



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

David Edwards
Interviewed by Jill Mahler

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Oral History
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DB
United Kingdom

+44 (0)20 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Tape 1 Side A [Track 1]

Okay David, it's very nice to meet you. If you'd like to start and just, you know, say when you want to pause.

I was born in 1942, at my grandparents' home. They were living in an old house not far from here in a village near Glastonbury, in Somerset. Obviously it was wartime, and my mother was staying with my grandparents at the time, obviously because she was expecting me and because there was no facilities at that time, it had to be a home delivery. My mother has always said that for the first 10 minutes after I was born I was perfectly alright. There was no complications, although she did experience an alarm the day beforehand, but it seems that after 10 minutes or so after delivery I stopped breathing, and (fortunately the doctor, who I think was helped by the nurse) they had oxygen in the car and he brought oxygen and they revived me after five or six minutes, I think. But it was that time that I sustained some damage to the brain because of the lack of oxygen, and therefore that has been the cause of my cerebral palsy from birth. Of course my father was serving in the army but he was actually present when I was actually born. But he had to return to the services from the army and had to serve in North Africa and Italy, and apart from a short time he didn't see me again until after the war had ended, which meant that my poor mother was left having to cope as best she can with a baby who obviously was not developing as normally. At that time of course very little, if anything, was known about cerebral palsy and the doctors had no idea at all. So my mother had to use her own intuition to deal with me and to try and encourage my arm and leg movements, and with the help of a very kind and understanding district nurse, between them, they devised a means of getting my arms and legs moving. But it was a very slow process apparently and there was nobody to advise or direct what they should do. Of course, I don't remember much at all of this period of the first three or four years of my life. It was war time, we were living in an isolated farm cottage, next to a radio beam station which transmitted messages across the world and of course we were a prime target for enemy bombs. But fortunately none actually fell on that radio station, but when the air raids were on, my mother had to take me down to the main farmhouse and we all had

to shelter in a cellar of the farmhouse for safety. And one thing which I do vaguely remember is my mother pushing me in a pram down what was then the main road, to this farm and the [tapping noise] American troops coming along in their tanks, and on vehicles and throwing oranges and other fruit to us, which of course you, in those days, were unable to purchase anywhere in the shops. But apart from that I cannot recall any real details of my life at that time. So [mechanical noise in background] when my father returned after the war, I was three years old and at that time I could not walk at all, even though my mother had encouraged me and tried time and time again to get me to walk. But I believe she told me that I could take a few steps with holding on to her or to something, but it was the greatest joy of their lives when they saw me take my first steps at the age of about three and a half: just a few steps across the room, unaided. That was a great achievement.

[Whispered] Good. Yes, definitely.

Yes. Well then this was in 1945, '46, and we moved to another farm cottage, which was attached to the farm itself which, just for a matter of interest, was called Poundbury Farm, which is now incorporated in the town redevelopment [Poundbury] inaugurated by Prince Charles, near Dorchester.

Mm.

So my father worked on the farm and he looked after the poultry on the farm and we had quite a large flock of birds there. And my development then, although quite slow, did improve and I was able to walk about fairly well. But of course I was always falling down. But even so I spent a great deal of my time at Home Farm with my father and tried, [laughing] p'raps trying to help him a little bit, and getting quite enjoyment with that. In 1946 my brother Anthony was born, so my mother had the extra responsibility and work to look after both of us, which she found quite a strain because it was a case of coping with my needs and also with caring and looking after a baby again. It was quite a difficult period for my parents.

When I reached school age in 1947, it was undecided what should be done. Even at that time, there was very little knowledge about my condition and the education authorities were in a dilemma as to what they could provide. But it was decided eventually that I could attend [rustling noise] the infants' school in Dorchester: the Grove Infants' School (which is now the local art centre).

Oh yes, I know.

Yes.

Mm.

So, [rustling noise] it was decided that I could attend there and for the first term or two I just went for half a day.

Mm.

My mother or father took me down on the back of the – we had a little seat on the back of his bicycle – he took me down and fetched me at lunch time, and that experiment, for me, worked out very well because fortunately the head teacher there was a very kind, understanding lady: Mrs Stevenson. She didn't have a clue about any kind of person with disabilities or children with disabilities at all, but she was very intuitive and she helped, supported and encouraged me a great deal. She went out of her way to try and explain to the other children about how I was and what they should expect, and the other children totally accepted me very well, even in those days, and I played with them out in the playground, and this really helped me...

Mm.

... in integrating in the playground. I remember once, we had a very cold winter: I think it was 1947,

Mm. [Coughs.]

and the playground was covered in ice, and of course the children, they enjoyed that,

Mm.

skating on the ice. And two of them got a hold of me, one each side, and skated me across the ice.

Oh dear.

I can remember that [both laugh]. And like I was saying, Mrs Stevenson really helped me a great deal at that time. I remember once she discovered that I could control my arms and hands better, standing up and leaning against a table at the right height, so during lessons when we had to write anything she let me stand up...

Mm.

and I used to write on a cupboard at the side of the classroom,

Good.

and I think this gave me more control with writing and drawing. I used to draw a lot then, quite artistic. So that period in my childhood was very happy, constructive.

Good.

[Break in recording.]

So, we are now around 1947, '48 time, and one of my vivid memories of this period was having my mother and father, on a couple of occasions, cycle with myself and my brother – both seated on the seats behind on their bicycles. They made the journey

from Dorchester up to my grandparents' home at Baltonsborough near Glastonbury,
[Somerset]

Gosh.

a distance of 35 miles.

Whew!

[Laughs] I believe that they returned on the train, but even so, it was quite a journey.

Very tough, yes.

Yes, and I remember one incident then that stands in my mind – [aircraft noise] we got caught in a thunderstorm half-way, and we had to shelter under a tall hedge, and I was so frightened I screamed and screamed because of the thunder,

Mm.

and I was about six, maybe seven, and my brother of course was only about two or three. We were both crying [interviewer laughs] and screaming. We were so scared. But then of course, it was hardly any traffic on the roads then. You would pass a car or vehicle, I suppose, every five or 10 minutes. So there wasn't the hazards or dangers that we encounter now because you wouldn't think about cycling. And talking about cycling – it was about this time that my father purchased my first tricycle, which I used practically all the time.

Mm.

And this was great exercise for my legs. I used to go hurtling, either down the garden path, which was a long path. I got more adventurous and went outside, much to the annoyance and anxiety of my parents, but I used to go and ride around outside the

farm. I often fell off. I was always falling off and banging my head or cutting my head, grazing my hands and knees. But no, I was gaining more in confidence all the time and that helped. That was a great help to me at the time.

Mm.

I suppose that I was at the infants' school, I think it was less than a year (I can't be sure) and the education authorities at that time they didn't have any provision at all for schooling for children such as myself, so they advised my parents and my school – I should go to a special school. I think that then my parents reluctantly agreed to it because there was really no alternative because no upper school would accept me. So that was a very difficult decision. So I was sent to a school run by The Shaftesbury Society at Bournemouth. That was terrifying. It was a junior school at that time. It was called 'The Victoria Home' I s'pose I was, I can't remember if I was six or seven, I think I was seven when I went there, and my mother has always said how upsetting it was when they first took me there, that I was crying, and my mother didn't want to leave me but they just had to go.

Mm.

And the nurse took me and told my parents to go, and that was a very distressing time for a young child of six or seven to be taken away [talking together] from their parents.

Mm, terrible, terrible.

My recollections of Victoria Home are rather haphazard and vague, but the one thing that really sticks in my mind is, you know, being away from one's family, parents. We were for one thing – there was no holiday at Easter.

No!

So you had to be there from the start of the year right through to the summer holidays:
that's what, nearly eight months?

Oh dear.

And for young children,

Terrible.

away from their parents for all that time...

Terrible.

They were allowed to see their parents once a month on a Saturday – the first Saturday in the month. Their parents could come and visit them and p'raps take them out in Bournemouth, but there were many children there from families or parents who weren't able travel that distance.

No.

I mean, way back in the 1940s the transport system, it wasn't like it is today. It used to take four hours just to get from London to Bournemouth on the train, let alone by car. So there was two children there whose parents lived right up in the north of England, so they didn't see their parents all that time and I used to [aircraft noise] see the other children crying at night, wanting their mums, and like, for the first week or so, I just couldn't stop crying. But of course, in my case...

[End of Tape 1 Side A]

Tape 1 Side B [Track 2]

Yes, in my case, obviously I was fortunate, in that Dorchester was only about 30 or so miles from Bournemouth. So my mother and father were able to come over, drive over in the old farm truck and take me back home for the day, once a month.

Good.

So of course I always looked forward to that, but the most dreadful thing that happened to me there always sticks in my mind. It was my grandparents' golden wedding anniversary one weekend, and of course my parents wanted me to be there to join them, but unfortunately it didn't fall on the weekend when they were allowed to take me home. So I was given a choice: did I want to miss the weekend where I was allowed home, or would I prefer not to go home that weekend but go to my parents' [grandparents'?] anniversary? And of course, what a choice or decision to give to a child of that age. Of course I wanted to see my parents again, and I opted to go home on the weekend. And so I missed my grandparents' family gathering, and I was the only member of the family that wasn't there on that occasion and that was so upsetting to me.

Of course, of course.

Yeah. I suppose that for that time, the facilities at [rustling sound] that home were fairly good, apart from a lot of steps. I remember a lot of steps there. Besides the stairs they had a good physiotherapy room, they had regular treatment, and they actually built a hydrothermal pool when I was there so we were able to exercise in that. They [traffic noise in background] did take us out on excursions in an ambulance-type vehicle, like a mini-bus (I suppose it was) and they took us along to various places and things. The staff were mostly very kind and, you know, tried to help as best they could, but there was a whole mixture of disabilities there. There was a lot of people with polio there and TB [tuberculosis] cases, and a few amputees even. It was a bit

one-sided in that, for some reason, the girls were able to stay at that school longer than the boys, so we had an imbalance of ages,

Mm.

all the time. But I certainly remember the teachers were good and patient, and we did most of the normal lessons that children of that age would do. My favourite member of staff was called 'Nurse Fox' and she was extremely kind and she would try to comfort us when we got upset and, you know, but the matron was, well, unapproachable, you know, and had a very...

Mm.

detached view. But so yes, that is the main thing that I remember from Victoria School because the isolation of being away from home for such long periods and especially that period from January to the [aircraft noise] beginning of August,

Terrible.

you know. I just didn't understand why they did that [laughing] at all – leaving us all that time. So, I think I can't remember any more about that period. I'll stop.

So shall we stop now?

Yes.

Yes. OK.

[End of Tape 1 Side B]

Tape 2 Side A [Track 3]

This is the second of our meetings. If you'd like to go ahead. Phil was very pleased with the last tape.

Right.

You don't have to bend towards it,

Right.

you just sit comfortably.

Yes. I finished the last session with an account of my experiences at the first boarding school I went to at Victoria Home in Bournemouth, and I would just like to start this session, just to p'raps go back and say something about my physical condition during those early days of my life. As I said, I did take my [rustling sound] first steps of walking about the age of three and a half years old; but I was very unsteady on my feet, and I had very little control of my hand movements and arms which flew about in all directions. The spasms were quite severe so that, although I was actually taking steps, I would usually have to hang on to something (I had a little trolley which my father had made in those early days). But when I attended my first school at the infants' school at Dorchester, by that time I was having regular physiotherapy at the health clinic in Dorchester because the medical profession by that time had some idea...

Mm.

... of the cerebral palsy condition and it was helpful. I believe I also had some kind of speech therapy as well but I'm not sure about that – my mind's a bit hazy on that one. But the problem was of course that these regular physiotherapy sessions interfered with my attendance at the school,

Mm.

and that was one reason why the education authorities said that it would be better if I went to a special school where the treatment and the education would be there together.

Mm.

And so that was one reason why (although I was very happy at the Grove School) it was decided (and my parents regretfully agreed) that I should go to the Victoria Home. But as I say, my walking was very unsteady and erratic, and I was always tripping up, falling down, grazing myself, banging my head and everything else because I walked up on my toes.

Mm.

Very little balance... So, definitely after about I think a year at the Victoria Home, the orthopaedic surgeon who used to be visiting regularly recommended that he should operate on the backs of my legs to cut the tendons,

Mm, yes.

to drop the heels. So obviously my parents had to give their permission to do that. I figure I was about eight and a half then when it was done,

Mm.

and that was quite a dramatic experience because I spent I think it was just over two weeks at the hospital, and for some reason my parents weren't even allowed to come and visit me.

Oh God!

But fortunately I was in the Poole General Hospital, and both my uncle and aunt worked there. My aunt was a ward sister at the hospital,

Ah, yes.

(not on the ward I was at),

No.

and my uncle was a pathologist...

A ha.

... at the hospital so they would come in,

Good.

every day, just to see how I was [laughing]. And I remember a very amusing incident: one day my uncle came in about lunchtime and he fed me some jelly,

Mm.

and for some reason they'd put some butter in this jelly and I was sick all over my uncle's posh uniform. I don't know why they put butter in jelly,

Yuck.

but, [laughs] you know, that's the kind of incident that I do remember [interviewer laughs] of my time,

Yes.

in Poole Hospital.

[Break in recording.]

OK?

Yes. I don't remember much else about that episode in my life, except I can still [remember] real pain, especially when they took the stitches out two weeks afterwards. But from that time my walking improved. I was still unsteady on my feet, but at least I was putting my [traffic noise in background] feet down together on the ground, and I wasn't falling over quite as much. And of course we had regular physiotherapy at the school.

Mm.

It was generally about three or four times a week even, and they did have a hydrotherapy pool there,

Mm.

so in that respect it was at an advantage that I was at that place at the time. I wasn't very happy at the Victoria Home: it was very impersonal and as I've already said, for very young children to be away from home for such long periods [sound banging] of time...

Extraordinary. So this would be in the late forties, yes?

Yes, late forties, maybe up to 1950...

Yes. But, you know, you weren't happy there because you missed your parents. How did you feel about what you were learning, the standard of education?

Well, I got on quite well at the actual

[Talking together] Good.

school lessons. The teachers were very helpful and they worked individually because there was only about ten or twelve pupils in the class.

Mm, mm.

But there was only three classes anyway. [Inaudible.] But by that time I could read quite well, but of course my hand movements were still very jerky. I found it difficult to hold a pencil.

Mm, mm.

So the writing... I couldn't do much writing.

Mm.

But I think the standard of education there, for that period, was reasonably good.

I bet you wish they had invented computers in those days,

Yes, mm.

or even typewriters would have [talking together – David: typewriters, yes] helped you a bit. Did they have any typewriters?

No, no. Nothing like that, no.

Oh

No but, although I said that, that aspect of the place I felt was, like I said, quite enjoyable. But as far as the home itself was concerned, it was very impersonal, and the staff didn't seem to [rustling noise] be approachable in any way, apart from that one nurse (Nurse Fox) so everybody seemed to go her when they got upset, and she was very kind. And the matron – we didn't really seem to have much to do with matrons.

And so did you have to call all the staff 'Nurse So-and-so'?

[Talking together] Yes, Nurse, yes.

So it was really 'medicalising' your disability?

Mm, definitely, yes. Yes, and [voices in background] one thing that sticks in my mind is when the children got parcels from home [background noise] they weren't allowed to have them, except that all the sweets and things had to be shared out between the children.

Mm hm.

But one thing that did happen there, which had quite profound repercussions in my later school life was that, one tea time the matron came and asked me to go with her up to what they called 'the play room', and for some reason I thought she was going to take me away somewhere. I cried and screamed, kicked up a fuss, but anyway, when she got me there she introduced me to a man who was going to form a Christian Cub...

[Talking together] Ah.

... Troop at the school.

Mm.

He asked if I might like to be part of it, and that was my introduction to the scout movement,

[Talking together] Good.

which carried on right through my school days, and beyond. About 17, I think, I eventually left it.

Mm, mm. [Talking together] Yes.

But I think I'll say more about that, later on.

OK.

Right. [Sound of rustling paper.]

Do you want a rest?

Yes.

[Break in recording.]

Right, well, as I've already said, [voices in background] the Victoria Home was run by what was the Shaftesbury Society, who had at that time (I think) six other homes and schools around the country. So, at the age of I believe eight or nine, the boys were passed on to these other schools which in this case was situated at Margate,

Mm.

on the Kent coast. [Coney Hill Home, Margate.]

Oh dear, that's a long way away from your home.

Yes. So, as the education authorities were still prepared to encourage me to carry on at the boarding school, to have this special education and treatment, [rustling sound] it was decided that I should go to Margate to continue my education. My father made a visit there beforehand so he was able to actually see the school, and went there and came back. I think he said he seemed quite impressed by what he saw, but when the time came for me to go there, at the end of the school holiday, I was taken in a car with two people as escorts from the education authorities. And they had to take [rustling sound] a girl to a girls' school in Surrey on the way, and I remember that was a terrible journey because of course in those days there was no motorways or anything like that. We left quite early in the morning [rustling sound] and we didn't get to Margate 'til, well, teatime in the early evening after taking this girl to her school. So by the time I got there I was feeling really exhausted, anxious, worried and upset, having said goodbye to my parents early that day, and not knowing really where I was being taken. But anyway, I think I soon settled into the new school, the term there. It was quite pleasantly situated, on the outskirts of Margate. There was open country around. There was a farm opposite, which was a bit like home, which didn't make it quite so hostile, different, and of course one or two of the boys that had been at Victoria Home were there, because I had progressed with them.

[Talking together] Oh good.

So I soon made friends with them so that was helpful. And I soon found that (although when I went there they were in a transition period) the former 'Superintendent', as they called them, and Matron had just left, and one of the house masters took control for the first few weeks until the next person came: a Mr Simms. And Mr Simms was... the Superintendent's wife was Matron and...

Sounds like the workhouse. [Laughs.]

[Laughs] The Shaftesbury Society were very Victorian in their ways and their language, [laughs] but this Mr Simms, he was very kind. He was a person that you could easily talk to; very approachable. And he had time for [rustling sound] anybody, I got on very well with him, and by the time I was there he had an open sports car and he used to take me out for rides there. And although I thoroughly enjoyed that and it was a great deal of fun doing that, I was conscious that I was becoming one of his favourites, you know, and that caused some friction with the other boys. And it's something I suppose that's bound to happen, you know, in a boarding school environment, but I remember, you know, it was a cause of friction and there was fights and arguments,

Oh dear.

and everything else. Anyway I'm transgressing a bit. Anyway [voices in background] we were encouraged to be independent, which was very good, and we weren't cocooned or confined because the atmosphere of the school was good, because we were taken out quite a little bit on educational visits to factories, to local places of interest, historical sites, and we were taken to watch the local football matches,

Yes.

on Saturday, 'cos the Margate football field was about half a mile up the road, and we did that. They used to take us out for Sunday walks, and soon my walking [siren in background] distance, ability, was progressing all the time, and I was having less falls (although my arms was not very controlled, and they used to fly, especially my right arm which used to fly out in all directions, which sometimes caused embarrassment, hitting people). But yes... And the house itself had quite distinctive extensive grounds. It had an orchard and there was trees and bushes all around, and of course boys of that age, we got up to all kinds of mischief and [laughs] jokes, and I remember some of the older boys, they tried to strike a bike or a camp,

Mm.

in the corner of the grounds in the bushes, and got themselves into a gang. You had to be highly favoured to be part of the gang, but that was all put a stop to because they hid food in their pockets, and [inaudible] actually started a fire, a camp fire,

Mm hm.

cooking food [laughs].

[Talking together] God!

And they soon got into trouble for that [laughing]. But that was all part of growing up: the open spirit of adventure. So, yes, that was good really. We had each... the class had a patch of garden, we were...

Mm hm.

Just in the summer, we used to go out under supervision and actually look after the patch of garden, and mine was [inaudible: called] the flower patch, so...

Did you enjoy gardening?

I did, yes,

[Talking together] Good.

because my father had a very [talking together] nice garden at home.

Yes. Mm.

I used to, like, go out and try and help a bit.

Good.

Yes, and the school side of the establishment, that was very good. They had very...Mr Green was the headteacher, [rustling sound] and he was excellent,

[Talking together] Good.

encouraging people, and he taught, he had extra-mural activities in the evening. I joined this stamp collecting group and built up quite a collection of stamps over the years.

Do you still collect stamps?

No I don't. [Laughs.]

[End of Tape 2 Side A]

Tape 2 Side B [Track 4]

[Aircraft noise in background.] Yes, although it was a friendly, happy atmosphere, the discipline was quite strong, and the staff (well of course it varied) but the staff kept quite a tight control over everyday lives. The daily routine was quite rigid and structured. We used to have to get up at seven o'clock, I think, and get into what we used to call the 'daily queue' to use the toilet, and [laughing] we always laughed about this over the years but, we used to have to queue up, in order to use the toilet. They used to have a book, and they used to, if you were [weren't?] successful, you got a tick. If not, you had to try again the next morning [laughs]. If you weren't successful then you got another tick, and on a further morning if you wasn't successful then, you had to join another queue, to get your daily dose of Senna Pods [a laxative].

[Talking together] Oh God.

[Laughs.] And this... it was ludicrous,

Mm.

but that's how it was.

Yes.

That's something that has always stuck in my mind. But it was daily queues all the time: you had to queue up to go into school, you had to queue up to go in to have your meal, because we had three different what they called 'Houses'; we had all different houses.

Roughly how many boys were there?

At Coney Hill I would think about three dozen,

Oh I see, yes.

between thirty and thirty-five, not many because it was quite a small school. [Rustling noise. Voices in background.] There wasn't much privacy and you couldn't... they had lockers, but just one little locker where you could keep all your personal belongings. But they were far too small and you couldn't lock them, and so often things used to fall out or things got stolen.

Did you have locker inspections to see if they were tidy? [Laughs.]

Yes, things like that, yes. If they got too full you were told to throw things away and things like that. [Laughs. Rustling sound.] But one thing that was very similar to the Victoria Home was that the actual site was on a slope of a hill, so there was steps and slopes everywhere. But people with disabilities, [aircraft noise] you know, there wasn't any wheelchairs there 'cos they couldn't have anybody that was severely disabled at all.

So, did they at least have hand-rails?

There was a hand-rail, yes.

So maybe it was a policy to keep you moving?

Well yes,

[Talking together] Yes.

I expect so. But there was no [one?] time there, that they built a new extension on a patch of land at the back of the building, which the Cubs and they used as a quiet room. People might go in there just to sit and relax, because before that there wasn't anywhere you could go at all. And they used to after lessons, but in the day time a visiting physiotherapist used to come in and he was excellent, a very good

physiotherapist, so that treatment continued. And I was also going to a clinic in Margate to have speech therapy at certain points throughout my time there. So my speech also improved a lot in this time and because we were encouraged to express ourselves in drama and reading aloud in the classroom, we got ... it all helped to improve...

Mm.

... our conditions and so that was [inaudible: handy]. They had quite forthright [inaudible: views] on what to do.

And did it boost your confidence?

Yes, it did.

Mm, mm.

Yes, and we had a lot more contacts with the outside world,

Oh good.

they used to come in [inaudible: just to...], we were taken out and the American Air Force base was stationed two miles up the road, and they kind of befriended us. They used to give us an annual party at Christmas and they used to provide a cake for each boy on their birthday.

Gosh.

So, [laughing] you can imagine that: thirty-six boys (roughly), we had these delicious American cakes coming every week, [interviewer laughs] shared out at teatime.

Yes.

That was good. Yeah, anyway, we had a football and a cricket team,

Mm.

and we used to play matches with other schools in the area and

Good.

we won occasionally. But of course I wasn't able to partake in that but, well my best friend, Peter, [laughing] he was in the cricket team and one match, it was just a miracle, he actually caught the ball [interviewer laughs]. He actually caught it. He was so surprised he just fell on the ground. Yeah, I remember that. It's just the small incidents that I remember, but,

Were they all children with cerebral -

[Talking together] No, no.

palsy, or did they have other disabilities?

No they had other disabilities.

I see.

We had [pupils with] polio,

Yes.

well TB [tuberculosis], and

Yes.

things like that. But Peter had cerebral palsy. We knew each other right from the Victoria Home,

A-ha.

before. One or two others that we went together right through our school days.

Good, good. So, did you come home for three holidays a year?

Yes, we did there, yes. But of course, because of the distance my parents weren't able to visit.

No.

I think they only managed one visit a term, or even less than that, because it took them... they had to travel overnight on the Friday night to get there for Saturday morning, and they had to travel back overnight, on Saturday.

Yes.

So it was a whole weekend, you know, but they used to come just to take me out into Margate and we used to enjoy the delights of a seaside town, visit the funfair; Dreamland. And so I always used to look forward,

Yes.

to that, even though it didn't happen very often. But I remember my friend Peter and, I forget why but, at one stage [engine noise in background] he was very unhappy there, and, of course, we had to write letters home (I think it was every fortnight or something) and of course letters were censored, but Peter somehow managed to smuggle a letter out to his parents.

Mm.

And his mother came down and, well, I can't remember the exact details, but she really had an afternoon with the Superintendent about whatever it was that Peter was unhappy about, and I think she was on the point of taking Peter away with her, but it didn't happen. But that's just an example of how much we were under their control,

Yeah, absolutely.

all the time.

Do you think it was something to do with other children, or other teachers?

Probably, I just can't remember.

No.

No, I just...

Mm. Yes. And did he get into trouble for sending out a...

[Talking together: inaudible.]

... letter without permission?

[Laughs] Yes. Yes.

Mm. Yes.

And of course all the letters and parcels that came in, they all had to be opened before we were actually allowed to see them in case there... they used to take any money and

that and put it for people to pay back, which they kept, which could use to buy tuck [food] or [inaudible].

Mm, mm, mm. Did they censor the books you were allowed to read?

I can't remember [if] they did, no.

No.

No, but...

I remember having [laughing] The Cruel Sea taken away from me.

Really?

Yes.

Oh, no I can't remember that they did that. It's mostly comics we had in those days. Yeah. Can I stop now?

Mm.

[Break in recording.]

Yes, as I've already said, the majority of the staff at the school were very kind, considerate, friendly, understanding. But there were a few there, had no real conception of how to look after or care for children of our age group, and they imported a whole set of disciplines and ideas. I always remember one amusing incident when we kind of took control, more or less. This one member of staff, who I don't think stayed there very long, he was supervising what was our rest period. We had to have a rest period after lunch, every day. We used to have to lie on our beds, we had to be quiet and no talking, I think it was three quarters of an hour or something

like that and at the end of the time this member of staff for some reason wouldn't let us get up and go, because there was somebody was talking or something, I can't remember. But anyway, so this would be in the dormitory, about 15 or 16 of us, and so the ones that could, actually got out the window onto a fire escape and escaped that way. This member of staff tried to go after them, and the rest of us bolted out then to the door. It was a

Mm.

protest against authority.

Yes.

Something that impressed upon me greatly there was their method of corporal punishment, both at Coney Hill and later at Whiteness Manor [School]. It was terrible, because if somebody had misbehaved, had done something there against the school rules, he was punished in front of the whole school by either the headmaster or even the Superintendent: put over a chair, and thrashed (a thrashing with either a slip, a slipper, or even a stick, and on one or two occasions, [engine noise in background] they even took their trousers down

God.

to do it).

Talk about abuse and perversion.

Yes.

Oh.

Mm hmm. People just wouldn't believe it, would they, these days? But that's all what people did years ago.

Mm. Yes.

It was accepted. So that's something that's left me... well it [made] a deep impression on me, my mind.

Were you ever, did you ever receive corporal punishment?

No. I was always a [both laugh] goodie little boy.

Yes.

Although I did, well as we're talking about it, I did protest once, and in my best schoolboy manner, but it didn't, ... We had Prefects there and by that time I was totally, you know, anti-authority, you know, against any kind of authority I was given by my companions. One of my friends became a [Prefect]. This was later on, you know, towards the end of my school time, and the older one got the more chance there was of becoming a Prefect.

Mm.

And this friend, Colin, he was a couple of months younger than me, and it was between him and me, and because his speech was clearer, he was given the chance to be a Prefect, and I considered it most unfair.

I do too, I think that's appalling.

Yes.

That can't have done much for your confidence.

No. No, I was about fourteen or fifteen,

[Talking together.] Mm, mm.

at this stage, and of course anything he said I totally rebelled against and this was at the senior school [Whitiness Manor School]. Even there we had to open our letters in the presence of a member of staff in case there was money in it or other things. And they gave out the letters, just before the rest period, and I had no time to read my letter from my mother before the rest period and I read it when I was laying in bed. And this Colin came in and said, like, 'What are you doing?' and I just carried on reading it and he sent me down to the Superintendent's Office, where [you] may well have probably expected that he would give me a thrashing for disobeying a Prefect, but he [the Superintendent] I think he realised how I felt about it,

Of course.

so I was just given what they called an 'early night',

Oh.

and I had to go to bed at five o'clock instead of seven o'clock. [Laughs] It all seems so stupid.

Oh, it seems so terrible now.

[Inaudible.]

At Coney Hill, with the discipline and corporal punishment, were you aware of parents ever getting involved, or power parents,

No.

or were they only too pleased to have, you know, a school for their [laughs] child?

I think that this was the case, yes.

Mm, mm.

And of course in those days, corporal punishment, all the time, any schools really... I mean it was the accepted thing, wasn't it?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Well, I think on the whole, my years at Coney Hill were quite enjoyable and...

Were quite what?

Enjoyable.

Good, and -

And it did [inaudible]. I certainly had a more outward approach to my life, like I say, they certainly did their best to [engine noise] integrate us into the wider world, and

Mm, mm. Were you allowed out in twos and threes, or did you always have to go out 'on croc' walks?

Yeah, we had to go out on supervised walks,

Yes.

On a Sunday.

[Talking together] Yes, yes.

Sunday afternoon: it was church in the morning and walk in the afternoon, and sometimes we walked up to about [engine noise] three or four miles,

Mm, good.

because we were so open, there were fields around there.

Mm, mm. [Engine noise. Talking together.] Are you...

So we,

Sorry.

So they took us to church part of the way in this... they had like an ambulance-cum-minibus that they used, so they couldn't take everybody, so they took the ones that were able to walk fairly well half-way, they dropped us off and we had to walk the rest of the way. They came back and fetched the ones that were not able to walk very well.

Mm, mm. Yes.

So Sunday was practically taken over with walking, [laughing] backwards and forwards.

[Laughs] Mm. Kept you fit.

Yes, certainly did, 'specially in the winter. Because you were just in the north east corner of Kent you'd get all these winds.

[Talking together] Mm, mm.

You used to get snow and everything else,

Yes.

and we had to, unless it was absolutely pouring with rain, we obviously had to line up in the morning, outside,

Mm.

before going into the classroom.

God.

And we used to have, like, short...

Short pants? [trousers]

Yes, there were no long trousers in those days.

No, no.

You were only allowed long trousers when you got to the senior school. [Traffic noise in background. David laughs.]

Now, if you feel you've talked enough about Coney Hill, do you want to stop before we go on to the senior school, or are you OK [talking together] to go on?

Yes, I think I'll just stop there for now.

Was there anything more you wanted to say about Coney Hill?

I don't think so, except that it was my first introduction to television – that was a novelty.

Mm.

They had these little altered screens, made everything very small but they had like a mobile screen which they put in front of it, that magnified the picture.

Mm, mm.

And they used to let us watch the [humming noise like feedback] children's programmes at nearly teatime, and of course the day of the Coronation we all had to sit and watch the whole thing.

It was a long time to sit. [Laughs.]

It was, especially on hard chairs.

Mm.

Mm: so.

OK?

[End of Tape 2 Side B]

Tape 3 Side A [Track 5]

[Feedback.] OK. This is the third meeting with David, dated 3rd March, and we are going on with David's life story. OK David.

Thank you. I thought at this stage I would say a few words about my physical condition during these early days – the time that I was at school. I thought p'raps it would be interestin' to compare the treatment, the ideas and attitudes that the medical profession had in those days to what is current practice today. At my first school, Victoria Home, I was prescribed spectacles, glasses, to wear because it was thought, for some reason which I never discovered, that cerebral palsy people like myself were in danger of developin' a squint, [talking together] in my right eye.

Right. Good.

And I had to wear these glasses all the time, and they were only a nuisance [laughs],

Mm.

as one can imagine. I was always breakin' them for a start, and it was [rustling noise] quite difficult. It was a extra handicap havin' to wear them. But eventually, when I got to my last school, [Whiteness] Manor [School], I just ditched them myself and nothin' more was said about them. And all through my school days, I was havin' to wear heavy, surgical boots. This was to attempt to correct a tendency of my ankles to go inwards, and keep my feet straight. I think this was after the operation to drop the heels, but I had to wear these boots, right through (as far as I can remember) to when I left the senior school, which was at the age of sixteen. And this again, you know, especially durin' the hot summer months, it was really uncomfortable. I also, for two or three years, I had to wear night callipers,

Oh.

in bed. I surmise that this was to try and keep my legs and ankles straight. But of course, bein' athetoid [a type of cerebral palsy] the restriction just had a detrimental effect and increased my spasms, and [talking together]

Mm.

I found it difficult. And in fact I think once the staff had put them on and I couldn't sleep, I used to take them off. But, [laughing] I know why. Because of the tension in my legs, I used to break these callipers 'cos they were made of aluminium and padding, so that didn't really do much, wasn't any benefit at all [laughs]. But, I had regular speech therapy (I used to visit a speech therapist in the town of Margate) and this continued I think for three, p'raps four, years.

Mm hm.

And fortunately the speech therapist she was very good at her job, and we kind of got to know each other. We got friendly, we developed confidential conversations,

[Talking together] Mm, good.

and this helped me. It was actually [good?] to speak to somebody outside of school, and just discussin' outside of school.

[Talking together, David inaudible.] Mm, good.

And [rustling noise] this was an enormous help to my psychological well-being. My walkin' was still very unsteady, even after the operation, and my walking gait was very erratic. And my arms ('specially my right arm) was slightly bent, and when I was balancing sometimes I used to hit people with my right arm. But, it [I?] was hittin' through doorways and things, and bashing myself. I had quite a nasty incident when I was goin' out of the door. I caught my hand [voices in background] on the door, and got a large splinter in my finger,

Mm.

and the splinter had paint on and the whole finger became sceptic and inflamed. That was a very bad experience because I had to go in to hospital and have it lanced and everything; and I was still fallin' over, and cuttin' and grazin' myself.

And with this arm, did you have any embarrassing incidents, like people accusing you of groping them, or [laughs] something?

No, I've -

No, because of -

I've never had that.

No, I have heard [laughing] of people having, you know, great embarrassment.

Yes. I know one time I [and] my mother (we were on the train) and she was tryin' to get my coat off of me. And my arm flew out and really hit her hard. I hit her terribly,

Yes.

at times, yes. Just these little incidents stand out in my mind.

Have you better control now over these involuntary movements?

Yes, but in recent years it has got worse again. Now I take muscle reaction [relaxant?] tablets. But, especially at the Coney Hill Home, we had an excellent physiotherapist,

Good.

who came in most days, and we had individual sessions with him and he was very helpful and understanding. And he did a lot of limb replacements [?] and gettin' me to try to walk in a straight line. He had a line on the floor, and we had to walk,

Yes.

in a straight line. And also relaxation. But at the senior school the physiotherapist, who was the wife of Mr [?], she wasn't quite so understanding and therefore [never?] had so much patience. But I remember her [her?] tryin'. She used to have two frames – one to tie laces, and one to do up buttons – and neither of those were very helpful. I really used to struggle to try and do that. So, as far as my hands were concerned, I still had little control over them at that point, in my early teens. [Inaudible, break in recording.]

OK.

Well I was at the Coney Hill School up to the age of (I believe) twelve, but then I went to the Shaftesbury Society Senior School which was at a place called Kingsgate near Broadstairs, which was six or seven miles away, right on the tip of the north east Kent coast. A very cold place, but in the winter we used to get the bitterly easterly winds, a lot of snow and ice. And I think that will always stay in my most vivid impressions of [Shaftesbury Society] School – the fact that we were always cold. Because the point is, the heating system was totally inadequate and it was a very spartan regime, having to line up each mornin' before they called breakfast (which was about before eight o'clock in the mornin') in our houses outside in the yard. And that's unless it was pourin' with rain, but on a bitterly cold mornin'... I think that's always with me [laughing]. I still feel the cold now thinkin' about it, and it seems that they had no concept of, you know, of how those conditions would affect children with all kinds of disabilities. We had to get up, strip, and wash in a cold wash room which was at the end of a draughty corridor, the door leadin' out into the yard. Another thing I remember – the main toilet block were across the other side of the yard, so we had to go across, usually to use the toilet, and we had to be in bed by half past seven in the

evenin'. We're talkin' about boys up to the age of fifteen now, and we had to strip wash again, stand in this draughty corridor, to have a cold drink of milk and p'raps a biscuit or a slice of bread, stand, not sit down.

And what happened if you didn't make it in the morning over to the toilet? I mean surely you had to get dressed and all that,

[Talking together.] Oh yes.

before you could even get there?

No, we had toilets inside,

Oh, you had urinals inside. [Talking together] Yes.

but yes, we had toilets there, but it was just the main toilet block for the school buildin' that was on the yard.

Mm.

But you seldom went to the toilet.

Terrible.

The toilet facilities weren't adequate anyway, for the number [talking together] of boys that were there.

Yes. And did you have baths, or showers?

We had baths and showers, but they had to be supervised,

Yes.

by the staff, and we were only allowed a bath, or shower, once a week. We had to have a change of underclothes. We had to go a whole week without. That was [hard?] playin' games and football, and things like that.

Yes, yes.

I think of all my impressions and memories of [Whiteness] Manor School, I think it was that that stands in my mind the most. The actual house itself was, I believe, a Victorian, well, manor house I suppose; so it was totally not suitable for boys with all kinds of disabilities. Another stupid thing was that it had a main staircase, and off the main hall a wide staircase and shallow steps, but we weren't allowed to use that at all. We had to clamber up a steep side stairs at the back, which I presume was used for the servants' quarters. And there was this staircase and I think that two or three times boys used to fall down them.

Mm, hmm. On the other hand, they might have called it 'normalisation', because I am recognising things from your school that my expensive girls' public school also had: you know, like cold dormitories, feeling the heat from the electric light bulb, not being unable to use the splendid central staircase,

Yes.

which was only for staff and prefects [laughs].

Yes.

But it wasn't as bad as yours was because, with the toilet block over the other side and, mm.

I suppose it's just the attitude – no idea,

No.

in those days.

No. No idea really. Yes. So who was in charge of the school? Was it an enlightened, or -

Well again it was the Shaftesbury Society...

Yes, yes.

... Senior School, and The Shaftesbury Society is, or was, a Christian organisation,

Yes.

and very evangelical preachers. They were not all [evangelical?],

So,

but I thought that they were practising, ordained in their own way. They didn't actually materialise in the way that we were expected to.

Mm. So were the staff and the headmaster, or headteacher, [laughs] appointed on their Christianity rather than their knowledge of disability?

Well certainly yes. The superintendent and matron were husband and wife [talking together, inaudible].

Gosh. Even that sounds like the workhouse. [Laughs.]

[Laughs] Yes, we used to have to call them 'Sir' and 'Matron', and all this.

Mm.

And the actual house staff were quite nice, and they were [had?] all very Christian beliefs and values, but the teaching staff and the school side was quite a separate buildin' and was far more relaxed and more conventional. And it was the teachers, well two or three of them, I really got friendly with. And they used to encourage us to do more outside the school when you can, but of course there was strict restrictions on what you could do outside the home. But these three teachers, I will always remember, (with whom I kept in contact with many years after I left school) they used to invite us to their own homes,

[Talking together] Mm, good.

give us some tea and things like that. And that really... it give us some rare opportunities of actually bein' in what I would call a 'normal, homely environment'. But they were too few and far between. We certainly weren't allowed to go out at all, unsupervised. They used to take us out in what they called 'the ambulance' to certain things of interest, and occasionally to the cinema, and to the theatre occasionally. But it was all supervised. Sundays were borin' but busy days. We had to attend church in the morning. We had to go one in the morning, after our lunch and rest period, we had to go for a supervised walk, up to about four or five miles sometimes,

Oh God.

and then, in the summer months, we had to go to church again in the evening. I personally, at this stage, was beginning to question, and because I'd been brought up in the Anglican church I resented havin' to go to a church that had denominations with congregational church – very much evangelical, bible-thumpin' type of preachin'. And as I got to the age of fourteen or fifteen, I kind of rebelled against this, and fortunately one of the staff, a Mr Butler (who incidentally also was cerebral palsied himself: very mild cerebral palsy) he was Anglican, and he started to take a few of us to the Anglican church on a Sunday evening. So that was a [in?]

Bournemouth. But until we were in our last two terms at the school, we weren't allowed to go out at all by ourselves. And then [in] the last two terms they used to call us 'the nine o'clock boys' [laughs] because we were allowed to stay up until nine o'clock (whereas the others had to go to bed at seven) and we used to be given a proper supper instead of just cold milk and sandwich. We had a bit of a cooked supper, and we were able to stay up and watch television, but there was a point where they allowed us to go out on a Sunday afternoon by ourselves, so that was great of course. By then I had gained a little bit of independence. Most holidays I used to go walkin', by myself, to the local park and down to the cliffs which were about half a mile away I should say, and had a great sense of freedom.

Mm, yes.

But certainly, it was very Victorian in the whole place, the whole idea and the system of corporal punishment. The system it was awful – the spectacle of seein' a poor lad bein' thrashed in front of the whole school. And I always remember a boy bein' caught because the grounds were quite extensive, and a lot it was out of bounds anyway, but of course we didn't bother about that. But if you got caught, and were out of bounds, you got into trouble. But this poor boy, he didn't have a home (I think he was an orphan) and in the holidays he had to –

[End of Tape 3 Side A]

Tape 3 Side B [Track 6]

OK.

This boy, I think by then he was about fourteen or fifteen, he got caught one day in the bushes. He was with a member of the domestic staff, a young girl, and she was given the sack and he was expelled instantly from school. Goodness knows where he went, but he had no family at all. But instantly: no reason. Also, of course, some of us senior boys used to have a bit of fun with the girls at the girls' school about a mile down the road. Sunday afternoons, we'd meet them in the park and go out with them. That was frowned upon, but they didn't [know?] I was goin' out. And every year they used to call [have?] what they called 'garden parties' at the school, organised mainly by the local committee. They called them, oversaw the school, and raised standards and that. And we used to have to perform something, and get dressed up, and things like this, and it was quite breathtaking really, some of things they got us to do.

Mm.

And I remember we had a dwarf boy, a dwarf. He was very small, only about four foot high, and one year he had to dress up as a baby. And that didn't seem, well, p'raps I didn't think it at the time, but lookin' back on it, yeah. But one positive aspect was that by this time I'd been with the scout movement, at the previous school, and I was now in the scout troop at [Whiteness] Manor, and I did enjoy that. We used to go campin', and once a year proper camp in an old park near Sevenoaks. That was very excitin' because that gave us that week of freedom, independence and skills, and I became, before [the end of?] my time there, I became the troop leader

Good.

of the scout troop,

Yeah.

because I gained my first class badge,

Very good.

too. And part of the first class badge, you had to undertake a hike of I think it was about fourteen miles. Now, by this time, this is goin' back a bit but, I met somebody called 'Sandy'. This was back at Dorchester. He'd introduced me to the branch camp,

Ah yes. Mm.

so I'd already been [to] the branch camp a couple of times but when it came for me to do my first class test, this hike, Sandy managed to adapt it for me – that instead of walkin', I could cycle on my tricycle.

Oh good.

And he got another of the senior scouts to come with me, and [rustling sound] we were supposed to camp out for the night, and we took our tent, but havin' got the tent up we 'ad a terrific thunder storm, [interviewer laughs] and fortunately, we were in a field that had an old barn.

Oh.

Yeah, and so we went into the barn, [both laugh] spent the night.

Good.

Of course we had no sleepin' bags in those days, we just had blankets, and I actually did that, down this Dorchester.

Mm.

Yes.

That's very good, fourteen miles.

Fourteen.

Very good, yes. All this is familiar to me because I was in the guide movement too.

Yes. [Laughs.] Yes.

Did you have to do things like that?

Yes. I also, you know, used it as a stepping stone a bit.

Mm, yes, good. Yes, bein' in the scout movement certainly helped me a lot, making me that independent, self possession [talking together, inaudible] and I think that was the most positive aspect of it. And also, one year, I can't remember which year it was; I can remember we had St George's Day parade at Windsor Castle.

Gosh!

I didn't know if they still hold it, but it's all the scouts, the youth movements together in a quadrangle at Windsor Castle, and the Queen comes,

[Talking together] Good.

and inspects you. And it's said they have a complete troop of disabled scouts there, and they choose two from each county, and one year I was chosen to go.

Great.

But unfortunately, well that particular year the Queen was unable... well she had a bad cold, so the Duke of Edinburgh came and talked to us.

Mm, good. And was he good?

Yes, yes he was.

[Laughing] I mean, 'cos he's supposed to have a reputation of -

Yes, well he was chatterin' and

Good.

yeah. I've still got the photograph of me [talking together] and my two friends.

Mm, mm, that's great.

So that compensated a little bit, because when I was in my teens, '52, the Queen, well she was then Princess Elizabeth, (meantime this was at Dorchester, because most of the land around Cornwall belongs to the Duchy of Cornwall) she visited the three hundred farms, but of course I missed that because I was at school.

Do you want a rest?

Yes. [Break in recording. Rustling sound.] Well of course, being away at boarding school for up to three or four months at a time, we all used to look forward to the holidays. And as the day approached we used to get very excited and I remember one year we had a kind of flu virus goin' about the school, and we were so afraid that they would stop us goin' home. But thankfully it didn't happen and we were so relieved. We used to have to go by train up to Victoria Station in London, where our parents used to meet us – they used to have to come down from all parts of the country and meet us at Victoria Station. And of course as we got near the station we got more and

more excited, and we used to look out the window to see if we could spot our mums and dads, and so that was an exciting time, something that we used to look forward to. And also the train journey: 'course in those days it was steam trains, the journey used to take longer, but was far more interestin'. And my father used to come up to fetch me, and sometimes we spent a few hours just lookin' around the parts of London and that then. For somebody that's used to the peace and quiet of the countryside, that again was a new experience. The crowds, the traffic, the shops... I remember we used to get what they called 'The Royal Wessex Train', which must 'ave been... it was quite a famous engine on the sort of southern railway. It used to run everyday from Waterloo down to Weymouth, and it actually used to do the journey in I think it was three and a half hours, whereas the other trains used to take up to four and a half hours,

[Under breath] Whew!

so it was quite an experience to travel on p'raps up to a hundred miles an hour,

Gosh.

on an old steam train like that. And the way we used to run at Southampton, they used to, well it still does, run by the docks. And I used to look out and see either the Queen Elizabeth or the Queen Mary Ocean Liner in the dry docks at Southampton. And, of course, I got a nice time meetin' my mother and family again – quite an emotional time. It took the boys a couple of days for them to settle back into [things?]. I used to look forward to gettin' back on the farm again, and by this time I had a bigger tricycle, and so I used it all the time to cycle round. I used to [go on?] the farm and get up to all sorts of mischief [both laugh] and things. I used to still come off the tricycle sometimes, but I didn't seem to come to much harm, except for a few cuts and bruises. But anyway it was the sense of freedom again and bein' home with the family. At the age of about I think ten or eleven, I had desires to, you know, go further afield by myself, and my parents wouldn't think of it. They said, 'You can't walk down that busy road by yourself, into town.' But then my brother, who I think at that

stage was about seven or eight I think, he said he'd come, he'd look after me. So we used to walk into Dorchester,

[Talking together] Mm.

and walk round, because by that time I'd got used to walkin' and havin' to go on these regimental marches at school. And I could walk fairly well.

Yes, going in isn't so bad, it's downhill. But [laughing] coming back, it's all uphill, isn't it?

[Laughs] Yes, I found that. 'Specially when I got to actually cycle into Dorchester and back, yes. But after a time my brother he got fed up with that and he didn't want to come with me any more. I think because he became conscious of people lookin' at me and he got embarrassed. And so one day I took it upon myself to go on my own. I didn't tell my parents until I got back, you know.

Mm, good for you.

[Laughs] So that was the start of it. Once I'd done it once, that was it, and I never did look back, you know.

Mm, very good.

The fact that I got back in one piece, I think [talking together, inaudible].

Yes, because it was a fairly busy road, [talking together] and it was the main road to the West Country.

Yes, yes it was. No pavement,

No.

just a tree-lined avenue, banks... And quite often I remember we had to like throw ourselves onto the bank, because the cars came too close,

Yes.

because the road, it was a very narrow road.

Mm.

But I certainly enjoyed it because bein' a part on the farm and sometimes takin' part in farm activities like haymaking and harvestin', it was [?]. And I forget how old I was, but there was a very nice friendly man who used to work on the farm, as one of the farm labourers. He used to drive the tractors and when the farmer wasn't around, this man Tom used to let me get up and steer the tractor.

Good.

And I remember one day he let me steer it 'cos he was ploughin' a field, and he was steerin' a straight furrow right across the field. And from that time I knew that I could steer

Mm.

a vehicle safely. I mean not to actually drive it, but I knew that once I got my hands on the steerin' wheel, I knew that I could steer it.

And so it was possible and that, I suppose, it made you [laughing] set your sights on -

Well, yes, I shall come to all that later on.

Yes.

And durin' the holidays, 'specially summer holidays, I used to spend a week or so at my grandparents', up at Walthamstow where I was born and brought up. And I always used to look forward to this because it was really my first introduction to [knocking sound] lookin' forwards to my teenage youth. Because I was part of a group, with my cousin Michael and three or four other youngsters, we used to go about and call ourselves 'The Gang'. We used to get up to all sorts of things: fishin' in the river, we used to be scrumpin' the apples,

Mm.

and we used to get up to all sorts of mischief, as young teenagers do. And I always felt part of it, and was accepted as one of them. And if I needed any help they would help me (if we 'ad to clamber over a gate or something). They just accepted me, and it was really great. And there was girls and boys in the gang,

Oh good.

which was nice. But also, bein' with my grandparents – I used to love bein' with my grandfather. He was the verger of the church and one of his responsibilities was goin' and windin' the clock in the church tower, and he used to take me up the spiral staircase.

Mm, mm.

How I used to get up there [interviewer laughs] nobody knew. Neither did I. But I was at that age, I suppose I was about well ten, eleven, twelve years old and as we got higher and higher the tick in the pendulum used to get louder and louder, and I was gettin' scared to climb so close [interviewer laughs]. And my grandfather used to laugh at me 'cos he was always makin' jokes, jokes about ghosts and spirits and things. But he was a great character and everybody in the village, especially children, used to love him. They used to gather round and he used to tell 'em stories and make

up things, and he had a lot of stories about the ghosts and St Dunstan's, things like that. And of course we boys used to be intrigued by all this [laughs] and he always used to have a sweet in his pocket, give us sweets. He was so well-liked in the village. [Break in recording. Background noise.] Yeah, I think it's around this time that I began to feel conscious of bein' different to other people. Although I've just said that I was accepted, as part of the gang of people, when I used to go out walkin' around the town of Dorchester I was very conscious of people starin' and hearin' remarks. 'Oh, poor boy', or 'It must be hard for his parents,' or all things like this. And I think that it was around the time of my early teens, when I was actually walkin' about in the community, I really felt conscious of bein' different from other people, because at that time, one hardly saw any other people that had a physical disability,

Mm.

like myself, because I suppose they were either shut away in institutions or there just wasn't anybody about, there just wasn't the people. I stood out in the crowd sort of thing, whereas today nobody, or hardly anybody, takes a second look at you. It was a lot of the children of course. I mean they didn't know better and I just had to accept about that. But nevertheless it did take time for me to come to some little realisation that I've got to ignore it and just carry on. And of course not bein' able to speak very well, I couldn't (especially with children) I couldn't try to explain how I was, and that made it p'raps more difficult other people with similar problems. But it did mean that towards my middle teens I just thought that I was standin' on the side lines all the time. And I remember particularly, p'raps this was just after I left school altogether, that I used to go to the church youth club, and the leader, he was a keen ballroom dancer and he used to hold like dancing classes. And I used to just have to sit at the side and watch them and that's, you know, because he felt slightly embarrassed for me to try to dance, and I couldn't, certainly at that stage but -

You'd have been all right the next decade, when the twist [talking together] came in, and [laughs] and you can dance on your own.

Oh no, oh yes. As a teenager,

Yeah.

nobody said 'When are you goin?' to ask –

[End of Tape 3 Side B]

Tape 4 Side A [Track 7]

OK. [Rustling sound.]

Well at the age of sixteen, one had to leave Whiteness Manor, without any real academic qualifications, because they didn't teach [background noise drowns out David] like GCEs or anything like that. But at the last year they did manage to have one exam board section and that was the Royal Institute of Art, the RSA [RIA?], and I took one subject, which was Elementary English. I had to have English Language, and to take that, because there was no way that I could write legible answers to questions... So I took that and I passed that one, but that was the only academic qualification that I gained from bein' in the school. [Break in recording. Someone says something inaudible.] So I believe it was '59, p'raps '58, I left Whiteness Manor. All the boys that were leaving had a tradition of throwing their caps, because we all used to have to wear caps. All the boys that were leaving used to throw their caps out of the train as we crossed over the Medway Bridge, which is a tradition that I had grown up with all these years. Well I always had this, I s'pose lookin' back on it, naïve ambition to follow in my father's footsteps and be a farmer, and specifically to keep poultry as my father used to. And I kind of insisted that I wanted to do this, and I can't remember bein' persuaded not to by the education authorities. The education authorities in Dorset recommended that I went to the North College near Alton. So, in the September of that year, I went in autumn to the college, which was the start of a far more congenial, and bein' out of boarding school, 'cos I'd only been, but it was still like in an institutional-type atmosphere, it was far more freedom than the [?]. There was only like two houses, one for the senior boys and one for the junior ones, and because I was already senior I was in the senior house in the old part of the buildin', that was a manor house. It had a very nice, friendly house master, what he was called I can't remember. I was actually introduced to him by Sandy my friend, because he knew him quite well, and so I went to the Treloar College with the hope and the intention of doing a training course in pig and poultry keeping, which at that time they did there because they had a small farm. It lasted about two or three months, and of course I found it hopeless. There was no way that I could cope with that kind

of heavy work, and in the end I became quite ill. I developed (I think it was [when] I cut myself a bit of bread) a septic finger, and had to go to hospital again, and so that dashed all my hopes and dreams. Anyway, so they decided that they had a tailoring course there and they thought p'raps I could operate [talking together] a sewing machine.

Wow.

But, you know, that again was hopeless. The instructor of the training course, he could see straight away that that was, and I just spent time in the workshop just playin' about with bits of cloth. But it was almost like half a day; the other half of the day I spent in academic work. So really I continued on my education at the Royal College, [engine noise in background] but I suppose in a way, you know, it was a good thing, you know 'cos I really learned more, and especially in my basic subjects – maths and science – which I hadn't really done a great deal of in the previous school. We used to have to (durin' the college) do prep, both in the evenings and on Saturday mornings, so it was quite a strict education. But I certainly enjoyed my time at the Royal College. We were, well we were supposed to, run about outside the school. I used to be walkin' in the lanes, 'cos the situation in the open countryside, Saturday afternoons, we used to go into the town, and we used to go to a matinee at the cinema, and we used to stay in the town 'til about seven o'clock and do what we liked. And we had most of Sunday free as well, after attending the church service (which we had in the chapel connected to the college). But after the first term I started goin' further afield. I used to get the bus into Farnham and I used to go to the shops, and on one occasion I even went as far as Winchester,

Mm.

on the bus and the train. So this was at the age of sixteen, and through that I gained a lot of independence and confidence, and it was very helpful and instructive, you know, but at the end of that academic year the Dorset education authority said that [because] I wasn't undertaking a training course, they could no longer fund me. So I

had to leave. So I was only at college for one year, I think it was from '58 to '59, and that was the start of my long struggle to obtain some kind of gainful employment. So I think... [we] will leave it there, and continue next time.

[End of Tape 4 Side A]

[Side B blank]

Tape 5 Side A [Track 8]

*David has written his life story up to 1963 and is working from that. [Rustling noise.]
OK David.*

[A lot of rustling.] Well after leaving Treloar College in the summer of 1959, because the local educational authorities had not continued my funding, I was certainly feeling very disillusioned and feeling that, 'Where do I go from here?' not having gained any academic qualifications. And so coming back home, I felt so isolated and I really found some kind of relief and solace by going out walkin' across the fields with our little dog which we had then. And also, I did a lot of cycling on my tricycle, and well at that time I had an old handmade tricycle, which we'd bought from somebody.

[Laughs] It was a real rickety contraption and it only had one handbrake. And I had some terrific adventures and exploits, cycling around the lanes and well south Dorset really, but it generally got me out and gave me the great pleasure of bein' out in the countryside and of course there wasn't as much traffic on the roads then as what there is now. So I was able to manage very well considering that the actual tricycle wasn't really in a road-worthy condition, with just one handbrake and [laughing] I don't know how I did it.

I guess in some ways it was more reliable than these modern battery-driven things that can break down and leave you stranded.

Well yes, at least it didn't [laughing] break down.

Yes.

And I think I only had one puncture, all the years that I was cycling. But after that I did get a new tricycle, which was far safer. Anyway, so as I said, I didn't even know where life was gonna lead me at this stage. I just had my seventeenth birthday, and the immediate prospect of finding any kind of work or even training seemed rather remote.

You were unfortunate, living in a place like Dorset,

[Talking together] Yes.

which was very backward.

Yes, very. [Knocking sound.] I forget the sequence of events, but the next two or three years really... but at first, I remember I had to sign on for work at what was then the labour exchange. Had to queue up with everybody else, and that was a trial because I had to sign on Wednesday, and go and sign on again on Friday to collect my money.

And Wednesday's market day, so -

It was, yes.

Yes.

Yes, I used to have to cycle down there, to the labour exchange.

Yes, town is very busy that day.

Yes it was. Well, the first thing that happened that autumn was that I think it was then called the 'Disabled Resettlement Officer' suggested that I attended what was called then the 'Industrial Rehabilitation Unit', which was at Bristol. And I spent three days there, which was a total waste of time. And apart from the fact that I stayed with a very nice family out there who took me round to see the sights of Bristol, it was totally inappropriate and inadequate for me, for my particular condition, because it was just geared up for people that had industrial accidents and things. They didn't have a clue about somebody with cerebral palsy at all. Anyway, what can they, how can they assess one, in three days? So that was the first thing that happened. And then

I think it was that autumn, yes it must have been autumn '59, had a visit from Bill Hargreaves...

Mm.

... from what was then The Spastics Society.

Mm.

He was then the Industrial Liaison Officer. He actually came to visit me in my home, and suggested that I attended an assessment course, which they had in those days, to assess me for my [inaud]. They thought I was suitable to attend the Sherrards Training Centre at Welwyn Garden City, so in February of I think '60, I went on one of these assessment courses, which they held at Bexhill [engine noise in background] in a place called Colwall Court, which I believe was a hotel or centre that The Spastics Society ran in those days. And that course lasted a whole week, and that was the first time that I actually met other young people with cerebral palsy, and also of course it was a mixed group.

So before that, at your schools, there had been all disabilities.

All disabilities.

[Talking together] I see.

Yes, very few people with cerebral palsy there. So as far as that was concerned, [knocking sound in background] that week was quite beneficial to me, because that meeting helped on a social basis, of the young people involved, and gave me the confidence to speak about myself – 'cos I was still very shy and withdrawn. And we went out in the evenings and we went out to a show, and different places, and I did enjoy that week.

At the White Rock Pavilion. [Laughs]

No, I can't remember, [talking together]...

Yes, I know Bexhill. [Talking together] Yes.

I can't remember the places but... yeah. But it was December, and also I met on that course... it was run by Margaret Morgan, and Jane Thompson, and William Truelove – social workers with the society in those days – and they were excellent, and I certainly kept in touch with them over the years. But it was found that a course at the Sherrards [Training Centre]... none would be appropriate for me, so nothing actually materialised from that assessment.

And couldn't they make any recommendations?

I forget. I can't remember what they did recommend

[Talking together] I see.

at that time. Well, back in Dorchester I already had contact with what was then the Youth Employment Service, because they two came under the youth employment service, and I met for the first time a very nice person called Jean Tocher, who was the Youth Employment Officer for the whole area. And Jean took me on board, and left no stone unturned to try to get me into some employment. And I used to go and visit her regularly. But for all her efforts, there was no offer. People were so reluctant to actually give me [rustling noise] even a trial period. But she was so good, and she let me go down to the office in Weymouth, one afternoon a week, and just do a bit of office work, filing papers and things, just to give me that little bit of experience. And whether she was allowed to do this or not, I don't know, but she did [laughs]. So that all helped me. I was still of course signing on at the labour exchange, and the manager there she he tried to make contact with firms and things, and eventually, because they were in the rotary club, the manager of the old steam laundry at Dorchester offered to

take me on, as a part-time basis, just to do a bit of work in the laundry. So I went in, just in the mornings, and I found that I could easily handle the clothes – sort them out and fold the towels and the sheets after they'd been ironed. But, well, it was something, and it gave me a bit of pocket money for doing' it. But it only lasted about, I s'pose three months, because then the laundry transferred down to Weymouth. And anyway, it was alright doing that, but working in a steamy hot atmosphere with all these women wasn't really congenial.

You must have been exhausted there.

Well luckily it was only like three hours in the mornin'.

Yes.

I did, but -

But the damp heat is the worst.

Damp heat, yes. I certainly couldn't have done it for a whole day.

No.

No. So that was, you know... But at least it just give me a bit of, you know [laughing], something to do really. Well, so I was really bored, and frustration set in at that time, and I was a little [low?] at the time, and felt very disillusioned by everything, hopeless of gettin' any kind of employment. But eventually I said to myself that I've got to make myself fresh contacts and push myself and join in socially. So I joined the church youth club. That was a real effort, I remember, goin' through those doors for the first time, because up to then I hadn't actually mixed socially with people of my own age. And although I couldn't join in many of the activities they had there, at least I was speaking. And quite a few of the young people I'd known at my first school, (the school that I'd grown up together) so that was good. But when it came to like

playing tennis or ballroom dancing, I just had to sit outside and thought, 'Well, I'd really like to have a go at dancing.' But little did I know at that time that wish would become a reality in a few years time (which I will relate when I get there). I also made contact with a local group for the Spastics Society at Yeovil. And I used to go up to Yeovil on the train and meet them there, and we had social activities and outings so that all -

How did you find that? I mean were you aware of it being run by people who...

Yes.

you know, were doing it at as a mission in life and -

Yes, it was mostly parents of

Yes. Yes.

people with cerebral palsy.

And did you have any autonomy, the young, the people?

No, not really no.

No, no.

No, but it was just good to make contact...

Yes.

with people there. Well, one day when I went to visit Jean Tocher when she held her weekly sessions at Dorchester, she introduced me to somebody that was to play quite an important part in my life: a person called Charlie Wilton. And he, at that time, was

the leader of the local boys club, which held their meetings in the same hall, and we became really fast friends. He took me in, and he was a person that wouldn't take no for an answer. If there was something that had to be done, he would do it. He wasn't one for sitting back and just letting things happen. In due course, he'd just go right in there and, you know, blow people up. And anyway, he tried his best to (because he was quite well-known he made contact with all kinds of people) to get me... and although on one occasion he was helping me to fill in an application form for a clerical job at County Hall and we sent the application in, and we didn't hear anything for several weeks so Charlie said, 'Right, we'll go and see them.' [Laughs.] We barged into County Hall, went in various departments to find the right person and they said, 'Well we'll just see how he gets on, sorting these few papers,' and I managed to do it fairly well. And we thought this man might give me the job, but then somebody else came in and we heard some whispered conversation, and he said, 'No, we can't help you.' I remember Charlie blew his top. [Laughs.]

Yes, the discrimination is...

Yes.

... terrible.

Anyway, after about a year, the boys club moved to different premises in a old mission hall down North Street, Dorchester, and it became like a youth club there. It was very rough and ready, because it was full of young people, but Charlie kept quite good control, and everybody liked him. And I used to spend most of time down there, not just in the evenings but in the daytime. I used to go down there and do various things, and that occupied my time, and I became quite well-known because Charlie used to take me round to all his visits and that. He encouraged me to enter I think it was the Dorset Association of Youth Clubs. They had like a art and craft exhibition each year and Charlie encouraged me to enter to show articles that I'd written. And to my surprise I was awarded two First Class on those articles, and I also got what they called the 'Canning Shield' for the most effort. So of course then I had my picture in

the local paper and everything, so everybody practically got to know who I was in the town, and Charlie was one for pushing [laughs]. And I remember one occasion, [rustling noise] the radio programme Any Questions? was gonna come to Dorchester, and because it was a radio programme that always I used to listen to, I really wanted to go there and be in the audience. But they only allocated tickets to people that were, like, in organisations [banging sound in background] and like the town councillors, and things like that. I went down, I remember it was a Friday evening; I went down and said to Charlie, 'I really would like to go.' He said, 'You go, just walk in,' and I said, 'Well I can't really do that.' But he said, 'Have a go.' So I did. I just walked through the door and sat in a chair. [Laughs.]

Good, [talking together] good for you.

Nobody said anything.

No.

That was when Freddie Grisewood was chairman

Yes.

of *Any Questions?* He had a disability – he certainly walked with a stick, yes. So –

[End of Tape 5 Side A]

Tape 5 Side B [Track 9]

OK.

Right, so my efforts and [rustling noise] other people's efforts at trying to find me some gainful employment continued, but it didn't... we were getting absolutely nowhere. And the employers in those days just took one look at you and, you know, either said, 'No, we...' I'd rather they said that. But I was just, 'We'll let you know,' and, you know, we just felt like saying, 'Forget it then.' I think it was, yes, in the summer [interviewer coughs] of 1961, I spent three months [interviewer coughs] at, it was called 'The Rehabilitation Unit' at Odstock Hospital. It was part of the hospital, and we were actually with the patients, but we had our own separate, like, dormitories. And I forget... they had all kinds of work there, mostly industrial, and I forget exactly [laughing] what I did there in the actual workshop.

Hold on. [Break in recording.]

But it was a grand group of people there, and I got on very well with everybody. We used to have some laughs and go out in the evening [rustling noise] into Salisbury, to have a pub crawl [laughs]. And I don't know how we used to get back up the hill to Odstock Hospital. I forget; I think we had to get taxis or something. But it was quite an enjoyable [interviewer coughs] three months really, and I used to travel back home [interviewer coughs] at weekends on the bus. And I met a lovely person there: Harry Lark. He had both legs amputated, through some kind of accident that he had, but he was [rustling noise] a good person – always smiling, always cheerful, nothing seemed to bother him – and he kept everybody else happy in there, and somebody else who I kept in contact with for some years afterwards, until unfortunately he died. And he had a very old invalid car, and he was keen on this motor cycling, scrambling and, I remember once, he took me to a scramble but, yes, I wasn't really supposed to go in it, but [laughing] I squashed into his little mini car, and the escapades that we got up to. I remember on one occasion, he lived in, I think it was a caravan, near Salisbury somewhere, and I went up there one weekend to stay with him, and [laughing] we

went out in the evening on a pub crawl, and didn't get back til about one o'clock in the morning. And can you imagine, two people with disabilities, dead-drunk, tryin' to make up a bed, in a small caravan, [both laugh] about two o'clock in the mornin', and it's just something that I remember so vividly, but it was great fun. Anyway, goin' back to the assessment at the Rehabilitation Unit – nothin' came of that, but the doctor that was in charge there he recognised my literary talent and he suggested I might gain some kind of, as a proofreader in the printing trade. And so I pursued that idea a bit, but I think that one needed some academic qualifications. Now, I believe that I said previously that I took the one exam at Whiteness Manor School, but I've since remembered that I actually took two exams. I took the GCE English Language and I failed that one, so in order to actually apply to be a proofreader one needed at least one GCE English. So with Charlie's help I started goin' to evening classes at the local secondary modern school to prepare for this GCE English Language exam. And the headmaster there at the time, he again was a great person, and he helped me, encouraged me, and he actually marked my English exercises himself. And, because by that time my younger brother was goin' to that school, so like, he knew the family. But 'e was also a good friend of Charlie's as well, so they kind of worked together. And when the actual exam time came, it was agreed Charlie would be my official amanuensis, so we had to like practise together because it's so difficult tryin' to dictate to somebody else.

[Talking together] Absolutely, yes.

So we had to kind of build up some kind of, you know, communication and dialogue through the mock papers.

And apart from that, you've got to learn to assemble your thoughts in order, [talking together] haven't you?

Yes, yes. I found it extremely difficult. But we persevered, and I took the exam, was given extra time, over a period of two days,

[Talking together] Good, that's very good!

well just half a day, and it was for those days, yes. Of course, Mr Dawes the headmaster, he assisted with the examination. But it all worked out well, and I passed it.

Good.

Thinkin' that this is goin' to lead me on to pursuing this career in proofreading, I'd written letters to publishers and so on, but I don't think I got anywhere on that.

Well it's an extremely difficult profession to get into.

Yes.

It's so over-crowded, you know, there are just more people wanting to do it than those they need.

Yes, this is what I discovered afterwards,

Yes.

yes, and probably I was given the wrong advice, but at least it enabled [me] to take and pass that exam.

Good, good.

So that again was the end of a let-down and once again I got dejected and, you know, thought the whole world was against me gettin' anywhere. But by this time, as one would gather, my mobility was gettin' better and better, and I was goin' to take us further and further afield. I went to London by myself for the first time, when I was about eighteen, to attend what The Shaftesbury Society used to hold: an annual

festival. And I went to that one year, and I remember, because it took place in the evening, I had to travel back in what was then called 'the mail train', which left London about twelve o'clock in the mornin' and didn't used to get back down to Dorset until about five o'clock in the mornin'. And that was [laughing] quite an experience travelling overnight, by oneself, on a cold, draughty train.

Did they have any carriages to sit in,

[Talking together] Oh yes, they had -

Or was it all mail?

No, they had two or three carriages

I see.

attached to the actual mail train.

Yes, yes.

Yes, and [noise of plane in background] I remember right up to, well, up to about the 1980s, they still ran it down to Weymouth, and you could actually post your letter until about ten o'clock at night. They had a little post box at the side of the actual carriage,

Really?

and they used to park at Dorchester Station for about half an hour, and you could go and post your letter there. [Interviewer laughs.] Yes, all these little things.

Yes, yes. Those days of progress [laughs] have gone.

No, they've all changed. In fact they've stopped a lot of mail trains to Scotland now. And I can't remember what year, but I actually booked a holiday, at Prestatyn Holiday Camp, North Wales, and I went there by myself for a whole week.

Right.

It was a good adventure and -

Yes. How did you find that?

Well, all right, as far as I can remember,

Oh.

'cos I was quite active in those days. I walked better than now, and we had a day excursion [to] Snowden, and I went up to the top of Snowden on the railway, and I s'pose I was about eighteen p'raps nineteen years old then. But I can't remember how I actually got up to Prestatyn: I think it was a coach. And then after the week had finished, I went over to Liverpool and stayed with friends there,

Good.

for a few days.

Good. So, this was in the mid-sixties, so it was at the time of the Liverpool Sound, and the Beatles and,

Yes, it was about 1960,

Yes.

'61.

Ah, just before it began. [Talking together.] Yes.

Just before that, yes. But I certainly enjoyed that because it was a completely new and different place, totally different to what it was down south, and you know, people were so friendly and helpful up there.

Good.

Mm.

At this time, were you getting Unemployment Benefit, or Disability Benefit, or what else was it called before Income Support? [Laughing] I can't remember.

Supplementary Benefit.

Oh yes.

Yes I was gettin' Supplementary Benefit, I think. Yes. And then also, it could have been a couple of years after that but, I went on a package coach trip, right up to Scotland,

Mm.

by myself, and stayed at a hotel beside Loch Lomond. So that was a great experience, and I've been back to Scotland many times,

Have you?

since then.

So this was your first real experience of independence [talking together] and travelling.

Yes, really, yes, and looking back on it, it surprised me that the holiday companies and coach operators, you know, agreed to take me, because I was still quite unstable on my feet, and in those days, you know... But, I suppose you were beginning to get more enlightened but even, you know, thirty or forty years ago... But as far as the employment position was concerned nothin' was happening at all, and I was starting to think that if I was goin' to get anywhere, I'd got to move away from Dorchester, to a place that 'ad got more opportunities. But at that time I had no idea how to do this or where I could go. Then at that time, it was in the summer of '62 I think, I had a pen friend up in London who I'd corresponded with for quite a time, and she had polio, and she came down in her little invalid car, all the way down from London to see me.

Mm, that was some journey in those days,

It was.

without motorways and that.

Yes, and it took her the best part of the day,

Yeah.

and [laughs] she was [a] very courageous, plucky girl. And I remember she came down for about three or four days, and she had a friend, a Miss Canton down at Lyme, (I think it was Lyme Regis) and she wanted to visit this friend. And between Dorchester and Lyme Regis there was a very steep hill called [interviewer coughs] 'Chiddock Hill'

Yes, at Chiddock, yes. [Tearing sound.]

It was a lot steeper than what it is now because they've straightened it up, and [laughing] Linda, she got half-way up and couldn't go no further, so she reversed all the way back down,

Whew!

and started again, and she did it. I don't know how she did it but she did. She [talking together] was a very plucky girl.

Marvellous, yes.

Yeah. Anyway, so Linda come down to see me, and I said 'Well, I'd like to go up and visit her,' and so in the September of that year, which was '62, I went up to her home in London, where her parents had a pub there.

Where in London?

Peckham.

Oh Peckham, yes.

Yes. I've got to find the... anyway, we went up, and we went to the ... that's right, yeah. Now, in 1962, Bill Hargreaves has formed what was to become The 62 Clubs. Have you heard of them? His mission was that young people with disabilities could get together socially and run their own clubs and I think they called it the '62 Clubs because it started in 1962.

Mm.

And that September, the London club was holding this social at Park Crescent (this was the Society's headquarters) so Linda and I went to that evening and met a lot of young people with cerebral palsy. And so my circle of friends and contacts increased

from that time onwards. But I also had an uncle and aunt that lived in Bromley, just outside London, and I went to stay with them for a few days that week. I expressed my desire to move away and find employment, and she was saying 'Well, why not come up here and try your luck?' and I said 'Well...' And I think that she said they'd be willing to put me up for a time. Well, so that raised my hopes quite considerably. And later that autumn, my aunt met somebody in Bromley who told her that the local Spastics Society were goin' to open a workshop in Bromley and through her I made contact with them and they put my name down, you know, for me to go there. But the opening date they kept putting back and it was gonna be March and then went on, but [tearing sound] eventually it did open in May 1965, which was after that terribly bad winter which again [meant?] we were cut off by the snow for about three weeks, up at Pembury Farm. We had to walk across the fields to get to the town, because the road was completely blocked: no traffic at all that winter. So it was a long hard winter to wait, but in I think it was April, yeah, April 1963, I actually moved away from home. And the trepidation of my parents... [laughs] and my father didn't want me to go, but I think they both felt it was really important, that this was gonna be my one chance of gettin' somewhere in life,

Mm.

and I'd be staying with my aunt and uncle in Bromley, and starting in the workshop at the work centre there I think in June or July of that year [rustling noise]. I would like to stop now. [Break in recording.] So I think I was at Bromley in the April of that year, and because the work centre wasn't actually open then, I had two or three months really gettin' used to living in a large, urban environment. But I took it all in my stride and I used to go up into London and quite happily hop on a bus and train, and find my way around London (although I did lose myself a couple of times), but thinkin' back it surprises me just how far I was able to walk in those days without gettin' tired, because I must have walked three miles you know, each day.

God, that's a long way.

And I wasn't fallin' over.

[End of Tape 5 Side B]

Tape 6 Side A

Tape of David Edwards, recorded on the 10th March. OK?

Right. Yes so I was exploring London, and goin' to the various places of interest, and I believe it was that year that I went (for my twenty-first birthday) to the promenade concert, which I think that I always wanted to go to. And bein' able to get there, that was really enjoyable, and to get into the queue with the promenaders, I did that two or three times.

Gosh! And were you able to stand the whole time?

[Laughs] No I remember we were supposed to stand, but I did manage to do it for a bit. But there was some attendant used to come round, he used to quietly bring his stick. He used to give a little kick and say, 'You've gotta stand up,' [laughs] because to get more people in. Yeah, it was bad.

Yes, I've always, you know, thought 'I couldn't stand all that time' so I've never been, although I would love to go.

No. It was just the atmosphere and the comradeship of standin' in a queue, outside, for about three or four hours to get in. It was soon after I went to Bromley I had a surprise – that the Yeovil group had put my name forward to visit, to have a fortnight's holiday in Jersey.

Mm!

In those days the Jersey group of the Society offered, authorised, [rustling noise] a fortnight's holiday for a group of twelve people to go there and stay in people's houses or in guest houses, and my name was put forward by Yeovil so that I only had about a week notice on this to organise myself. So that was my first experience of flying (they used to fly in those days to Jersey). About that fortnight – it was a

wonderful holiday. It was a very lively group of people we had: they took us on visits, we had a full social programme in the evenings, and it was usually very good fun. And I s'pose it was my first real experience of bein' with others of my own age, and, well, just joining in and just doing things I mean that anybody else would do on holiday. So that all helped, and I made friendships there, mostly with the girls [laughs], and yes, but holiday friendships don't last very long, as we all know. So, I started at the work centre which had just opened, about the end of June or July of that year.

And what was the name of the centre?

Well we just called it 'The West Kent Spastics...

[Talking together] Oh West Kent, yes.

... Society Work Centre'. It started in a small way, because the manager had to procure some contract work from various firms, and it was mostly jobs like packing, assembly of pens and p'raps a little bit of metal work. He did manage to turn into quite a happy family atmosphere. There was only about a dozen people there, certainly to start with, and we had a bit of social life as well. And of course by this time I'd made contacts anyway in the Bromley area, mostly with the church, and so I got on with them, and I was a member of a youth group there, so it wasn't just confined to the like 'in-group' of the centre. I had a lot of outside friends and I started goin' to evenin' classes as well. I tried French, astronomy, and then eventually I went on to take my English Literature, and passed that, so I had two

Good.

two GCEs

Yes.

by then. It's difficult to remember the sequence of events then. Obviously I was living with my aunt and uncle: that worked out favourable most of the time, but there were occasions when things got a little bit difficult and my uncle would... but certainly I was quite happy, having to go along and doing things and going there in the evenings. But the time came when, I think, well the situation became a bit uneasy, and I sought other accommodation. And I think it was the social services; they found me a place with a lady that used to take in lodgers in Bromley. And she was a very pleasant person and very homely, and she took me in. She had another lodger there, and that worked out very well 'cos I felt part of a family, and the other lodger had a car and 'e used to take us out at weekends in the country,

[Talking together.] Good.

to the seaside. I also, by this time, had another tricycle, so I was able to cycle round a little bit even with the increase of traffic in that area. And then... yeah, of course all this time, I was in contact with the main Society (The Spastics Society), 'Scope' as it now is, and with their employment and social facility department. And I s'pose it was the following year, '64, p'raps '65, they'd opened a large sheltered workshop and hostel in Birmingham,

Mm.

and they suggested that I might like to go there. So I gave it a lot of thought, and I thought, 'Well p'raps this is another opening,' but I remember it was a very big wrench to leave there,

Mm.

because I'd made some really good friendships; people in Bromley and the other areas, and also in the work shelter, and I had a girlfriend at that time. So I can't remember whether it was 1963 or '64, but I know it was the 1st November, my uncle took me up to Euston or Paddington, and got the train to Birmingham. And as soon as

I got there I thought, 'This is totally, you know, in alien to what I'm basically about.'
It was vast and all that I can remember of Birmingham was just concrete: concrete everywhere. And that day, it was raining. It rained

[Talking together] Oh.

every day, so that first impression of the place didn't go away, you know? It just... I never settled, and because I'd left so many friends back at Bromley I just couldn't settle down. It was a brand new place, brand new building, modern style, and the accommodation was excellent. We had like, there were two little... it was built like a hexagon shape...

Mm.

there was two little flats in the corner, we shared a bathroom, but to go outside into that horrible place, it just, I don't know, I could never really describe it but just grey, and wet, horrible. I can't remember ever havin' a nice bright sunny day up there [laughs]. And I used to come back to Bromley, well, most weekends on the coach and stay with my aunt and uncle. Anyway, I just couldn't keep away. And also, I had to come back in February the following year because I had to have some kind of dental treatment business. I had to go into hospital, and I used to have all mine done back at the Bromley Hospital, so really I

Which hospital? Farley?

Bromley.

Bromley Hospital.

Yes, I didn't want to have it done up in Birmingham,

No.

because I had nobody there to visit me no more. So, and the work that I was put to in the workshop, it was nothing; they couldn't find anything constructive that I could manage. And one thing I remember doing was breaking up these old phones, these bakelite phones,

Mm, oh yes.

so that their parts be recycled; things like that.

Mm, mm.

That's the only things I can remember ever doing there, in the six months that I was there.

Oh gee.

So with those hopes and expectations that the staff had, that the Society had, and my own hopes, again were dashed,

Mm.

by that experience: so, I soon went. By the Easter of the following year I said, 'No, I've had enough.' But the thought was to go back from Bromley, and go back to what was my landlady, but then that didn't happen because she'd taken another lodger.

Oh.

So, rather reluctantly my aunt and uncle took me back there, and I was then back at the work centre in Bromley.

What did you do in the work centre?

It was mostly sub-contract work; packing, very light industrial work,

Yes.

assembly. Can't do much else there. But I was on the main job we had (the contract we had) for quite a time – was putting bath cubes into their cartons. [Rustling noise.] We had to get them in a certain order, so that they showed through the holes. We used to do thousands of those, and also assembled toy ducks. We used to throw the ducks at each other [both laugh]. It was very monotonous work, because... out at lunchtime... Anyway, the time passed fairly quickly, except when the work didn't come in, then we started to get bored. But luckily there used to be a pub just across the road, [interviewer laughs] we used to go in there at lunchtimes and relieve the monotony. But all the time I was lookin' around for employment, and gettin' nowhere. I used to write letters, phone calls, and I went to quite a few interviews, which would get no results. Once I travelled right over to the other side [of] Croydon.

Ah, Croydon, yes.

I think it's Philips' factory. I had to get three buses to get there, for an interview, that that didn't come to anything:

No.

I got a letter back, about a week later saying, 'We can't consider your application.' So I got more and more disheartened about it all, you know. Now I think I'd like to stop there, I don't want to do any more.

[End of Tape 6 Side A]

[Side B blank]

Tape 7 Side A [Track 11]

[Rustling noise] I am recording again with David Edwards. Hello David, well,

Hello.

how about it?

Right. Well last time we got up to the 1960s, when I went to Bromley in Kent, to attend work at the newly-opened work centre there. And just to start this session I would like just to p'raps back-track a little bit because, although my move to Bromley didn't come up to my expectations as far as obtaining work is concerned (real work, meaning normal employment), it certainly gave me far more opportunities socially, and certainly giving me the independence which I was seeking, right from when I left school, because of course there was far more opportunities to participate in anything in that large, urban environment, rather than in the atmosphere of a small town like Dorchester. [Rustling of papers.] I've decided to go over some of the things that I was involved in. First of all, I think I mentioned last time about the '62 Clubs. [Rustling noise in background.] This was started, as the name suggests, in 1962, by Bill Hargreaves, who could see that there was a need to establish a social environment that people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities could get together, organise their own activities [engine noise in background] outside the control, as it was then, of their parents (who used to cocoon them in an atmosphere that wasn't conducive to their [interviewer coughs] future life). So these clubs, the '62 clubs, was established in I think [sound of car horn] p'raps four or five different places around the country, mostly in London and Nottingham. The first conference that they had, a weekend conference, took place at Nottingham University, which I didn't attend, but apparently it was successful. And [interviewer coughs] then the club used to meet in the basement, which was a conference room of the then Spastics Society, in Park Crescent. They used to meet once a fortnight on a Saturday evening, just to socialise, have record dancing, p'raps a guest speaker used to come in, and we just were enjoying ourselves. And we used to organise trips to the West End theatres, and

places of interest, parts of London, and the home counties. Of course, for me, living in Bromley, to get up to the centre of London meant I had two bus journeys and a tube,

Good.

but I took all this in my stride. I didn't think anything about it really.

Good.

As you know come back on a Saturday night, it's a rather harrowing experience, having to wait for a bus at the Elephant and Castle, which then was [tearing noise] a pretty rough area,

Yes.

with all the drunks and that. But... [sound of pages turning] and sometimes I didn't used to get back to Bromley 'til twelve o'clock, but [interviewer coughs] of course we met each other and, I get a bit mixed up with dates but I believe it was [rustling gets more pronounced] that September, 1963, that Bill Hargreaves organised the first mixed camps at campsite which I went on, and that was a great success. As I said it was the first time that they'd ever had a mixed camp there, but it was a great success and [laughs] my abiding memory of it was [laughs] Bill Hargreaves trudging round the tents at night trying to make sure that we were all in our right tents, but [laughs] when you hear him coming by the sound of his footsteps, and he often tripped over the guy ropes. Anyway, [interviewer coughs] so it was a great success and from then on the '62 Club movement went from strength to strength. But unfortunately, of course all the members got older and dispersed and I think, well I s'pose it lasted, what, just over twenty years?

[Talking together] Good, mm.

I don't know but, it got fewer and fewer in numbers, especially after Bill retired from the Society.

What do you think of special holidays and camps, just for disabled people? I mean, do you think they should go to ordinary holiday camps, and mix with everyone?

Well yes, that would be the ideal.

Yes. [Talking together] Yes.

Yes, but in those days, I mean... [talking together, both inaudible. Interviewer coughs.] Although, havin' said that, I don't know if I mentioned the fact that I did go to a holiday camp by myself,

Mm.

up in Prestatyn,

Good.

North Wales.

Yes, I know.

That was my first holiday I ever had by myself, so I think that was the year that I went to Bromley, but I can't remember. I got myself involved in a lot of things. Soon after I moved there I was introduced to the Spring Club, one of the established Spring Clubs for disabled people in the country. They had a regular session at Eltham swimming pool. I used to go there most Sunday mornings. That again involved... that took up at least half a day, because it involved getting two buses each way to get there, but that was the start of my swimming [interviewer coughs] career, because I've kept it on, more or less, right to the present day. Another thing I went to was a local jazz club. In

those days it was traditional jazz, and they used to have all the well-known bands like Chris Barber, Terry Lightfoot, Acker Bilk, and the great thing about going there, it was like a night club atmosphere, a dark room, and I used to buy a drink and just sit in a corner, and just enjoy the sound of the jazz group, and it felt very relaxed. I just remember melting into the crowd.

Mm.

[Interviewer coughs] And through the years I went to various evening classes. I went to one on astronomy,

Ah yes.

for about two years, run by a quite well-known astronomer, at that time, Gilbert [??], and one of the events that he actually organised was he brought us a sample of moon rock that he brought back from the... and I actually held this moon rock in my hand.

Gosh. Amazing.

Mm. [Interviewer coughs.] I went to another evenin' class, on French, but I'm afraid that didn't work out: although I managed to read a little in French I could never actually pronounce it, so that wasn't very successful. But towards the end of the sixties I went to evening class to take the GCE English Literature. I'd already taken a part, [rustling noise in background] the English Language, but I thought I would do the English Literature, and I sat for that and passed that.

Good, did you have someone writing for you?

To be quite honest, I forget what happened.

Oh.

I must have done. [Talking together] Yes.

Yes.

In that case I just forget what happened. [Interviewer coughs.] [Laughing] It's such a long time ago, you forget the detail. Another activity that was a great boost to me was from going to the '62 Club. I made contact with somebody who ran an old-time dancing club for people with disabilities. And if you remember when I was at home in Dorchester, [interviewer coughs] I used to go to the youth club – when they used to dance I used to have to sit at the side and watch them. But here I could actually participate in dancing,

Good!

with people, knowing [they] had the same problems as myself. But we didn't care what we did [Laughs]

No.

but proper tuition [?],

Yes, yes. Good.

and that was run by a police inspector.

Mm.

That took place right up in Kilburn, North London.

Gosh, it's a long way from Kilburn to Bromley.

It used to take me two hours,

Yes.

or more,

Yes.

bus and tube. And I remember some nights I never used to get back [interviewer coughs] home until well gone twelve o'clock. I think back on it now and wonder how I did it, but of course I was a lot younger. [Laughs.] [Rustling noise. Interviewer coughs.] I also started to attend the parish church in Bromley, and even in those days it was a very outgoing church. And just by going there most Sundays, that again was very helpful – 'specially the curate used to have these discussion groups for young people after the evening service, and there again I met young people and made friends there,

[Under breath] Good.

and that church was to have quite a big influence on my life a bit later on. The second curate that came there became a very close friend of mine, and he was to have quite an influence on my life and my family in the years after that, but I'll come to that in due course. [Rustling sound.] A lot during those early years, 1960s, I was a free agent so to speak, and I was completely independent. I used to go here, there and everywhere, and it was great. I suppose it was the best years of my life really.

How did you finance yourself?

I used to get what they called in those days 'Supplementary Benefit'.

Mm, mm.

And the... (whatever they called themselves then)... they used to pay my rent,

Good,

as well,

Good.

and we got a very small amount each week from the work centre, so really I was quite well-off in those days, because my aunt she used to cook for me and we used to get a cooked meal at the centre most of the time, so yes.

What kind of work were you doing at the centre?

Well, very boring work really – mostly assembly.

Did you feel exploited at all?

Yes, it was, [talking together] yes,

Yes.

We used to do monotonous

Yes.

assembly jobs. We had these little toy ducks that we had to stick together, come in two bits on plastic (we used to have to stick them together) and we had another contract, putting bath salt cubes into a carton. We used to do thousands of these, putting six bath cubes into a carton.

And you were not paid an economic wage.

Well we did... pocket money, I -

But on the other hand, if you had got a wage, say piece work, you couldn't have got the Supplementary Benefit.

No, they paid us as much as they could, so we got (I think it was, when I first went there) I think it was two pounds a week, and I think it rose over the years, to about four pounds. But of course in those days, four pounds was quite a lot of money. [Interviewer coughs.] But life in the work centre, it wasn't... although it was quite friendly, you know, it was a good atmosphere, tensions developed between the staff and those that went there, and also between us because it was boys and girls of course, and relationships developed.

Were you all, had you all got cerebral palsy or

[Talking together] Yes.

were there all sorts of -

It was all cerebral palsy, because it was set up and run by the local Spastics Society, as it was then. And sometimes things got rather out of control and it made for, you know, a lot of hurt feelings and things like that. But like I say, on the whole it was, it was quite a happy, relaxed sort of atmosphere, apart from on the odd occasion when we were under pressure to get a contract done. But quite often we used to go in and sit around, and do nothing 'cos there wasn't no work there to do. [Interviewer coughs. Loud rustling noise.] It was very handy because [laughs] there was a pub just across the road, and most of us used to go over there lunchtime. Yeah, a very friendly landlord.

Great.

And in those days of course my hands weren't as unsteady as they are now, and I could just about hold a pint mug, providing it wasn't full up, and the old landlord he

used to fill it two-thirds, and just charge me for half a pint, [laughs] so, it was full ration

Very good.

he give. My God, those were the days. [Laughs. Pause.] I used to travel to the work centre by bus, but then after a year or two, I managed to get my tricycle sent up from Dorchester, and I used to cycle the two or three miles.

My God, you were brave to cycle on those roads, [laughs, then coughs].

Well fortunately it was all uphill going, but downhill coming back, so at the end of the day it wasn't so hard. No, I don't know how I did it, [laughs] but the last time I spoke, I believe I talked about going to the sheltered workshop in Birmingham, which came to nothing because I returned to Bromley. They allowed me to go back there, which was very fortunate, but when I returned I found that my landlady had taken on another lodger because of course she never expected me [interviewer coughs] to come back again, so then I was in a right dilemma. My aunt said that I could go back there, but it was only temporary, and I had to find another place pretty soon. Eventually, well it was after a few months, social services [noise of aircraft] opened in what was a... it was a ordinary large Victorian house for young people, that were working in the area.

Like a hostel.

It was like a hostel, but working in the area that couldn't live at home, sort of thing, that had problems at home. And my social worker at that time managed to persuade them to go and live there. I had to share a room with another young chap who was quite a pleasant fellow, and we all mucked in together. There they had a warden, and his wife actually lived there, so they cooked the meals. But there was a major incident that sticks in my mind, about living there: I became very ill and the doctor suspected I had smallpox, and they had to get the health officer to come and check, but it turned out to be chick – **[End of Tape 7, Side A]**

Tape 7 Side B [Track 12]

It turned out to be [loud rustling noise] chicken pox, which I must have caught from another resident there, a young girl who was also showing the same symptoms, but not as badly, but because she was a lot younger... Anyway I was so ill that my parents had to drive up to Bromley, and take me back home in the car to look after me for two or three weeks; it took me that time to recover because I must have been about twenty-five, twenty-six, at this time. I must... just... something else that I just want to mention, going back to my various activities: the other week I heard [tearing sound] of the death of Peter Large.

Peter Lodge or Log?

Large.

Uh-huh.

Peter Large.

Oh Large.

He was a well-known spokesman in the disability field. He did a lot of the legislation for the various disability bills that went through Parliament. He was involved in what was known as the 'Disablement Income Group' and also, following that, the Association of Disabled Professionals. I used to go to both their meetings, met Peter Large several times, but I always remember at an AGM of the Disablement Income Group, we were all sat there waiting for the chairman, and the news came through that she'd been involved in a car accident coming up from Surrey, and she was very much respected and loved by everybody because she'd done so much, she had multiple sclerosis. And then the news that came through said that she'd died from her injuries, and that still, I remember that Saturday, how shocked we were, but they continued with the meeting. It's just something that sticks in my mind, and hearing that Peter

Large, his death, the other week, it just brings it all back. Well, goin' back to the situation in the work centre, two of my friends, women that was there, they'd actually got employment with a company that supplied most of our work there. It was a factory making electrical components and steel cabinets, to house electrical installations [interviewer coughs]. And I was gettin' very much fed up and disillusioned by it all, saying 'Well, I'm not going to be stuck here for the rest of my life,' and then I said, 'Well, if they can manage to get employment there, why can't I have a go?' I asked the manager of the work centre about it several times and he said, 'No, you wouldn't be able to stand and you wouldn't be able to do the work fast enough for them,' so in the end, it was on a Monday morning, I took myself up to the factory, asked to see the personnel officer, told him my situation, and 'OK,' he said, 'we'll give you a go.'

Very good.

Course the manager at the work centre when she heard about it, [laughing] didn't like it, but at least I got in.

Very good, yes.

Well, [interviewer coughs] at first they stuck me up in the stockroom, sorting out the stock and that, and then they put me down on the factory floor with my friends. We were operating a plastic injection with moulding tubes (very antiquated they were, quite dangerous) [laughs]. You had to be very careful what you did. It was a dirty, noisy, dusty environment, but most of the other people there were women, and I thought that they [were] happy in their own way. They had to keep cheerful and muck about there, but I didn't like it there, to be quite honest, but I stuck it for four years.

Gosh.

They kept... One of my friends, Margaret, she left because her family [aircraft noise in distance] moved away and Diana, I think, I'm not sure, she left. But anyway, I stuck it

for four years and they tried to get me out of production several times, but I stuck my ground, and in the end I left only because the factory was relocating to another area.

So were they paying you the routine wage, the same wage as everyone else?

It was piece work,

Ah-ha, yes. [Coughs.]

mostly, so I wasn't gettin', you know, as much as the other operatives there, [talking together] but I -

But you were better off than -

Oh yes,

Yes.

definitely. On the standards of those days I was doing quite well, really.

Um hum.

So, I was there from well the end of 1967 to the end of 1972, so although it certainly wasn't my ideal [talking together, inaudible],

No but you stuck it.

it was a start, you know? It was employment.

Yes.

I was getting, you know, a national insurance stamp, paying tax, [interviewer coughs] and that was important.

Good.

For nearly, just four years. The only other employment that I did manage to have was at a Christmas relief at the Post Office

Mm!

sorting office. I did that for a couple of years. It was quite hard work, and a ten-hour day we used to go, so

I know, I've been in a person's office

[Talking together] Have you?

and seen all the sorting machines and,

Yeah, and I used to have to sit -

I've always thought I'd be too slow for it.

Well they used to put me on the parcels, so what I had to do was I used to have [to] stamp the parcels [interviewer coughs] as they chucked them on a table. But it was a ten-hour day, from ten in the morning to ten at night, and about an hour break, but -

Were you standing, or could you sit?

I had a stool there.

Good, good.

Yes, but the money of course was fantastic,

Yes.

you know, in those days. So good Christmas bonus. [Pause.] But of course the hours were quite long, from eight in the morning until half past five, and I used to get very tired. We got an hour (I think it was an hour) off for lunch, but it was further to travel. I would go by bus, which the bus stop was quite a way from the factory, and I also used to cycle as well.

[Rustling noise.] Good.

Now, how I managed to cycle all the way down from Bromley High Street and back again, I don't know. I had one accident one mornin' – I was cycling down the hill on Bromley High Street, going past a car, and he opened the door and knocked me off my bike (tricycle). I was off work then for a couple of weeks. I had very bruised ribs and that, but apart from that I survived four years.

Very good.

[Pause.] I don't think there's any more that I can say on that. [Break in recording.] OK, well goin' back to the 62 Club, they had two more weekend conferences [rustling noise] after that first one, which I did go to. I can't remember which year it was [laughs] (I should think it was '69), they had the conference at Reading University there, and that's where I met my first wife.

Oh is it?

Yes. She was a member of the 62 Club, and she lived down in Kent, in Westgate. Unfortunately we didn't exchange addresses, [laughs] but luckily we met again at a social evening at Park Crescent. It was a rather fraught [sound of rustling papers] courtship because we lived about sixty or seventy miles apart. But I used to go and

visit her most weekends down in Westgate, stay with her parents, who were very kind to me. I've forgotten what year: '70... yes '71. She left her job she had down there and moved to Bromley, and got lodgings in Bromley, got a job for herself, more or less, you know, there and then.

Mm.

And, by this time... I've got to go back a bit – the house where I was living, run by the social services, that kind of closed down,

Mm hm.

and I was left without a home. But they said, 'Well, if you're prepared to live there by yourself, you can stay there until we've sorted what we're gonna do with the building.' And of course it was an old dilapidated house really, and I was there by myself for, it was about nine months, it could have been a year. I got very depressed during this time because my future was very uncertain. I thought, 'Well, everything's collapsing around me and the only alternative's for me to return home,' which I thought, 'Well I've got this far...' I didn't want to give it all up. I got very depressed and felt I had, and I was under the doctor for quite a time [interviewer coughs]. Well after that period it was taken over by the local mental health authority, or whatever they called themselves in those days, as a rehabilitation, a half-way house. So I was there and I had a different type of resident [both laugh] in some ways. They were all ex-mental health patients. There wasn't nobody in charge, and the things that happened there, well, no one could write a book about. But [interviewer coughs] it certainly wasn't the relaxed environment that I had fondly... So that's how it was, when my fiancée, as she was then, moved to Bromley and I was just getting over the depression.

And what was her name?

Doreen.

Doreen. Mm. [Coughs.]

Well, course, we wanted to live together, but at that time the housing authorities stipulated that you had to be married in order to get on the housing list. So, although we hadn't planned on getting married that early, we thought, 'Well, if that's the only way we're gonna get a home of our own, we should get married.' So we got married on New Year's Day 1972, at Bromley Parish Church. Now, [interviewer coughs] our friend Michael, who was the curate that I mentioned before, he'd become a vicar down at Rochester, so we had become very, you know, very close to him. And Doreen as well, we would go and visit him and we wanted him to marry us. But because he wasn't actually at the church there it had to be a combined effort with the vicar there,

Yep.

so we had two vicars. [Both laugh.] Now, the thing about the wedding – a year or so before that, The Spastics Society, as it was then, had set up some [interviewer coughs] kind of series of weekends for couples that wanted to get married, so we could just get together and discuss things, common problems and that. Somehow or other, a film company got interested in it, and started filming us on these weekends. They took us to a pub one evening, they showed us having a drink in the pub, and they showed me carrying my half pint of beer over to the table, so when we announced that we were getting married they said, 'Well can we come and film it?'

Gosh.

Well we were rather, you know, nervous about this, and of course we had to get the permission of the church and all that. So our marriage was actually filmed, incorporated in this film that they were making called Like Other People. Scope have still got a copy of that film. It was subsequently shown as part of a Man Alive programme on the television,

Mm!

and when the Open University started a course called 'The Handicapped Person, in the Community,'

What a title! 'Handicapped Person' Mm.

they incorporated parts of that film in their

[Talking together] Good! [Coughs.]

television programme.

Good.

So our wedding was shown hundreds of times [interviewer coughs] not just in this country, but we also heard it was shown in Japan and Australian, so... [laughs]

[Sounds like she's choking] That's very good.

But the actual film centred not [on] us but on another couple that wanted to get married. They lived in a residential home, and they wanted to get married and have a home of their own, and the film centred on them really. [Rustling noise. Door bell rings.] Oh.

Oh. Do you want me to open it? [Break in recording, followed by feedback.] As we're nearly at the end of tape, we're going to start a new one soon, OK? [Sounds like a lot of activity from the interviewer.] The tapes always seem to go on far longer than you think they will.

Mm.

[End of Tape 7 Side B]

Tape 8 Side A [Track 13]

*14th April... I'm taking my mic off because I am spluttering and coughing so much.
OK David, it's all yours.*

Right. Well after we got married we, well, came to live in the hostel, or whatever you like to call it. It was certainly far from ideal, and we had a lot of trouble with the other residents.

Was this still the mental health au -?

Yes, [talking together] yes.

Yes.

One thing that happened was that [a lot of rustling etc. in background] Doreen used to come back from work and find that her mail had been opened, and things like this. And there used to be arguments and fights between the residents, and we just had one room, of course [interviewer coughs] on the ground floor, it was the largest room in the house, I know, but it was, like, cramped with all our belongings. And then we applied for housing straight away, and after a couple of months nothing materialised, so I think we went to see the doctor and he got the Medical Officer of Health to come and look at the conditions. So our needs were put on the urgent category, and we were offered a ground floor maisonette in a very pleasant area of Chislehurst [talking together, inaudible].

Yes, I know it well.

You do?

Mm hm.

Well these flats were between Chislehurst and Sidcup really but [interviewer coughs] very pleasant, and we took it straight away. We were very pleased,

Mm.

and settled down to married life there. Doreen had this job at Cosmos (the tour operator) who had their headquarters in Bromley.

Right.

She was in the post room, which meant she had to get up for early start and start work at half past seven in the morning (but then she used to get home early). Then, after a time, found a job and worked (clerical work) at the Education Department offices which were only half a mile up [interviewer coughs] the road, which was far more convenient and better for her. But because she worked at [inaud] they used to get a discount on the holidays,

Mm!

so we had a honeymoon on a coach tour of Austria,

Oh, lovely!

visiting Innsbruck, [talking together]

Yes.

Vienna, and other... We had three nights in Vienna.

Oh super. [Rustling noise.]

It was quite an experience.

Did you like Vienna?

Yes [background noise] very much, except that our hotel was really crummy, in a [laughing] back street but yes, it's certainly a place that I would quite like to go to. And I'd already been on a holiday to Austria about two years before, by myself,

Mm hm.

on another coach tour,

Yes.

and staying at a resort in the Austrian Tyrol. One thing I found I lacked on that trip, because it was the first time I'd actually travelled abroad, was the fact that most people, the shopkeepers and the people in the cafes, could understand what I was saying, better than what they could [laughing] in my own native country.

Really?

Yeah, it was fascinating. I suppose it was because they had to concentrate. So yes, we had a very pleasant honeymoon. One thing that we did, I think it was before we got married, was that The Spastics' Society as it was then and the equivalent organisation in France, organised a sponsored walk to Calais, along the coast. I think it was about twenty miles altogether, and we took part in that... went across on the Hovercraft and [laughs] of course we didn't complete the walk; we did about, five miles,

[Talking together] Gosh that was - [coughs]

and a French man came along with an old battered truck and said to me, 'Do you want a lift?' so we gladly said, 'Yes.' He took us back to Calais, where we were all given a grand reception in the,

Good.

the Guildhall or whatever they call it.

Yes.

But we did that sponsored walk for, you know, for ages.

That's very good indeed. Yes. I was just thinking the other day about the people who do marathons and thinking, 'Should I be getting on my feet and doing something?'
[Both laugh.]

Yes. [Interviewer coughs.] No, I think we've done our bit.

Mm.

I certainly couldn't walk five miles. I've got a job to walk out to the car. Anyway, we did that and we went on another '62 Club conference, again at Reading University, and I think two, three, years after we were married, Spencer was born.

How long after you were married?

About, just under three years.

Mm.

Yes.

Good. So, that must have made a big difference to your lives.

Yes it certainly did.

Mm.

Yes. We had a lot of advice from all the professionals, but we discarded it all and just got on with it [laughs] ourselves,

Good.

and we had a lot of help. Doreen's mother used to come up and help a lot, and we also got a home help, come in on weekdays to help with the baby and things like that, [interviewer coughs] and we became very friendly with her. Yes it was a great event, and we got ourselves on the front page of the local paper... a photograph

Good, mm.

because of course back in those days it was something out of the ordinary, something the people producing the paper... [Laughs]

And did you get any negative comments? I mean, you say the health professionals told you things but you ignored them; did you get any negative comments from the general public?

I can't remember anything. No I think we just [laughing] kept quiet about it.

Mm, good.

I know, when we announced we were getting married and we got engaged, it was kind of [interviewer coughs] dismissed, just to say, 'Yeah, yeah', it just an idea, sort of thing. Nobody actually believed that we were actually [laughing] gonna get married; just as though it was probably just two immature people, but of course that made our determination grow stronger.

Of course, of course. So, Doreen's parents gave you a lot of help and backing.

Yes,

They were - [talking together, inaudible.]

My [Her?] mother certainly helped after when she was -

How about your own parents?

Yes, they were quite supportive, I remember. [Talking together] And they were happy for me.

Good, good.

Yes. Altogether I think, yes, things worked very well. Can I stop there?

[End of Tape 8 Side A]

[Side B blank]

Tape 9 Side A [Track 14]

OK David. This is 19th April, Tape One [sic]. Go ahead.

Well, I believe the last time I got to the stage, speaking about the birth of my son Spencer. We were at that time living in a ground floor maisonette at Chislehurst in Kent, but it was reasonably ideal for our needs. We had to have a few adaptations made, mainly in the kitchen, but it was a pleasant, very quiet area, apart from the main road, which ran at the back of the complex of buildings. But we had woods, vegetation and woodland which was the start of a large park area, and we looked upon the outskirts of Greater London, and we had this open countryside where we could go, stroll, and go for quite long walks in the woods around that area. [Pause.] But when we got married, Doreen, my wife, had the old invalid car which she'd had for a few years. But in those days they came under the Ministry of Health and the regulation was that if a couple both needed their own transport, [sound or aeroplane] then they provided a proper car.

Mm!

So we were issued with a mini car automatic, and so that made life a lot easier, that we could travel around together. I at that stage wasn't able to drive, well, I was able to drive, but I'll come to that later [laughs]. So of course the first problem which presented itself – how did we manage to take a small baby out with us wherever we wanted to go? So we overcame that by getting a carrycot which in itself fitted into a small pram frame.

Mm.

And we pushed it out to the car, and we had permission to take the front passenger seat out of the car, and so we put Spencer in his carrycot on the floor, in the front, beside,

[Talking together] Oh what a good idea,

Doreen,

yes.

because it would have been impossible to lift the carrycot over the back, because it was only two doors.

Mm, I remember, yes.

Mm, yes. So that's how we managed to travel about, and in fact we used to go miles in that car we used to. I remember, it was about a few weeks after he was born, it was a lovely day, a really spring day, we went to a place down in Surrey, picnic area, and had a picnic outdoors. Mm, and I can't quite remember but I think it was that February or the year after that we went to a hotel, run by The Spastics Society in Westcliffe for the weekend. And they had trained staff there to look after the babies, and to give ourselves a break.

Good.

We had a lot of advice of course, from the various professionals and doctors and nurses, and I think it was the occupational therapist at the hospital, constructed a type of sling that Doreen could wear round her neck and carried Spencer in. But it was totally impractical because the sling went from side to side so Spencer quite soon got the intuitive knack of clinging on with his arms round my neck and his legs round our waist. I remember that's how I used to carry him to bed, put him in his cot. [Laughs.]

Yes.

But of course he developed quite quickly and was able to certainly crawl at an early age, so he got up and walking. One problem we did have was that he soon learned

how he could get out of the cot at night, just by heaving himself over the top [laughing] of the cot, so that caused a few headaches.

Yes.

We used to worry. We worried that he was gonna hurt himself falling onto the floor. But, apart from that, you know, we managed quite well because we'd previously been on these weekend get-togethers with other young couples that were engaged and married at The Spastics Society. After our children came, they continued that with the same couples, so that we could all get together at weekends and, you know, just exchange our ideas and things, and how we were managing. It was more like a self-help group, but of course it was good that the young children could actually be together, 'cos the staff there, they looked after them, and it was really a great idea and also very helpful. [Rustling sound.] We also had a home help, who came in most days, most mornings in the week to help us, [clattering noise in background] and she became a great friend and supported Spencer a lot.

Did you need any help with bathing the baby?

I think that, yes, at first, then she got more confident. But then I think how we did it was that [we] put the plastic round the bath, fitted it into the sink somehow, and then we was at the same level (we could manage that way), and then dried him on the draining board... Oh yeah! [Laughs.] One funny sort of advice that we had, this was before he was born, Doreen was told by some health worker or somebody that it would be impossible for her to carry him because he would weigh like a half hundred-weight of potatoes. [Laughs.] I was...

I'll bet she showed her health visitor that she certainly could carry the baby.

Yes.

Yes.

Were you ever, did you have any other worse, negative experiences? Did anyone suggest termination or,

No.

taking the baby away or anything dreadful [laughing] like that?

No.

Good.

No, we had no one. I've been trying to think if we had any incidents, any kind of real trouble with professional people but I can't actually recollect anything like that at all.

Good.

Everybody was most helpful and accepting things as they were. Course things got better when Spencer was a little older and he could sit upright. And then we had a folding pushchair, and we could just put him in that and we managed to lift him into the car and we'd fold up the push chair. I used to be able to take him for quite long walks and that round the local area. He started to go to a small, what they called 'kindergarten' at the age of, I think it was about two, three and a half, at the time, which was very helpful because Doreen went back to work for a time at that stage, because I'd left the factory soon after we -

So Doreen went back to work did she?

Yes, for just a half day, yes, when Spencer was a bit older. And yes [engine noise in background] because she had this job in the Education Department, which was only half a mile up the road, which was quite convenient.

At this time, were you still at the factory in Bromley, or had you left?

No, I'd left that factory about a couple or three months after we got married, because it closed down at that time. And I said I would stay there anyway, earn some, you know, money. It was mostly to get enough money together [laughing] to get married. But in the meantime I was still trying to get work, but unsuccessfully.

Did you go through the Department of Work or 'Labour Exchange' as it was called then?

Yes, it was.

and did you meet up with the DRO, the Disability Rehabilitation [Officer]?

Yes, several times.

Any good?

[Laughing] Not really, no.

No, that was the main complaint about the DROs in those days – that it was really just a career move, they weren't particularly interested or had any insight

[Talking together] No,

[laughing] into disability at all.

No, they had no real training,

No.

from what I know.

No.

No. Although some were better than others, some did try their best, but mostly it was very negative and frustrating. You never got anywhere. I'm trying to think now, [background noise] the year before that, 1974, I decided to have a go at taking an Open University degree course. My main motivation in doing this was at least it would give me something to present in prospective employment. At least, if I got some kind of educational standard, a degree, then you know, I might stand a better chance. So I started that in 1974, that was the first year. Altogether it took six years of study. It was very hard and boring, because working, studying, mostly by yourself with very little, you know, back-up or working with other students, takes a lot of self-determination.

Yes I know, but I think six years is quite good, because I've known lots of people take as long as six years who [laughing] have no problems at all.

No. Well, you could take up to two credits a year, with (in that case) the science department you could get your degree in three years, but you had to get six credits altogether. So I just went for one credit a year, and that was enough.

So what did you do the degree in?

Mostly in the Arts-based subjects, I did a bit of Social Science, and I took what was then a new course called 'The Handicapped Person in the Community.' I took that in the second year that [rustling noise in background] they got it together, and so a few months after Spencer was born, in April of '75, I had the opportunity of going on a study tour to Rome.

Mm.

It was a bit of dilemma for me, because having a small baby, leaving, you know, a wife and small baby for two weeks. But she encouraged me to go and her mother came up, so that was great experience, going to Rome. We had two weeks there and went round to all the historic sites, including St Peter's, and actually being invited to the weekly audience with the Pope.

Mm!

He had a weekly audience in this large auditorium, and the Pope actually gave us, as a group, a split blessing.

Was this a study group with the Open University?

Yes, yes.

Good.

'Cos they had an association for disabled students, and it was tremendous, and as I was taken on both courses. Yes, so that was quite something. And we had our study periods at the teachers' training college (Bromley College), and through them, I can't remember how it all came about, but I was offered study facilities there. I was allocated a little room somewhere on the third floor or somewhere, just so I could have somewhere quiet. I took my typewriter there, and I used to go there about three or four days a week, also be part of the local students' community there.

Mm, good.

And it was because of that that Spencer was able to go to this kindergarten, because that was run for the children of the students that were there.

[Rustling noise] That was very useful.

Very useful, yes.

Yes.

Yes, it all fitted in very well. [Pause.] Now, to say something about driving. Ever since I drove (or steered) a tractor on the farm, I knew that I could drive a vehicle. I tried and tried for many years from the time that I was eighteen to try and persuade the authorities that I was capable. It was all under the Ministry of Health at the time, and there was this doctor that was supposed to assess people for their capabilities. He was in his seventies; he didn't have a clue, and he used to take one look at me and shake his head. And I think I tried the letters and went to interviews. I even got Bill Hargreaves to arrange a test drive for me with the British School of Motoring, but I'm afraid that was all terrible because the actual test drive took place in Kensington in inner London, and can you imagine the -

In where?

Kensington,

Kensington? Oh gosh.

in London. Can you imagine, the first time that I'd actually driven a car, and

[Talking together] That was very unfair.

trying to drive in all that traffic? You know there was no dual controls or anything, but of course the examiner, he just said, 'No.' He gave a very negative report back to Bill Hargreaves. So I kept on trying, and in the end I beat them at their own game, because where I was staying at the hostel, at Cambridge Road, they had agreed that I could have an electric chair. They had electric chairs for people that they considered

weren't capable of driving an ordinary motorised [vehicle?] [rustling sound] and they'd agreed that I could have an electric chair. But because I had nowhere to store it there, I had to decline that. And then, I forget what year it was... '74, 75... they brought out this new regulation. After they'd agreed to scrap the invalid car, they said that all the people that had electric chairs were also eligible to drive motorised vehicles.

Gosh, that was quite a big leap. [Laughs.]

Yes.

Mm.

So, nobody told me about this but I found out about it. So I applied again, and what they called 'the technical officer' who had been on my side most of the time, he persuaded them to give me a test drive up at Crystal Palace, on the open circuit there. So we took the mini car up there. They all [laughing] clambered into the back, this medical officer, technical officer, and I drove round and they could

Good.

see that I could drive.

Great.

So I had six lessons, which were paid for by The Ministry of Health. I also had a few lessons from a friend.

[End of Tape 9 Side A]

Tape 9 Side B [Track 15]

[Talking together] OK.

So I, after six lessons, which were paid for by The Ministry of Health, I had a few more lessons with my friend, who was in the police force. I took the test and passed first time. It was [laughs] very strange, funny really; the actual test centre was in the middle Sidcup High Street, and I drove out onto the High Street a few yards. There were a lot of people on the pavements, and somebody stepped out, and I slammed on the brakes, and the examiner said, 'All right, you've done your [interviewer laughs] emergency stop', [laughs] so I didn't have to do that again.

Good.

Yes, so that was that. And that really was a great leap forward because I'd tried, like I said, since I was eighteen, and this was in my early thirties, so it was really sixteen, seventeen years, I struggled. A real battle that was, but I was successful and that was probably the greatest, [laughing] achievement of my life – not the actually driving, but actually persuading others,

Yes

that I was capable of doing it, because I knew right from the start when I was quite young, that I could drive. [Laughs.]

It was a wonderful defeat of prejudice.

Yes, certainly.

Yes.

Certainly, yes.

And -

And then, well a few months later, [engine noise] because I was so elated, I thought 'Right, I'll go the whole hog and go in for my advanced driving test.' So I joined a local group of the Institute of Advanced Motorists, [rustling noise] had a few lessons there and trial runs, and I think I took the test about six months later. Unfortunately, [laughs] I didn't pass that. The reason was, well, the reason given was that I was too cautious, probably because I hadn't had enough experience. I was just being too, you know... going along. But I wasn't defeated and I took the advanced test again after we'd moved, and passed it then.

That's very good, because when I did the course, you know, they said something like sixty-five per cent fail the first time.

They do, yes. [Talking together] yes.

Yes. Very good.

Yes. So... [coughs] If I remember rightly, we were at Chislehurst for four, about five years. We were quite happy there. There wasn't really enough space for a young child to go out safely. In fact we didn't have any garden at all, there was just a communal area at the back, and because the road was fairly near, we had this fear of Spencer running onto it. In the Open University we had to attend a compulsory summer school, at least the first on the degree course, and my second summer school was at Keele University. And I drove up there, by myself, and on the way there (and in fact on the way back) I drove through what was then the beginnings of this great new city called 'Milton Keynes' and I was, you know, impressed by seeing all these new developments beginning to go up. So we thought, 'Well, how about trying to get a move there?' because we'd heard that there was accommodation for people with disabilities at the end of each row of houses. So one day we went on a trip up to

Milton Keynes, and saw what eventually was the housing officer, and practically gave us the keys to the house, there and then.

[Laughing] God!

Not quite, but we got a letter I think the next two weeks, confirming that they could offer us a place up there.

Gosh.

[Laughs] We're talking now of the late 1970s, when housing was much more available than what it is now, and of course they were encouraging people to move to Milton Keynes anyway, so it all came a bit of a shock because we didn't have much time to think about it. And one thing I remember, for almost a year previously, we had asked the social services that they could completely adapt the kitchen, strip the whole kitchen out and adapt it to suit our needs, and they'd worked out all the plans and everything, and it was agreed that it was gonna be done. And when we got this offer of this house in Milton Keynes, I felt so awful that I actually went over to the planning office at Bromley Council, [laughs] and had to offer my apologies that we no longer needed the work. But I felt really awful about that. And so, I believe it was in the December of '77 (I know it was a few weeks before Christmas) we moved to this new bungalow in Milton Keynes. It wasn't completely new because there had been tenants there before us but they'd moved on. And because these tenants were sisters apparently, and they suffered from arthritis, they had the work surfaces raised quite high because they couldn't [bend?] down very well, and that suited us down to the ground. That's why they could stand up and they had all the surfaces at the right level, so there was very few adaptations needed.

Did it have a shower?

No.

No.

No, they didn't take showers at that time. We just had a bath, and a hand grip to get into the bath, yeah. But it had wide doors, wheelchair access,

Good.

level access.

Were there things like shops around there?

Yes, well because Milton Keynes was built up into separate estates there was shops facilities on each estate there, so it was only about a five-minute walk to the local shop there. So yes, that was the start of a new life, really,

Mm.

going there. And we soon got into the swing of things, and we made contact with the local group, and became friends with the chairman of the group, who was a great help and support to us (came round and did all the little jobs that needed doing).

Which group was the -

This was the local group of The Spastics Society.

Mm, did you meet up with a Glynn somebody?

Yes; Glynn Vernon.

Yes, he made that video,

Yes.

a teaching video.

Yes.

Yes.

But that was a few years later.

Was it?

About two or three years later I think, I first met him.

Mm.

Yes.

So was the group quite strong and helpful?

Yes, it was. There was quite a few people with mostly young children, and young people but with their parents and that, but they had various activities and meetings and, you know, quite supportive. But we soon got into various other groups as well, outside of the disability field because there was so many other opportunities there, in Milton Keynes.

Good.

And I personally got involved with the Peace Movement there, which was very [?] at that time and also the local history... They'd set up a museum and rescued all the farm implements connected with the rural life of the area, which had of course disappeared under all the developments. I got involved with them and other things, so we spent a very busy, active two or three years at Milton Keynes. Spencer went to the local play

group in the mornings. We took the decision not to send him to the local school on the estate because we could see that it was just totally out of his... you know... rough. And we'd applied to have him sent to a village school just outside Milton Keynes, and that was agreed with the proviso that we'd be responsible on getting him there and back, which involved a round trip of ten miles, you know.

Twice a day.

Twice a day. It was quite a commitment, but he certainly benefited from going there, and I certainly believe that he realise his more potential by going to a smaller school. And he joined the local cub pack. Eventually he joined the church choir, and one Saturday he had to sing at four weddings.

Weddings, yes.

Yes, four. All on the trot.

Four!

Four on the trot. [Laughs.]

Heavens! [Clears throat.]

He was very tired that night. [Laughs. Engine noise.]

Did Doreen find a job in Milton Keynes?

No, she didn't apply for anything,

No.

but she enjoyed... we both got ourselves involved in voluntary things there so,

Good.

and I got meself involved with the local welfare rights officer. She used to visit people to help them, advise them on their benefits, things like that.

Good. Good, very useful.

Yes. I think I - [break in recording.]

[Slight feedback underlies the following.] OK.

During, [interviewer coughs] our time at Milton Keynes, I forget what year it was, but Motability came in existence and that took over from the defunct Ministry of Health [interviewer coughs] provision. Well, in that, so instead of having been given your own transport for mobility through the [interviewer coughs] The Ministry of Health [interviewer chokes, break in recording.] Instead of getting help, getting assistance from The Ministry of Health, the Mobility Allowance was introduced about the same time as the Motability scheme, so one had to use the Mobility Allowance in order to lease the car from motability. So we had to give up our dear little mini car, in which we'd travelled around the country, done quite a few thousand miles in it altogether, and apply for a car on the motability scheme, because we were both entitled to Mobility Allowance.

Did that work well?

Well, financially it did, but because it was the early days we had a lot of trouble, in actually getting our first car. That's another fascinating story. The garage altered the car, which was an old, well it was a Sunbeam,

Mm hm.

hatchback, and had actually taken delivery at the garage. It was just stuck there, but because the papers hadn't arrived from the Mobility offices, they couldn't go ahead to have the car, and they kept phoning up Mobility and waiting and they kept saying they'd sent the papers down. It was unbelievable. So me, in my crusading days, took a trip down to London, found out where the offices were, which were on the third floor of a large office block. I walked straight in, past the security bloke, up to the offices, demanded to see somebody in charge, and asked, 'What happened to the papers?' They didn't know. They said they'd all been sent out, and yet all of a sudden this chap was sat behind a desk and he suddenly went down, looked in a drawer, and there were the papers, in the drawer.

Thank God you weren't... [talking together]

'Cos they'd had too much, I took the one, took them to the garage, got our car.

Thank God you did that.

[Laughs.]

[Laughing.] I bet you gave them quite a fright, when you turned up.

[Laughing] Yes. 'Cos they were so shocked, you know, they couldn't do anything really.

Well I hope they apologised to you. [Tearing sound. Break in recording.] So as well as being a benefit advisor, you were also involved in the Peace Movement,

Yes.

the CND? [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament]

It was affiliated to the -

Oh I see.

There was a professor at the Open University called Michael, and at that time he was a leading figure in the peace movement and he, you know, got it all together and -

Was that after the Greenham Common protest?

It was during.

About the same time.

About the same time, yes. Yes, we knew one or two people that went down there.

Mm, yes. So how many years did you live in Milton Keynes?

I've been trying to work it out; I think it must have been five or six years.

Mm, mm.

And another thing that would be of interest; we also were on the local access group.

Oh yes.

Advising and suggesting, especially in the construction of the new shopping centres that they built there. Once, we got an invitation to visit a place over in Bedfordshire; we'd felt it was too far away. Now this was a yoga centre called 'Yoga for Health'. It was in a large country health [centre?], it had recently been established by a person called Howard Kent who was previously a television producer, and was asked to produce a series of yoga programmes. And he got so impressed that he became, over the years, a qualified yoga teacher and a yogi. Anyway, by visiting there one day and

doing the access survey, that was our introduction to yoga, which we continued to do over the years.

And did you find yoga helped?

Yes. Mostly, yes.

Do you still do it?

Unfortunately, no I found it too difficult to do the postures. But at this Yoga for Health foundation they concentrated on, well mostly, people with illness, and it was found that yoga was very beneficial for them. And they've had some great success stories, and as far as I'm aware it's still going strong, (although I think that Howard Kent is no longer there, because he's well in his eighties now). But certainly I used to go and visit there quite regularly, and stay there for a few days... very,

[Talking together] Good.

beneficial and a restful place, because it's right out in the country,

Lovely.

very peaceful.

Since you've been grown up, have you had any medical interventions, any therapy or advice from doctors or, anyone taking any interest? I mean, I know that you attend an osteopath but have you ever seen anyone with any specialist knowledge in the problems of growing older with cp [cerebral palsy]?

No, not really. A couple of years ago my doctor referred me to a consultant at The Musgrove Hospital at Taunton, who has some knowledge of cerebral palsy. It was mostly just in my back [loud rustling noise] problems. She suggested that I might

[try?] physiotherapy. From the main group... went to the physiotherapist at Yeovil a couple of times. She tried a few gentle exercises, in the end she says, 'No,' she says, 'I can't really do anything for you. No, you've got,' she said 'to the stage where, you know, physiotherapy was pointless really.' Which I knew anyway.

Do you feel that they understand the pain that's associated with ageing?

No, I don't, no.

No.

They understand what causes it, but they don't understand.

[End of Tape 9 Side B]

Tape 10 Side A [Track 16]

19th April, recording with David Edwards. David, we were just talking about the problems of ageing with cp [cerebral palsy] and that you felt they understood the reasons and causes, but not actually the implications of having cp.

Yes.

Yes. And with age it does not get any easier.

No, certainly.

No.

The older one gets, the more difficult it becomes.

Yes.

I think that with cp you age quicker, because with all the complications with your body.

Yes, I fear you do [laughs]. Yes. Yes I was quite depressed about being described as 'a little old woman with a big dog', the other day.

Oh dear. [Both laugh.] Didn't they think you could control the dog or something?

One has to have a sense of humour.

Yes. If we couldn't laugh at our difficulties we'd never get anywhere.

No. During these years of travelling around and being a young adult did you have much contact with your brother and sister?

No, not a great deal. We went down to visit my parents. We did stay a couple of times with my brother and his wife, who lived in Hampshire at that time. He was working on a farm, and got on well with my sister-in-law and also Spencer got on well with his cousins at that time.

Mm hm. Ah, after you graduated did you find any employment at all?

Again, no. Not really, no. Well, two little opportunities did arise. The first one wasn't for a graduate. I managed to somehow get, I don't know how it came about now, but I got a little job at the post office headquarters in London, as a messenger, an internal messenger, which just involved delivering papers around the offices in the building. They came down to a central room where we sorted them out, and then delivered them, so it was just a case of going up and down the lift, and taking it. That was quite hard, it only lasted a few weeks, but the journey up into the centre of London each day was really exhausting, [background noise] but that all fizzled out because I was on a six-week trial, and the supervisor that I was under thought that I'd done well, I was getting on well enough to get through, then all of a sudden I was told, 'No, we can't take you on, on a permanent basis.' And I was told by one of the others that the head of the post office, I've forgotten who it was at that time, had actually seen me and asked, you know, what I was doing there. And he put his foot down and said 'We can't employ that chap.' So that was that. And then when I graduated [rustling noises] I applied to the Civil Service, and because I was a graduate they had to set me an aptitude test which I had to go down to London to take with about twenty other candidates. And because I passed that they were obliged to actually give me an interview, and I had to go down to London again to some government office (it was in Victoria Street in London), and when I got up there, there was only one other person there to be interviewed, and I'm sure was a put-up charade because they had to. They just did it as a show, and of course, I wasn't accepted, so that was the end of that.

What kind of business was it?

It was the Civil Service.

Oh yes. Civil Service.

Civil Service, yes. I applied for a job as a Junior Civil Service Executive. So that was that, so I think after I gave up altogether.

It's a big fight against prejudice.

Yes. It certainly was in those days, as far as employment was concerned.

Mm. [Traffic noise in background.] Do you feel you've said enough?

Yes, just say... [Break in recording.] Oh sorry, shall I start again?

What?

Well, yeah. Once, one summer in early May, we decided (well in fact I decided) [laughs] that we were going to do a grand tour of Scotland.

Mm.

So, we had our first car, a Sunbeam, we piled into, and left home at about eight o'clock in the evening and drove overnight up to the borders. Stopped at Derwent Water about six o'clock in the morning, had breakfast and then we drove over. We were going to stay at Youth Hostels, and our first Youth Hostel was a converted chapel, stuck right out in the middle of a field. No path. It had a stream running by it. I thought when we got there, 'I feel very tired driving, how are we going to get over there?' But fortunately Spencer came to the rescue and he carried all our stuff that was involved in the car.

Good boy.

He was about, I suppose, about seven or eight at this time.

Very good.

And it was just a converted chapel, and it just had a screen to divide the males and females,

Yes.

but at that night there was one or two other people staying there. There were two elderly ladies, and they were cycling somewhere in the Midlands up to John O'Groats, and they were both in their seventies.

Gosh.

They had stories to tell. [Laughs.]

Mm. Very good.

But we had an enjoyable ten days touring round Scotland, staying at these various youth hostels and seeing our friends at Aberdeen.

Gosh, you got all the way up there?

Mm. Yes.

Very good. And were the youth hostels fairly accessible?

Well, not really no,

No.

but of course then we were [aeroplane overhead] both pretty able to climb stairs and that.

Mm. [Dog barking.]

But certainly not that first one.

Yes.

But we'd gone on hostelling holidays before that. We went to North Wales, our first one. Yeah. I thought I'd just get that one, OK.

[End of Tape 10 Side A]

[Side B blank]

Tape 11 Side A [Track 17]

Today is the 19th of May. Interview with David. He is going to continue where [laughing] we think he left off; having just moved to Milton Keynes. OK David, over to you.

Well [rustling noise] Milton Keynes in 1977 had already grown, been in existence, about five years, and when we moved there, there was only about two or three roads, linking the north and south of the city, and just about three estates had been built; so it was all very new. A lot of mud as well, as well as building sites. But at that time we [loud rustling] certainly looked forward to a new phase of life, and more opportunities which was there. The bungalow was on the estate. [Voices in background.] It had only recently been built about a year ago with its own wheelchair access, [noise of aircraft overhead] and had a very spacious garden which was our main reason for accepting the offer of housing there (because at the previous place at Chislehurst, there was no garden for Spencer to play in). The garden took a lot of work because it was just really rough ground then because the estate was built on what was a field and it was all rough, and during the years that we were there we managed to get it in some kind of order and grew vegetables and some grass and made a lawn. Even though it was early days there was a lot of help and support, because most of the people that came to live there were from London especially the East End which was of course starting to be developed. So people were wanting to move, so that people were really coming into an entirely different environment to what they'd be used to. And so the actual housing corporation employed social workers and some welfare officers and community workers were always there to help and encourage you to, you know, become involved in the growing community. Our first problem actually started before we moved, because we applied to the DSS [Department of Social Security] for help with removal costs and got no response. And they came back with the excuse that they hadn't received the letter. [Sound of engine noise.] After further investigations and phone calls, they said that the letter 'ad been torn by the automatic machine that opened the envelope. [Noise of aeroplane.] Well, so, we actually had to pay for the move of course, but I then contacted [rustling noise] The Welfare Rights Group at

Milton Keynes and there was a real good chap there, Paul, and eventually we went to appeal and eventually we got the money,

Oh good.

back from them. And that's how I got involved with The Welfare Rights Group in Milton Keynes, became a committee member and also a worker for them. The second difficulty [laughs] that we came across, soon after we moved there; we registered with the local doctors' surgery and were allocated, like, the senior partner there, who was an older doctor. [Rustling noise.] Now, through that period we we'd been considering having another child but (I think my wife first suggested it) p'raps we could adopt a child. And rightly [laughing] or wrongly, I mean, sort of with hindsight we knew it was pretty impracticable, but we had all these high ideals then. There was an organisation called 'Parents for Children', and this particular adoption agency dealt with, not severely disabled children but moderately, and we applied to them and their own social worker came to visit us and was reasonably, you know, encouraged. But she said we had to get a doctor's report, and so we went to this doctor, who hadn't even seen us before and presented this, you know, idea to him, and he just dismissed it there and then. No way of putting it that concept...

[Talking together] I'm sure this -

It wasn't the fact that he'd said, 'No,' but the fact he hadn't even seen us, he didn't know anything about us, at all.

Such arrogance.

Yes.

I'm sure this isn't the first time you came across the arrogance of the health professionals?

No. Certainly not, no. So, after that our community worker managed to get us transferred to another doctors' surgery in Milton Keynes, but at that time apparently it was quite difficult to change doctors, but he managed to get it. Another little incident, well it wasn't a little one but, when we applied for our first Motability car, Motability was just beginning to get off the ground then, and we applied for, we were going to have a Chrysler [rustling noise] Sunbeam hatchback. It had been delivered to the garage but we couldn't take delivery of it because the garage hadn't received the necessary paperwork from Motability. It was stuck in the garage for four or five weeks, [laughs] and we kept phoning Motability and they kept saying, 'Oh we've sent it. It's all been sent out.' Well, in the end I had to go down to London for some other business, and [aeroplane overhead] I couldn't get them by the phone, I found where the Motability office was, it was on the fourth floor of a large office block. Walked straight past the security guard on the door, went up into the office and confronted them. They still insisted that they hadn't got the papers, they had just sent them, and the chap said 'Well, wait a minute,' and he bent down, looked in a drawer in the desk and there they were, still in the drawer. So I said, 'Well thanks,' and I took the papers, and took them back home, and we got the car the next day.

Oh! So frustrating.

That's my first little episode with Motability. I've got into another one later on, a lot more serious. So, we all thought, through the help of Paul at Welfare Rights Group, we did a little protest. The Graeae theatre group came,

Yes.

to put on a production and they were in their early days before their... and I thought that the prices that they charged for admission were too high. Anyway, I argued that there ought to be some concessions for disabled people and pensioners, [rustling gets louder] but they wouldn't have it. And so Paul and I stood outside the door with a placard, and did a bit of a protest about it, [laughs] and one of the actors, I forget his name, did come out and we put our point across but they wouldn't give in and well, I

didn't actually see the production. That was just another little incident that just sticks in my mind. Anyway we soon settled into the place and got involved in various groups and organisations; the church again, and the local historical society that I mentioned,

Mm.

and the Milton Keynes Peace Campaign which was very active in those days. We got on to the local, what was then The Spastics Society committee, and I must say that Fiona, the secretary, was so very helpful in practical ways. She often used to come round to do some jobs for us that needed to be done, and... We used to meet, the committee used to meet at the local school, which was a special school, a day school for pupils with all kind of real problems and that, not just disabled. And I became quite friendly with the headteacher there and after, well, two or three years, I was invited to become a governor of the school,

Good, good.

with my background knowledge and that,

Yes.

[laughing] and because the school was just about a half a mile up the road, and because I was the only one governor that was available in the daytime, I had to sit in on interviews for prospective staff and that,

Oh good.

[It] was good and I went on a short course for school governors. Gosh it was difficult that. [Rustling noise.] Now the then Spastics Society built and established what they called at that time 'the professional workshop.' It was on another estate to the north of

the city. It was all part of the big scheme of sheltered housing that each house stuck on the end of a block, and you had care staff on call twenty-four hours a day.

Where was this?

This was in Milton Keynes.

Yes. [Talking together] Was it a residential unit or part of the school?

No. This is a different thing altogether.

Aha, sorry.

Set up by The Spastics Society,

Oh yes.

and right from the start it had a lot of problems because it just wasn't working there as they'd hoped it would. But anyway, I became involved in this so-called [noise of plane overhead] professional workshop, which is still there actually, but -

Was it just for the staff of Scope, [talking together] or for anyone working with - ?

No, it was set up for people with disabilities, hoping to start their own business,

[Talking together] A-ha, yes.

and they provided all the facilities there for them to start a business. I suppose there was about seven or eight of us altogether all the time I was there, but I think one or two actually went into business on their own. And the chap that ran the place he set up (or he'd just set up) an agency for Apple computers.

An, excuse me, an agency for what?

Apple computers.

Oh Apple computers.

Yes, this was going back in the early days of Apple.

Yes.

Hoping that he would be getting people to come in and see them, and to sell them, so we had one of his Apple computers to work on. And I suppose I gained some knowledge and [rustling noise] computer skills from it but it didn't really come to anything, and after about eighteen months or so I kind of left, well it kind of folded up at that time because of the family pressures. Anyway, so I don't know whether I talked about access group being set up, and visited a place about thirty miles from Milton Keynes, called 'Ickwell Bury', which was a foundation called 'Yoga for Health'. It was set up by Howard Kent who first became involved and interested in yoga because he was a television producer and he produced a series of programmes upon yoga, and well he'd spent some time in India and that. But he set up this foundation, basically because it was found that doing yoga helped people with disabilities, particularly those who had MS [multiple sclerosis] and they'd had, well, over the years they've had great successes [rustling becomes pronounced] there for people with quite a few problems, and it was certainly not a cure but helped them, you know, cope better. Anyway that's what had happened to us; we were invited there to do this access survey, and that was my introduction to yoga, which I've continued on and off over the years too. But it's certainly a beautiful place, out in the country and very peaceful. [Pause.] I completed my Open University degree in 1979, after

Good, good.

six years.

[Talking together, David inaudible.] That was very good.

And most of the assignments and that, well all of them were done on a typewriter, and they used to, for the final exam, at least they let me do it over a period of two days, which [helped?] there.

Did you go to summer schools?

Yes. I went to two summer schools. That's interesting, the first one was the Arts Foundation Course, was at East Anglia University,

Oh.

and they insisted that I had to have a carer go with me [laughs]. But because I'd been going to tutorials locally, I'd met, got quite friendly with another person doing the same course, Denise, [laughs] so when it came to going to summer school she offered to be my carer, 'cos she was doing the same course. But as I say they didn't really have much to do, but there [they] just had to be there.

They were there on paper.

Yes.

Yes. I hope they've changed their philosophy by now.

Oh yes because the second summer school that I went on, at Keele University, they didn't say anything at all.

[Talking together] They didn't, no.

They just said that I could manage and that's all right. Very tiring, summer school, very tiring.

How long do they last?

Oh, one week, and they're always in the summer of course.

Yes.

But it was hot.

Mm. But did you enjoy them?

Yes, mostly. Yes especially the second one was better, because the campus was more, you know, flat, accessible. Yes. We (I forget what year it was) but we joined the Youth Hostel Association, and we went on several trips. We went into North Wales. Our first experience of Youth Hostels was at Shrewsbury at a autumn half-term holiday, and that year [laughing] for some reason it was a cold autumn, and it was the first frost of the winter, and we were absolutely frozen: you know, because it was just blankets in those days. And that was our first experience of a youth hostel but it didn't put us off, and we went to North Wales and a few other places, and then one year we I think Spencer was only about p'raps seven or eight, we did a grand motoring tour of Scotland staying at youth hostels there. And I remember, we travelled up over night from London, and -

What, driving or by train?

No, driving,

Gosh.

because we could both drive.

Yes.

and took it in turns. And the first youth hostel that we stayed at when we got there we discovered it was in the middle of a field. It was a disused chapel, and we had to park the car on the road and I remember Spencer he took half a dozen trips to and from the car carrying all a lot.

What a good fellow.

[Laughing] Yes he was very helpful. It was very spartan place, with just a partition dividing the male and female, and we had two other guests, two elderly women, that were cycling. They were cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats. They were both in their seventies and they certainly had some stories to tell.

[End of Tape 11 Side A]

Tape 11 Side B [Track 18]

It was about ten days altogether.

Travelling round Scotland, yes.

Yes, and staying at various youth hostels up there, and we visited friends that we knew, well our neighbours had moved back to Scotland where they'd originated from, and we visited them and one other person that we knew. And Spence... we wrote [rustling sound] an account of the whole holiday, and Spence did like a little illustrated map of the various places on the map that we stayed at.

How old would he [be] about?

I think he was about seven or eight.

Good for him.

Yes, I've still got it somewhere.

Yes.

After a time, I gradually became disillusioned by a lot of Milton Keynes. It had become too hectic, and overpowering, especially after they built the new sixth shopping centre there. It was all commercialised, and so much of the open countryside had gone under concrete, and housing and factories, and it just wasn't... I used to, well I quite escaped to and knew of a part called 'Stony Stratford' – that was one of the recent towns which had some character to it. We used to go there every Saturday to do our shopping and I had a long-felt desire and wish to return to somewhere in the West Country, nearer my home. We actually tried once or twice to get some kind of exchange home, or housing down this way but it didn't... But then, I think it was 1983, a long-time friend of mine who lived in Dorset, we'd kept in contact with her

and her mother over the years and invited them to come and stay with us, and they were just bowled over by Milton Keynes because Marjorie didn't really [inaud] all her life, because they lived down in the country and there's no facilities for people and no understanding of what [inaud]. And so she said, 'What a great opportunity, if we could exchange houses.' So we applied, not thinking that anything would come of it. But after about three or four months, we got permission to exchange. They lived in a bungalow in Marnhull in Dorset, and what did it, going to visit and it's in a beautiful place with wide views over the countryside, I really just couldn't believe that she was willing to... But before the actual move took place, I can't remember what time of the year it was, but we went on a planned holiday down at Cornwall, staying at a permanent place, a converted holiday cottage down there, and whilst we were down there we got a message that our house had been burgled,

Oh!

and we arrived back finding the whole place upside down,

Oh that's not nice.

mud everywhere and bottles smashed, and it was just young kids had got in, broken in. They took my electric typewriter and radios, and we were really anxious because Marjorie and her mum might not want to come and live in Milton if that kind of thing happen but fortunately it didn't put them off.

Oh good.

And the exchange went ahead, and we moved down to Marnhull, and Marjorie moved to Milton Keynes and she's never looked back since.

Really?

She's started a new life for her. She's got involved in so many different things up there, and she's training on the computer and she's well in her seventies.

Amazing. Amazing.

Yes it is; it's the best thing that ever happened to her.

And how about you? Did you feel that your move to Marnhull was the best thing you'd done?

It was for me, yes, because I'd come back home and of course I was much nearer my parents.

Yes. Did Spencer make the transition well?

Yes he did actually because obviously he'd been going to school there for about, what, three or four years and he'd just started in the primary school really. But yes, he went to the village school in Marnhull, and made friends there. Had a very good headmaster in Marnhull at that time. He also joined the scouts; well the cubs as it was, and the choir in the church. Yes.

Good.

He was happy. Can you stop a minute? [Break in recording.] We made the [background noise] move to Marnhull in 1984 (I think it was '84). Course it was probably me being nearer to my parents because up 'til then there had always been at least a hundred miles between us. Now it was down to just [laughing] thirty miles. It was a rather sad period for the whole family, as my sister had died about a year earlier.

Oh dear!

She had developed MS, and it was a particularly severe strain of MS. She spent some time in the intensive unit at Southampton, and [interviewer coughs] it came, it started off at the birth of her son... [interviewer takes a drink and coughs, David inaudible.] They gave her an epidural and they think that's what triggered it for her. But she actually went downhill really; it was only about two and a half years from the onset of it,

[Talking together] That's very short indeed.

until she passed away. I think it was the beginning of March 1983, but because we were living that distance away, I wasn't really involved or aware while it was happening. And it was a very frustrating and difficult time for me because I could see, hear, what was happening and I made several suggestions of what could be done, including a visit to the Radcliffe Infirmary at Oxford, to the top specialist there, and I was told that I could talk to the Multiple Sclerosis Society, who offered to provide one of their counsellors, but my efforts weren't accepted. So it was a very difficult time around then, for all concerned I think. And Mary died I think when Tom, her son, was about two.

Oh dear.

So he didn't really know Mum at all. It devastated my father, he just, he couldn't come to terms with it, and he was never really the same afterwards. The fact that, I mean, there were two people... So, that was really sad for him.

But excuse me; your father seemed to have coped very sensibly with your disability?

Yes, yes.

Yes.

But of course he was younger then.

Of course, yes. And also fathers and daughters often have a special bond.

Yes, mm. Mary was very much like father in ways so... And it's sad because I liked to see her, and we got on very well [sounds upset]. So that was about a year before we moved to Dorset. We were just, like, getting on with it by the end. So we had the end bungalow in a quiet cul-de-sac, and it had wide views over the

[Talking together] Lovely.

Dorset countryside and we were told that it was considered the best council property in the whole of Dorset for its views and that,

I can well believe it; I know the area very well, yes.

because Marnhull being on an escarpment.

Yes.

But now they've actually built some houses at the [aeroplane noise] back now so the view's rather spoilt now, for like, whoever lives there now. We soon felt, you know, at home and the people around accepted us very quickly, and we had a lot of practical help from a friend from Southampton, Marjorie, who used to come and help me. So we continued the lawn... [inaudible] [background noise obscures speech] ... helped us a lot. I became involved in various aspects of village life and church, and my wife would go with me, [background noise obscures speech] and different things, and one big advantage was that we were able to go swimming regularly again. We joined the Apollo Club at Yeovil, and they hold two sessions a week.

Good.

We'd go to one at Sherbourne and one in Yeovil, so that was a great boon. And also they'd do sailing and canoeing.

Where did you go sailing and canoeing?

They go to Sutton Bingham.

Sutton. Whereabouts is that?

It's a reservoir when you go from Yeovil to Dorchester.

Oh yes I've seen that reservoir on the map, I've never been there.

You turn right.

Yes.

You turn right for Halstock.

Yes.

It's a beautiful setting there. I've continued, well not so much now, but I continued with the sailing over the years.

Mm.

I actually, well, I got myself on the committee again, became secretary for a short time, [laughs] and we were quite involved for a couple of years. I also, through the church, I was secretary of the PCC [Parochial Church Council] [talking together] for a time.

Were you?

And, because I was still very much involved with peace work then, I organised a special service one year at the church, based on the whole peace movement again, based through the Friary at Batcombe.

Oh yes.

One of the brothers

Yes

was there and I got friendly with [him?] and he came and we did like a special -

You didn't have any trouble from all the [talking together] [laughing] ex-majors and colonels of Dorset?

Yes, I did, but they stayed away. But we had about twenty people came.

Good. [Talking together] Yes, yes.

Pretty good for a service like that, because the vicar and his wife were very helpful, right through my time there and they sympathised with us, you know, what our particular interests were. And so Spencer settled into the local village school [rustling noise] very well, and had a very good headteacher at that time, and joined the cub scout pack and,

Mm, yes.

joined the church choir again, and... Now I had my tricycle going on; I used to cycle again through the little lanes, which we never thought I'd ever do again. [A lot of background rustling.] I didn't cycle as far as I did in my younger days.

But it was very good exercise for you, dear.

Yes it was. But, we took the decision that it would be in Spencer's best interests if he could go away to a proper school because we was finding that trying to get him to all the places, for school activities and things, whatever he wanted to do was just getting' a bit too much for us. And of course we asked him, and talked to him about it and he seemed pleased and said, 'Yes, there's nothing to stop,' and we'd been recommended to this school at Ba -

In Bath?

Mountain Combe School,

Yes.

just outside Bath, so -

Monkton Combe?

Monkton Combe School.

Yes, yes I know the area.

It's a large independent public school. They got a prep, junior and senior school there.

Yes.

So with the support and of the vicar of Marnhull, we got in touch with the educational trust, who helped us financially. Spencer gained an assisted place.

Oh good. How old was he when he went?

I think he was twelve, but I can't remember. I think he was twelve.

[Talking together] And -

Eleven or twelve.

And did he continue to like it?

Yes, more or less. Yes. Well it was a junior school to start with,

Yes.

and then he went up to the senior school when he was at thirteen.

Until what age did he stay?

'Til he was eighteen, well nearly eighteen.

So, in a way this was really reverting the experience that most disabled children criticise, that they resent, being sent away from home because of their disability?

[Laughs.]

Yes, it was very strange really, yes.

Yes.

We felt, at the time, that plenty more facilities for him,

[Talking together] Yes.

and experiences for him, to be going away to a school like that.

And did this prove to be the case?

Yes. He got involved in a lot of things, yes. He got a passion for art and woodwork, carving, and he played rugby until he got his injuries [interviewer laughs] like they all do.

Yes. So did he leave school with qualifications?

I think he got an A in artwork. I think there was something else, but he did an Arts foundation course at Westminster Poly.

Oh yes, yes.

[Break in recording.]

Well, as I said, we found Marnhull to be a very friendly, easygoing place to live. All our neighbours, mostly quite elderly, but were all very nice, and you felt you could go and visit them any time. It's something that I've rarely experienced really in the various places that I've lived, and the vicar and his wife supported us in many ways. I've always remembered my first contact with Quakers.

With the Quakers?

Yes, from going to meditation days at Batcombe Friary, we used to go on what they called 'Peace Day' every year, and a number of Quakers used to go to there. So that was my first contact with the Quakers, but it wasn't until a couple of years after, that I started to go to the Quaker meetings at Shaftsbury. [Pause.] Well, I don't want to say very much about them, I just written after a couple of years Doreen, my wife, became disenchanted with country life and yearned to return to the bright lights of Milton Keynes.

Yes I had been wondering how a person who had always -

[End of Tape 11 Side B]

Tape 12 Side A [Track 19]

Recording with David Edwards, on the... what date is today?

Around the twenty...

[Laughing] Yeah, I know that. About the 26th.

Yes.

Well David, you were just going to tell me about how your first wife began to get fed up with rural [sound of bird cheeping in background] living. OK?

Yes. Well at first she settled in very well to village life, but over time, she got disenchanted and found life rather boring compared with what the sort of lifestyle she was used to, or had been used to in Milton Keynes. When the time came when she did actually leave home, and [rustling in background] I think it was 1985, because most people in the village knew us by then, they were all most sympathetic. And I received a lot of help and emotional support from everybody following the marriage break-up, especially the vicar and his wife, who were very helpful and supportive, and came and talked to me. And the vicar, because he'd been involved with getting Spencer into Monkton Combe Junior School, because it was Christian-based, he actually came with me one day, soon after, so that we could go and see Spencer and the headmaster, and that was most helpful. But it was a very difficult time.

Yes, it must have been very difficult.

Yes. I also received a little bit of counselling at that time.

Mm. So did your wife return to Bromley or wherever?

No, Milton Keynes.

Milton Keynes, yes.

But like I said, everybody was most helpful, both giving me emotional support and practical help, and the friends from the church devised a rota between themselves, where they'd cook me a hot vegetarian meal nearly every day, [talking together] and brought it round for me.

Gosh, that was very good.

Yes, that actually continued for the first two or three months, which was very much appreciated. I'm grateful to them. And I also continued getting the basic home care, which we'd been having anyway. The main problem for me was that we'd bought a new car, through Motability, on the basis of our joint mobility allowance. Well, as I was the only one getting it, I was having great difficulty in repaying the loan. But the (I forget what they call him) 'field worker' from Scope, she came to the rescue and managed to get some funds together to help me a little bit,

Good,

and, she, so,

Oh good. Was her name Maggie Barker?

[Pause.]

No, never mind. Any -

I can't remember her name now.

No, no.

I'm terrible with names. I think she was based at Salisbury or something like that.

Mm. So, you could manage financially? How long did you stay in Marnhull?

Well by the time, I can't re - [sound of bird cheeping]. Until I got together with Helen, my present wife, which was a period of, well, four years I suppose altogether.

Good and during that time, I suppose Spencer had holidays?

Yes.

Did he come to you, or you go to?

We had joint custody, but yes he came to me because he was nearer to me. His school was near enough for me to visit him. I used to visit him most weekends.

[Talking together] Good,

Well,

Good. What, you drove up to Bath or - ?

Bath, yes.

Actually it's not too far, [talking together] no.

No, it's not far, no. It took about an hour.

Mm.

Actually, it was, well, after the initial, whatever you call it: shock, heartache, depression, I found escape just by driving. I used to drive for miles.

Mm.

Visiting new places. I made a trip up to Liverpool and visited Audrey Angus,

Gosh.

plus a lot of our friends up there, and -

That's quite a journey, isn't it?

Yes, miles of motorway. [Laughs.] I could do it in those days. I remember that same year I went to the Sidmouth Folk Festival, in - [talking together, inaudible.]

Did you? Yes.

Yes, and then I've mentioned the Quakers before.

Yes.

They were having their, what they call 'residential' meeting at Exeter that year, in August; the same time as the folk festival. And a friend of mine, a Quaker, was there, and I decided to drive over to Exeter from Teignmouth, on the chance that I might see her, and when we got there, there was over two thousand Quakers there.

Oh gosh.

[laughs] And what really impressed me, and I tell people this time and time again, but what impressed me was that nobody knew me but everybody called me 'friend.'

Yes, yes.

[Laughs.] And that was my introduction, at least real introduction to the Religious Society of Friends. But I did eventually find my friend, and well we had a chat, but it was getting late and I had to drive home.

Oh gosh.

But that, as I say, that was my

[Talking together] Yes.

introduction to the Friends and it was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life; being accepted.

Yes, yes.

Complete stranger. [Laughs.]

Lovely, good.

Another thing that happened that year, in late September, I achieved a lifetime ambition. I'd always had this ambition which I never ever thought I would fulfil, of driving right to the top of Scotland,

Mm!

doing a grand tour,

Gosh.

doing the whole of Scotland,

Yes.

and because I was a member of the youth hostels, I just got in the car, and did it.

[Laughs.]

Good, marvellous because, what, it must be about six hundred miles?

Yes, it was about six hundred and fifty I think, altogether. I did it over a period of ten days I think, staying at youth hostels each night. But one night, because I was so wet and cold, I booked in at a hotel, [laughs] because there was a hostel right at the far north, which was really, you know, rather rough and ready.

Were they?

Yes. But, I managed to get to the very top: that was not John O'Groats, but the other corner,

Oh yes?

Called Cape Wrath?

Yes.

And to get to Cape Wrath, you've got to get on a little motor boat,

Oh God.

to take you across to the rest of the loch, where you get on a minibus, that takes you over desolate countryside, complete desolation for ten or twelve miles, right up to the lighthouse at Cape Wrath. And it was late September, and the chap that ran the boat was dubious about taking us across because it was a bit rough, and so he said 'I won't take your money until we come back, [interviewer laughs] just in case we don't make it',

Yes.

[both laugh] but we did.

Gosh and what an experience.

Yes, because so few people actually get as far as there because

No.

it's the only way that you can go, you see?

Mm.

And the minibus only takes twelve people anyway,

Yes.

and there's no roads at all, so that was -

[Talking together] And late September, you know, it -

Well that was the last week it was going to run

Yes.

the trip.

Was it still light late in the evening, or - ?

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

When we got to the lighthouse we couldn't see anything, because it was a thick mist.

[Laughing] Oh dear.

The most we hear was the sound of the seagulls,

Yeah.

but it was still a great experience, to say that I've done -

A great achievement. I think you were very brave actually. I think I would think twice about going all the way up through Scotland, [talking together] you know?

Like I say, it's something that I'd always had in my mind, ever since my uncles used to tell me about Scotland. They used to go to a place up in the north, called Pekay Afric [phon.] and they used to come back and tell us about it and how beautiful it was, and I think, well, from that time, when I was quite small, I've always had, this, well, desire really, to get a name to it, and of course I've been to Scotland now several times, but that was the ultimate. [Laughs.]

Yes. Right. And you were all alone, [talking together] touring there.

Yes, completely, yes, I was all alone.

Mm, very good.

When I think back on it, well, [laughing] I can't really believe it, how I did manage, you know?

Mm, mm.

Especially, in these little hostels and, you know, they were draughty and cold.

Yes, yes, and would they always be accessible?

Well of course, in those days I could manage [talking together] stairs and things like that.

Yes, yes, yes.

And after about a year or two I was getting a yearning for company and a close friendship again, but although I had plenty of friends, there was nobody really close. And so I saw this advert for a friendship agency in one of my magazines called 'Natural Friends'. It had only just started at that time, but now it's quite a large friendship agency; national. Well people didn't put similar interests down like, you know, interest in the environment, ecology, vegetarians and things like this, so what you did, you wrote in, said what you were and weren't interested in, you know, and they tried to match you up with a person with similar... It turned out [?] ... touch with half a dozen names and addresses but I started writing to two [someone shouting in distance] females; one in South Wales and one in Kent. And it was just mostly general correspondence, but I actually went up to Kent, and met... I think it was in Kent... but, that was a total disaster. [Laughs] But, to be quite honest, I can't remember whether it was Helen that wrote to me, or whether I wrote to her, but anyway, we -

Through this agency?

Through this agency.

Yes.

But anyway, we kind of made contact. And straight away, in my letter to her, I told Helen of my disability, and it was that that made that. She always said she perked up [inaud] too good. I was very honest. About ten months [after?] I then went to visit her, early in 1989, and met her family, and we [stayed?] with her family.

Where was she living?

Where she is now,

Oh.

Midsomer Norton.

Yes.

But because Spencer was in Bath, you know, I thought it would be convenient,

Yes.

because of course, yes, it kind of long-winded. What really clinched it I think was that I'd become ill in that spring, and Helen said 'Well you can't really, well live on your own, by yourself all the time, you'd better come to stay with me for a time,' and she looked after [me] for seven weeks up there, and, well to cut a long story short, after quite a bit of soul searching on my part, we decided to move in together, and we got married in November of that year.

Good.

And I haven't really looked back. [Laughs.]

Mm, good.

But Helen had to apply for a transfer, because the house she was living in at the time wasn't big enough. We had three bedrooms, and so we got a transfer to a house not far away, just about a quarter of a mile away, which was somewhat bigger but even so, we had to sleep on the ground floor; the four children had these four bedrooms upstairs.

So she had four children or,

Yes.

three and Spencer?

Four. Helen's got four children.

Four. [Under breath] Oh God! How old were they then?

Holly was, she'd just left school and was going to university, so she'd be about seventeen, eighteen, and the youngest was eight years old.

Mm. So you had another family?

Yes; acquired another family altogether.

So how did you enjoy that?

Yes, it seemed to have worked out all right. Helen... the initial bother was Helen's youngest son,

[Talking together] How old was he?

because he thought that I'd come and usurped his authority.

Yes.

But he was ten or eleven, just at that age. But yes, considering all the factors, it really worked out very well, indeed.

Good, good.

And we did a lot together with them over the five or six years. We were a family and went to school and I helped a lot with transport, because Helen wasn't driving at all, so I always seemed to taxi them there, getting people to their different places, so I, you know, I came in quite useful. [Both laugh.] We had a [rustling noise] late honeymoon, if you could call it a 'honeymoon',

Mm.

the following year,

Oh yes.

again in a youth hostel, [laughs] and we went to Pembrokeshire,

Oh I know it, yes.

stayed at The Pembrokeshire Hostel, which is actually purpose-built for the disabled people,

Good.

and it's in Broadhaven, on the Pembrokeshire coast. [Pause. Bird cheeping in background.] We did a lot of things together, as a family. The second year, we went to a Quaker, well it's a kind of a retreat guest house in Berkshire, and it had a family week there, and we as a family took a holiday there with the children, so.

Did you enjoy it?

Yes, very much. I think everybody did.

What did the children think of it?

Well the youngest one wasn't too impressed but the other two certainly did. Alistair, the oldest son, he's a bit of a exhibitionist and he's quite adaptable. He at that time liked playing with the children, and he was very adapt, entertaining everybody else.

What did you say his name was?

Alistair.

Alistair.

Alistair, yes.

U-huh. Mm.

[Pause. Bird cheeping.] Well, as usual, I soon got involved in the local community, [laughs] as I always have, wherever I've lived. They were trying to set up an arts centre in Midsomer Norton, and we spent probably two years on this project. I got involved on the steering committee, and we got lottery funding and everything. It was all going through, and then all of a sudden BANES decided that they weren't going to fund it.

BANES: Bath and North East Somerset.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes, but we'd actually got the lottery funding on the condition that the local authority would contribute,

Yes.

and they didn't. That was after two years' work.

Oh gosh. That's... BANES is the local county council in that area?

Yes, they're terrible.

Yes, I know, I used to work for them at one time.

I also got onto the –

[End of Tape 12 Side A]

Tape 12 Side B [Track 20]

Yes, I was on the committee of the local CAB [Citizens Advice Bureau] for about a year, and previous to that I'd been on another committee for the Avon County Council, which had set up a disability forum type thing, and I had to go to Bristol for their meetings, and helped out on various projects which they initiated at the time.

Which date was this, because I used to belong to that too? Did you know Ruth Pickersgill?

The name's familiar but -

And Penny German?

The name's familiar, but I can't place them.

Yes. Sorry to interrupt.

Then I got meself on the tenants' forum, which led into... I was elected onto an ad hoc sub committee of the Housing and Social Services -

Very good, just hold on while I check the... [Break in recording.] OK, we're trying the mics again. You were just saying you got on to the Housing and -

The Housing and Social Services Committee,

Good.

of the local authority of BANES,

Yes.

as they call it. Although as I say, I don't think it was BANES at that time.

No, it was all part of Avon.

Yes.

Avon Social Services.

Yes. Well, this was like an ad hoc, who were invited to sit on the committee meetings of the Housing and Social Services Committee, and we used to feed in any issues which we, as tenants (rather than go through a third party) we were able to ask... feed into the main meetings that they had, and I was on that for a time. And through that, I was invited to be in a group of about six of us, to interview prospective organisations who were tendering their, [rustling noise]... people get tenders to housing associations, to take,

Mm.

to take over the running of the housing stock.

Mm.

And I was part of a small group that would interview potential applicants for that. Of course that involved quite long process, over a period of six months I suppose,

You were extremely busy.

so some weeks I was going to the meetings practically every day,

Oh.

different things going on at a day centre,

Good.

and committees and things.

Hold on a second.

Yes.

[Break in recording. Feedback.] You can go on.

Shall I carry on?

Yes, we're just seeing how you sound.

Oh, shall I -

You said you were very busy on committees: just list a couple of them so I can test the sound.

Yes, the Housing and Social Services Committee.

OK. [Break in recording.] We have changed mics. You say something.

Yes. Well as I was saying, I was kept very busy on the - [inaudible.]

Alright.

But another thing which became important in my life at this time was that I took up painting, and I never thought that I had any talent at all for painting, but Helen was quite an artist herself, and done various paintings for people over the years, and through her encouragement we both attended an art class run by an extremely good

tutor. And this tutor showed me a technique, whereby I painted a scene, usually a seascape or scene on the coast, but upside down, and that was my first painting, and it was, it just came out, just like that.

Oh!

And after it just developed, and so I took up painting and went to an art club regularly, once a week, well twice a week they used to run it, and over a period of, what, two, three years, p'raps four years. I've produced quite a number of portraits, mostly seascapes and a few other scenes.

I've been admiring the one behind you on the wall.

Yeah.

Really good, [talking together] yes, and all around.

[inaudible] ... that one there. And actually, well most of the ones I gave away to people, but I have sold one or two. We used to have an exhibition once a year to sell the paintings, so that was something else that I never thought I would ever achieve.

Mm. You've really achieved so much in your life.

Yes I have.

Yes, and it's wonderful, the things you've been involved in.

Mm hm. Yes, I've had a rich variety of different pursuits and interests and... So that took up most of my leisure time, I suppose (the painting) because I used to do it not just at the art club but also at home, 'cos Helen could set it all up for me; the easel and get the paints ready. I painted in oils because that's the easiest medium.

Why? Is it because it doesn't run or - ?

Yes, water colours, you know, run yes.

Yes.

But yes, well I also did sketches, and we used to go off places. I had got a sketchbook, and I used to do sketches of the places we visited, and things like that.

I'm full of admiration, I wish I could draw or paint.

My only regret is that I'm not able to do it any more because of my pain in the shoulder and neck. The actual strain of trying to hold the brush and things like this just hurt too much. But at least, you know, I've got something to show,

Yes,

for my -

At least we know you've got that talent.

Yes. Yes, it's something that I'm quite proud of myself.

Yes.

And the one painting which I consider my best, I just adore, I think it's still out in Kenya.

Kenya?

Kenya.

Yes.

Because Spencer commissioned me to paint a picture of an African scene,

Yes.

of a lake, and the forest and the distant hills, with animals in, like with water, elephants and things. I did it from this photograph it was, and it just came out perfect.

Wonderful, because animals can be so difficult.

Yeah, well they were at a distance, they wasn't close-up but,

Yes, yes.

also I've got the old photograph of it that I've done.

Good. So Spencer has that picture has he?

No, he used to. He asked me to do it for his friend, who at that time was living in Kenya with his parents, and he wanted to give it to him because Spencer went out to stay with him for

Gosh.

six months,

[Inaudible.]

and he asked me to do it for him, to give it to him. [Laughs.] And of course the other advantage of living in Midsomer Norton was that I was able to go swimming once a week, 'cos they had a club for disabled people.

In -

Yes, every Sunday morning. So that was -

Good.

It's easy to get to, and

Yes.

plenty of help. I still had my tricycle at that time, but unfortunately my cycling days came to an abrupt end because, well, I was getting, you know, less able, less agile. And on one day I cycled about half a mile up the road and I came off the bike, on this quite busy road, and I thought after that I can't...

You lost your nerve.

I lost my nerve, [talking together] yes,

Yes.

and the traffic, and you know. By that time there was just, there was no pleasure,

No.

in cycling. So after all those years I had to... that's the end of my cycling days.

But I mean I think many people find nowadays that cycling on all but the most remote roads are very difficult.

I'm a supporter of Sustrans [transport charity] cycle ways, because I'm sure that is the only alternative that we've got now, to have these cycle ways and

Yes.

people can still use their bicycles away from the traffic.

Yes, and Avon at that time was making quite good progress, wasn't it?

Yes.

With cycle paths?

And since then they've developed a network, right across the country.

Yes.

That was a great thing about Milton Keynes, because they actually built the cycle ways into the initial development. Can we stop at all?

Yes, of course.

[End of Tape 12 Side B]

Tape 13 Side A [Track 21]

David Edwards on the 8th of June. OK David?

Well, I believe the last session I got up to where I was living at Midsomer Norton,

[Talking together] Yes.

with my wife Helen, and some family activities and things that happened during those seven or eight years that I was there, so we're almost up to date.

Yes.

But -

You seem to have been extremely busy, and had a very active role in the life of the community.

Yes. When I think back on it, I'm quite surprised just how much I was involved with different things that were going on.

[Talking together] Very good.

So, if I describe our home; we were living in a four-bedroom house, it was a council house, and although it's four bedrooms [rustling noise] there wasn't much space, because at that time there was six of us living under one roof.

Very small.

Very small and the rooms themselves were small. There was a lot of doors and I kept knocking myself, I kept knocking things and the situation was getting rather difficult for everybody really. And as the children were getting older, teenagers, they

obviously wanted more space themselves. They brought their friends in and that, and things got rather squashed and chaotic at times. As I described, we were actually living and sleeping in one of the two downstairs rooms, which in itself is pretty small. The council had made some alterations, providing an en-suite toilet to that room we slept in, making things easier rather than having to walk through the sitting room to the bathroom. But in the end I came to the conclusion, the ideal situation would be for me to find somewhere else nearby, so that I could have my own place, 'cause we didn't have the room that I needed. Because of my involvement with the Tenants' Forum Panel, I knew a handful of people in the Housing Department and Social Services at the time and after, I s'pose must have been about nearly a year, and after a big case conference, it was decided that they could put my name down for a ground floor property nearby. And [rustling sound] as things turned out, soon after that happened, because of my association with the Quakers this -

With the Quakers?

With the Quakers...

Yes.

We discovered that there was [loud rustling noise] a property which they had down in a place called 'Long Sutton' which was going for let, had become vacant (they'd let it out for rent). It was a hundred-year-old building. It was really beautiful, the old Quaker schoolhouse. Well, I took one look at that inside, and there was space galore, with just one large room which was the school room, and then another separate room, another large room, which was used as a big bedroom, and I thought, 'This is it. This is all the space I needed,' [engine noise] so at that time it didn't take much deciding to make the decision to take this property.

How far was [loud rustling] Long Sutton from Midsomer Norton?

It's about the same distance to what it is now, about twenty-seven miles. The only draw-back to this particular property was that it was situated on a busy main road, used by heavy lorries going backwards and forwards, and that was the one drawback which I realised straight away. But anyway, I had a nice garden at the back, very overgrown, but very pleasant, with apple trees and things. So it suited me very well in that respect, and for a couple of years, I was quite happy there, apart from the situation of having to cross the road to get to my car. And in the end, I had to get somebody to help me get to my car each time which wasn't, you know -

[Talking together] No, not satisfactory.

[Inaudible.] And also of course it meant my wife Helen, she endeavoured to come down each weekend, and at that time she wasn't driving and I usually had to pick her up from the bus at Wells which is half-way. So that that was, you know, quite difficult. It was quite a difficult situation really. But that's how things turned out. I think I'd like to say something, as I've mentioned the Quakers quite a lot, I think I'd like to just say something, how I became involved with them because it had quite an influential on my life – the last about twenty years really. [Birdsong in background.] I, of course, had known about the Quakers for some time, but never really become involved because I was a member of the Anglican Church and attended church quite regularly, well regularly really, when I was at Marnhull, and before that. I'd known a friend up at Liverpool for quite a number of years, and it so happened that after the break-up of my first marriage, I had more contact with them and they were Quakers. And they kind of introduced it to me and I started going to the meetings at Shaftsbury, and became a member really just after my second marriage to Helen. And through me, Helen also became involved and became a member. But they have, you know, had quite an influence on my life because it's meant that I've actually become involved in, and been part of, a caring community. And it's given me a lot of experience, and the confidence to be able do things,

[Talking together] Good!

for them, and also meeting other friends all over the country because every year they have a gathering; yearly meetings. Every four years they have a residential yearly meeting in some part of the country, and every twenty years they have a summer gathering.

Really?

So I think there's a [sound of bird cheeping] wide variety of people who I would not have met otherwise, and the first year well I went to several meetings up in London, but the first residential week was up at Aberdeen.

Oh, a long way away.

I think [inaud] again, and this was the first time for quite a number of years that they'd actually met all that way which was Scotland, and I was able to take Spencer with me,

Good

which he quite enjoyed, you know, 'cos they had young people's activities and so that was another -

That was a great opportunity between father and son.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes. And since then I've been to meetings all over the country. Warwick, Lancaster and York...

Ah yes.

and the second year that we'd been married, we took the family (not Holly the eldest, but the other three) we took them to a family week at a, well, it's a Quaker-ran, like, retreat place. It was in the country in Berkshire and that was very successful.

Good.

I enjoyed that, and I think that gelled the family together.

Great.

Yes.

'Cause it's not easy taking on four growing children [talking together] is it?

No, no it wasn't, but they certainly enjoyed it. It was all like organised as a family week, and they had trips out for them and we were able to do our own thing, you know.

Good

So that's really how it all came together really, my involvement with the Quakers, and they've... it's been a great source of help, inspiration, to me

Great.

over the past years. And I do appreciate going to a meeting just for the quietness and silence.

Which meeting house do you belong to?

Long Sutton...

Long Sutton, yes.

... which the actual meeting house is three hundred years old.

Ah.

It's quite a well-known one.

Yes.

Yes. Because there was a thriving Quaker community in the early days of the movement there, and some landowner gave them the land to build upon and they've got four different properties all together at Long Sutton.

[Pause]

I'm trying to think where Long Sutton is, I know I've been through it,

[Talking together] Yes.

but I've been dashing round so much.

Yes you go through if you come from Martock

Ah yes,

You go through it,

Yes, yes

[Talking together] because we were half way -

I remember now, yes.

Trying to think of other things that I've done... Well, there's so much that I've done, but it's also helped me in my communication, to quote a happy occasion where I've been asked to speak. We've been, Helen and I, have been on several weekend courses and gatherings on behalf of the local Quaker meetings, and we're asked to give a group report to the meeting afterwards, so that has helped me in my confidence, but -

Very good yes, you're used to public speaking?

Well, I have been. Not quite so much now but it does, you know... I remember the first time that I did it, I was very apprehensive about it and I expressed my concern to the Clerk, and she said, 'Well...' you know, she encouraged me to go ahead and do it.

Good, good.

One thing we did go on, it's several years ago now, I mean, they had organised... there was a group of Quakers that had disabilities, and made kind of a little campaign to try and integrate, you know, and make the others aware.

Yes

And they organised a weekend at Warwick: I think it's Hereward College?

Hereward College. Yes.

Hereward College, yes it was there, and that was very inspiring, because people with strength, you know, talking all this different issues; integration and people's attitudes and this sort.

Is that group still going?

No unfortunately.

No.

The two friends that like started it, they had to drop out for various reasons, but the [?] of us still correspondence in the week with friends that I have on the subject of disability. The subject's still kept alive. I remember on this weekend, a friend, something that he said has always stuck in my mind because I thought it was one of the truest things I've heard, about disability... He said, 'If we could say people didn't have to eat or didn't have to get dressed life would be so much simpler.' [Laughs.]

[Laughing] Oh, yes.

[Sound of pages turning.] I've never forgotten that.

Yes, yes, indeed.

Can I just?

Do you want these?

[Break in recording.] Yes. So, after about two years of living in the old school house, and as the disability had become more and more apparent, I decided that I must try and find somewhere else, so I put my name on the housing register for this area, [bird tweeting in background] but it took I think nearly two years for them to offer me the place that I now do live in.

They offered you this place?

Yes. Yes. This was the first offer they made,

Oh I see.

after two years of being [talking together] on the register.

Gosh.

Even though the social worker and the doctor had written, in support of my application.

So you were making that hazardous journey across the road [laughing] every day for another two years?

Yes. You know 'cos then I had to call upon [rustling sound] my neighbour across the road to get me across each time because it's just, you know, it's horrendous section of the road, because it's on the bend in the road.

Yes.

The lorries used to come hurtling round the bend, and you couldn't see them. I kept saying 'It would be lovely if they could just pick up the building and place it somewhere else,' [laughs]

[Talking together] Absolutely.

because everything else was perfect and they'd made a lot of alterations for me. They'd made a ramp up to the rear door and adapted the bathroom and everything.

Very good.

Yes. So I was offered this ground floor flat in Somerton, what, four and a half years ago I think I've been here.

And how do you like living here?

Yes, I'm quite happy here, and mostly it's a nice, fairly quiet area, and I've got this little garden, well patch anyway.

Have you entered into any village life?

No, this is one of the things p'raps that I kind of regret really, because I haven't really got to know people in Somerton very well, and I think I've never been inside any of the neighbours' houses in the whole of four years.

So why do you think you managed so well, socially, in community matters before and not here?

I s'pose because I was more able to get about under my own steam. My speech wasn't quite so bad as it is now, and -

Although, I mean, when one gets used to listening to you it isn't bad at all,

No

really.

But some reason, but when I first came here, my neighbour downstairs said, 'We keep ourselves to ourselves round here,' she said. [Laughs]

Oh.

I found that

Oh dear.

I've had a couple of the neighbours come in here because I've invited them in,

Yes.

but I've never actually been invited. But of course as most of them are elderly,

I see.

and again, hard of hearing...

Yes.

I think this fear on their part, that they... which I understand really, so -

And maybe it's that generation, they're not so tolerant or they've never thought about people with disabilities. [Engine noise.]

No.

Yes.

And people with cerebral palsy aren't that very common,

[Talking together] Yes.

around this particular area, because it's only a small town; twenty-five thousand people here.

What about the parish council? Do you know the representative for this area?

Yes, yes. I've got, there's one councillor that I know fairly well, because she did come in, to help me at one time on a temporary basis. She's quite good, but none of the others... but I have actually been to a town council meeting,

Yes.

[bird tweeting] but not to actually speak, just to try to get some more people but nobody seems to come. I've always got to wait for someone to come and I can't really go to them.

No, no.

But having said that, about four weeks ago they had the what they call the 'Annual Parish Meeting', and I did go to that, and at the end they said, 'Any other business?' now I did speak up,

Good.

because two years ago I had this little [laughing] campaign about the bus stops. Every other place on the bus route between Yeovil and Wells, they've raised the curb at the bus stop, to allow people better access to the bus,

Yes.

except Somerton. And this blockage somewhere, there's always excuses why nothing's done about it, you know, being a historic place and everything else, and although I had the support of the Community Relations Officer for this area, which again [left?], so that was two years ago. So I raised that again in the -

Good.

and I think everybody heard me, everybody that was there.

Mm, gosh. I mean just putting a few more inches on the pavement isn't going to upset the historical look of the -

Our town council (everybody says, it's not just me) everybody knows it's a -

[End of Tape 13 Side A]

Tape 13 Side B [Track 22]

You should take up as a cause and,

[Talking together] Yes, I ought to.

get some publicity in the local paper.

Yes, I think I ought to try it again.

Yes, because it's, you know, the whole... the Part Three of the DDA [Disability Discrimination Act] which came in October is all about access.

Yes, and we have got the low-level buses

[Talking together] Yes.

on these routes that they can lower the platform and they are wheelchair accessible.

Yes, yes.

They've got... but if you can't get the wheelchair on there in the first place.

And it's not only wheelchairs, it's mothers with pushchairs,

Yes quite.

and some elderly people can't manage high steps.

No.

Yes. So maybe it, you know, maybe if you've got the energy [talking together] you should start a campaign.

It is the energy to keep going.

I know. Absolutely.

That means you've got to get somebody else on your side to, help out.

Yes. But I thought Somerset had quite a good access department. I mean I know Dorset doesn't and it's pretty hopeless at things but -

There were some places, but the access group I sometimes go to in Yeovil, they've always got a battle on their hands to get things done in Yeovil.

Where? Where in Yeovil?

Where?

Where is the battle?

Well, getting, lowering the pavements,

[Talking together] A-ha.

at crossings and things like this.

They haven't done it?

Well they do it but it takes so long,

Yes, yes.

you know? And parking also is a very big issue these days,

Oh yes, yes.

for disabled badge holders. Did you know that in North Dorset Council you've got to pay to park in their car parks, even though you've got a blue -

You can write to the North Dorset District Council, and get a special permit.

But haven't you got to live within the North Dorset?

No, I don't think so.

Oh.

But I'm not sure about that.

I did read on the Dorchester Tube the other day that you couldn't park free if you've got a tax exemption.

Well I use the special pass I got from the West Dorset District Council,

Really?

and so far that's been accepted. You, maybe you should ring Nordis, and ask them, you know, their advice. Do you know the organisation Nordis?

Mm.

Yes.

Yes. 'Cos I often go into Sherborne [talking together] to park.

Yes of course. Yes, yes. Do you still go to the Friends' Meeting House?

Yes. Not as much,

[Talking together] No.

as what I have been. This year's been... There again access is a problem,

Is it?

with parking. This house, it's on the opposite side of the road to the old schoolhouse,

Yes.

so you've got that busy road,

Yes.

and you've got a road junction there,

Yes.

and [inaudible] would park, you've got to get there really early to park down the side of the road, [rustling of papers] and then you've got to walk along the road 'cause there's no pavement. [Dog barking in background.]

Wouldn't one of the Friends kind of reserve you a parking space?

Well, it's difficult. They have got a little car park in the large courthouse there, but Friends don't like to use it because it's difficult to get out of it [laughing] because,

there's a visibility problem. But that's one of the reasons why I don't go. I did go last Sunday. Helen took me over there and picked me up, so that she could,

[Talking together] Oh good.

get me in and come and get me again.

Yes. Are there any other Friends' Meeting Houses near here?

Yes, in Street.

Oh.

That's quite accessible; they've got a ramp there to get to the door. That's the nearest one, yeah. We used to go to Street for a time. Used to go to the one in Street.

'Cos my friend lives just north of Sherborne and he goes somewhere to the Quaker meetings.

Yes, they have... there's Sherborne and Yeovil meetings.

Ah Yes.

They have their meetings at the Digby Hall in Sherborne.

Yes, I know it. Yes. So -

I just wanted to say something about social [rustling noise] interaction.

[Break in recording.]

David you know that I'm now working in a residential unit with ten adult men and I know that some of them feel very strongly that they're isolated in the community. They would like to get to know more people, especially those of the opposite sex, and [bird tweeting in background] I wondered if you'd got ideas about how people go about meeting others?

It really comes down to the opportunity of how you can meet and interact with others in a social situation. For people like ourselves, with cerebral palsy, and especially if one's got a speech impediment, this is extremely difficult.

Yes.

If somebody has been institutionalised, either from school or perhaps been mollycoddled at home for the early part of their life, and not had the experience of meeting others, it is extremely difficult and I s'pose looking at it from the other person's point of view, so off-putting to come face to face with somebody who might have a quite severe disability that's not able to communicate [voices in background] spontaneously. It's the spontaneity that really counts I think.

Mm, yes.

Now I'm sure, in my particular experience, because I was at boarding school until the age of sixteen and had very little contact with someone of the opposite sex, when any opportunity did arise, I was really scared,

Mm.

and of course it made it a lot worse because I just dried up, [laughs] and,

Absolutely.

yes and I'm sure it put me back, socially, about five or six years. It took me 'til I was in my early twenties and didn't... went to the '62 Club. I think that was the time when I really, personally interacted, you know, freely with people from the opposite sex.

Looking back now, do you, or even now, are you an advocate of integrated education?

I would think so, yes.

Yes.

Looking back on my life, I wish I knew at that time, it just wasn't possible and practical, that I could go into a mainstream school [dog barking in background] but I just wish that it had happened. Yes, yes definitely.

Yes.

[Break in recording.]

I mean, as far as employment is concerned, I thought that I could have got a lot further, given the chance to prove myself, and at the time I wasn't given the chance: nobody seemed to want to give me even a trial period. They just took one look at you, and just kept on, 'We'll let you know' sort of thing. And from what I've read and seen in those days things are a lot better, because the Government set up different schemes to help people like ourselves get into employment, and give incentives to the employers and so on.

Yes. I mean even sleepy old Dorset has a scheme whereby they arrange employment for people with disabilities, with and provide someone to support a person

Really? Yes.

in that job.

It's so different these days from what it was.

Yes.

Yes. And, if I could just comment on the housing... There's a definite lack of suitable accommodation for people with disabilities and really all the Governments have dragged their feet over this one.

Yes. If things could be, would you prefer to move back to Midsomer Norton? If you could get a transfer to a place similar to this?

If it would suit my needs, yes. But I prefer Somerton to Midsomer Norton.

You do?

Yes, definitely.

Oh.

But I was speaking generally. There's such a lack of housing in the public sector. Well round Norton there's not much building going on at all, any kind of public sector housing, but what is building is just not suitable for our needs. That's why I find places like Milton Keynes so successful, because then they started from scratch and built it at the time rather than, having to adapt places later on. And I know on two occasions when I've moved house that the housing after I'd left had restored the bathroom to what it was before.

How short-sighted.

It's so stupid.

Yes.

Whereas they could let that property to somebody,

[Talking together] Yes.

another wheelchair user. I'm sure they would do it here as well.

It's crazy.

Yes.

[Break in recording.]

[Bird tweeting in background.] Well, I've almost come to the end of what I would call 'my life story' [laughs], but I would just like to read what I wrote, as part of my original life story which I wrote up to the age of when I was twenty-two, and it took several years actually but because I haven't really said anything about how it was in my early days. So I would just like to read this, [rustling noise] if that's all right? I wasn't diagnosed as having cerebral palsy until I was four years old. My mother realised something was wrong, as I was very inactive and muscles were rigid and stiff. The many visits to the health centre was futile, as nobody could tell her anything other than what she already knew. I was poked and prodded by scores of doctors, nurses, and welfare officers, most of whom gave me up as a hopeless case, or could not find anything wrong. One, having failed to find anything abnormal, remarked as I gave her a smile on leaving the room, 'Oh, I think one ear is bigger than the other.' The one person who gave my mother encouragement and hope was the visiting district nurse, and she showed my mother how to move my arms and legs, which eventually got me crawling and finally taking the first steps about the about the age of three and a half. And when I look back on my life and [dog barking] all that I've achieved and done, I feel a great sense of gratitude to my mother, for her persistence, and getting me to move and to use my limbs in the way she did, because, well she was totally by herself.

My father was away in the army in wartime. And you know I think back, if my mother had not done that, encouraged me, and got me moving, I never would have achieved about half of what I have done. And I do owe her a great debt of gratitude, I know.

Mm.

I think that's all I have to say.

[End of recording]