days.

In institutions? Were they, you know, put away, hidden away?

In mental institutes.

So it was quite unusual for your mother and father to keep you at home?

Very unusual.

And people's reactions when you went out, they were surprised?

They looked and walked away.

Everybody?

Nearly everybody.

[Mary questions Gordon, 'Even?']

The majority of people looked and walked away.

What about [Gordon interrupts] sorry.

I think they were a bit frightened of me.

What about the people who got to know you in the shops? Perhaps your relatives?

Oh yes, I got on well with people in the shops, when they got to know me. I can remember lots of people begging in the streets and they knocked on the door begging. Or they got war veteran on the boxes that they were collecting and I did wonder why they didn't have a job.

Do you think there was a lot of poverty and... after the War? Was it difficult, do you think for people after the War?

I think they made a lot of fuss about nothing. They could have worked for a small wage.

And what about when you went to Norbury. What was your house like there and your circumstances there in Norbury?

Mary: *When you moved to Norbury. What was the house like?*

It was a bit better than the other house, it was very nice. There was no back garden; oh there was a back garden but no way to get in it, so everything had to come through the house and through the kitchen.

Was there...?

The dustbins and everything. And the coal had to come through the house. My mother got a bit fed up with that but my dad wouldn't move again.

And your mother, did she work outside the home at all?

It wasn't done in those days. When you got married in those days you stayed at home. No housewife would work at all.

[Break in recording.]

The only people who went out to work were perhaps widows.

And can you tell me a bit more about your mother's background, your mother's upbringing?

Difficult, that's difficult.

Difficult, your mother's family...

My mother was taken away and brought up by relations. She wouldn't tell me but I've got a good idea why. She stayed with these people until she was 12 and then she came back to her parents, to her mother. Grandma had got a job by then and had looked after us.

Was it to Gloucestershire she went?

[Mary responds, 'No.'] Oh, that's the wrong bit.

[Mary questions Gordon, 'Where did your mother go to stay?']

Oh near Swindon, in a village called Upper Stratton.

Did your mother ever talk about her childhood to you?

I don't think she knew much about it. She kept asking who her father was but her mother never told her and she took that to her grave. So she never knew her father. That's why I think my grandmother was a prostitute.

How did your mother and father meet each other?

My father came back from the War and he got a job with the Civil Service. My mother had a very good voice over the phone – she was a telephone operator – and he used to ring up and get this voice over the phone and he was intrigued and then they met. I don't know whether it was love at first sight or not. [Laughter.]

Did they go out, go courting for a long time?

About 18 months. My mother was very fond of violets and he brought her a posy every month. Every time he came to see her he had a posy in his hand. He just used to

appear or they used to appear and she didn't know where he hid them. He used to hide them in his hat. [Laughter.]

And when did they get married?

On Christmas Day 1922.

Was that unusual to get married on Christmas Day then?

I think they did it then, in those days.

And your father, he worked in the Civil Service yeah? When he came back from the War he got a job in the Civil Service?

After he came back from the War, yes. He had five brothers and he wanted to get out of the house. He wanted and he got this house in Norbury. He couldn't really afford it but he got it.

And how old were your parents when you were born, roughly? [Laughter.] Was your mother quite old to have a child when you were born?

She was 25.

And your father?

Same age.

Same age?

They were born within three months of each other, so they were the same age.

And did they ever tell you about or did you observe their reaction to your disability...?

I think they just accepted it after time. They were a bit upset but I think they just accepted it.

And they didn't have any more children?

They were afraid to. I was the biggest mistake they ever made. [Laughter.]

You told us a little bit last time about going to hospital. Did you have a lot of contact with the hospital over the first few years of your life?

Yes, they gave me what was called an electric bath in those days...

[End of Tape 2 Side A]

Tape 2 Side B [Track 4]

*Can you tell me a little about the contact you had with the hospital in the early days?
Could you tell me again?*

Yes, they gave me electric baths and my mother used to take me up there every day for weeks.

Was this? Sorry...

And they got me sitting up.

Was this at Great Ormond Street you went?

Yes.

How did you get there?

I can't remember.

No.

I think it was by bus. You wouldn't have been able to walk, it was too far. I don't know how far it was but it was too far.

And they said this helped you sit up?

[Mary repeats the question, 'Did it help you sit up?']

They said it did but it actually didn't very much. After we moved to Norbury until my father had a haemorrhage of the lung. Oh and then I went in and stayed for a little while.

Yes.

[Mary speaking as herself, 'I remember that.']

Yes, you told us about that.

That was in 1931.

You were seven years old?

I had just started to get on my feet, just about that time.

I was going to ask you about that. Did you do that mostly on your own, or did your mother help you? How...?

No, I did it mostly on my own. She had too much to do; my dad was very ill at the time.

Can you remember what you did to learn to walk?

I got round the table, pulled myself up and walked. It wasn't really just struggling to walk. I got a titanium bar to hold. Nobody thought about getting anything, any equipment at all.

So the hospital or the physios didn't help?

'Don't forget you're mental', that's what they said.

Did they? Is that the way they treated you, as 'mental'?

Oh yes.

What...?

There was someone who came round every three months, to see if I was still alive.

From... hospital?

Somebody from the health authority.

They gave you a wheelchair at one stage, yeah? Did you say?

[Mary whispers, 'Say it again.']

Sorry. They gave you a wheelchair? Did they give you a wheelchair?

Good God! No. [Laughter.]

I thought you told me they gave you a chair? [Laughter.]

There was nothing in those days, nothing. [Laughter.]

But through this your mother and father must have understood you?

They did.

And your doctor?

He was a good man he was.

Can you tell me a bit about him? Did he help you?

Not very much.

[Break in recording.]

So you never had a wheelchair? Have you ever used a wheelchair?

A very old-fashioned one when I was 10 or 12 and then it got chucked out in the garden. It disappeared one night.

And you were walking for quite some time weren't you?

I didn't go into a wheelchair again until about 50 years after that.

I was wanting to talk also about... you didn't go to school is that right?

That's right.

Yeah. Can you tell me a bit about, I mean did your mother and father have any discussions with anybody about it? Or did anyone come and...

My mother tried to get books to teach me but they wouldn't let her have them; they said it wasn't worth spending money on a 'mental'.

The education authority said that or the hospital, health service?

My mother taught me to read, I don't remember how. I got an idea they took me up onto the common. Oh, comics, sorry. I had the words divided up in a comic and I got the idea from that.

And nobody was suggesting you should go to a special school or...?

No, if I'd moved about three miles up the road I could have gone to somewhere but my dad didn't want to move.

Do you remember your parents' reaction to this?

I think my father was very angry. He got me some good books. He would choose the books and they were very useful. And I started reading. They didn't think I'd make it but I did.

Your parents didn't? Your parents didn't think you'd make it? No, sorry.

Anyway, I did it all myself.

You must have done Gordon; you must have done a lot yourself. What about arithmetic?

[Mary repeats, 'What about arithmetic?']

Nothing very advanced; you just picked it up. You started and then you thought you were too old. Mathematics, yes but you taught yourself. You couldn't get on with it, you were too old.

When was this? When were you too old? Is this later?

About 55. Oh, right.

So your mum helped you read comics. You did a lot yourself. Can you remember about the kind of things you read and you enjoyed when you were learning?

[Mary asks, 'What type of books did you enjoy?']

Technical books. Scientific books. Even my father couldn't understand them.

[Laughter.]

So that was the kind of thing and do you still like that kind of book?

Yes. Your brain was too good for your father. He was a bit stuffy. He wasn't as daft as we thought he was. [Laughter.]

Oh dear. Did you read literature, poetry?

Yes, I tried poetry.

Shakespeare?

My mother had some books, my mother had a few books that were good and I've still got them.

And when you were a bit older like, I don't know, 11, 12, did anybody come back and reassess you?

No, it wasn't like that. At that time because it was the Wartime then, everybody was thinking about the War. I don't expect you've got any ideas?

Probably not. [Laughs.] Can you tell me what your teenage years were like? What was it like for you when you were a teenager? What did you do?

Not much. I had one or two good [?].

[Mary asks Gordon, 'Good friends do you mean?']

I had one or two good friends up the road – boys – most of them couldn't be bothered with me.

But you had a few friends?

About three.

What kinds of things did you do together?

I played chess quite a lot, not very much but we played with a cricket ball. Otherwise not much.

And did you have many hobbies or other interests?

Yes, I had quite a lot during the War; I was making aircraft models quite a lot. And I had a very good stamp collection; it was worth quite a bit of money. And then Kath made me get rid of it. [Laughs.] I should have given it to Arthur really but we sold it. It was worth about £5,000.

Who's Arthur?

[Mary responds, 'My brother.']

Your brother?

[Mary responds, 'Got a DECO, a power of attorney.']

*Yeah. And did you have any contact during that period with other disabled people?
Did you meet other people who had disabilities?*

I don't think so.

You've never been part of a disabled group?

No, I wasn't that type. I was a bit of a loner.

Would you have liked to have been? Now, looking back would you like to have had contact?

Oh yes, quite a lot. I think I missed quite a bit.

Have you had friends? Have you kept up with those friends from when you were younger?

Until we moved up to Birmingham. One of them went to New Zealand, I don't know what happened to him, he'd be about the same age as me, if he's still alive, which I doubt. He was a bit mad, like my brother, always a bit mad. [Laughs.]

How was he mad? In what ways?

He used to do daft things. [Laughs.]

I think we've....

[Break in recording.]

Just about other things you remember?

I remember that the kids used to come up to me and make faces at me and they asked me what was wrong with me, what could I say?

How did you feel? [Noise of people talking in the background.]

Bloody awful. [Laughter.]

Stop.

[End of Tape 2 Side B]

Tape 3 Side A [Track 5]

It's Tuesday 8 November. I'm interviewing Gordon Taylor at Kenilworth Grange Nursing Home. My name is Anne Austin and Mary Noon is voicing Gordon's comments.

It's lovely to see you again and I think you said there were some mistakes in the tapes so far? [Voices in background.]

My mother went to Cheltenham when she was three weeks old.

[Break in recording.]

She spent about 12 years at Cheltenham. Before my grandmother could have her back.

Right and where was she staying then, in Cheltenham?

I don't [know] where she stayed in Cheltenham.

OK, yeah but when she was quite young?

She first went to school in Cheltenham until she was about 12, [coughs] then my grandmother called her back again. I don't know why.

You don't know why?

Yes, I've got my ideas but I can't prove them, so we don't really know.

Was there anything else on the tape that we got wrong?

I've forgotten what the other mistakes were.

We can set them right later, OK? You have talked quite a lot about your early life as a child and when you were learning to read and so on, and when you were a teenager. I'm wondering whether you could tell me a bit more about when you were a young man and the kind of things that you did?

Where can I start? [Laughs.] My first years as a teenager were in the War of course. I wasn't allowed to get about much, so you spent a lot of time at home. My job was to go and get the grub and the food. [Laughs.]

So you did the shopping?

And that was a job too. Quite often there was no food left by the time I got to the front of the queue. Fortunately the shopkeepers knew me [coughs] and let me come to the top of the queue sometimes. That didn't please the old women; they got very annoyed about that. [Background voices.] [Laughter.]

And what kind of things were there to buy? Can you tell me a bit about the food that you could buy?

You could buy what they got, which wasn't much – in fact nothing at all. [Laughs.] You might be lucky and get some fish sometimes but not very often. Many a days I got home with an empty basket.

[Break in recording.]

So you were telling us about the shops and going shopping.

The aircraft came over; there were about nine bombs on one night. We stopped up, they used to get later and later every night and you could just about get to bed before the 'all clear' went. Oh, you'd got a shelter in the garden but we never used it, until it got really bad and we had to then.

Can you tell us?

It was very small inside, so you can imagine how squashed we were. My mum used to put me in a deckchair and I was most uncomfortable because my feet stuck out of the doorway.

[Break in recording.]

We had got a bomb at the bottom of the garden about nine o'clock one night. We were listening to the radio at the time, so we didn't hear the bomb coming down. Next thing we knew we'd all been blown up. [Laughs.] And the ceiling came down upstairs. In the garden next door there was a wooden shelter, it was covered in sandbags, all the garden wall... the bomb just missed them by about a yard. My father rushed down and got them out. It just missed them by about a yard. I don't know how they got out really. That's all. Fortunately the bomb didn't do much damage because it went deep into the earth and they never found it. It's probably still down there. [Laughter.] And we got up the next morning to find all the ceiling was down, all the walls were cracked, we just carried on downstairs – all in one room – for about three months. And they didn't come back then because it was over. We stopped there for about two years I suppose. And then my dad said, 'Blow this; I'm going to get my house repaired.' And then he went to the builder and organised it. [Lots of noisy voices.]

Shhh.

Do you remember anything much about the end of the War and the celebrations or not?

Yes, our celebrations in the street after the War. When it was over and my mother took me there to see what was going on. I could walk then, so that was all right. I've never seen anything like it before or since. It's not quite the same today, they didn't

get quite so... Apart from the flying bombs in 1944 and that was horrible. Never knew when they were coming. You waited until the engine stopped, then you dived for cover. [Laughs.] There were three or four minutes before it crashed; if you were anywhere near you'd had it and if not, you'd got away with it. [Laughter.] It wasn't very funny. And then one day they sent rockets over.

Can you tell us about that? Rockets?

You had no time at all and you got no warning at all with the rockets, they just crashed down. It was terrifying if you thought about it but you tried not to think about it. But we got over it. [Laughs.]

And after the War you were a young man then, can you tell me about some of the things you did, what your day was like?

I didn't do much; I wasn't allowed to. They didn't let me have a girlfriend. They told me it wasn't possible. They didn't tell me anything about sex at all. They thought because I was disabled I wouldn't want a girlfriend. They just thought it would go away but of course it never does.

Did you want a girlfriend? Did you see anybody you liked?

I saw plenty of people I liked but they wouldn't look at me. [Laughs.] They didn't understand.

Did you go out socially to, I don't know, dances or cinema?

They took me to the cinema every week. That was the high spot of the week.

They? Is that your parents? They took you?

Yes, my parents took me. We sat in the back row. I often wondered why? I found out afterwards it was so that I could watch the other people. [Laughter.] I thought that would make you laugh.

Did...?

Oh they took me to see the *Crazy Gang* and they were crazy too, yes.

Were you able to meet anyone of your own age? Or were you able to go out independently...? Were you able to go out on your own or with people of your own age?

No, not at night-time. I would go out for walks in the daytime but not at night. They thought I'd get lost. I was over 40 before I started going out with girls.

[Mary, 'Is that what you said?']

But remember I'd got no money of my own.

Even when you were a young man your parents were still controlling you?

Yes. They thought I would get into mischief. I can't think of any other reason. They didn't tell me anything about sex, I found out that for myself. [Laughter.] Whether my mother knew afterwards I don't know, she never mentioned it. Whether they thought it would go away or not I don't know.

So you were living with your parents for how long Gordon, like this?

I lived with my parents until 1960? So I always lived with my parents.

And in that time you didn't have work, independence?

No, I used to go to a work centre. For about five years I went to a work centre in Norbury, in Croydon, before I got the job in Birmingham.

Can you tell me about the work centre, the...?

Oh, it was a craft centre. We used to do basketwork and sea grass stools. The stool and chair seats.

Oh and a little bit of metalwork as well.

You did metalwork? Did you do metalwork?

Yes, I didn't like that very much.

Were there other disabled people there?

Yes, there was a lot of people there, about 25.

Did you make friends with other disabled people? Get to know them?

[End of Tape 3 Side A]

Tape 3 Side B [Track 6]

Not really what I call friendships.

Have you ever been in a disabled group or having disabled friends in your life?

No, never. I'm a bit too old now. By that time I was a bit too old. There were one or two that I worked with that I quite liked but they didn't like me. I was too clever for them.

How did you develop your cleverness, your understanding?

I have no idea. It just came.

You learned to read and music?

It started very early. My mother got me to read in about three weeks. I was very quick. Then I started reading technical books.

So mostly you were self-taught?

All self-taught. Nobody taught me anything very much.

And what were your favourite books and subjects when you were younger, when you were a young man? Sorry, what were your favourite topics when you were young?

Oh I can't remember really. I can't... Anything. Astronomy was one of my favourite subjects but anything – it still is today. I think I would have been clever enough to have gone to university, if I'd had the chance.

Now you were in Norbury until about 1960, can you tell me about the move to Birmingham?

Sorry?

[Break in recording.]

My mother died when she was 58, in 1959. She was 59 when she died, in 1958.

Had she been ill?

She had a heart attack in 1952 and she never really got over it. And in 1957 she started to go down, yeah. My father took her to hospital but they couldn't find anything wrong with her. She was there about a month I suppose. And she never came out. She had an operation and they found she was covered in cancer. And the day after the operation we went to see her and she was very bright and cheerful and the next day she died.

I wonder if that was quite a difficult time for you? Was it difficult?

No, the most difficult time was when my father died. I had all his family trying to tell me what to do and that was annoying, very annoying but I didn't take any notice of them.

What kinds of advice did they give you?

They wanted me to go into a home. They wanted to get rid of me. But very fortunately my stepmother was there.

Tell me about your father, how he met your stepmother and their time together.

[Mary asks Gordon, 'When did Bill meet Kath?']

My father then met Kathleen on a coach trip to Scotland.

After your mother had died?

No, my mother was still alive and knew Kathleen. My father didn't want to go on the coach, he would rather have gone in his car but my mother got her own way and went on a coach. [Telephone rings.] Kath was sitting behind us on the coach and we became friends and she took a fancy to Bill.

And what did you think?

[Mary, 'Say that again.'] [Another person comes in and speaks to Gordon.]
[Break in recording.] [Mary, 'Yes. Gordon's hairdresser. No, she wouldn't know, you'll have to apologise to her.'] [Break in recording.]

Oh, I met Kath when Mum invited her over to our house. Oh, when they decided to get married Kath promised that she would look after Gordon. That suited me down to the ground.

You liked her? You got on with her?

Better than her mum, his mum [my mum].

[Mary, 'Well that's saying something.']

Can you tell me about that? In what ways better than your mum?

My mother was too dictatorial, I don't know why. She was frightened I would get into trouble. I'd got a bit more sense than that. [Laughs.]

And your father and Kath didn't have a very long marriage, is that right?

About two years and a few months. And therefore she wasn't allowed to have a pension. You have to be married for three years before she could have got his pension.

Was that a rule of his employment?

[Mary answers, 'No I think you mean the government pension. Which pension do you mean? The normal civil pension, the government pension?']

Normal pension. She got the Civil Service pension yes but not the state pension, not until she got it in her own right.

[Mary speaking, 'Which was much later of course 'cos she was younger then.']

About 50, yes.

[Mary speaking, 'When he died.']

So about 20 years before she got her pension.

And was your father's death sudden, was it? Did he die very suddenly?

Well, it wasn't really sudden because he was gassed in the First World War and therefore he was never very robust. He had a haemorrhage one day in 1931, that put him in hospital or my mother looked after him then; he hated hospitals. It was very difficult because she had me to look after as well. In those days I couldn't do much for myself. He went downhill a bit after my mother died. Then in about 1961 he left work. Took his retirement pension from the Civil Service about nine months. We'd had a lot of fog at the time and it was the smog that affected him, it got down into his lungs and he went into hospital. And the last time I saw him I said to him, 'Are you going to get over this?' And I thought, 'No you won't.' I told them, 'I know him better than you do.' [Laughs.] He lasted about a day and a half and then just went. Very difficult time for me. I missed him far more than my mother – much more – we

were very close. Oh, my family thought Kath would leave me and they wanted me to go into a home. They were afraid that Kath would leave. I said she wouldn't but they didn't believe me, they didn't trust her. And that is that. [Laughs.] They weren't very pleased when I told them I was going to move up to Birmingham and get out of their way.

Was moving to Birmingham your idea or Kath's?

It was both really because I'd been offered a job up here and Kath wanted to get nearer her home, her parents. She wanted to get away from my family.

Was she from this area? Birmingham area?

Yes.

Can you tell me about the job you went to?

[Mary asks, 'The job at Meadway what was it?']

It wasn't much of a job. Half the time sitting and doing nothing or messing about.

What was made there?

Bits for cars, carburettors, all different components. They gave me the job of getting them up, putting them all in big boxes, certain things like that. I was on my feet all the time.

And how long were you in that employment, Gordon?

About 15 years.

But you didn't enjoy it very much? Did you enjoy being there?

I couldn't really say that. It was a very boring job. They wouldn't let me take [a] managerial job. [Coughs.] I got into terrible trouble more than once for doing things without being told. I could do the job better than the foreman could do it. [Laughs.] And eventually he had to give way because I got the better of him one day. [Laughs.] And he realised that I was much cleverer than he was. [Laughter.]

[End of Tape 3 Side B]

Tape 4 Side A [Track 7]

I'm interviewing Gordon Taylor at Kenilworth Grange nursing home and it's Friday 9 December and my name's Anne Austin and Mary Noon is voicing Gordon's speech.

Well, there's lots to talk about today Gordon. I don't know where you want to start. We've just seen lots of rosettes and awards you got when you were growing chrysanthemums with Kath. And this was in Birmingham, in Yardley. Do you want to tell me a bit more about growing chrysanthemums?

Oh, I started in Worthing? It was in Worthing. My parents took me down there for a week. They were trying to find out what I could do and what I couldn't do. It wasn't very exciting because they kept doing the same things over.

Was it a centre or a training centre to look at your skills?

That was the idea but unfortunately it didn't work. They wanted to know what my abilities were and they didn't like what they saw.

This was in Worthing?

In Southend, sorry it wasn't Worthing; it was in Southend. It wasn't at Worthing at all, my mistake. They started to ask me, they got me on the... Oh, it was on a mechanical... drill [?]. [Both talking together.] They told me afterwards that I was the best one there.

How old were you then, roughly? How old were you?

Over 40. Just about 40. About 1964. About that time. I hadn't got much idea of getting a job at all. I wanted a job because I'd got no money coming in and the sort of job they would give me wasn't what I wanted. All they would give me was a workshop job in Birmingham.

Was that how you came to go to the Meadway Centre?

Yes.

Can you tell me a bit more about the centre?

I got on all right with some people but not all of them. In fact, I didn't get on with the foreman at all. He thought everyone was the same and he wouldn't let anybody do anything for themselves, no. It was just a waste of my time. One day he made a mistake and left the work for me to do on my own. Well of course I'd got him then.

[Laughter.]

What was the kind of work? What kind of work were you doing?

[Voices in background.]

Mostly labouring.

Sorry.

[Break in recording.]

You were talking about the kind of work you were doing at the Meadway.

Just little jobs on a machine. I'd been doing it for years.

How many years were you there? How many years at the Meadway Centre?

About 15. Quite long enough. [Laughter.]

You were saying they couldn't give you the kind of work you wanted to do, this was down in Southend, what would you liked to have done Gordon?

I'd have liked to have gone in the office and used my brain a bit more, which they didn't allow for. Eventually they gave me the job of packing everything. This suited me a bit better. Not all that much but a little better. It was quite hard work because I was on my feet the whole day and not very interesting.

A lot of the things you learned were self-taught weren't they? You learned and you read a lot when you were younger. You said to me you were going to talk about how you came to be so clever.

That's going back a long time. Started when I was five, when they started coming round and the authorities said, 'We can't educate you; you've got no brain. Don't bother; don't waste your money on him. Have him certified and forget him.' That's what they said.

Yeah? Really?

My parents were horrified and so was my doctor. 'Don't let them do that at all.' That's how I came to be home all the time. I was very frustrated; it was very boring. Yes, my mum tried everything, she even tried to get hold of the schoolbooks but they wouldn't let her have them. So she started to get me to read. I don't think it was a hard job. I used to read comics. In the comics they split the words up and that's what got me started to read and then I did that all day. And at the time I listened to the radio, oh *Radio for Schools*. I listened to *Radio for Schools*.

Can you remember anything about the programmes you heard on the radio?

Every term they issued books and my mother sent for the books every year. And from then on I started to learn. I wish I'd taken French and German but I didn't. I didn't see much point in those days but when I got older I realised I'd made a big mistake.

What were the subjects you liked reading and learning about?

Mostly geography and English and nature too and science, up to a point. I didn't get on too well with that; I found I couldn't understand it. I'd like to have taken that further.

And have you gone on reading and studying all your life, when you were an adult as well?

Yes. I like to read high class books which my mother... she sent for them but she couldn't understand why I wanted these books but my father understood.

And then when you were with Kath, you were doing a lot more, you were learning more about music and the chrysanthemums, yeah?

I suppose so.

Tell me a bit more about that.

[Fourth person speaks for Gordon, 'Not yet.']

You're getting too far advanced.

So tell me what came before that then.

My father tried to get me jobs but every time he was turned down and he couldn't work out why. He ought to have done really but he couldn't work out why.

Can you tell me about the kind of jobs he tried to get you into?

Mostly office jobs. He thought I could work a bit better but he got turned down on medical grounds. They thought I was mentally defective therefore they weren't allowed to employ me.

Was this when you were a young man was this?

In my twenties. They used to come round every six months to make sure I was still alive.

Who came round?

It must have been the Department of Health I suppose. I used to hate them coming. My mother used to say, 'Get off my step.' [Laughter.]

And did you get any benefits or were there any benefits or any money coming in for you then?

Nothing at all. They thought I didn't need it 'cos my father was working.

When you were a young man how did you spend your days? If you couldn't work and your father was working, what kind of things did you do when you were in your twenties?

Just walk about.

Where did you go?

Anywhere.

Long walks or...?

Quite long.

In the countryside.

Five or six miles.

On your own?

Completely on my own.

Did you have many friends at that time?

No. Oh I did have one friend. He was quite good, we used to play chess together, quite a lot and he took me out once or twice. He would be about three years younger than me and he used to come round quite often. He lived in the same road as I did. I used to go and meet him from school every day and we got on quite well.

And did you meet any girls?

Good God, no! It wasn't allowed. I wasn't allowed to, not in those days.

But there's a photograph here of a family at the seaside, this is when you were younger I suppose, about 10 or 12. Were they friends or family? Can you tell me about this?

I can't really remember. They were just on the East Coast. I met them on holiday. Holiday bungalows; I expect it's still a dump.

It looks quite a happy photograph.

Yes, I expect it does. They're much younger.

[End of Tape 4 Side A]

Tape 4 Side B [Track 8]

So, did you go in the water much?

No, I hate cold water. I still do today.

Did you learn to swim at any time?

Oh, years later they tried to get me in the swimming bath at Heathcote, a rehabilitation centre [Warwickshire] but I didn't like it. I couldn't get on with it at all; I couldn't be bothered.

Preferred walking?

Yes. I was too old to start.

I was wondering also about this picture, this is you, can you see?

That was a summer holiday. That's my mother.

Your mother?

Yes.

Family group?

Yes. Horrible family. I don't remember much about it.

Why do you say 'horrible', Gordon? Why do you say 'a horrible family'?

Yes, that was before the War about 1935. I could just about walk a few steps.

You learnt to walk at about 10 or 12 were you?

A little bit younger than that. I started walking let me see, about six. Just a few steps round the table and then I got to walk more. I had difficulty holding my head up, so I bumped into everything. It's a wonder I've got any knees left. [Laughs.]

Tell me about how the people you met... what was their attitude?

I was just ignored by most people; they couldn't be bothered.

Even the people who were your neighbours or in the area, who knew you?

Yes but the close neighbours they got to know me and what I could do. ['I'll go and get some coffee', whispered.]

I went up to Spastics headquarters to see what they could do for me and they offered me a job up in Birmingham, when the centre opened. It wasn't open then, it was going to open.

And your father had died and Kath also was thinking about coming to Birmingham. Can you tell me a bit about that?

Kath decided that we would move up to Birmingham. [Inaudible whispering.]

Right.

The job came along and when I got there it was terrible, it was absolutely a shambles. Half the equipment wasn't there and it took three or four months to get the job sorted out. And I didn't get on with the people very well. They didn't know what I was capable of.

What made you think of going to see the people at the Spastics Society? Was that your idea?

It was the only thing I could think of doing but they didn't offer me very much. They gave me part-time employment at home. They gave me a lot of stones, oh to fit into a brooch? I got a few bob for that but not much.

And that was Spastics Society, who organised that?

Yes, they used to come back every three months or I used to send them back every three months. It gave me something to do, I suppose.

And what did you feel about the move to Birmingham? Did you want to move? What were your thoughts about that?

I wasn't sure. I thought it would be something different. I expect it was all I got. I expected more than I got.

You mean at the Meadway Centre?

Yes.

And what about moving to Yardley and – 'cos you had always lived, you'd nearly always lived in Beckway Road, in Norbury – so what did it feel... about moving to a different place?

You thought the more I did, I would feel much different, the more I did.

Were people different in Birmingham? Did you have different...?

Oh, quite different.

Tell me.

They were more down to earth in Birmingham; they were a bit snobby in Norbury.

And what was their attitude to you in Birmingham?

Indifferent.

Did you find it difficult to settle down here?

Not really, I just got on with the job.

And tell me about some of the things you did with Kath in those years, in the Seventies and Eighties.

What shall I start with?

Mmm, tell me about some of the places you visited.

Mostly Scotland

[Fourth person, 'Also Germany.'].]

We used to go up to Scotland every year.

How did you travel?

By coach.

And where did you stay?

All over the place. Quite nice hotels and one was very damp, a bit of a dump.

[Laughs.] Some places were awful but mostly quite good.

And back at home what was your day like? What were your days like with Kath? Back in Yardley? What kind of...?

We were quite close.

And she enjoyed cooking?

Yes. [Whispering.]

[Break in recording.]

[Mary: 'You tried to talk about religion you didn't succeed. [Laughs.] He tried to talk to you and you're not religious at all are you? He doesn't believe in anything ']

Was this a student?

[Mary, 'Was this one of the students was it? Who tried to talk religion to you? Who was it that you talked to about religion? Oh I don't know perhaps I got the wrong end of the stick.']

[Fourth person, 'There was one lad that was there for quite a while that they got quite friendly with.']

A priest or a vicar? No, a brother, what a monk?

[Fourth person, 'Oh yeah. One of the brothers of an organisation obviously. And he tried to talk to you about religion and you weren't interested. You told him you weren't interested.']

[Mary, 'Well, where was he from? Where was he from? The Plymouth Brethren?']

Yes.

[Mary, 'Oh, the Plymouth Brethren, they got hold of you did they? I suppose they thought they'd got an easy person and that you'd go along with everything and you didn't?']

Yeah.

What did you tell him? What did you think?

I told him to keep quiet about religion.

And what do you think about religion?

I'm not going to tell you.

Is it private?

Definitely.

What about politics? Is that private too? Sorry.

[Mary, 'What about politics?']

I vote Conservative every time.

And are you interested in things that come on the television?

Yes but I'm not interested when they start lecturing, I turn it off.

Now, you said you weren't going to tell me about your chrysanthemums but I'd like you to if you can? When did that start, that interest in growing flowers, growing chrysanthemums?

It started when my dad, when we were on holiday. My father bought half a... oh after the War, my father and I started off with some cuttings. We got quite a collection. In fact we brought them up to Birmingham on the van. All in their pots. [Inaudible whispering.] And then, believe it or not, we only broke one and it was a very good one, [laughs] it was a nice one. Used to get them out, bring them on for November.

And every year you went to the local shows and...?

Yeah. I had the best ones at home. Oh yes, I had to join right away because I had such good blooms and then the first year [fourth person, 'Walked away.'] walked away with three cups. That was 1970. And then we grew them for about 10 years and then I had to give up. Kath decided that it was too much, yes it was too much. We had to give up.

And during that period you used to go to concerts and so on, did you? Music concerts, yeah? Where did you go?

The Albert Hall.

[Mary asks, 'You went to the Albert Hall did you, with Kath?']

Yes. The Fairfield Hall in Croydon and the Festival Hall and then in Birmingham the Symphony Hall, the Town Hall and there was a new hall and we used to go there quite a lot.

What kind of music did you go to listen to?

I liked most of it.

[Fourth person, 'Rachmaninoff.']

Oh Brahms, I liked Brahms too and Mahler too, my favourite. A lot of people don't like Mahler but I do.

Did you hear Simon Rattle conducting?

Yes.

Oh, the orchestra's gone [down] quite a bit since he left, in my opinion anyway.

And so, you were with Kath quite a while and did quite a lot in the Seventies and Eighties. Are there other things you want to talk about from that time? Did you meet people more then?

I'm not sure what you mean.

Did you belong to any groups or societies? None? No? Sorry.

Well, none. I was too tired by the time I got home after being on my feet all day.

Did you meet other people at all, apart from Kath and your work of course?

I used to meet the Toc H [UK Charity] people and The Chrysanth people [Chrysanthemum Society].

[Mary, 'And you went to the Brind [ph] club.']

And I'm wondering how people's attitudes to you and how you like them?

Not very much. I couldn't really be bothered. Not interested.

[End of Tape 4.]

Tape 5 Side A [Track 9]

I can go back a long way now.

Yes?

Over the main road there was a very big bridge in Norbury. There was a bridge over the road, a railway bridge over the road. Every time I went under the bridge I screamed my head off and I couldn't stop. My mother used to give me a good old smack, which made it worse.

Was it because it was frightening or...?

She tried to stop it but there was a particular shop on the other side that she liked, it was a draper's shop. I think it was a bit cheaper than the others. [Laughs.] Opposite there was the police station. She could never get me inside. You were outside; you were left outside screaming your head off.

You must have been then about four, five?

About three or four years old. I couldn't walk then. I was just about sitting up. They stopped taking me to hospital when we moved house and it used to be... It was terribly difficult to get out because the pavements were not made up or the roads. Neither the pavements or the roads were made up, so it was very difficult. They used to put pieces of wood to make the roads. It cost about £150 to make up the road.

Was this because it was a... sorry?

It was a lot of money in those days. Of course it would be much more today but in those days £150 was a lot of money.

Was this because it was a private road or... Norbury Terrace, Norbury?

Yes. Oh no, it wasn't a private road but they didn't bother in those days, they just got the houses up and left the roads. After a number of years they then had to build the road up before they built any more houses. I don't expect many people knew that.

I don't think they do.

I don't expect many people remember that.

Do you remember the roads being improved?

Very noisy when they built up the road, it was very noisy. They did it at all hours of the day. And then, after about six months, they started to lay the pavements. We got the beggars. People had got more money than the beggars because they were working. They'd stand in the middle of the road and then knock on the door.

[Break in recording.]

I'm wondering what other things have changed since you were a youngster?

I can remember a lot about the streets and about going back to when there were horses and carts. They used to come round the streets every two days selling vegetables and the baker came round every day and it was very fresh bread; all with horses and carts. And the dustman used to come round and the coalman, all with horses and carts. Lovely big horses. About 1935 they went off the road. And lots of people in the streets begging.

War disabled?

They were mostly War disabled. Even if they had a pension it wasn't very much. They'd just stand in the street all day begging.

[Mary, 'Gordon thinks there's no need for that.']

They didn't get much out of me.

I was going to ask what people's attitude was towards them?

Some people gave. I think they got a good bit out of it actually. They still get away with it sometimes today.

Were there more beggars at that time, than there are today do you think?

There were quite a lot of them. They get caught today but they didn't bother in those days. There was a lot less traffic in those days, so they could walk up the middle of the road. They weren't allowed to stand still; they had to keep walking. It would be a bit difficult because some of them were blind. Oh and some people made out that they were blinded in the War. And they got double money for that, if they were really blind but they still had to keep walking in the street.

I'm wondering perhaps today there's more help from the welfare state perhaps? And I'm wondering how you feel about that? Whether you feel you have more or have had more help than when you were a little child? 'Cos you said at one stage there was no help for you, no financial help.

No, no help. I haven't had any help at all apart from the doctor; he tried to help. He was a very good man but even he couldn't do much. They said they would help me if my father would move about three miles up the road. They said they would help but my father couldn't bear the thought of moving. He was still worried about the War. The house that we would have gone to was very inconvenient, most inconvenient. Everything had to come through the kitchen: the coal, the dustman, window cleaner, everything. Most inconvenient. I myself would not have stopped there because it wasn't fair on my mother. He couldn't see it. He was a bit of a stubborn old fool.
[Laughter.]

And I mean over the years have you had any help from social services? Have you had any assistance?

Good God, no! They wouldn't help me.

Not at any time? Any sort of help with well, with wheelchairs or living?

Good God, no! Nothing.

Is that because – I don't want to pry too much – but is that because you didn't want help or because they didn't offer?

I would have accepted help, if they'd given it to me but they wouldn't. They said I didn't qualify?

When was this?

Before the War.

And later, as you've grown older?

About 1931 my father was very ill from the War. We'd got no money coming in at all, so he applied for help from the people at... oh, the board for help for disabled people/War disabled [both talking together]. They came down, 'Oh, you've got too good a home; you'll have to get rid of it all.' And my father said, 'Get stuffed.' That was the only help we had, nothing. Oh, that's why my father never bought a poppy.

He had strong views. What would you say to somebody, a young person today, Gordon, who had cerebral palsy? What advice would you give them from all your experience?

Make the best of life that you can.

You feel that you've done that?

Not really. I could have done much more if they'd have let me, especially with education. I had a good brain but I couldn't get anybody to give me a push. I told you there was a man who used to come every six months just to see if I was alive.

I think probably education would be better, I hope education would be better now?

It's problematical. Oh, I don't think much of the education today.

Do you think that a young person with cerebral palsy wouldn't be any better off than you were, today then?

No because people with cerebral palsy are classed as abnormal. They still are regarded as 'mental', even today.

So you feel attitudes towards people with cp haven't changed?

Not much. You get a bit more help and you can get about a bit but as regards education, not a bit.

Have you had a chance to try any new technology: computers or communication?

No, they did offer it to me when I went to Helen Lay [Centre] but it was a bit late for me to start messing about with that lot.

People think that there are possibilities there for disabled people possibly.

It's difficult.

[Break in recording.]

[Mary asks, 'And what was the worst time in your life? Which was the best time in your life?']

About when you were [I was] about 50, when you were [I was] with Kath. She used to take me out a lot, much more.

Tell me a bit about that? That early time with Kath, what kind of things did you do?

Mostly it was quite difficult but mostly it was difficult getting used to living with Kath but I had to in the end.

[End of Tape 5 Side A]

Tape 5 Side B [Track 10]

You were just talking about your time with Kath.

I did find it quite difficult because my family had no time for me or for Kath. They were afraid that she would leave me. I don't know what put that idea into their heads but that's what they thought. They thought that she had just married Bill to get the house and they thought she would dump me somewhere else. Oh, they were quite tight with money and worried about money, they were quite worried. In fact, they took it into their heads that I'd got money. They thought that Kath had taken all my money. Why they thought that, I don't know. It was quite a difficult time.

But then you were saying that one of the best times was when you were with Kath.

Yes because she did take me out a lot. She used to take me out most weeks. I wasn't quite, I wasn't left on my own; that made a difference. I didn't have to walk the streets on my own, not quite so much. I still got very lonely at times. When she started taking me on holidays and it got better and better.

Tell me about the holidays.

Mostly coach trips to Scotland; we toured all over. I used to think Scotland was my home. [Laughs.] I think it was probably something to do with my grandparents but I used to think of it as home. I used to go up to London quite a bit, to the Albert Hall, to the *Proms*. Nobody else did. Oh when Kath and Bill were together, Kath wasn't very well one day and my father had to take me and he got bored stiff. [Laughs.]

Kath was a very important person for you wasn't she? In your life.

Yes. I was very lucky to have her. I was very lucky to find Kath, except for the last couple of years.

Do you want to talk about that?

[Mary, 'Probably not.']

The last couple of years, do you want to talk about that or not?

I'd rather not.

No.

It's not very pleasant, as you know.

So good times and bad times. What do you think is your greatest achievement, Gordon? What's the thing you're most proud of?

Probably getting your [my] little car and my gardening. I'm most proud of being able to drive and my gardening. Getting the prizes for my chrysanthus, which I grew from... I had to give up growing chrysanthus in 1980, after about 30 years, about 15 years. My father brought some cuttings home and that's what started it. At one time I had about 150 in the garden.

What ones you were most proud of? Did you like the pom-pom ones or?

The single chrysanthus, you probably don't know?

I don't.

I didn't think you would.

Tell me about them.

They're grown, they grow like daisies – just the one in the pot. They're quite difficult to grow actually. It's just the timing.

Timing of what? Of chopping them back or...

[Mary, 'Take us through the process of growing your chrysanthus, from seeds or from cuttings. Were they from cuttings you grew them?']

Yes, take the cuttings about this time of year. January start them in little pots and then pot them on, pot them on until eventually, in about June or July, they go in the very big pots and then you start growing them properly. [Laughter.] It's jolly hard work.

But that was something you enjoyed?

I got them bit mixed up but I got... Oh you got mixed up with the national society. You got one in the big show in London. After a time they developed a flower with my name on, a plant with my name on. I don't know whether it's still about.

What colour was it?

It was red. A red single.

[Mary, 'That was Jack Walman's catalogue wasn't it?']

And was the Chrysanthemum Society a place where you could actually make friends with people on an equal level, on the same level?

Yes, I did. And one day I surprised them all. I got the more advanced certificates and won the best in the show. That surprised everybody.

And are there any other friends you made, as an adult from your interests or...?

[Mary whispers, 'Your stamps, what about your stamps?']

[Break in recording.]

I had quite a good stamp collection. Kath made me get rid of them.

[Mary speaks, 'Yes but Kath made you get rid of them in the end but you spent quite a few years collecting, both of you collecting.']

About 14 years.

[Mary speaks, 'And you had friends from Bristol coming up to see yer stamps and everything. Had a lot of friends in the stamp world.']

I should have kept mine.

Did you go to stamp meetings or did you meet people?

Yes, I went to stamp fairs quite a bit. You get the odd good ones and according to the stamp book rubbish... In books they fake a lot of stamps, so you have to... and put the odd good one but mostly junk.

[Mary speaks, 'But you were quite a discerning collector.']

Did you collect a particular country or a particular type?

I had a lot of Queen Victoria. I collected that era from the jubilee. A lot of them.

I don't know how it works. Do you buy stamps or find them or [laughs] swap them?

You used to sell quite a number to get a good one.

[Mary asks, 'From the catalogues?']

No, from the dealers. In the shop, yes. [Both talking together.] The dealer that we dealt with had a shop in Weston, he used to come and see us. We don't know what happened to him.

So that was quite a sociable activity?

Oh yes.

[Mary, 'I think you got Kath involved as well because she started to collect, didn't she? But she didn't collect the same as you, did she? What did she collect?']

Australian, why I don't know.

Perhaps they were pretty? [Laughs.]

[Break in recording.]

I could go back into a lot of detail?

[Mary, 'But I think we've covered it pretty well. The thing is do you want to say.']

[End of Tape 5 Side B]

Tape 6 Side A [Track 11]

I'm interviewing Gordon Taylor at Kenilworth Grange Nursing Home and it's 7 February 2006. My name's Anne Austin, and Mary Noon is voicing Gordon's words. There are some queries from last time Gordon. On one of the pages of your transcript you said, 'They wouldn't let me have a girlfriend.' I was wondering whether this is your parents? And then later on you say you're over 40 when you began to go out with girls. [Laughs.] What made this possible? Do you want to tell me a bit more about that?

I wasn't allowed to go out with girls. They kept me in, I don't really know why. I realised afterwards why. Because I might ask too many questions. [Laughter.]

Was it your parents who said you shouldn't go out?

Yes. They never mentioned anything to me about sex at all.

Did you learn anything about sex?

I suppose they thought I hadn't got any feelings. They were nervous about it and I didn't ask, I just found out for myself.

What sort of age was this Gordon?

Fourteen or 16, about that time. It was Wartime then.

Right.

So there wasn't a lot of opportunity to get out. In any case, they wouldn't let me.

What age did you begin to go out independently?

Not really until my mother died. I was about 34. Too late.

But you said you were over 40 before you started going out with girls.

Yes.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

I can't really remember very much but nothing happened. No girl would be interested.
No girl would be interested in me.

Have you ever had any important relationships with girls?

No. I tried it once but she rejected me, so I didn't try any more.

And what made it possible when you were 40?

Oh, I had my job; that was when I came up to Birmingham.

So were things more sociable then, when you had your work?

Oh yes, quite a lot. Before that I wasn't very sociable but after that lots of people came in. I got into trouble for that because they gave me a course every year at a hotel. I got into trouble because I kept myself to myself.

Was this at work or...? No?

[Mary whispers, 'On holiday.']

On holiday was it?

Oh no, it was a course. Oh it was supposed to be to see whether we were able to work or not.

Oh, were you in Birmingham at this stage or was this before Birmingham?

This was before I came up to Birmingham. I came to get a job then.

You did mention going to the cinema with your parents?

Yes.

Can you remember anything about the films that you enjoyed?

Not much.

Not much.

No, I can't remember much. We always had to sit in the back row, my father insisted because he couldn't get out quick enough, so we had to sit in the back row.

Because he didn't enjoy the films or...?

Oh no because of his illness, his problems.

And then you said your father would have preferred to drive around Scotland than go by coach. Did your father have a car?

He bought a car in 1955, a brand new Hillman Minx.

And was he very proud of it?

Yes, he was. It had to be bench seats in the front and they weren't very comfortable, I didn't find that very comfortable. But he wouldn't spend the money and have individual seats. [Laughter.]

And did you go on long journeys? Can you remember any particular journeys you did with him?

We used to go to Devon quite a lot, about once a year. But he would never take me to a hotel. He thought I would frighten other people I suppose.

So where did you stay?

In farms, private homes. Some of them left much to be desired. They weren't all that comfortable.

Did you used to enjoy those times or?

I suppose I did at the time but looking back, no. [Laughter.]

Can you remember any particular holidays with your parents that you enjoyed, when you look back? Any particular holidays with your parents or times you enjoyed?

Not really, they were all pretty much the same.

And after the move to Birmingham, you've spoken about your father's relatives, your parents' relatives; did you have any more contact with them after you moved to Birmingham with Kath?

No, they're mostly dead.

Did any of them keep in touch or not? Did they go on contacting you after you moved?

No, they left me on my own, except for Kath.

I'm jumping about a bit here. When you were younger, you spoke a bit about things at the end of World War Two, yeah? You talked about the events. Is there anything you haven't talked about there? There were celebrations weren't there and so on. Can you remember anything about that you haven't talked about before?

Oh there were street parties at the end of the War but I didn't join in very much. I was too old [both talking together] for that then. [Laughter.]

Were you? And do you remember any other? VE day, VJ day?

No not really, I was frightened to go out.

You were about 20, 23, 24?

About 21.

At the end of the War, yes. [Both talking together.] Do you remember much about what your area was like or what south London was like after the War?

A lot of damage about, a lot of ruined houses. I can remember there was a lot of – where houses had been – a lot of ruins. I can remember a lot of people just wandering about, doing nothing.

When you say you were afraid to go out, can you tell me a bit more?

It wasn't so much I was afraid to go out, I really wasn't allowed to go out.

Even when you were 20?

Yes, they thought I'd get lost. I did have a friend at that time, a boy friend and he used to come down every week to play chess. He lived up the road, quite near. Oh I went off him because I was so desperate for other people.

Because at one stage you've said you used to walk a lot, you used to walk for miles.

Yes.

Was that when you were younger or...?

That was before the War. I used to just do that to get out of the house. I can't remember where I went but I was always on my own.

There's a reference also to making model aircraft. Can you tell me more about that?

That was something I did with my dad, he used to help me quite a lot.

Did that go on for some time? Did you collect a lot of model aircraft?

Yes, I did that for about three or four years and then I dropped it. Got tired of it.

[Laughs.]

You've got a number, I mean you talk about learning maths when you were 55, is that right? Learning maths, much later?

Yes.

How did that come about?

What?

How did you start to learn maths?

I can't quite remember. I think I got different books I suppose.

And you've just shown me a psychologist's report on you, which was done when you were about in your late thirties, do you want to tell a bit about how that came about?

A man used to come and knock on the door about once a year, he came from the local health authority, he actually came to see if I was still alive. And one day he came and my mother asked if he could... my mother was in bed at the time but she wanted him to... and I said to him, 'Go away. I don't want to see you any more.' I didn't realise at the time what he really came for... and the next day I mentioned it to my physiotherapist and he told me all about what it was and said why he came. But he used to come every year, I didn't invite him in, he stood on the doorstep.

[Break in recording.]

You were talking about the man who gave you an intelligence test, a sort of psychologist test. Did you do that at home or did you have to go somewhere to do the test?

It was at home, it was at home when he...

Did he bring in particular kinds of, I don't know, apparatus to do it? Did you have to move things around? Or is it a mental test?

[Mary whispers, 'I think he's got the wrong end of the stick.']

All right.

[Break in recording.]

I couldn't write at the time. He asked me questions.

I'm interested to know about why they gave you a test at this stage. Do you remember?

Why? Oh, he was checking to see if I was mentally defective. He wanted me off the list.

And he found out that you weren't at all mentally defective.

Yes, that was why they gave me the test to make sure. A lot of people didn't bother but I didn't realise it at the time. But of course I couldn't get a job until I got off that list. That was why my father always failed to get me a job. So he didn't understand what was happening.

So the list was... what was the list exactly? You were on a list at the beginning and that meant you couldn't get work, I'm wondering what the list was?

It was a list of mentally defective people in the whole country. They put me on it when I was five.

So after this you were able to go for work?

I never saw him again.

So that was quite an important [both talking together] piece of paper. There are some questions – to go back again – about your mother, which I'd like to clarify. You said quite early on that your mother was brought up in Gloucestershire and you mentioned various places that she was. Can we go through it again, just that bit? You said she was in Gloucestershire as a child.

In Cheltenham.

In Cheltenham. And there was something about a village near Swindon, called Upper Stratton?

That was after the War.

That was after the War, right. So she went first to Cheltenham and then to Upper Stratton. Do you...?

She went there when she was three weeks old.

To Cheltenham?

Yes and she stopped there until my grandmother fetched her back, when she was about 12.

Do you know who looked after her? Anything about that? Was she fostered?

I'm not sure; I think it must have been a friend.

So she stayed there from three weeks and her mother fetched her back when she was about 12?

Yes. She hated coming back.

Did she tell you about that? Did she tell you why?

[End of Tape 6 Side A]

Tape 6 Side B [Track 12]

A few more questions. What about contact with Kath's relatives when you were in Birmingham?

[Mary speaks, 'Kenilworth. You came to Kenilworth quite a bit, to Mum and Dad's. Oh yes, after your mum died you came to Kenilworth with Kath to see Mum and Dad.']

Only about once?

And then when my father died we came up to Birmingham for good.

And did you have much contact with Mary or Arthur at that time?

Quite a bit I suppose. I don't really remember. Mary lived in Wokingham then, in the Sixties.

But since then of course you have had contact haven't you?

Oh yeah.

Yeah. I've got a question here; we may have covered it already. Somebody expressed a wish that you should be certified – this may be going back to the list – was it the doctor that your parents told, 'Don't let them do this', to certify you or did it just happen or was it the doctor of your family?

I don't quite know what you mean.

[Break in recording.]

She asked for books but they wouldn't let her have them. In the end I had to rely on the radio.

Yes, you mentioned something about schools radio programmes. Do you remember what they were called or anything about them? What were they about?

About everything. They were very good, French and German but I couldn't grasp that.

And you also mentioned something about high-class books. You wanted high-class books or your mum wanted high-class books. Can you tell me a bit more about what you mean by high-class books?

High-class books?

You remember?

I don't quite know what you mean.

Neither do I.

[Break in recording.]

[Mary asks, 'What sort of books?']

They were technical books.

About?

I can't really remember but probably everything.

You enjoyed reading?

Yes, at that time I did.

And when you were talking about your friend who came to see you and play chess, was he called Mick?

His name was Stuart Haymer [ph].

Do you have any contact? Did you keep up contact?

Not now. He went to New Zealand about 1950. I don't even know if he's still alive.

And you talked about going on holiday, on the east coast and you stayed in holiday bungalows.

Yeah.

Yeah and you met some much younger children.

Yeah.

Do you remember that? Do you remember what their reaction was?

They completely ignored me.

You didn't play with them, alongside them?

No. They wouldn't bother.

There's one of the photographs when you're in a group of children at the seaside. So do you remember that one? When you were with a group of children?

Which one was that? I can't remember.

Perhaps we'll look at the photographs later. And then there's another time when you said people tried to get you to learn to swim at a rehabilitation centre?

[Mary asks, 'It was at a private...?']

It was at a private 'do'. It was where the physio used to take me to.

It was called Heathcote? Was it Heathcote?

[Mary asks, 'How far back are you going?']

How old, it's on...?

[Break in recording.]

[Mary asks, 'Pardon? You were about 14. Oh, he's talking now about when he was a child.']

No.

[Mary, 'Older than that?']

Would be about 1935, '36.

[Mary, 'Oh, so that was years later but that wouldn't have been Heathcote, that would have been somewhere in London. But I think he has been to Heathcote while he's been here; you've been across to Heathcote from here, haven't you? Because they've assessed you for your wheelchair and things like that. So there would be a swimming pool at Heathcote, which is just the other side of Leamington but that wouldn't be what he's talking about there. "They tried to get me in a swimming pool", so that...']

somewhere in London that was, “but I didn’t like it, I couldn’t get on”. Pardon? You were still working at that time? Walking. You were walking? I see it was when he was walking and it was when he was in London, when he was younger. You see he didn’t like it as a child and then he didn’t like it as he got older but then the Heathcote, that was much later, you know... while he’s been sort of... I don’t know whether it was here or before that. But you see Heathcote is the rehabilitation centre where they take you for assessing all sorts of problems as regards....’]

[Break in recording.]

I’m wondering if you remember when they tried to get you to swim, how did you feel about that?

I’ve never learnt because I’ve never liked the cold water. And I couldn’t stand up properly, I couldn’t react properly. So it was a waste of time.

Can you tell me a bit more also about... you told me one time about going to the Spastics Society headquarters in London and you were sent some work to do at home?

Yes.

Can you tell me some more about that?

Well it was, oh that was making brooches.

What did you have to do?

I didn’t like that very much. Kath used to do it; we used to do that together. Marquisette brooches.

Was it very fiddly?

Yes, it was very difficult. It was much too small for me to deal with.

So they sent you the materials?

Yeah.

And then?

Oh, I did get a bit of money back but not much.

And was it your father who took you to the Spastics Society?

[Gordon speaks but Mary is not able to understand.]

You said that you went to the headquarters of the Spastics Society, do you remember that?

Yes.

Did you go with your father?

No, he was dead.

Did you go on your own?

No, I think Kath took me. Yes, she did.

One of the questions we haven't sort of clarified, you said one of the chrysanthemums was named after you. What was its exact name, do you remember? What's it actually called?

[Mary, 'The Gordon Taylor Chrysanth.']

Mmm and what's it like? Do you know?

It was a red single chrysanth in the Jack Walman brochure.

How did this happen, Gordon? How did it come about?

Jack Walman used to come and see us and he organised a lot of the shows. And he wrote an article on me in one of the books once and he thought a lot of me, we got on well together.

[Mary, 'He wishes I could find the photographs.'].]

Were you pleased when you had the chrysanthemum named after you?

Yes.

Another thing we haven't talked about much, did you have one of those little blue tricycle, little blue invalid cars?

Yes.

Can you tell me a bit more about that, you haven't referred to it much?

Oh I didn't use it much, only to get to work and back at the Meadway Centre. I couldn't go very far with it; it used to run out very quickly.

Did it?

I did apply for a battery-driven one but they wouldn't let me have it. No, sorry. I did apply for a petrol-driven one but they wouldn't let me have it.

So you couldn't get very far?

About five miles and then the battery would run out. It had to be recharged every night.

So how did you feel about having it?

I did make a mistake that when I lost the battery-driven car and I should have carried on and got another one. I should have got one but I didn't.

Why did you lose it, the battery-driven one?

It wasn't very good. It only went about eight miles an hour.

So it wasn't freedom? It didn't mean freedom for you?

It wasn't very good in traffic. I couldn't get by anything. That's why I asked for the other car but they wouldn't let me have it.

Why wouldn't they?

They said I wasn't capable but I would have been.

Did you have to pass a test or anything?

Oh yes. Yes, I had to take a test before they would give me a licence and they said no I couldn't have the petrol car. They said I was incapable to be in charge. Kath didn't like driving, so that was that.

Kath was able to drive was she? Oh Kath didn't drive?

No, she thought she would and she wanted to keep Bill's car but Bill's brother wanted it.

You went to the Helen Lay Centre – oh respite – quite often. You said you were offered computer training, can you remember that?

There were computers at Helen Lay; I could have used them if I'd been able to.

Have you ever tried using computers?

I tried once.

[Mary, 'What did you say?']

Sorry. Have you tried using a computer?

No, I haven't tried. I think I'm too old now.

Would you have liked to have been able to...?

Oh yes, of course.

There are quite a lot of gadgets and things these days that you can use.

If I'd have known in those days, I would have learnt but not now.

So that, you know, it's your life so far. Are there other things you want to do? Have you got any plans Gordon?

No.

Are there any other things you'd like to do if you could?

High-class work.

Can you tell me a bit more? What kinds of work?

Probably research.

You would enjoy that.

Yes, I would have done. I don't like getting my hands dirty. [Laughs.] I don't like industrial work at all no, that doesn't suit me. That's why I was never really happy at Meadway. I just put up with it because I got paid for it, that's the only reason.

Which times of your life have you been happiest?

Well, I'm sorry to say but after I lost both my parents I had more freedom and I got out more. Kath was my world. Nowadays I'm too old.

[Break in recording.]

The driver of the vehicle drove me, he came in backwards and he knocked me over.

At work? And what happened?

He broke my glasses.

Did he? Were you hurt?

He just put the brakes on in time, so I wasn't badly hurt. Got bruises. Oh if he hadn't stopped it would have been bad. That got the wind up me. [Laughter.]

And sometimes you did fall over? You fell over just in the ordinary way?

Yeah. The concrete was very hard on my head. [Laughter.]

[End of recording]