



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

Sheila Bingham
Interviewed by Philip Mann

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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]

Well, it's 12 July and I'm talking to Sheila Bingham in her home near Doncaster. Now, Sheila, if I can begin then at the very beginning, perhaps by asking you when and where you were born?

I was born in Accrington, in 1931 [24 July 1931]. I was born at home, because they didn't know I was going to be born when I was. I was a few days early than it should have been. Dad was out at a meeting. Mum was left by herself, and the nurse who was supposed to look after us decided to have a day off. So she went off really, thinking I wasn't going to be born – and I was. Then when Dad came home and found us, together on the bed, he rang up the doctor, and got him to come out, and we were both taken to hospital, and four days later, the nurse, the doctor said to Mum, 'Leave her here, and go and start again. There's nothing we can do.' Anyway, I survived that night. A nurse came to Mum, and she said, 'Well, if that's going to happen, take her home; look after her as much as you can, and enjoy her for, you know, four or five days or whatever.' Anyway, I survived... We were in Accrington and Mum tried to find a clinic, or a doctor, or anything, and walked around with me for days after days after days, and finally we found a clinic, only to be told, 'Come back next week: we've just closed the doors.'

So, just to return to your birth then. Was it, although it was a few days early, and perhaps unexpected, the precise time, was it a difficult birth then, or?

Could be, I suppose. That's why I'm like I am, but, as I say, nobody was in the house to look after her at all, so when they came in, he was all, taking to hospital and finding out what we could do.

And, this doctor then said...

The doctor said to Mum, 'Go home and start again', as I said, 'She's had it.' And then a nurse said, 'If that's the case, take her home, look after her, and have a nice time for four days or whatever.'

Because the expectation was then that you wouldn't survive?

I wouldn't survive overnight, but, of course I did.

What led them to initially think this though?

I've not the faintest idea. I didn't know much about this, Mum didn't tell me much, too much about it. Well, eventually we found this doctor. We did go back the next week and found him, and then he suggested going to the specialist, which I went to, eventually. This was in Manchester of course, because Accrington's not quite, very far away, and Dr Le Page; you've probably heard of him well most people have, I think, said... I went in; I've forgotten how old I was, a bit later, went many times, of course. And I found there was a cupboard door at the other end of the room, and I saw this cupboard door and it was slightly open, on purpose I think, and I started going towards it: not walking, not crawling, but going on somehow. I don't know how I got there, but I did.

So, how old would you be Sheila then, at this time then, when you were visiting the clinic?

I would be about 10 months old, I should imagine, for this first visit. There were so many visits; I don't know quite what the routine was. Anyway, he told Mum... Mum was stopping me going. She thought I shouldn't be going to cupboards, you know, and he said, 'No, leave her. Let's see what happens'. Eventually, I got there, how I don't know, but I got there under my own steam, and he said, 'Oh, there's something in her. There's something happening!' [laughs] but I wasn't supposed to walk, talk, at this stage at all. On my third birthday, Mum and Dad bought me a doll's pram and, of course, I stood up and I toddled off, with my feet turned in, inwards all the time, so

once again, I was taken to other specialists, who suggested callipers. Well in those days, 60-odd years ago, they were very heavy, very awful, clumsy, cumbersome things, which they aren't today, of course, and I was at, with those for, ooh, five years, 10 years, something like that.

So, when did you first start wearing callipers then?

When I was three.

And, prior to that then, having seen the various doctors, when was it that your parents actually got a diagnosis of cerebral palsy?

I don't think they did. In the Thirties, I don't think people... understood. I think Dr Le Page did, because I was about five or six then, if I remember rightly, and he said, 'There's two alternatives.' We lived in Manchester at that time, and he said, 'There's two alternatives. You can send her off to America or go to America and live there or you can go down to St Margaret's School in Croydon,' which had just recently opened. I don't know what year that would be but neither of those alternatives were... advisable, so Mum just set and taught me to do everything.

And, so, just to look back at your family circumstances then. Were you then your mother's first child?

I'm the only one, yes.

And in seeking out different doctors, and in finding out what your circumstances were, how did your parents take to that? What was their reaction?

Well, Mum decided to do everything she could. Dad was a bit... dubious I think, not knowing what to do. He didn't... well, I shouldn't say this, but he didn't help as much, as, I think, looking back, he should have done. He always thought I could do things and I couldn't.

And so, how old [clears throat] were you, when, how old were your parents when you were born?

In their thirties.

And they were working then, or your father was working, was he?

Dad was working, yes. Mum just stayed at home and she gave up her job when I was born.

So, what, just to, get a bit of background, what was the nature of your parents' work?

Dad worked at the CPA, Calico Printers, printing cotton and ... inventing nylon and 'Terylene', and all those things which was never heard of in those days, of course. But we had a big garden, in Derbyshire, and he, during the War, took this on. He did an allotment, about an acre, and he gave me a little patch to do, and of course, I was keenly watering me garden – this is the story that everybody tells – and I didn't know he'd put chemicals in to damp the weeds down; kill the weeds off. So I used to get the can of water, water my garden; he said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'Killing the weeds'. He said, 'Oh yes, OK', because in those days, I was wearing callipers, which is very, very awkward to kneel down on.

And, [clears throat] living where you were; you were first near Manchester, were you, then you moved to Derbyshire [talking together]. What was that when did you move to Derbyshire then?

That's right. When I was one year old.

And where you were then in Derbyshire, did you have the support of a wider family network?

No. One of Mum's brothers used to come over from Cheshire where he lived, miles and miles away, occasionally. At very short notice he used to just appear and that gave her a lot of encouragement, because she had somebody to, you know, talk to.

Because, at the time then, I suspect... What do you suspect [clears throat] the knowledge or awareness of cerebral palsy was, particularly perhaps amongst the medical profession?

I should say non-existent...

And,

in the area that I was in.

And so the only immediate remedy, if you like, was the suggestion that you should wear callipers. How would you describe those callipers?

Up to the knee, up to just below the knee and, of course, the boots as well, which didn't help in the winter, in the summer, because they were hot and cumbersome, but I just had to wear them.

And what were they intended to do?

Straighten my feet or legs, I suppose, but I don't think they did... much good, quite frankly.

And in terms of options for education as you approached, perhaps five, what was under discussion then?

There was a teacher, a nursery teacher, well, infants' school teacher; we didn't start until five anyway in those days. And she used to live next door to me – Miss Hadfield – and I used to see her going out to school with a load of kids, all going like Pied

Piper, going to school, and I really wanted to join them. So eventually, she, although she took the second class: five-, six-year-olds, six-year-olds, they'd be: she said she'd take me on and see how I got on. So I did go to school for a little while, but I enjoyed it, when she was teaching me, but when I got to seven, she said, 'No, stay down another year, in my class and then go up.' Well, eventually I had to go up, and that was it.

This was the local village school, was it?

Yes. Yes, the local village school.

And in terms of...

And they were very good to me. The children were excellent; they knew exactly what to... they let me join in all the games. They let me win sometimes, which is a great surprise.

And so was it a big school?

It was just an average village school. I don't know how many pupils there were and I never...

So did you know most of the children anyway then, or, that went to the school?

Well, obviously, I knew the ones round me, who lived near me. They'd see me, well, they'd been with me all the time and, of course, the head girl used to live near me. That was the May Queen, eventually, and she used to take me out, walking with me, and going in the pram. I had a pram of course, in those days, and she used to take me out [talking together] quite a bit.

So you started... to be on your feet, aged three, walking with the doll's pram. And in terms of your general walking, then, when did that come on, as it were?

It didn't. [Laughs.] I had the callipers until I was about 10, but they got so cumbersome and so awkward, that I don't know what happened. Eventually, I gave up with those and wore shoes: big shoes, boots specially made, and they were even worse I think.

So you'd been back to hospital, or the doctor's, to...?

Oh we used to go back every... three or four weeks, yeah. Anyway, Mum taught... I couldn't use my right hand at all, that was just like this, it is now, well it isn't, and Mum got me to do all kinds of things. We used to play games. She used to have, we used to have a shop, a little shop, you know, a toy shop, put me in one room, and said right; I'd set it up and close the door, and go into the other room. Then I'd have to go, knock at the door. I had to open it with my right hand – I wasn't allowed to use my left hand – and then give, and then shake hands with her, and then serve the customer. And that happened every day of my life, and I left school when I was seven, and Mum taught me for three or four years at home, but then of course I wanted to go back with bigger children, so I went to another school.

So what was the thinking behind, you know, leaving school and being taught at home then?

The leaving of school, because when I went up to Standard One, the children were too rough for me and also, in Standard One, the girls had to do needlework, and the boys went off to do woodwork. Now they couldn't teach me to sew because I couldn't use both hands, so they gave me some toys, in a corner of the room, but after a while, they thought, 'Well, she'll go home and tell her mum what's happening, and [laughing] this will not be approved of'. This is my own way of thinking now, and so they started on the knitting. Well of course, I couldn't knit either. I did eventually learn by Mum's teaching. So, well, I just sat there, doing nothing, when they did sewing. Anyway, after a while I couldn't have... do any more of this... because the teacher in those days had a long cane, and anyone who did anything naughty, I didn't get the cane, but

any boy, of the boys or the girls, spilt anything, they got a whack from the cane. And this annoyed, well it didn't annoy me, it upset me. So Mum took me away and I had lessons at home, with that teacher again, Miss Hadfield.

And,

And others.

And in terms of how the cp presented itself then, it was ... Were you right-handed?

Yes, but I couldn't use my right hand.

Yeah. As I said, so it, in particular then, affected your right hand,

Yes.

As well as the walking... So, in terms of being able to acquire the writing skills, what did you do?

I used my left hand but I was very, very, very slow, and, but they put up with me, and, when I got to bigger school, of course, people did the job for me. And I used to take it home, do the lesson at school, and then take it home so I did all the work I had to do during the day, in my own time, plus all my homework as well.

So, in terms of, what, writing up notes and things,

Yes.

You took them home you'd make rough notes in the day, would you?

No. Somebody else made rough notes for me and then I had to go home, and copy them into my own.

So, who was doing the note-taking for you?

One of the other pupils.

So, this was in the days, obviously, before any kind of learning support assistant arrangement, or...

Nothing. Nothing: and I went to an older school, they weren't any.

And so let's,

Others.

You were then, just having completed, what, three years of tuition at home?

Yes.

And then came the thought to go to a secondary school.

Well, there wasn't a secondary school, it was a private school.

OK, so what led to the particular choice of the school that you went to?

Because I knew somebody who already went to it. They were all able-bodied, of course, and they were all small classes. But it was six miles away, so I had to get on a bus to go.

And so, what age did you go there?

Twelve.

Twelve.

Twelve until I was 16.

And what was the name then, Sheila?

Marple. Marple High School [Marple near Stockport]. It was a private school, though it wasn't...

Yes and so, what sort of numbers again of people, just of size?

About 50 of us...

About 50.

Altogether. Five classes.

Yeah and, you were the only child, were you, with an apparent disability?

Yes.

So, was it boys and girls?

Yes, oh yes.

And so, how did the other pupils, how did you get on with the other pupils?

Very good. Excellent. No problems at all at that one and, of course, by this time I was very keen on looking after children myself. So the headmistress, said that I could look after the little ones, when it rains, go down to the infants and you know, look after them and read to them and play games with them.

So this was, the school had infants as well, did it?

Yes, five 'til 16.

Right, but in terms of the older pupils then, there was only about 50. Well, there was four classes all, in total.

Fifty altogether.

All, including the younger children.

Yes.

And for your parents then, to ... you know, to pay for you then to go to the private school, that must have been quite a...

Yes. We had to pay for everything in those days; doctors and everything else, so they must have spent a fortune on me.

And meantime, your father was still working in the same area, was he?

Oh yes.

The Chemicals [?] yeah.

He was working in Manchester.

Right and ... do you remember, you know, at the time, from how you felt about going to the new school, in particular?

Oh I loved it. I loved it. Every minute of it, I really did. It was... really an opening. Although I couldn't do, well I did all the work, of course, but I had to do it in stages of course. As I say, somebody did the work for me and then I did it at home, so it was a lot of hard work I can tell you. You never had a second to go out.

So, there you were then, at the...

[Talking together] Yeah.

Nearby private school, for, and working your way through particular years. Did you have particular favourite subjects that...?

English... I loved English and I liked geography, to a certain extent. I liked history, very much. I didn't particularly like art, though I did enjoy French, funnily enough. But I didn't take any 'O' levels or anything at school, because they didn't go up to that standard.

And in terms of your general mobility, at the time, by this time then you were, you'd dispensed with the callipers, had you?

Yes.

And you had these special shoes, and... were you then undergoing things like physiotherapy at all?

No, I had no physiotherapy at this stage. I did later on because that, again, I had to go privately. I knew somebody who was a physiotherapist, but while I was at that school, when she sent me down to look after the little ones, she always said, 'You'll get a job, when you leave school, with children, won't you?' I said, 'Yes. I'll try'. I tried in vain; nobody'd have me, of course. So I worked with Dad, Mum and Dad in the garden, of course.

Mm. That's going ahead a few years, I guess. And in terms of looking for solutions, if you like, looking to make things easier, you were still in a situation were you, where you were asking, you know, perhaps one of your friends to make notes, and then you'd have to write the notes up?

Oh yes, [talking together] I did that all the...

In the evening and so on?

Four years I was there.

So, in terms of writing those notes up then, did you write them up yourself then?

Yes.

Using your left hand, as it were?

Yes.

Yeah.

It took me all night just to catch up with me day work, because I had to give the books back the next day.

And as you then, you know, progressed through the school, you said earlier on that they didn't actually do, sort of 'O' levels, as it might be described now, did they, do any final, any kind of end-of-school exams at all?

No. We didn't get up to that standard... eight, at all, unfortunately.

And so, as you approached the end of your school time, what options did you have?

I didn't have any options in the village school but, at that time, Mum and Dad were moving to the Lake District, and we moved up... sorry, we moved to Nottingham, and then the Lake District, that's right. And so I went to college in the Lake District; in Nottingham, but there again it was a case of doing the job and, you know, at college,

and then borrowing somebody's books again, so I had to have the same procedure all over again.

So, what kind of college was this then, Sheila?

The People's College of Education.

And ...

In Nottingham.

And what were you studying there?

English, religious knowledge and French.

So this would be...

And English literature as well.

So this would be when you,

And scripture

I was in my twenties at this stage.

Oh right, so you, there was a, so you left the private school then at, what, 16 did you?

Yes.

And then there was a few years' gap, was there?

Yeah, working with Mum and Dad in the garden because during the War we had to.

So... right. So, the garden that you had obviously, Wartime then at this time.

Yes.

That was mainly to feed the family was it?

Oh yes.

That was the idea.

But Dad was still working, of course, but we did sell the produce.

So in terms of your ... seeking other work, or looking for other work... did you, look for other work at all, or?

Well, we did when we got to Grange-over-Sands, working in a nursery, and I started working in a nursery – Mum and Dad’s nursery – because Dad felt he couldn’t do much more in Hayfield in Manchester and he thought the outdoor life might do us the world of good, so I worked on that for a long time.

So, just to return to the sequence of events then. You moved, when you left the private school, to Nottingham first of all.

Yes.

And how long did you stay at Nottingham?

Four or five years.

So this was through the remainder of the War years, then, and

Yes. Well, after the War.

Right, so, when did you, and through until after the War, yeah?

Yeah.

Yes.

We went to the Lake District after Hayfield. Sorry, I'm all...

Oh, not to worry, no. So Hayfield then was...

Hayfield in Derbyshire. Then we went up to the Lake District, and did this... that also was... the Lake District for, four or five years doing, and then that went bankrupt, because we couldn't get the staff to do it, and we couldn't get this and we couldn't get that.

This was a market garden, was it?

Yes, and people used to go in and pinch everything while we weren't there, because we lived about a couple of miles away from the garden, which was, and then Mum, Dad took a job in Nottingham.

Oh right.

So that's when we went.

So that when you left school then, you moved to?

Derbyshire.

To [talking together] Derbyshire, to the Lake District.

No, the Lake District.

You moved to the Lake District. So your father left his other work, did he at that time?

Yes, he left CPA.

Yes.

And went to work for himself.

Specifically, during the War years, to run this market garden.

No, that was after the War.

I see. Yes. Right. So, he carried...

He worked during the War in May, in Der..., in Nottingham... in, Manchester.
[Talking together] I'm getting it all wrong.

Right. So, what did he do during the War then?

He was at the CPA.

So he was still working in the same work. Was he in a reserved occupation, was he, or?

He wouldn't join.

Oh I see.

He wouldn't join up.

I see.

That's why we had to have the market garden.

Oh I see, so that...?

If people didn't want to join up, they had to do something.

Yes.

For the country.

So, when did you move to the Lake District, to start the market garden?

When I was 17. 1949.

1949.

Yes.

You were 17 in 1949. Right, so that, I see.

Or 18. [Laughs]

So, we'll just reiterate those sequence of events then, Sheila. So that you left school at 17.

That's right.

You were in Derbyshire, still.

We were still in Derbyshire.

At the time.

Yes.

Your dad was still working at [together] at CPA and, in the meantime, he was also cultivating his own garden, was he?

That's right.

Which part of the produce you sold.

Yes. That's it.

Then, in 1949, was it, you moved?

Yes.

To

To the Lake District.

To the Lake District. Carried on with another market garden business there.

Yes.

Right and it was,

We sold things on the market stall.

I see, yes. And, having moved to the Lake District in 1949, how long did you live there then?

About eight years.

And then after those eight years, you came back to Nottingham, and it was in, then in your mid-twenties when you went to college there in Nottingham.

That's right, yes.

Yeah.

But in the meantime, I'd ... when I was in the Lake District and I'd applied to all kinds of jobs, they sent me to a rehabilitation centre, which was at Egham.

Who was that?

In Surrey.

Who sent...?

The Labour Exchange.

Right.

because I did enlist, or whatever you call it, and they thought I could get thorough training. So, what did they do was put me on a machine – sewing machine – needless to say, and the needle kept coming out and I was a nightmare to everybody else under the sun. So eventually, because they knew I'd been a gardener, they sent me out into the ... horticulture department, and I was very happy there.

And so, you were at Egham then, having this assessment, by, or run on behalf of the Department of

Labour Exchange. Yes.

Sorry, the Labour Exchange. How long did that assessment last for then?

Six, eight weeks.

And so was this then, your first time, essentially, you know, spending that kind of length of time away from the family home?

Oh yes. The first time I'd been away from home in my life by myself. [Talking together.] Hard,

And how did,

It was hard-going.

And how did you feel about that?

Well, it had to be done, so. I wanted a job. I didn't get the job I wanted but I was, after a job, but putting me in gardening again, which I'd already done for years and years and years – all my life – I didn't, wasn't very happy on that score.

So, when you were in the Lake District and you were helping your dad out with his market garden business...

[End of Track 1]

Tape 1 Side B [Track 2]

So, when you were in the Lake District helping your dad with the market garden business, which he'd got by this time, what kinds of things were you doing, to help your father?

Well, gathering the vegetables, gathering tomatoes everything for the market. And I used to stay at home and get the dinner ready, for when they went to market. But busy times, of course, I used to go with them, and work on the stall with them.

So you ran a stall at, in the market,

Miles away from where we were, yes. That was in Barrow-in-Furness.

And your mum was helping as well, your father, in the business.

Oh yes, Mum and Dad and I all worked. It didn't pay but we worked.

[Laughs]

And when you were then looking for other work, initially, before the assessment, what kind of work were you looking for?

Well, I've always wanted to work with children but I've never succeeded, and so we moved to Nottingham.

So, when you left...

The Lake District.

When you left your school, the head teacher had said to you, as you say, that, 'You'll end up working with children'. Had you then initially looked for work with children?

Many times and oft, but nobody'd accept me. I went to an interview, in Nottingham, when we got there, and the interview went fine because I'd worked with children, in various places, you know, looking after them and so on. And they said, the last question was, 'Have you handled a baby of under six months old?', and truthfully, I said, 'No'. He says, 'All right, you can't have a job'. Anyway, I went back to Mum, she was waiting for me, and we waited for the next girl to go in, and I said, when she came out, 'Ooh', she said, 'I got the job'. I said, 'Good for you', I said, 'What kind of questions did they ask? Did they ask you if you could handle a baby over six months old?' and she said 'Yes, but I said 'No.' They said, 'That's all right, we'll teach you,' but no such luck for me.

And so, what was this interview then, Sheila? What was the organisation?

For a job with nurses' children, looking after children when the family went to work.

So, was it a privately-run organisation?

Well, it could have been anywhere.

Yeah.

Just general appliance, you know. Just generally.

So, it was training to be a nursery,

A nurse.

Nursery worker. Nursery nurse.

Well, nursery assistant or

And you said, prior to that interview, that you'd worked with children at various times, what were those times?

Well in Nottingham, we had a... group on a Saturday morning... it was The Cripples Guild, as it was in those days. I joined The Spastics Society, of course, Mr and Mrs Wolff, but this was a Saturday morning club for disabled children, while their mums and dads had a break or went shopping, or did what they wanted to do without the kids.

So, what was the name of the organisation?

It was The Cripples Guild.

Cripples

Run by Mrs Beesley.

Cripples Guild.

[Talking together] The Cripples Guild.

Right and was that a particular Nottingham-based organisation then, or?

No, it was the Royal; this was based in the Methodist Church, in the centre of Nottingham.

And the Cripples Guild was a national Methodist organisation was it?

No, it was a national organisation, I don't know whether it's geared to Methodism or not.

Oh I see. Sure.

National.

So, you joined that then, having moved to Nottingham, and...

Yes.

And worked with disabled children.

That's right.

How did that feel, working with children?

Oh, it was lovely. Oh, exactly what I wanted. And then Mrs Wolff's son went to the Wilfred Pickles School, which was just opened, and he said, 'She is so good with children, why doesn't she come and join me in school?'

And so he...

So, Mrs Wolff rang up the school and said, 'Do you want a house mother?'

Right, so the

And well, yes.

The Wilfred Pickles School was a school for disabled children.

That's right. One of the first opened by The Spastics Society, Scope, as it is now.

Right, so, had you heard about The Wilfred Pickles School before that then?

No, only from Richard, and Mr and Mrs Wolff.

Right and so, you would ... just to return to Nottingham then. You were studying at the college in Nottingham and what was the outcome of that?

Well I got a GCE 'O' level in French and English.

Right, so after that then, you were looking for work with children,

Yes.

And, in terms of taking the exams – just to cover that a bit – what was the technique there then?

Well, by this time I had a typewriter, and I could take, I did the [sound of aircraft noise in background] mock 'O' levels on this typewriter, but that was very hard going. So, when I took the exams I dictated it to other people and dictating in French, is not very easy.

And just to describe the set-up then. You were in a different room were you, you and the person you were dictating to?

Yes, well I had to have somebody looking on, just in case we made mistakes.

And did you have extra time at all or anything like that?

A little bit; about half-an-hour extra but it was very... well, I won't say I enjoyed it, but I got through it.

And in

because I passed.

Yes, well done. And in studying at the college, again, what was the situation there?

Well, there again I had to take my notes, borrow them off somebody, because I couldn't read my own writing, they were so fast, and then do double work again.

And then,

Catching up all day and then, doing my homework as well.

And so the, typewriter that you had, that was a...?

Portable. Yes.

A sort of manual typewriter? A portable manual typewriter?

Yes. That's all there were in those days.

And so you used that for exams, did you use a, for course work?

I did that for the mock exam,

Right.

But when it came to the real exam, I had somebody who wrote it down for me,

And in...

And I dictated it.

And in terms of use of the typewriter generally then, did you use that for making your full notes in the evening at all?

Sometimes. It depended, you know, it depended what we, what I was doing.

And to type, of course, that would, needs a fair bit of finger dexterity.

Oh, I used one finger. I was a one-finger typist, I still am.

So, [sound as if vehicle reversing outside] but it must have been nice though to see things typed up in that way?

Yes, but of course, with the computer you can rub them out and start again, but with a typewriter: no such luck. If you made a mistake, you made a mistake, and had to... start again, you know.

So, in writing up your course notes in the evenings... because it was not so hurried, was it easier then to follow your own writing?

Oh yes. Much easier, yes.

And how did you find the actual process of studying, having not taken exams previously?

Hard-going, but luckily for me, I've got quite a good memory, so it all helped.

And the college itself, that was a college, was it, for students taking exams, what, perhaps later than otherwise?

No, I was in with 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds. I think I was the eldest there, at the time.

And so, was that the local authority college then, or?

Yes, in Nottingham. Yes.

And so, how did that feel, having had perhaps a number of years out of full-time education, to then go back into it?

It was hard going. The point was, I was at The Wilfred Pickles School first, and then Mum, unbeknown to me, joined me up at this college, thinking that if I got some 'O' levels, I might get a 'better', in inverted commas, job.

Oh right. So you started work at The Wilfred Pickles School before [talking together] you went to the Nottingham college.

Oh yes. Yes.

And so let's just rewind a bit then, in terms of when you started at Wilfred Pickles School, how long had you been in Nottingham?

About two years, but I worked with the children every Saturday of course, and helped whenever I could.

Right, and The Wilfred Pickles School was itself near Stamford I think, wasn't it?

That's right, yes.

So, OK,

Boarding school.

Yes. Let's look a little bit at that then, shall we, in terms of how that then felt. How did you feel, you went for an interview did you, to The Wilfred Pickles School?

No, they phoned me – phoned my neighbour, and said I'd got the job – and, 'Would I start on the Monday?'

So the,

I got, they gave me two days' ... notice,

So, they

because Richard had said, 'Come'.

Oh right, so he was working there was he?

No, he was one of the pupils; he was eight years old at the time.

Oh of course. So, the people at The Wilfred Pickles School, they took you on without an interview?

That's right. Well, I went. We arrived at... five o'clock in the evening on Sunday and I started work at eight o'clock the next morning. And so I went to find Richard... who... they were having their tea and I said, 'Oh tell Richard that I've arrived', and one little girl piped up, 'Are you staying?' and I said, 'Yes'. She said, 'Well take your coat off then, if you're staying.' So Mum said, 'You're in: you're in, you've been accepted.'

So, was it the visit, the initial visit then was just to sort of look round?

No the initial visit was, 'Be there, and start work the next morning.'

So, it was rather unusual though wasn't it, to take you on without an interview perhaps?

Quite.

Yeah, but this was...

But they wrote, they got a good reference, from Richard: or his mum.

Right, so once you'd arrived did you have any kind of formal interview at all?

No, no, I just got on with the job.

So this was,

Looking after the kids. I had two children: one was deaf: very deaf, and the other could only say, 'mummy', 'daddy', 'yes', and 'no', but she knew everything you said to her. They were both five years old at the time.

And so The Wilfred Pickles School had been going, had it, for a number of years?

No. It had just started in the September.

[Talking together] Right, and what...

For a term.

Yes. And so what year would this be then, Sheila?

1956.

1956. So they'd started in September 1956, and you

No, they started in... September '55.

Sorry. September of 1955, The Wilfred Pickles School started.

Yes.

And you were

Yes. January '56.

January '56.

Yes.

Right, so...

So, they'd only been there a term.

Right.

So, everybody was new.

And,

We didn't know what we were doing, or anything else.

What were your impressions then when you got there?

Oh, I thought it was a lovely place. It was an old-fashioned house, a very old house with out-buildings, which we used a lot. The cottages and the classrooms were in, what was the stables and all kinds of outdoor buildings, you know. So, the idea was for the children to live in the house and go to school, so they had to physically go out of their house, across the yard, well quite a few yards, to the big school, to the classrooms.

And, of course, in the early days then, the numbers just beginning, including, I think as you say, children with hearing impairments, as well as children with cerebral palsy – just beginning then, numbers building up. What sort of numbers of pupils?

There was 70. Sixty living in and 10 day ones, who came from Peterborough, and they were bussed in every day, by our own mini-bus.

And what sort of age of ranges?

Five to 16.

Sorry, [laughing] range of ages, even.

Yes. Five to sixteen.

And run by The Spastics Society [talking together] as it then was.

That's right, yes.

How would describe the atmosphere of the school?

Wonderful. We all co-operated with everybody else. We knew what everybody else was doing. The individual children were children, individually, and we got to know them. I know quite a few of them, still, grown up, and I don't hear from them but I know where they are, and what they're doing, and I keep in contact through other people. I keep in contact with quite a few of the teachers as well. I did until they died off... older than I am, of course.

And in your own personal circumstance of course, I mean, the children, those that were boarding, were away from home, and you were also away from home then yourself. What were your emotions about that?

I enjoyed it. I liked the independence. I liked the way I was able to do things for other people, instead of people doing things for me all the time... I was alive.

And so you were in your, what, early twenties?

I was in my element.

And you were in your early twenties as well, yes?

Yes.

Right, so that, for you, then, this was the first major time you'd been away from the family home.

Yes.

And you were working with children, which had been your long-held ambition really. So, for you then at that time, life must have seemed pretty good?

It did.

Yeah. And you had... what, two children you were saying, in particular, to look after?

I had two little ones to look after, yes. As I say, one was deaf and the other was just 'mummy', 'daddy', 'yes' and 'no', but she knew exactly. Raymond was the boy, who was deaf, and he could... Jigsaws as well, he got everywhere with jigsaws. Give him a jigsaw and he'd done it in two seconds flat, you couldn't keep pace with him, and Alex, she knew everything you said to her, but she never had more than four words. We did teach, try to teach her, the speech therapist, but to no avail.

Was it because of the...?

We don't know. We never found out what that condition was at all.

*And so, being a house mother then, you were assigned in particular to two children.
Take me through a typical day, if you like.*

Got them up in the morning; dressed them, gave them their breakfast, or helped them with their breakfast. And then we went back and had ours, and then at lunch, break time, of course you had to go and toilet them and things like that. And then at lunch-time I was put on the job of being with the day pupils on a table, and looking after them, and then going back to work. Then, after a while, these two children were taken off me and one was given to somebody else, and one was given, and I had the job of putting the mugs out every morning, and taking everybody to physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. Every half-hour, five children, to five different places, near at hand of course, for each classroom. So I had to pick five up, take them to physio or whatever, get the five that were there, take them back to the classroom, and that continued 'til nine o'clock in the morning until five o'clock at night.

And it was all on the same school campus.

Oh yes, it was all on the same. It wasn't very far, but it seemed far enough, especially when one little boy decided to go in the opposite direction to what you wanted him to go into...

And...

Which happened quite a few times.

Yeah and about 70 pupils altogether, you were saying.

Sixty living in, 10 day ones, yes.

Just how did the kids get on with each other?

Fine. Just like any other family.

And they were coming from, those that were boarding, from different parts of the country.

All over the country, yes. south, east, west, you name it, we'd got it.

And so was there a high ratio, then, of house mothers?

Yes, there was about five children to each house parent.

So, how did you get on with the other house parents?

Fine. No problem. Five teachers, I mean I was involved in every, every one. In fact, when the teachers had a meeting, I used to take over the class.

And were there other house mothers... people working there with apparent disabilities?

No. One. Pat. Pat Bilney [who had cerebral palsy]. I'll mention names...

And...

Because I want them to hear this.

And so, to be working, not only with children, which you'd wanted to work with, but with disabled children, with children with cerebral palsy, the very disability that you yourself had, how did that make you feel?

Grand, because I was doing something for somebody else. They helped me, anyway. I mean we helped each other. In fact, one day, a little girl came to me, she was about ... Alice. Alice Moira, one of the first children, first mums and dads were, who got

together and started us all off, in... whatever it was, in 1952. And Alice came to me and said, 'Miss Lead, we've been reading 'Daffodils' by William Wordsworth. What does 10,000 look like?'

And the...

And she said, 'I know it was 10,000, I saw it at a glance'. I said, 'Well, if you come down to the... ask your house mother to take you down to the lake. You'll see about a thousand', I said, 'And just imagine, ten times'. She said, 'My house mother won't take me!' I said, 'All right, I'll take you', so when I got off Tuesday, after tea, I said, 'Come on, Alice, we'll go down to the lake'. It was summer, spring, anyway... and she was so pleased that I had given her the opportunity to... sort something out that she wanted to sort out: and that's what I did. The other house parents wouldn't.

And this was a...

Well, I did, some of them. [Inaudible.]

This is Alice Moira, as you say, daughter of one of the founders of The,

That's right, yeah.

Of The Spastics Society, yeah, Alex Moira. And just to put in context then, The Wilfred Pickles School itself, it was in quite extensive grounds then?

Yes, it was.

And what was it previously, the building?

The big building was a home for delinquent children I believe, or maybe, I don't know.

And named after a popular entertainer.

[Laughs] He was. Named after Wilfred Pickles, who came to the school and we all met him, and he was lovely with the kids, he really was. Course he'd got his own son who unfortunately – David – who unfortunately died when he was five years old. He'd just got him into a school. Nobody'd take him on, the usual story, and nobody'd take him on to school, and Wilfred was getting a bit annoyed about this. In the end, he'd just died and the headmaster said, 'I've got a place for David', and of course it was too late. So he founded, he wanted to name this school in memory of David, I suppose.

Right and he lent his name and supported the work of The Spastics Society.

Yes, he came quite a few times to see us.

And did the...

He and Mabel.

Uhuh. And, for those that don't know, how would you describe the work of Wilfred Pickles?

[Laughs] 'Have A Go', of course, was his main thing. I personally liked him.

A quiz programme, this was.

The quiz programme, yes. I quite liked him and I liked him even better when I met him, but he was very ... he was quick on the uptake. In fact, I'd gone to the tent where he was signing autographs, with one of the little boys who wanted his autograph, and Wilfred was just coming out, and I said, 'All right George, we'll come back', and Wilfred said to him, 'It's all right George, I'll be back in a few minutes'. And George said to me, 'How did he know my name?', course I'd just said it.

And was the son of Wilfred Pickles – David - was his disability cerebral palsy, then?

Yes.

And was it widely known, do you think, that Wilfred Pickles had a son with a disability, at the time?

I don't think it was. I mean he died at, I don't know what year it was, this was, but I suppose it was ages before that The Spastics Society got started.

And did you find that the children, amongst themselves, and perhaps to you as well: did they ask questions about their own disability, disability generally? Did they ask you questions about your disability?

No. We just all played together, and supported each other, and you know...

They just took it as normal I guess, just everyday.

Well, we had, we did. We were in that environment, everybody else was the same. So I mean, nobody... Well, I don't know whether it's a good thing to be in a special school or not.

[Talking together] And...

I don't know. There were no special schools when I was little anyway, so...

And in terms of how your parents then felt, about you, securing the job of a house mother at Wilfred Pickles School. How did they feel about it?

I think they were pleased that I got the job I wanted in the end. It took me many years to get there but I kept pleading, I wanted to work with children.

And what was it in particular that drew you to wanting to work with children?

because I was very fond of them, and I always liked to be in their company. I meet a girl who used to visit us when we were in Derbyshire. She always turned up and had a cup of tea with us. She was only three.

And so did your parents, looking back then, feel... now that you were in this position, you were in your early twenties, you'd arrived at this circumstance, and then looking back at the early medical advice that you'd been given when you were just a few days old, how do you think they felt about...

I've no idea, they never talked about it, but I suppose they were pleased.

And, in terms of your own longer-term aims and ambitions then, what were they when you were working at Wilfred Pickles?

I don't want to say. I was hoping I'd continue there but of course Mum and Dad, Mum had her ideas, and signed me up for the college.

So, how long did you work at Wilfred Pickles?

Two-and-a-half years. I'd have been there until it closed in 1970, if they'd, if I'd had my way.

And so... in terms of going to the college, did you discuss with your mother then, attending the college, or was it...?

No, she just said, 'You're going'. Mr Pedder got a letter saying that she did know me and would I start next week?

Right, so, who was Mr Penney, sorry?

Mr Pedder, the headmaster [talking together] of Wilfred Pickles School [R.A. Pedder, Robert Pedder].

Right. Mr Pedder. Right, so...

And he just said, 'You're going to college', and I said, 'But I've been home for my holidays, she never said a dicky bird [cockney rhyming slang for 'word'] she never said a word to me.' Went back to school, which I enjoyed working at. A fortnight later I'd been enrolled at college.

Right, so, how did you feel about that then?

A bit annoyed [talking together] in some ways.

And so... Uhum.

A bit annoyed in some ways, but I'm very grateful now.

And so, how old were you then, just to pin it down, when you...

In my twenties again.

Again in your twenties but,

Well, nearer 30 by this stage.

Right. So, your mother hoped that, by going to college then, you'd have more options, as she might have described it? And you'd started, as you say, two weeks into a fresh year at the Wilfred Pickles School.

Two, a term.

Into a term. So, going back to college must have been quite a shock to the system then, in a way, was it?

Oh yes. It took me a term to catch up of what I'd already missed in the first two weeks.

Right, and was this then a year-long course?

Yes. Yes, I was there for a year, yes.

Right, OK, what we'll do, Sheila is, because we're coming near to the end of the tape.

[End of Track 2]

Tape 2 Side A [Track 3]

So then, as we know, you proceeded in that one-year course to get those 'O' levels and prior to that you'd worked at The Wilfred Pickles School for a time, for two-and-a-half years, [talking together] I think, wasn't it, altogether?

Yes.

Going back a few years as well, you'd had this assessment – Department of Employment assessment – in Surrey, so we'll take up the trail from there. What was the outcome of that assessment course?

Well, they knew I'd been working in the garden with my mum and dad, so they sent me to Kirkham, which is near Preston, to an experimental research station, working in gardening, of course. Needless to say, again, gathering vegetables and flowers, and tomatoes and all you can name, and I got into digs in Kirkham where a young man was also in digs. And Mrs Ball took me in because he was supposed to be leaving; this was in August.

What year would this be, Sheila, approximately?

Fifty-something. Can't remember. Fifty-five it was, or something. Yeah, '54 it would be. And I met David, who was in the same digs but he didn't leave until January. So I had a term from August to January and during this term, of course, we worked together every day in the gardening. We were doing different jobs but we, you know, saw each other quite a bit. And anyway, eventually he left – in January – to train as a teacher, and he'd borrowed a book from somebody and this somebody said, 'Do you want my address, then you can send it back to me?' 'No' he said, 'I don't want your address, so I'll send it back to her.' So this person said, 'Ha ha, yes, something's going on here.' It wasn't, of course, at the time – at least I didn't think it was – but

while he's still there, he sends me for cookery lessons. He actually applied for me to go to cookery lessons, and I wondered why at the time.

At the local college was this, or?

Nearby, at the local school. So I went for this course and he met me every time I'd been, he didn't let me walk home. Anyway, he left and we kept in contact with each other, he came over, he lived in Surrey. His dad used to be a reporter in Doncaster and he was born in Doncaster to start with, and I didn't know that at the time, of course, but we corresponded with each other, and he came up and saw me. We were in Nottingham at the time and he came up and visited me and I went down and saw him. So every holiday, you know, we saw each other. This went on for 10 years, then after that he asked me to marry him,

Oh, excellent so,

And I did.

So, oh good, we'll come back, to that if we may, so that, [talking together]. Sheila, yes just to establish the set-up with your new work then, what was the detail of the work that you were doing?

Well, I was gathering all the vegetables and, you know, sorting them out and doing the bunches of flowers for market – to bale up – and somebody collected them and took them off.

So, was

Every day.

So, was it a commercial market garden again, then, or...

Yes.

And so what

They'd sell them to the research station.

Right, so what was experimental about the work then? Or [talking together] the crops?

Well, all the crops... they were experimenting on tomatoes and how to make them different sizes, or different shapes, or... you know, whatever. They grew everything you could name.

So, who ran the organisation then?

It was... the government, I suppose.

Government, you think? Right.

I suppose it would be.

Yeah and so, there you were in digs, and you'd met this chap, who you then later on came to marry, which was excellent.

Ten years later.

Ten years later, excellent news really, and you were in digs. So, how did you view... there you were then working, perhaps doing similar work to the work you'd done with your parents. What did you think about things at this time though?

Well, it wasn't where I wanted to be, of course, because I still wanted to be with kids, even though I wasn't there for years later, but... Mrs Ball saw some little stamps, little... 'Please Help Spastics' at the shop, so she bought some.

This is the landlady, is it, or?

Landlady and she said, 'Do, do you know anything about this Spastics Society that's being announced?' I said, 'No.' It was all new, of course, in '52, and I said, 'No' so I told Mum about this – I phoned her I think – and she, unbeknown to be again, wrote to the local group, found one, I don't know how on earth she found it, but it was in Preston, which is four or five miles away from Kirkham And one day, Sue, a friend of mine and I were walking down out of the woods to catch the bus home, a car was stopped outside the gates and she said, – I've forgotten now what her name was... Martin – 'Mrs Martin, from Preston Spastics Society. I'm taking you home.' So, this young lady and I got in the car and she took us back to Mrs Ball's.

So, had she been looking for you, or had she just happened to come across you or whatever?

Well, she knew where I was in digs because Mum had told her and she'd come to Mrs Ball and, of course, I wasn't there I was at work, so she'd come up in the car to fetch me home.

So, she'd made contact with you with a view to asking you if you'd like to join, or?

Well, yes. Anyway, we went in and she'd got a little boy in the front. I've forgotten his name now, I wish I could remember, six-year-old, and he was sat in on the front seat and when we got in I said to Mrs Ball, 'Did you know she'd got somebody with her?' 'No.' She'd been talking to her for two hours in the house, and left the little boy in the car, which was very annoying as far as I was concerned. Anyway, she said, 'Bring him in.' 'Well', she says, 'I can't feed him here, because I haven't got his food, he likes special.' I... 'Well never mind, you're bringing that lad. He's not staying in

any car for anybody' so that made Mrs Ball very keen. After that, we had coffee mornings and we did all kinds of things, and whist drives, and I supplied the prizes.

So, this was, you know, the main, or some of the work of the Preston branch of the Spastics Society was then to raise funds, what, for the Preston branch in particular?

Yes.

And so you got involved in helping

Well, I didn't actually. I went to see the chairman invited me to his house one day and he'd got a little girl of eight or nine. Now in those days, there were no walkers or anything of that sort. So what he'd done, which was very ingenious of him was cut down a dining room chair, put four wheels on it and this little girl stood up with that walker and was able to go round the house, [talking together] with it.

No walking frames as you say.

No walking frames at all, nothing to help us, and he very cleverly... and I really take my hat off to him for thinking, you know, to make her mobile.

Because when you'd grown up then, you didn't have contact with physiotherapists at all, or?

No.

And so,

So, Mum taught me everything. I went down to Stockport – going back again years, of course, when I was a little girl – we went down once a week. And one lady came, there was a group of ladies, I don't know why I was put in with the ladies but I was, and she said, 'How far have come?' She went out to Mum one day. I kept telling her I

was doing nothing, just sitting there watching everybody else, because I couldn't do anything. Well, I could but I didn't, I wasn't allowed. And this lady came, I told Mum I wasn't doing anything, Mum didn't believe me, I was only six, and this lady came out to her, she said, 'I don't know how far you've come' but she said, 'your little girl's doing nothing.' So, after that, Mum took me home and did it herself.

So, you were waiting for some physiotherapy were you, or?

Yeah. I never got it.

And who were these other ladies then, they were?

They'd gone for treatment.

Oh, I see.

They'd gone for... well not physio, but games.

Yeah.

To use their hands and things, you know.

So, this was in the early stages of when you were,

Yeah. [Talking together.] I was about six or seven at that time.

Potentially going to have some physio. Right. And so, your mum did some physiotherapy herself then, did she?

Yes.

Yeah. Where did she pick those techniques up from?

I've no idea.

Mm. But that was the main way, was it?

But I mean, she did it and that was it.

Mm.

I'm alive and kicking and... able to do things. Well, to a certain extent.

And so, physiotherapy then, you know, conducted mainly by your mother then, that was the main way, was it, the main... intervention that you had as a child, as far as your cerebral palsy was concerned?

Yes.

And so, by the time that you were, you know, into your teens and beyond what was the circumstance, in terms of the ease with which you could use your right hand and so on?

Well, I can use it to a certain extent.

And so, did you have physiotherapy particularly on your hand movements?

Well, Mum taught me various things with it but I didn't do any physiotherapy as such, as you do nowadays I mean.

And what about walking? After, you were still having special shoes were you, or?

Up to about... 16 and then I, well, just went... We didn't bother about them.

And so by then, you know, perhaps earlier, your walking pattern had become fully established and so on.

Yes.

Right so, can you remember, perhaps, as you emerged, you know, into adolescence and young adulthood, how you felt about the fact that you had cerebral palsy?

Well, I never, ever... never even thought about it because I was just me. [Laughs.] I'd grown up, nobody'd talked about it, nobody... really said anything, so I mean, you just become a person and you do what you can, when you can, and think everybody else is the same as you, and they're not. This you discover later in life, but...

And at school, in particular, a relatively small school you were at, and you were the only child there, as you were saying, with an apparent, visible disability.

Yes.

But did the other children at all, were they curious?

Not at that age, no. Not the older ones. No, they didn't ask questions.

Did

No, they just accepted me, as a person. They helped when they could.

And

I didn't join in the games or things like that, of course.

Right... it could well be, do you think, that you may have been the first person they'd come across with a disability?

Could be. I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

Did you have, you know, from the school, particular friends that you were, drawn to?

One or two, yes. They lived miles away from me anyway, so I mean, they lived in Marple and I lived in Hayfield, as I say, seven miles away so,

And so, each day you got the bus to school and,

Yes, I met them at school and that was it.

So, how

I've not kept in touch with any of those.

So, looking back on your, you know, particularly your school time, how do you view that now; or then, indeed?

Well, looking back, I feel I was very lucky to have Mum – my mum in particular – and the first teacher, Miss Hadfield, who really encouraged me to do things.

And so, just looking at the time when you were taught, you'd been to the local village school for a time and then you were taught for three years, I think was it, at home?

Yes.

How was that organised then? How did you decide, what, how was the decision made to what you were going to study?

Well, Mum took advice from my two retired teachers, who were with the older groups as well, and they provided the lessons for me and, of course, we got books from

various places and jigsaws. And as regards geography and history and things like that, my aunty gave me a book of stamps: and of course from that – stamps – I learnt countries, capitals, populations, geography and the map of the world.

And the situation of having been at school and interacting with other children, then to go to a situation where you were taught, you know, at home, can you remember how you felt about that?

Well, I missed the kids. I missed them. So, when I was 12 I wanted to join forces with them again. But not at the village school, by this time I wanted to go... to a smaller... you know, where I got more... hopefully, more tuition, individual, if you know what I mean.

And so, what were the particular strengths, do you think, of your parents in particular... What was at the root of their determination?

To get me going as much as possible. But I mean, Mum had the, well she, I don't know where she was taught, but she got it from somewhere and she knew what, well, she definitely knew what she was doing. And I'm very grateful to my Mum, I can assure you.

And what was the nature of her work, you know, perhaps before she got married?

She was a secretary – shorthand typing – and a singer. She was in the Halle Choir, and the Liverpool Phil. [Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.]

Philharmonic, yeah. And in terms of, you know, having to, if you like, fight battles, if you will, or to try and get the right kinds of things for you, that must have taken a particular strength of character on their part, to,

Oh yes.

To undertake that.

Yes but they backed me up all the way, at least Mum did.

And with the arrival, then, of The Spastics Society as it became then, in 1952... were you aware of the fact of it forming on a wider level, the impact that it had?

Well, as far as I was concerned, it was just a local group and I'd already been in group with the Preston group, just for a little while – not that I met any of them except the ... secretary and the chairman, who came to buy some plants off me in the Centre.

And you know, particularly, I s'pose, when one is young, you have one particular attitude and perhaps other attitudes at other times. How did you feel about, you know, contact with other disabled people or disabled children, emergent organisations like The Spastics Society, in terms of your own sense of self-identity, if you like?

Well, I was very grateful that they could exist and I wished they could have existed for me; I might have got a bit further if I'd been born 20 years later [laughs].

What did you feel, you know, was absent from what you would have otherwise wanted then?

When I was at school, individual... My own pace... It was too hectic, it was too... you had to do 40 minutes at this and 40 minutes at that, well, I wasn't used to it. I mean, when I was at home for lessons we were told, the teacher said, 'Half-an-hour and then have a break and then do something else' and that suited me fine. But when you get to... bigger schools, it's 40 minutes and then no break, you go straight to another class, which is a bit confusing, daunting.

And when you came to leave the secondary school years – the school that you'd been to, the private school – can you remember how you felt towards the end of that time, leaving there?

Well, I didn't want to leave, of course, but you had to at 15, 16 and I wanted dearly to work with children again. I was still after that game but there was a little nursery school near my bus stop and I used to jump up and watch [laughs] over the wall. Every time I saw children or heard children I had to be there, if I could.

And you know, how would you describe your childhood really?

Looking back on it, OK, but at the time I was lonely, frustrated, thinking about it nowadays. I wasn't in those days because I didn't know any different. I'd always something to do, Mum always gave me something to do and I was always learning. Even during the holidays you were still learning, well, you never stop learning.

And would you have otherwise wanted to have taken exams, before you did?

Before I did. Ooh. Well, if I'd have been able to, yes. I'd have liked to have taken the exams when I was younger.

And so, jumping forward, as I say, after being a housemother at The Wilfred Pickles School you found yourself enrolled to take these 'O' levels in a year's course. So you were with different teachers with different subjects, I would imagine.

Yes.

So, how did the learning experience compare, from your earlier experience? [Sound of bird cooing in background.]

More difficult because I'd been a few years without learning. I mean, I was learning all the time with the children. I mean that was different but learning to live, kind of thing. But going back to college or school you had to learn all over again and it was hard going, particularly as I'd had three or four weeks when I should have been there

and wasn't. So, I really I got here with three or four weeks' work to do before I even started.

And you know, you'd been away from home working as a housemother at Wilfred Pickles School and here you were back at home as it were, attending a college, local to where you lived with your parents. The attendance at the college itself was, perhaps, as you were describing, a surprise to you. How did you feel about the change in your circumstances?

Well, I had to cope and that was it. I was put in at the deep end, kind of thing, and well, I coped. You either sank or swam and, luckily with me, I swam.

And, there you were then, you know, joining in with other students, who were perhaps a good few years, well a few years younger than yourself. Meantime, you'd met David and were still in contact with him. What had you hoped the circumstances would be then, after you'd completed your 'O' levels?

Well, needless to say, I hoped I'd get a job because nothing materialised at all, so when, and David, of course, kept coming back. I went swimming, Mum sent me for swimming lessons. I'd been swimming at Hayfield because on the estate we had an open-air pool, so Mum did teach me to swim quite a bit there, but I went swimming with a group of children. I was, as I say, in my twenties by this time. David came up every holiday – he was by this time a schoolteacher. [Bird cooing in background.] He'd taken his college work and he became a schoolteacher, and I went down to meet him once or twice: stayed with his parents. And eventually, as I say, we got married, 1963, and then of course we... Mum had already been to the doctors around to see if I was allowed to have kids. [Laughing.] She didn't tell me all this. She never let on what she was up to. Anyway, we decided we were going to have children, whatever anybody said it didn't matter.

So, your mother had, knowing that you were 'courting' as it would be described, had

Yes.

What, visited her own GP [clears throat] to 'gather information' as she might have described it, right. So, how did you feel about that then, when you discovered that?

Oh well, I didn't discover it for a long time. Dad let the cat out of the bag years later, luckily for me. I was a bit annoyed about that but I never told her and she never knew I knew.

And so, you know, you'd been courting, you'd known each other for 10 years.

Mm.

How old were you then, when you did in fact get married, I wonder?

Well, it was 1963, so I was 32.

And your wedding day and the time leading up to that and so on...

Well, the New Year before that year, Dave proposed to me and Mum wasn't at all happy about this, getting married and so on. She didn't think I should but she never let on, she kept quiet over this – said he was no good for me and all kinds of things but never mind – I took no notice of her and... can you put it off?

[End of Track 3]

Tape 2 Side B [Track 4]

We're going to the part I got engaged in the January?

Right. Yes and then you got married in

August.

August.

August 17.

And there you were,

1963.

1963 and so, there you were with David then, setting up

A new home

Home together. Where had you planned to live, I wonder?

He got a job in Tadley near Basingstoke, so consequently he got a house there. I was still living with my mum and dad in Nottingham and he said, 'I got the house.' He said 'in June' and we'd already arranged the wedding in August. So, we went down for a weekend no cups, no saucers, he'd brought nothing. So he bought two double beds, yes, two double beds, he had the camp bed that he was sleeping on from his dad's. We took our knives and forks, he bought a table, two chairs and two deckchairs – so we were all right for something to sit on – and some food, but we took our own knives and forks because he'd only got one knife and one fork and one spoon there. So, we more or less camped out for a couple of nights at the weekend, and then we went home and started getting ready for the wedding.

And so David's job was again in teaching was it?

David's job, he'd got a full-time teaching course by this time. He'd been on supply for quite a while – well, during the time I, you know, knew him and yet I wasn't with him – and so he got this full-time job, as I say, we got married and then, of course, we started preparing to have family.

And so he was working for Hampshire County Council?

Hampshire County Council, the Hurst School near Basingstoke, Tadley near Basingstoke. And we worked there; he worked there for a year. We got the babe, so we, when we were just met and then when she was born they had three 'awkward customers', as they called us, and they couldn't well they didn't know what to make of me at all. They'd never had a disabled person in their midst beforehand,

This

Yes?

This was in the maternity

Unit, yes. Sylvia duly arrived and she was taken away from me as soon as she was born, and I didn't like that little bit and I didn't see her for... 48 hours. She was born on the Monday afternoon, David came to see me on Monday evening, and he assured me she was OK. I didn't believe him; I didn't believe the nurses either. I thought there was something wrong, must be because they wouldn't have taken her away otherwise, but they did this in those days. They took you away for at least 24 hours; 'to give you a rest' so they said. Anyway, I didn't see her for, as I say, 24 hours but when I did, of course, she was lovely and I was very pleased.

And so what year was this, Sheila?

1964.

So, in planning to have a family then, your daughter arrived quite quickly really.

Well, I went into, I was... pains, I had my father-in-law for a bank holiday, it was Bank Holiday Sunday, so they came for the day – up from Redhill, Surrey – and they'd gone back about half past ten to eleven, and I was talking to a neighbour. It was a lovely evening, a lovely bank holiday evening, so, and then I started getting pains and things, so Dave took me to a hospital. I arrived at 3.30am. No bed to go to, so I had to go into some doctor's day place, you know, a sleeping place. And then in the morning I went into the hospital itself, the main rooms, because as I say, there were three of us, all difficult. They were going to have problems with all three of us they thought. One was a caesarean, I forgot what the other was and anyway, Sylvia came along and the next day they said, 'Well I'm taking you to see the babe.' Anyway, I was in for 10 days, took her home, they didn't even teach me how to bath her. They didn't even let me do anything with her, except feed her.

And in the run-up to Sylvia's birth, what kind of reaction did you get from doctors and from others, you know, when you were expecting Sylvia?

Well, they just didn't know whether I was going to do it or not. They were a bit... I had to go every month, of course, but I had to go to Battle, which was at Reading. They couldn't put up with me in Basingstoke because there were no facilities, special, but they had in Battle, so I went there for my post, pre-natal treatments and so on. And eventually, of course, she arrived. Took her home after a week and then the fun began. In those days there were bottles with teats at each end and a bung at one end. So David had to fill up the bottles each morning, two or three of them, so I could just warm them up and pop the teat on and the bung at the end and do that, because every time I tried, of course, it just shot to the other end of the room... and as for nappy pins, well! They were the good old-fashioned pins with their points. I did cope eventually; it took me a month of Sundays. And as for bathings, well I had to wait

until David came home at night and she had a bath with both of us, on the table in the kitchen.

And when you'd got married, and here you were, with a newly arrived daughter. What difference did that make to the way you felt about... well, yourself and the world, if you like?

Well, I had a lot more to do, of course. There were no washing machines, of course. I had, well, just a sink and a bucket and that was my... washing every day, and I didn't carry the babe, of course, I had to put her in the pram. So, everywhere I went the pram had to go as well. I never lifted her. Well, I did lift her once; I fell with her, which upset me no end, so I didn't try that game again.

And there you were, living in Hampshire. Dave was in a newly, permanent post, you were living in a different part of the country from where you'd lived before. How would you describe your outlook then?

Well, I was very pleased, needless to say, to have the little one but, of course, I had to cope on my own. Of course, she was in the pram most of the day. I did talk to her of course; she was always with me. Whenever I did the work upstairs or... Well, when I went upstairs, she was nearly always asleep. I made sure she was asleep before I disappeared upstairs, which is a bit hard going but never mind, and she never went. She slept in the pram at night until we went to bed and then it was the one move upstairs, David carried her, to bed and carried her down in the morning, and that was it. So, really, we coped, and I went out every day with her. I went a walk with her, went up to the clinic once a week to, you know...

And in your dealings with doctors, nurses, others, do you get the impression that they'd come across anybody with a disability with a baby before, at all?

[Laughing.] I don't think they had, but they were very good and they came whenever I... needed them. [Voices in background.] I could just ring up the health visitor, and

she was on the doorstep to help, when she could but we did try to cope without anybody, and luckily for us they left us in peace.

And when you got married, just a year earlier, was it, I think, was it?

More or less.

The beginning of a new dawn in your life, being totally independent, with David as it were. How did you feel about that?

It was wonderful. At last I was able, I had to do, well Dave did most of the cooking, because although I'd learnt to cook quite a few times, he wouldn't let me handle this and that, the pans. They were either too heavy or too big, or too, you know, so I coped anyway. I had to make the meals but I found various ways of, you know, manoeuvring things around,

And of course,

Work surfaces the same size... same height as the cooker, a drop-door oven, so that I could slide things out onto the [oven] door [child's voice in background] and then pick them up.

So.

We've got Sylvia born now.

Yes and the town that you were living in, Tadley

Tadley, village.

So,

Near Basingstoke.

What was the name of the village again, sorry?

Tadley. T-A-D-L-E-Y

Tadley, yeah. That was then, what kind of size of village was Tadley?

Quite a small one. It was the outskirts of Basingstoke itself, about a mile away, so I joined the Basingstoke Spastics Society then and when my daughter grew a bit bigger... actually, I joined before she was born. I used to go and help. Now this little club that we started for mums and children, and the children could be left, while mums went and did their shopping but we got nobody. We got... well, we had two children coming in, they had lunch there and their parents could go off shopping but nine times out of ten, they just came and talked, didn't bother about going shopping, so we never had the kids to look after.

And was this before the real development of Basingstoke as a new town?

Oh yes, long before and then when Sylvia was born I used to take her down, it was a day out. Dave used to take me before he went to school and he used to pick me up, when he finished school at half past three. So, I stayed all day once a week, which was lovely, meeting other people and Sylvia had somebody to play around with. And then... we had outings and things, you know, with the kids and so on and it was nice, so we were there for two years, until we left there.

And so you used to go there,

At Basingstoke.

What, most

Once a week.

Once a week.

I helped with that.

And you know, Hampshire itself, a, green and pleasant county.

Well, yes.

And so your husband, David, his teaching career was continuing:

Oh yes.

And so, how long did you stay living in Tadley?

We were living there two years; one year before Sylvia was born and the other year, when she was born, we moved to Boston because he got a job at the college. He was fed up with teenagers, young teenagers and he got the older teenagers which was even worse it turned out, but never mind. So, he got a job in Boston and we moved up there when she was born.

So, this is in Boston, Lincolnshire,

Boston, Lincolnshire.

And again, a different landscape, [talking together] of course, a different situation there.

Absolutely. Yes.

So, he was teaching, what, 16-plus?

He was teaching, yes, he was teaching people who were going into... Well, it was a college and he was teaching farming, farmers and their... helpers. Now, what do you call them? 'Helpers' I suppose.

In what sort of areas of farming techniques and?

Farming techniques and things like that: yes.

[Talking together.] And

But they, well, they didn't want to learn. What 16-, 17-, 18-year-old does?

And so, you were, [Sheila laughs] moved then to Boston, with a young daughter and, set about making connections, did you to the local community?

We joined the, Scope again – Spastics Society – and another mum and I together, we set up a welfare department, because there wasn't enough physiotherapists for young children and older ones. So, she and I went down and saw the... medical officer of health in Boston and she and I traipsed round Boston, all over the place, included mums with the little ones who wanted all the extra physiotherapy for them and that worked. Dave had the car. Dave and Sylvie were looking after the children who weren't disabled in a field nearby, while the mum and the child had their physiotherapy. And that kept on until we left and then that fizzled out. And we had outings and all kinds of things, for them and that was like the Saturday morning club at Nottingham. So really, I transferred my affections to younger ones again.

So, in Boston then, it was a sort of weekly meeting, was it that you had?

Yes. The physiotherapy was, well, twice a week in the evenings and then we had the Saturday morning club, where all the mums and children could meet together and have coffee. And then we arranged parties and outings and Sheila and I – another

Sheila – did that until we left. And Sylvie started school there, just about, she was there for two years and then we left and came to Doncaster.

Right so, from Boston then, you moved to Doncaster. Was that again in connection with your husband's work, or?

Yes. he was fed up with the teenagers, well, older ones. There weren't enough of them to really warrant being a teacher there, so he went. Now when he was a teenager himself he lived in Doncaster, he was born in Doncaster and he went to Mexborough Grammar School. They paid for him to go but this school it doesn't exist now but it did in those days, was changed to a secondary modern school. Now he'd been applying all over the country for jobs because he was getting fed up with Boston and he said, 'I'll apply for this job in Mexborough, just to see the old school.' Anyway, he rang me up that night, he said, 'I got a job.' He walked into the interview room and there in front of him was a teacher – his teacher from schooldays – who recognised him and gave him a job straight away. So, then meant another move, so he said, 'Right, I'll get digs in Mexborough', and then he started this job in September I think it was, or before that. So, Mum again came to my rescue and she stayed with me, and I stayed up with her and Sylvia was at nursery school. And anyway, we moved here, she was at school anyway, and we moved here in 1971. So, once again, we joined the local group and I've been a member ever since. Then I decided that we'd become members of the big, Scope, big organisation, to join in my own right and of course, I have done and I've been a member ever since.

And this is when The Spastics Society – Scope as it became – enabled individual membership then?

That's right, yes. So I was one of the first again for them and then when Dave died, I still helped with Brownies. We'd started horse riding for the disabled in Doncaster; there was a group formed in 1978. 1979 Dave died and Sylvia continued helping with the RDA, but while David was still alive we did talk about the older ones joining. They wanted to join and there wasn't a group for the over-16s, so he suggested I

formed a group. David Branch heard about this and he said, 'Well, whatever you do, stick to 62 Club Riders' Group.'

So just to,

62 Club, I mean.

Just to reverse, RDA of course: Riding for the Disabled Association.

Yes.

And the 62 Club was a series of clubs organised for disabled, or people with cerebral palsy. So, what was the idea then, in forming a new group?

Well, we had the old one before... But going back to 1962, which I'd forgotten when we were there, that was in Nottingham. We always went to the meetings of The Spastics Society, it was held every month and one September – yes September it would be – October time, Mrs Wolff, the Secretary, as I said before, rang me up and said, 'You're coming to the meeting, aren't you?' Now, she'd never done this before because she knew Mum and I always went, so I thought there was something fishy going on. I walked into the room and Bill Hargreaves and David Branch both, one shoved a pencil in my hand and the other shoved a piece of paper in my hand, 'You are going to be the secretary of the 62 Club.'

Bill Hargreaves and David Branch, of course,

Yes.

Both well known within The Spastics Society, and Scope as it became. 62 Clubs formed as social clubs, then, for people with cerebral palsy. So, that started did it, your involvement in the Nottingham 62 Club?

Yes. The way they walked in though that day, I knew they were up to something, the pair of them. I'd known them for years and they'd obviously sussed me out as well. I didn't know what I was doing, I'd not the faintest idea and I became secretary of the wretched thing, you know, I shouldn't call it that should I?

So, what

It's a marvellous organisation.

So, what sort of activities did you do then, in the Nottingham 62 Club?

Well, the first one, I didn't know what on earth to do and I'd only got four weeks to plan it, so I said 'Right everybody.' We had a group by this time, of the younger people and we said, 'Right: what shall we do?' So I said, 'Right, the first month I won't do anything, we'll play records of things we all like and who's got a record player?' So somebody said, David. David and Bill said, 'Well, we'll be here to back you up.' Anyway, we arrived on the day with the records. We never heard records. They were so busy chatting to each other and introducing themselves and telling them how they'd got on beforehand...

And so, the membership then, of the newly formed Nottingham 62 Club, you know, what kind of age range was represented?

Sixteen upwards.

And for people of that age group then, I don't suppose, was there much other alternatives then, socially.

We did have a dance, Mrs Wolff organised dances every year and, of course, they all went to every meeting once a month and talks on various things but this was a club for ourselves, and we jolly well had to organise it, and Bill made sure we did. And he didn't do, he threw us in at the deep end, me particularly. I bless him for it, [sounds

emotional] I really do, it really made us all grow up and think, you know, on our own two feet.

But,

In those days, everybody was... taken. Mums took you, Dads took you, brothers and sisters took you, you could not think for yourself but he made us think for ourselves.

And yes, I mean, in that way there was, you're saying, limited leisure choice for people with cerebral palsy, people with disabilities. How do you think attitudes, well how would you describe attitudes then, towards cerebral palsy, towards disability?

Well, people didn't think we could do anything for ourselves, [laughs] so this was a good opportunity to show them, and Bill knew jolly well that we could do things for ourselves. I mean, he was only a young man himself. I mean, I know he was years older than we were but at least he had the foresight to think that it could be done. Why should the older generation take it all? he had to cope for himself. He was away from home. He came to England, didn't he? He was born in Australia, wasn't he? So, how he coped in the beginning, Heaven alone knows, but he did thank goodness and so did Shirley Keene, she's another one I'd have loved to have met again.

And what was her involvement? Shirley

Shirley Keene. Nothing with the 62 Club but she used to go round talking and I've heard her once or twice. I don't know where she is now.

Right and so she had cerebral palsy did she?

Yes. And she came from Australia; I know.

And gave talks?

Oh yes.

To whoever?

Yes and wrote articles in the Spastics News, as it was in those days, like I did.

And David Branch, of course, had or has cerebral palsy

Yes.

Himself as well.

Yes.

And in your

David's been down once or twice to talk to us about various things.

And in your, you know, young adult life and through to the time when you got married and beyond, being generally around and about, as it were, what kind of reaction particularly when, let's say you're a young mother, what kind of reaction did you get from people?

Well, I think they accepted me as I was but nobody came forward to help or, you know, well, they never came forward to hinder either, so I suppose I should be thankful for that.

And if you'd be, you know, walking down the street with Sylvia... did you get a reaction from people?

No. Not really. I was accepted. I suppose they did but they never said anything. If they did, they were very polite. [Laughs.]

And so, you'd moved, you know, from Boston then, on to Doncaster.

Here, yes.

And again, Doncaster, another community. What struck you particularly about Doncaster, you know, when you first moved here?

Well, I thought they were very friendly. I mean, they had a 62 Club, which was new again; it had only just started, so I joined them. I joined Scope, as The Spastics Society, straight away because we found there was [an] autumn fair that was going to be taking place. We didn't go to it because we were doing something else that particular weekend, but we did take some marmalade that we'd made – tinned marmalade – and David and I made tinned marmalade and dumped it on the secretary's doorstep. She wasn't even in. She'd seen us because she'd gone past in a car, which didn't stop, and she should have done I thought but... So, then we joined Scope here and went to all the meetings.

This was a fundraising autumn fair as you say,

Yes.

And they met then, did they, periodically The Spastics Society in Doncaster?

I joined the group and I went every month. David took me and Sylvia did her homework, and David did his homework while we were having meetings.

[End of Track 4]

Tape 3 Side A [Track 5]

Yeah, OK.

Well, today Sheila, is 13 July and we're going to start by recalling a time the in 1987, which was just after, I think, you received the

That's right.

Stars Organisation for Spastics Award. When came the news then that you were asked to go to an event in London.

Yes. A few days later after I received the Award, Monica Hart from SOS [Stars Organisation for Spastics] phoned me and asked me to go down to the Hilton Hotel, to present a bouquet to the Duchess of Kent, but it turned out to be a basket of chrysanthus [chrysanthemums]. For the next year I was asked, said I could bring somebody with me, so I invited Sue Endicott who'd nominated me from the Scope, for the long service award and we went down. We arrived and we stayed at the Bollington Hotel, which had a lovely view over the city of London. Anyway, we had a walk and got ready and then the taxi arrived for us – a personal chauffeur from the Hilton Hotel – and took us to the Hilton where we went into a small room and met the ones who were receiving their awards for making computers suitable for disabled people to use. And the Duchess of Kent was presenting them with their awards but later on I was to present the bouquet of flowers to the Duchess of Kent.

So this was an awards dinner,

That's it

Where the Duchess of Kent was presenting awards then to these computer people and you went down then with a colleague from

Stepping...

Stepping Stones, the organisation that you were working for in Doncaster. There you were then in the company of the Duchess of Kent and to present her with a bouquet. Take me back to that evening then, how did it feel in the run-up to the presentation, that here you were, being asked to present the bouquet?

Well, I was very nervous because of course, I'd never met the Duchess of Kent. What would she be wearing, what would I wear, would I stumble? Would I curtsy all right or not? Well, I did all right but we met all kinds of people and then when we went into the room, famous people were all around us. Everywhere we looked we could see somebody we knew, well not knew directly, but knew of and knew the name of.

This was a consequence was it, of the fact that it was a Stars Organisation for Spastics awards dinner and, you know, consequently famous celebrities and things were there were they, lending their support?

Well, yes. It was computer manufacturers who were doing the award, I mean, doing the thing. [Clears throat.]

And when you met the Duchess of Kent, going forward to, you know, present her with her bouquet, what was that moment like?

Oh wonderful. I went forward, bob-curtisied, I don't know how but I managed it. The Duchess then thanked me for the basket and said how nice the flowers were. I then returned to my table and my friend. On the way there, David Jacobs said he would speak to me later. Now, I'd known David Jacobs years and years and years before and I wondered how he remembered. He'd obviously looked me up.

This is...

Anyway, after the Duchess had left, David Jacobs reminded me that we had met 20 years previously in Surrey. He knew the date, he knew the occasion; it was the

opening of the work centre in Redhill, where my father-in-law lived and where David came from, Redhill, Surrey.

Right, so this was the broadcast

And he remembered all those years back.

This is 20 years previously, [talking together] the broadcaster,

Yeah.

David Jacobs, and he'd remembered, that detail.

He remembered the very date and the time and everything, which amazed me, absolutely. Speaking to the Duchess, when she went she left her bouquet of flowers, the basket of flowers on the table. And I asked her where she was off to and she said, 'I'm going down to Sheringham in a helicopter' and she said, 'I do not like flying', [laughing] which I thought was very nice of her to... but she knew everything about Stepping Stones and she asked me all kinds of questions on Stepping Stones, and the Brownies.

[Talking together.] So, this was

And everything I'd done.

This was later in the evening, when you had a chance to talk?

Yes. She called me across when we'd had dinner. She'd done her duty and she wanted to talk and she did and she was lovely. She said, 'Don't you dare call me "Duchess", I'm a friend' and she's like that, she is like that.

And so came the end of the awards dinner and you then returned to your hotel did you?

No, before that Sir John Cox the Director asked me to dance with him.

This is the director of

Oh yes, Scope.

The Spastics Society.

Yes, and I said, 'Well, I can't dance' and he said, 'Neither can I.' Well, he said, 'Come on' so he got me up and we went round the... he was lovely, it was 2 am by the time we finally got to bed that night.

So, oh gosh!

It was a grand evening though.

And in that kind of company, with royalty and celebrities and people from The Spastics Society, you know, how did you feel about the whole thing?

Well, I didn't know any of them, of course, but it was a grand... you got to know everybody. You talked among yourselves and the computers were very good, very fascinating. I'd never seen a computer in my life and I didn't know what we were talking about. [Laughs.]

This was 1987 of course [talking together].

Yeah, quite.

When computers were just coming in and so you hadn't at that stage got a computer yourself then?

No, never even seen them. Never even knew what they did at all.

And later, just to move on to computers then briefly, you became familiar with them, did you, and

No. I got a word processor when I took an exam in, several exams, and did the NVQ course of, in looking after children. And my dad gave me a computer which he had, a word processor, which we thought it would be easier than having to write everything: and it was a Godsend.

[Talking together] So

I did all my work on that.

So, you were able to write, you know, things on the screen, correct things.

Yes.

And

Wonderful.

And it was the computer you used to jot down some beginnings of your autobiography?

Yeah. It got to 80 pages eventually.

And in, you know, recalling various incidents in your life, do particular events, you know, seem the time ago they were or do memories remain fresh for you?

Oh, the memories remain fresh. The next thing a year later I was invited by the RDA to go, of all places, to Buckingham Palace to the Royal Garden Party, which was also lovely. It was just after the, four or five years after the wedding of Charles and Di. So, we walked across a courtyard up the steps where the wedding party had been, across a big hall with all the pictures of the kings and queens and everybody down a big flight of steps into the beautiful garden. And there we were escorted into three rows: one of which came the Queen and Duke; the second one Diana and Charles; and the third one Anne, but we didn't spot Anne. She'd escaped us and she was the one we'd come to see because she was the President of the RDA.

The Riding for the Disabled Association,

Yes.

Yes and this followed on from your involvement, did it, in the Riding for the Disabled Association?

Well, that followed on from getting the SOS Award. Everybody jumped on the bandwagon and started inviting me to different things, the Hilton and the [talking together] Buckingham Palace.

And you mentioned earlier on as well, Sheila, getting a long service award from the Spastics Society. What's the story there?

That came a bit later.

Right.

When Scope was 45 years old we went to the AGM in Blackpool, a friend and I, and quite a number of us were presented with long service awards, including Bill Hargreaves. And we arrived in Blackpool, had our dinner and afterwards came the

long service awards. When we were escorted to our tables, which had all got our names on, I heard someone talking to my friend Sheila and he said he went to The Wilfred Pickles School and I pricked up my ears. I said, 'I know that voice, it's Tony' so Tony and I we never stopped talking from that day to when we got our awards.

So, this was a

A little boy, [talking together] well, a

A, schoolboy, yeah

Fifteen-year-old.

Yeah, right. So, this was Tony who you'd last seen, I suppose, at school, probably what as a sort of,

When he was 15.

Fifteen.

Fifteen-year-old.

And so you had lots of memories really to exchange I should think.

Oh yes, it took us: well, we never stopped talking, and the man from the Newton Chairs where he worked was absolutely fascinated.

So, this was

I've forgotten his name now.

This was another guest.

Another, who brought him with him.

Oh, I see.

Who brought him up.

And so, here you were then, at the AGM of Scope in Blackpool when Scope was 45 – marking its 45th year – The Spastics Society,

Yes.

And what was the story of being presented with the long service award then, how did that come about?

Well, I'd written an article about myself – I don't know how the others came out – but it was service to the community in Scope, and I wrote an article about that, 50 Years of Scope, I've written.

OK so, you'd

[Sound of rustling papers.] This is put...

You'd written about your involvement in Scope and this led directly did it, to the recognition that you should receive a long service award?

Well yes, but it said 25 years on it actually but I joined at Preston and then we moved to Nottingham and then we moved to Basingstoke, and then we moved to Boston, and then we moved here, and I've been members of all of them.

So, all in all, Sheila, here we are in 2005, how long have you been a member of The Spastics Society?

Fifty-two years now. Since it was formed.

And so, you've seen the Society, as it then was, 'Scope' as it now is, you know, grow through all those years. What were some of the things that you highlighted when you wrote about your involvement in Scope?

Well, I just said how I started and as I say, I think in the previous conversation I was in digs, Mrs Ball found a stamp, a Christmas seal, and it all started from there.

This is when they used

In Preston.

In Preston, when they had

It's the first Christmas stamp, 1952?

And so, that was at the very beginnings of the Spastics Society, when they were fundraising through these means of these Christmas stamps. And when did you first hear that you were due to get this long service award then?

Well, again, they phoned me and asked me would I go down. I phoned them actually and said I wanted to go down because it was in Blackpool, and I could get to it. And then they said, 'Well, you've got a long service award, so don't come down on a Friday for the, you know, exhibition and things, come down on Thursday night, we're going to present you with the long service awards' so...

So, just to sort of paint the scene for us,

But we didn't know who was going to get it and who'd be there and who wasn't.

*Right, so you individually knew but you didn't know who else was going to be there.
So, it was an evening do, a*

Dinner.

A dinner. So, just paint the scene for us then. What sort of numbers of people were there at the dinner?

With their families, about 50, I should think.

And as the evening gathered pace at the dinner, what were your feelings when thinking back and in recognition of this

Well, people kept coming up from different places I'd already been to, so I knew them, pretty well, I knew of them anyway, but I was pleased and well it was wonderful to know that they recognised people – workers and non-workers.

And the mechanics of the presentation then, how did that take place?

Well, we went up in front of people and had our photograph taken. I've forgotten who presented me now. [Inaudible.]

So. You were presented with the long service award and in that moment what were your emotions?

Oh wonderful, elated. I know when I went back to Tony's table Tony asked if he, whether, if I'd mind having my photograph taken with him, the two of us together.

And in that time, meeting again with Tony, who you'd last seen as a 15-year-old, how did it strike you, in terms of the, you know, the passage of time if you like?

Well, it was wonderful and it was nice to know that he'd got married, 25 years earlier. I could not believe that one but there we are, time marches on. You don't realise, you think we're back in the days of The Wilfred Pickles School, and all my little ones are still little ones, and they're not; they've grown up, got married, had families, and gone their own way.

And have you come across, you know in other times or heard of other pupils who you knew from The Wilfred Pickles School?

One or two. Pat Bilney, who used to be a co-worker with me, she's also a disabled... wrote to me after I got the SOS award because she'd seen me on television and she wrote to BBC because she didn't know where I lived, so we've been corresponding every Christmas, ever since. She wrote me a lovely letter saying how she remembered the good old days at school. [Traffic noise in background.] We did enjoy it, the two-and-a-half years we worked there, and I was sorry to leave really but there we are.

Yeah. When you were growing up, Sheila, you were growing up in a small village and I think you had a particular friend nearby did you?

Yes, Edie and she used to take me out for walks. I couldn't walk very far but she used to play with me and everything else and then when she became, was asked to be May Queen she invited me to go and be an attendant. Mum was a bit dubious about this because I couldn't walk very far but she assured us that we wouldn't be walking, we would be in a car going round all the little villages, which was lovely. So the car duly came for me, at least a taxi came for me, and then we joined the car down the road. We had the beefeaters and everything, a real... they do it every year in Hayfield and they still do it. The first Saturday in May. We went round all the villages and then we went back to the village school, our village school. I had to walk a few yards up onto the stage. Edie went up on the top and the little girls and boys stayed at the bottom, and the beefeaters stayed there, then we had the ceremony and the following year I went as a fairy and won first prize.

And so you'd be, what sort of age?

Six.

And being a bridesmaid then, in the company of Edie the May Queen,

No, bridesmaid came later, a bit later.

Oh yeah, sorry, being

Yes.

Yes, you were the attendant, sorry, for the,

That's right, the attendant

For the May Queen. How easily could you walk at this time then, or

Very badly but at least I didn't have much way to go, and as I had a long dress, nobody knew I had callipers on or boots. [Laughs.] Thank goodness I had long dresses in those [talking together] days.

And thinking back, you know, now, as we sit here can you in your mind's eye recall that, visualise that?

Oh, very much so. It seems like yesterday and then, although it's 60-odd years ago.

And Edie herself, your friend, do you know what became of Edie at all?

She went to work in a shop and unfortunately was killed in a road accident, many years ago now.

Oh dear.

I'm sorry about that, I did keep in touch with her for quite a while but I lost contact with her.

And

She was still in the village.

And generally, you know, other children round and about in the village and nearby, what other friends do you remember from that time?

Not many from that early stage because of course I did most of my homework, at home.

And did you

And when I went to school again it was six, seven mile away, so they were all my friends were seven, eight miles away.

Scattered around and about.

Yes.

And at home, around the home and so on did you have a trike or anything like that at all?

No, I walked, but Mum brought me a doll's pram, Mum and Dad bought me a doll's pram when I was three years old, and I just got up and walked,

So

And I walked everywhere with that pram.

So, you know, up to that point then you hadn't really been walking as such but come the arrival of the doll's pram then,

Oh, it was a great toy to me, it really was.

And later on you were involved in a local wedding.

Well, it wasn't local, it was my cousin who got married in Liverpool, and we did a lot of phoning in those days because we were miles away from anywhere. So the dresses were made in Liverpool, I was in Hayfield and Mum and were on the phone quite a bit but we were asked if we would like to be bridesmaids, and I was seven at the time. I said, 'Yes' and when the day came, well we got our dresses eventually, we got our shoes nearer the time because feet would keep growing, so we didn't bother about shoes for a long time. But on the day I said, 'What do I have to do?' And it came the reply, 'Just walk, look nice, and behave yourself.' 'I think I can do that' and then her Mum added, 'And look after the little one.' Well, the little one was my two-year-old second cousin and when the day came, everybody was allowed to get dressed except the bridesmaids the little bridesmaids. So the bride got dressed, the big bridesmaids got dressed but we weren't allowed until the very last second, and then the car arrived and we were bundled into the car without our mums, which didn't please either of us. Now, I'd been told to look after the little one. Anyway, when we got to church we went up the aisle and the two little bridesmaids, for some unknown reason, were left at the back. They're usually put to the front I always thought, I thought in latter years anyway. But all of a sudden the two-and-a-half-year-old, Muriel, saw her grandma in the distance and said, 'I go and see Nana' and she was off like a shot. And I was told to keep hold of her, so of course, I was trying to pull her back and Mum put up her finger, she said, 'Just leave her, just leave her' and she said, as she went she fell, 'Oh dear' she said, 'I've dropped my woses.' Now, we had baskets of sweet peas not roses at all. Everyone burst out laughing, of course, which was lovely. We always tell each other this joke now.

And so, there you were, you know, aged

Seven.

And

Trying to look after a busy two-year-old.

And again walking, what, with the aid of callipers?

With callipers. Luckily for me a long dress, so nobody knew.

And walking itself was still a relatively new thing for you, again I suppose. Does that moment in time, if you like, does that sharply in focus in your mind?

Oh always, I'll never forget that day. It was a joy; it was a wonderful, so I've had one or two wonderful experiences. I may be disabled and unable to do things but memories all over the place. You never... what's going to turn up next. [Laughs.]

And in doing things you've done and undertaking the different activities you've done, what has been your over-riding aim as it were?

Helping other people. And last year I got yet another award from the RDA. A long service award, 25 years again. [Rustling noise.] I now work at, well I'm chairman, I've been secretary and chairman of Brockholes Riding for the Disabled [Brockholes Farm, Branton, Doncaster] and they presented me with a special award for long service again, 25 years, RDA.

And so this is 25 years since you began your involvement in

With the RDA.

And establishing in particular, a group for older

Well, yes.

And again, getting that award, how did you feel about that?

[Laughing.] That was just shot out of the dark as well. You never know what's going to... when that phone rings you just don't know what's going to turn up at all. There can't be any more now, surely to goodness. [Laughs.]

And so what was the circumstances of the award presentation?

Well, I'd been saying how long I'd been in the group, not in this particular group, but two or three groups and they, somebody must have, noted it,

And

And well, thought about it and wrote to headquarters and I got it.

And so, what was the circumstance of the presentation itself?

Well, I was asked to go to the riding stables – and I didn't know I was getting this, of course – and present the awards to the RDA children who'd now achieved their second or third riding badge. So, I landed and they'd already got their badges and I was told, 'Just sit there and wait.' A horse came out and stood behind me and then all the children, teenagers mostly, disabled, handicapped children came out, and stood round the horse, and me in the wheelchair and gave me this presentation and a little brooch, with 25 years on it.

And so you'd gone, thinking that you yourself were going to present awards only to find that

Only to find that I was getting one meself.

And

This happened so many times. They always get me there by false pretences.

[End of Track 5]

Tape 3 Side B [Track 6]

Sheila, just to return then to the circumstances of your birth, you came then, to be born at home.

I think it was the usual story though in those days to be born at home, quite what I was [?] as far as I know.

And the circumstances were, as I say, that your mother was expecting you and you had at the time then a nurse living in the house?

For some unknown reason, Mum had a nurse living in the house because she wanted company every time Dad was out and someone to be available. But that particular night Dad had a meeting and the nurse, seeing that it was a Friday evening, decided to go off and have her night off, which was, this was in Manchester – Accrington, Manchester – and she went off for the night. Dad arrived home at half past nine in the evening, to find Mum struggling with a baby, a newborn baby. I was born at nine o'clock in the evening and so he went and fetched the doctor, no phones, so he had to go and find him. Luckily he was still awake, least I hope he was, and Mum and I were taken to hospital, which was 20 miles away.

So, when you were born then, were you born early or?

More or less early, yes, a few days earlier than expected but not very much – four days.

Right and so, just that little bit earlier but only four days as you say. And do you know what birth weight you were, or?

Seven pounds three ounces, so I was a good weight to survive, which thank goodness I did. When I was four days old, I was not expected to live through the night, and Mum and Dad were told to go home, start again and forget me. But a nurse gave me

to Mum and said, 'Well if she's going to die she might as well die in your capable hands at home' so she took me, and I'm still here, 70-odd years later to tell the tale.

And so, who told your parents to go home

The doctors at the hospital.

And was there ever an occasion when you could talk to your mother and father about how they felt about that?

They never mentioned it. They just kept, I was a child, I needed looking after. I cried all the time, I never stopped and Mum walked round Accrington to find a doctor, a clinic and when she did eventually find it the door was shut in her face because it was time to go home and told to come back the next week.

This was in the first few months of your life.

The first few weeks.

And in terms of, you know the support that you may or may not have got from the original hospital where you were born; do you know what kind of level of advice and this kind of thing that your parents were getting?

No idea. They never spoke about it at all.

And do you know what led to the...

I know very little.

Do you know though what led to the thought that you weren't going to survive?

Well, I was so ill I suppose. Breathing problems, well they call them that in those days don't they? They could do something about it now but 'lack of oxygen' that was what they said.

And in terms of the... the presentation of the cerebral palsy, did that become immediately apparent, or?

Well, they knew I was disabled in some way but we never heard the words for many years. Dr Le Page in Manchester we saw, my specialist, and I used to go to him once a month,

And

To see what he could do but he said nothing, he couldn't do anything.

And

'Never walk; never talk; never do anything; never sit up.'

So this was the advice that he was predicting.

That he was, what he could tell Mum? Mum said 'Blow this' so she started, and

So, just to reiterate then,

When I was a year, I sat up.

Right, just to reiterate then, his advice was to your mother, when you were just a few months old that,

There was no hope. Just a babe and I would always be a babe.

And

But Mum wasn't taking that.

And in terms of, you know, your mother's reaction to that, it must have taken a strength of character on her part to turn round and do what she did.

Quite. First of all, she put cushions behind me to get me sitting up, which I did flop, and I flopped immediately down afterwards but never mind. Eventually I sat up, when I was two I believe and then as I say they bought me a doll's pram and I stood up when I was three. But my ankles turned up and so off I went to some more specialists – some retirement specialists [?] I think – and they suggested callipers and boots, which were a nightmare, and heavy in those days, metal things. I had to be strapped down every morning.

And what do you think now, looking back on all you've achieved, you know about the words, 'Go home, start again, and forget her'?

Pretty cruel, but in those days that's what happened and most people would just give up at that stage and do exactly what they were told to do but Mum luckily didn't.

And in terms of the diagnosis of cerebral palsy then, you didn't get that officially, if you like

For many years. It wasn't even, well it did exist but nobody put a name to it.

Mm. And did you ever, your parents ever talk about, you know, looking back at when you were an adult and did they ever refer back to those early times?

No, never. And I was allowed, or able, to forget them. I was just a child, I was growing up, I couldn't do everything but I got round it somehow, I did most things. Luckily for me I've got an active brain, so I can remember things; still can, and that

helped me a lot. Writing of course was hopeless. Dictating was a nightmare. Well, it spoilt my writing completely, so in the end I gave that up but I could remember what was said, which helped me no end in work.

And so, in terms of, you know, your facility to write, you would be naturally right-handed would you, and?

Yes, because I was affected, so I had to use my left which is not very easy.

Yeah and it's difficult sometimes isn't it to assess these things but to what extent do you feel that the cerebral palsy has been an influence on your life?

You try to forget it. As you grow up you try to do things and then find that you can't and you wonder why, [laughs] and it makes you a bit slower doing things, not really thinking about things but actually doing them. If I go to pick up something I use both hands to pick them up. I use my right hand as a support.

And in tackling daily things, if you like, you've endeavoured have [you] to find solutions, find ways around things?

Every day and every second of the day. If I make a cup of tea for example, if you are an able-bodied person you just pick it up, walk where they're going and that's it and sit down and have a drink. But with me I've got to, first of all, put the tea cup near the kettle, put the coffee or whatever in the cup and then pour the water or get the cup with the coffee in onto my trolley and then pour the water into it, [talking together] and...

But never the less, there is a way around

Oh if there's a will there's a way and I've found many a way to do things.

And moving forward a few years, Sheila, we find you living, I think, in Basingstoke then newly married to David and also with a new daughter as well. Just take us back to that time if you would, as a young mum.

Youngish mum [laughs]. She was born in hospital, I was lucky there but I wasn't allowed to see her for two days and I thought, 'Now what's gone wrong? Who's doing what, where and how?' It was easier; I was able to hold her, but not to have her. She was taken back to the nursery but after 36 hours I got her but then came the problem of putting nappies on, [sound of paper rustling] cleaning, feeding her. I breast-fed her for a little while but not for long. But the point was I couldn't do the nappies because in those days we had pins and the pins were always stuck in me or I was afraid of them sticking in the baby but eventually, with the help of one-and-a-half hands which I can use, I managed it somehow.

This is with the Terylene nappies as they were then and as you say, there's no sort of manual as it were, for parenting, so, with the new arrival of your daughter, how did you and David both feel about that?

Well, he was on holiday, of course, he was a school teacher and we had planned the birth to be at the beginning of the holiday, which it duly was luckily for us. So we had five or six weeks to get to grips with the babe and ourselves and everybody else. I was a week with her in hospital during which they should have taught me how to bath her, dress her and everything but no such luck. They didn't even let me... they let me feed her but they wouldn't allow me to change her nappies or anything.

So, how did

They did that.

Right so, how were they expecting you to be able to manage then?

Heaven only knows, so when we got home Dave and I had to learn from scratch how to do it and it was a bit daunting. They didn't even tell us how to fold the nappies up, let alone put them on but luckily the district nurse did and she came in quite a few times and gave us help.

And so, you evolved, you know, particular techniques, as the need arose, and in terms of, you know, any adaptations of equipment and this kind of thing around the home, what solutions did you arrive at there?

We had nothing, so for bathing her we put the table in the corner of the room. We had a towel underneath the bath, the hand bath [?], a towel at the side of the bath to put her on afterwards and did everything on the table and Dave at one side of me and me at the other. Eventually I got the hang of holding the babe, sitting up in there but as soon as she got a bit bigger and started throwing the water all over us, [interviewer laughs] the kitchen got a bit messy, I can tell you, slippery as well. But she coped and we coped, and then Dave had to put the nappies on because I couldn't pin them. He also, when I stopped breast feeding, he had to also do the milk for me, before he went to work, in the morning because in those days they were glass bottles with teats at both ends – a bung at one end and a teat at the other end – and for the life of me I could never get those on. At least if I did get them on they wouldn't stay on and then many a nightmare with that one but we coped.

And what about the kitchen itself? Did you adapt that at all or?

No. Except for putting the table in the corner, that's all the adaptation. There were no adaptations, nothing.

And so what about things like cooking and so on?

I did cook and I had a drop door luckily for me. I did manage that and I had Sylvia always with me in the pram: whichever room I went into, she was there in the pram. When she got a bit bigger I did manage to lift her out of the pram into a playpen in the

garden when it was a nice day. And then we she got to about one year old I found a little girl standing with the play pen up on end, walking out, so I soon stopped that one. She got the better of me there, that day.

And you had visits from the district nurse to start with, to give you advice as your daughter, you know, progressed, [loud traffic noise] did you have the support of what

[Inaudible. Break in recording.]

So as your daughter, you know, progressed and got older what kind of support did you have from, other mothers or groups, or?

Nothing really, nothing at all. There were one or two mums nearby but they all seemed to be, so busy. We, I used to talk to them as I was hanging out the washing, I used to talk to them over the fence but that's about all the contact we had. It's just nice to know that you'd got a neighbour if you wanted one.

And I suppose, compared to today, when there would be, well theoretically anyway, support groups and other points of reference, more information being available, you know. There you were just, I suppose... day-to-day, in a sense, just getting on with things.

Just coping.

And you know, looking

Well, they came up and that was it you had to do it, so

And looking back, do you wonder, you know, what are your thoughts?

Well, I often wonder how we survived and how she was, well, she was excellent; she was very good, very good indeed. I mean, I think she realised I couldn't chase her.

She did once try to escape me but a neighbour dodged out of her door and she got a terrific shock I think but she soon came back. She realised she wasn't going to get very far but that's the only time she's really gone off.

And has Sylvia, you know, had occasion to perhaps recall those, her own early memories with you?

She said a few weeks, years ago, that until she got to school, she didn't realise there was anything up. She just accepted me, which is what you want.

So she...

But children started talking at school and then she realised.

So, only at that point came your daughter's realisation to what extent that it mattered,

Yeah.

But anyway, that you had a disability.

And years later when one day during the showing of Joe Egg at the theatre in Doncaster, David, Sylvia and I – Sylvia was about eight at the time – were collecting the money outside and as one lady came out she said, 'I don't agree with that lot. They should be put to sleep at birth. It's a drain on the community' and David looked at me and Sylvia looked at me and I looked at them and we said nothing. And David said afterwards, 'Why didn't you go and tell her off?' and I said, 'You don't do things like that lass, you don't do things like that', so I kept quiet. I'd love to know where she is and what she's thought of in the future but never mind.

And do you think that sort of attitude... how common do you think that kind of attitude was?

Very. Probably not as direct as that was. She had no idea I was disabled, I was standing there I was, you know, I looked like any other person, holding a tin, I was just standing there. There was nothing unforeseen about that.

And what leads you to believe that that sort of attitude may have been more commonplace?

It seemed to be the attitude of people, I mean disabled people; I've been accepted, always. No, I've heard no comment, you know, to my face at all but I have been comments behind my back, I'm certain. For example, I went into a shoe shop; I wanted a pair of shoes. My daughter and grandson [sound of bird tweeting] was with me, and I was pushing the grandson in the pram, he was only tiny and I said, 'Can I have that pair of shoes in the window?' And the lady went to Sylvia, not to me, and said 'Does your mum realise those shoes are for men?' And Sylvia said, 'Ask her' and she was talking,

So this was the time...

She was talking as if I wasn't there and it annoyed Sylvia more than it did me.

So this

And another occasion, another lady was in a wheelchair and she went down on the Frenchgate Centre in town [Doncaster] on the lift and it's an open lift that you can see all around. She was in her wheelchair, her husband was pushing her, and when they got out a lady came up to her and she went, 'You did enjoy that, didn't you?' And she was a 60-year old this was, so we still get it. We still get people who are, well, ignorant I think, that's the only way to put it.

And do, in terms of, you know, one time matched against another time, do you think attitudes have changed, or?

I think they're changing, slowly, but, I think if parents give the wrong impression to the children... children accept you; I find children accept you. It's the grown-ups – maybe not so much these days – but it was the grown-ups in the past that gave the ideas to the kids. The kids don't notice. I mean I have to go into schools, I can go into colleges, I can go into anywhere the children don't notice, it's the grown-ups that look.

Yes, I wonder why that is?

I don't know. So, it's the grown-ups that want to be taught, not everybody. I must admit, not everybody, it's just an occasional... you still hear comments. You still hear comments.

What sort of comments?

Well, 'Can I do for you?' 'Can I help you?' 'Can I...' Instead of saying, 'If you can do this, you can do this' and giving them a chance. We are a bit slower, yes, but they say, 'Oh I'll do it for you.' We don't want people to do it for you, you want to be able to be a person and do it yourself. As Bill Hargreaves said, 'You can always do it for yourself; you'll find a way and get it done.' That's why the 62 Clubs were formed, and I'm very grateful to Bill for forming these 62 Clubs.

A network of social leisure clubs around the country.

And we got things done. We did things, we didn't wait for other people to do them for us we jolly well stood up for ourselves and debated what we wanted and nine times out of 10 got it done.

And your involvement in the Nottingham 62 Club, in terms of the development of the network of 62 Clubs, the Nottingham club then was quite early.

Yes, we started off in London in May and in October we were the second one.

This was 1962, hence the name.

1962, yes. But Bill [Hargreaves] had the foresight to start one in London; well he started with his own group.

And why was it that Nottingham was chosen for the second one?

I don't quite know; I never found that out. But Bill happened to know Ron Firman, who lived in Nottingham, so I think between them, well I know between them they got me into the position of secretary, before I knew where I was. I didn't even know what they were.

So how did you go about undertaking that work?

Well, I was just told by Bill to get on with it, so as I say, I organised a get-together. I didn't know what on earth to do for the first one, so I decided on records. Everybody got a record that they liked, so they all brought records, tapes – not tapes but records – on the vinyl, records and we started playing them but nobody listened because this was a club for people to get together, so we talked. We also had to make cups of tea. That was a nightmare because nobody could pick up the kettle or the teapot because they were too heavy, so we just had to involve able-bodied people but we did our own thing, and there happened to be a wagon there, so we put everything on it and just wheeled it in – somebody pushed it in

A trolley.

A trolley.

Yeah.

So, somebody pushed it in and I don't think much tea was spilt, least I hope not.

And now, in looking back at it, you know, from this perspective, I suppose it's difficult to, perhaps, fully appreciate the significance of the development really, in the sense that here was an opportunity for people to get together, which people perhaps hadn't previously had.

Well, that was the idea because up to then everybody, all the able-bodied people did things for the disabled and the disabled weren't allowed, some of them couldn't even dress themselves but after a short time we'd say, 'Well, if we're going to have a club of our own we'd better start doing things for ourselves.'

And what kind of difference do you think that made?

I think it made a lot of difference. It gave me more confidence I can assure you of that one. But, trying to organise outings and things was a bit of a nightmare. I did want to go to Cadbury's chocolate factory in Birmingham only to be told it was due for refurbishing and it wasn't available. So that was number one backlash, so I tried again and we decided to go to Dudley Zoo and we organised, Ron and I – he was chairman by this time, Ron Firman – he and I organised the trip out. We arranged 12 June to go to Dudley Zoo. Anyway, we collected everybody, wheelchairs and all – some wheelchairs, some walkers – and then we went to a gentleman...

[End of Track 6]

Tape 4 Side A [Track 7]

So we picked the wheelchair, we picked the gentleman up, he was in his sixties but the wheelchair no way would the wheelchair go into the bus, so we said, 'All right we'll borrow one when we get there.' So we got to Dudley Zoo and of course, if you know Dudley Zoo it's up on top of a hill with a long walk up to it. Anyway, we all got off; we all climbed off the bus and then said to the attendant, 'Have you got a wheelchair we could borrow?' So they lent him a pushchair, a little baby's pushchair: and this was a 60-year-old, quite tubby. He wasn't big but he's tubby and he certainly wouldn't go into there, so we thought, 'Well what can we do?' We'd got one or two wheelchairs with us, so we got him in a wheelchair. We pushed him up; somebody pushed him up to the top of the hill and put him on a seat then came down again with the wheelchair while other of us struggled on walking up. And those poor St John's people, we had three of them helping us, went up and down, up and down with this one wheelchair that somebody had brought from Nottingham and we eventually got everybody up to the top. By this time we were an hour late for our lunch, which had been ordered for 12 o'clock. We got there at one. So we went in, had our lunch and then Ron [Firman] and somebody else, one of our members went down to the local society. Luckily he knew where to find them and borrowed two good wheelchairs.

This was the local Spastics Society?

The local Spastics Society, yes, in Dudley. So we managed. Then of course we had to do all in reverse; get down the hill, get them into the bus and take the two wheelchairs back.

So how was it...?

I think they enjoyed it.

So how was it then that the numbers of people didn't have their wheelchairs with them then?

because in those days they hadn't got wheelchairs. Some of them just walked a little way and then sat down.

Right.

The ones who really needed the wheelchairs had to walk part of the way to get the others up the hill.

And have you been aware of, you know, in the contact you've had with other people with cerebral palsy, changing views in terms of whether or not people... should, views on walking and on mobility and...

Well no, I mean if they can walk they can walk but if they're falling down every few minutes, I mean it's a bit tricky. But if I realised that zoo was at the top of a great big hill; that was my second mistake. I made many mistakes in the 62 Club, but you learn by mistakes and my learning got worse and worse and worse as it went on, with arranging things that didn't happen,

And so...

Of which I was reminded years later by Mr and Mrs Wolff.

And so in these early days of the 62 Club in Nottingham what kind of numbers of people were taking part?

Oh, we had 30 or 40 eventually.

And people were [talking together] drawn

Any age. Over 16.

And people drawn from around the area. Do you remember people saying to you, you know, how significant it was, the club itself, in terms of the people's social opportunities?

Oh yes, they thought it was wonderful. They came up with every idea they had under the sun. Ron Firman gave us a talk on archaeology and all these various things. I gave a talk on Switzerland – I've been to Switzerland – and I gave a talk on the difference between climbing a mountain by cable car or climbing a mountain walking because I'd also by that time been up Helvellyn [Lake District].

Right shall we talk about your trip to Switzerland then? When did that come about?

Well, I've had two or three trips. The first one I can remember, the big one, was when I was 16. Put it off a minute.

[Break in recording.]

So your first trip to Switzerland then Sheila when was that?

I was in my teens and my aunty and uncle invited us to go and so we all went, and we stayed at... it was a coach trip, this particular one. I've been again since but this was a coach trip and we went to Interlaken, Montreux and Lucerne, and had two days in each, driving around by bus and walking. But the second trip I went to we stayed at Grindelwald and we travelled up the Jungfrau in a train, which was lovely. You went through the valleys and the mountains and right up to the top, which is 13,000 feet.

So this is one of the little Swiss trains and?

Yes. It's the Grindelwald itself is all, already 3,445 feet above sea level and it had mountain peaks all around it but the Jungfrau, Monk and... We were advised to wear warm clothes, take a pair of sunglasses. The latter was important but the first one

wasn't as we discovered when we got there we were as hot as anything, too hot to know what we were doing. We were so near the sun of course.

And so, when you were in your early teens then, by this time were you still using the callipers at all?

No. I lost the callipers when I was about 11.

And so, in those sorts of conditions then walking, you know, in the mountains and valleys in Switzerland, depending obviously on where you were and how high you were, would you be walking then with a stick or?

No, just walking ordinary. No problem at all, well, I limped a bit but apart from that nothing.

And so, it was a fairly... early in terms of the kinds of numbers of trips abroad I suppose. Do you remember having much contact with the local people at all?

Oh, we had loads of contact with the local inhabitants. Luckily for us they all spoke quite good English, so we'd no problems over that one at all – on the first occasion or the second or the third for that matter.

And you know, through your life and into your married life and so on, have you had much occasion to travel abroad?

Not since, no. I'd love to go again but I want to go for my 75th birthday but whether it will come or not I don't know, I want to go to Switzerland again because I love it so much.

And so, how many times altogether did you get to Switzerland?

I've been three times twice to Switzerland and once to Chamonix in the French Alps.

So, how did you get there each time? First time by coach but

First time by coach, second time it was a school party but they invited me to go as a 21st birthday gift. And we went down to London by train from – we lived in Derbyshire at this time – from Marple, where I went to school, and down to London by train, then across. I think it was Newhaven – Dieppe this one.

And so, the school party then Sheila, what

The school party, and then picked us up at Dieppe and took us to Chamonix.

And so, what was the association with the school party? It was your school; your old school was it, or?

No, it was a school that a friend of mine was a teacher at; and we used to go to a music group and a politic group and they invited me to go with them for my 21st. The children were all 15, 16 years.

Right, and so this was before you were married obviously and...

A long time before, yes.

And as a 21-year-old, at that time you hadn't yet started at the Wilfred Pickles school had you, or?

No.

So

Long before anything.

So

I had no job, no nothing.

Can you still remember then being 21?

Vividly.

What are some of the outstanding memories of the...?

Well, Mum and we were at [??] with the market garden, so I was doing market gardening and all kinds of things with them, helping there. And when my 21st birthday was coming up, Mum gave me a choice of a watch or a birthday party. And then this lady came up, 'Or a trip to Switzerland, to Chamonix with us.' In the end I said, of course, the trip. I wanted to go abroad and I'd been before and I wanted to go again – different part of course – and they said, 'Right we'll take you and pay for you and everything else.' We slept on floors and we slept on every... you name it we did it but in those days, of course, I could do, so it didn't matter and I fully enjoyed being with the young folk again.

Yes because you were living by then obviously, you know, back with your parents – having left school. And in some ways I suppose people have different outlooks when they're 21, perhaps now as to times past but, you know, when you were 21 – a significant age in any time – do you recall how you felt about yourself, if you like?

Well, I was growing up. I got the key of the door, I mean, you didn't have a key beforehand. Never, not like they do these days and well, I was wondering what life would bring me. So far it had brought me nothing except working for Mum and Dad, which I loved. I mean I didn't mind. No income; no nothing, no pocket money. My mum gave me a little bit but I put that in savings. I was very, very good at that game, during the war because we'd nothing to spend it on anyway. Sweets were rationed;

you couldn't have more than you could have: half a pound or whatever it was a week, or two ounces.

And in terms of, you know, things like social contact with other people, that I suppose was perhaps, well, there weren't maybe many opportunities to meet other people?

People who

I didn't have any social contact except people who came to buy things off us at the house. And I used to have to go across quite a way to gather the tomatoes and things, bring them back for Mum to weigh them. And by this time there were so many other people waiting for some more, I had to jolly well go back and get some more. So I spent my days walking backwards and forwards, climbing up steps and down steps and opening doors and opening windows, and gathering tomatoes, hoping I'd keep the stalks on them all and come back, and weigh them.

Because all that work then and

Because you had to keep the green stalks on the top, or they wouldn't buy them.

All of that work gathering and serving people with produce, that must have taken quite a bit of energy to do?

Oh yes, I was dead tired by the time I finished. I didn't know I was in those days but I mean I know now how much it did take it out of you. But it was something to do. I had no companions, they were all at school and I was at home, so.

And another significant age is often said to be at the age of 40. How differently did you feel at the age of 40 compared perhaps to the age of 21?

Oh goodness me! That's a good, marvellous question. I've no idea. I was just, well, getting married and yes I was married but I can't remember. I mean, it was just another birthday. I know they say, 'life begins at 40' and you do all this and that and,

t'other but, I mean, birthdays, as far as I was concerned was, 21 was your first one, really. And I suppose 60 when you retire was the second one. But nowadays they're celebrating all the time and 70 maybe – three score years and 10 and all that.

So, taking a few years forward then to your 60th birthday, do you remember your thoughts, you know, on if you like, the perspective of time on your 60th birthday?

Well, on my 60 birthday, I was now looking after my mum and dad, who live next door but one to me. So Sylvia made me a cake and I invited Brown Owl from the Brownies and her daughter to come up and that was it.

Obviously time travels [laughing] ever faster I think, really in some ways doesn't it, but... what were your emotions and thoughts, looking back over that part of your life if you like? What particular years stood out for you?

Well, my particular year was the wedding in 1938 when I was a bridesmaid. The other one was the May Queen and little things like that. You know, being a part of the activities if you know what I mean?

And in your married life with David [bird noises in background] different homes in different locations, different times. It's perhaps an unfair question in a way really but, you know in your time with David and with Sylvia, what special times stood out for you?

The things we could all do together. We never went away and left her, well, very occasionally. We did when we had the Christmas 'do' at school and things like that but apart from that she was with us all time. For our wedding anniversary, we always went out for the day. It was during the summer holidays of course, so we always made an effort to go out as much as we could for days. We just had one-week holiday in the year, which we usually went to the Lake District because we loved that.

So, you know, for family holidays then you often went to the Lake District?

In a caravan, yes. Sylvia nearly always took her friend with her because she's the only one.

And you know, had you ever thought perhaps in the early days to maybe have another child at all, or?

I'd have loved to have one but there again, [laughs] wisdom of other people – which doesn't work always – said, 'Wait 'til she's four, gets on her feet and you know, then try and start again.' By that time, of course, I was too old to contemplate having any more because I was late starter you know, in everything I do, [laughs] so by this time I felt it was very unwise to try and have another child.

But you know, seeing Sylvia grow up and flourish, that must have been a great pleasure to you?

Certainly is, certainly is and she's got three very good, healthy children:

And

No problems.

And being a grandmother as well

Oh yes, it's a joy. It's ever so good. I would never have believed that, in all my life, that I'd ever first of all be a mum and then be a grandma and it's lovely, wonderful. Especially holding that first one, that was a joy and, of course, in those days everybody could go in and be with the children, and the child was there at the mum's side straight away. Dads were allowed to go in any time they wanted to, whereas my David wasn't allowed in except for, you know, visiting times. Very, very different.

From when Sylvia was born?

Yes. Very, very different.

Yeah and what are your reflections perhaps on the, you know, the priorities of life really?

The priorities of life is just to get up and get on with it. Do the best you can and hope that somebody... well, even if they don't appreciate it, you appreciate yourself.

And you know, in finding ways around things and finding solutions... helping people, what are some of your sort of greatest satisfactions from life?

People say I'm a good listener and give advice when asked for it, not throw it at their faces, know what I mean? Some people give advice before you even want it and you never know quite whether to take their advice or, you know, do something else, so I'm a good listener, at least that's what everybody tells me.

And in working as you have done helping other people with disabilities, what has been your greatest wish from that?

That something good will come out of it. For example, at The Wilfred Pickles School we did a lot to make them co-operate with each other – get together and do things together, work as a group not as an individual. We know they have to work individually as well but work as a group. Now one little boy was very good at working as a group but when he went home – [noise of car] he's gone – when he went home, I said a few years later, 'What happened to Peter?' 'Oh' she said 'he took GCE O'levels, he got English.' And then I said, 'Well what's he doing now?' 'Just sitting at home doing nothing.' Because the parents weren't willing to get up and do things with him.

And how does that make you feel?

Terrible. I appreciate my mum even more. And another little girl, Elizabeth, she couldn't do anything for herself but she'd got a marvellous brain and she really could understand everything. Once, just after the Easter holidays she said, 'Oh my mum's got twins. I've got a twin brother and sister; lovely.' We said, 'Good, you'll see them in the summer holidays.' Anyway, when she came back in the September we said, 'Well, what were they like?' You know they'll be six months old, and she said, 'Do you know, I never saw them.' We said, 'Pardon?' She said, 'No' she said, 'Grandma's took them away into her house, so that my mum could look after me.' So I said, 'Well what did you do for six whole weeks?' And she said, 'I'll tell you what I did' and she put her arms like this. She said, 'Mum got me up, got me dressed, sat me on the settee, put the wireless by me, gave me dinner, gave me tea, put me to bed.' For six weeks.

And no activities?

No. Nothing.

Do you believe that the grandmother looking after the twins then was that proposed as something of a permanent arrangement or just an initial...?

When Elizabeth went home for the school holidays, the twins went to grandma's, full stop. Mum couldn't manage twins and Elizabeth. If she'd thought about it she could have done but there we are. Hope they don't hear this.

So, in doing what you've done then Sheila, different things, different circumstances, what has been one of the messages that you have been pursuing?

[Laughs.] One of the messages? Don't be a doubter because it does work. If a person or people connected with a disabled person has got the motability to keep pressing on, things can happen. I wasn't supposed to walk, I wasn't supposed to sit up, I wasn't supposed to talk. I can do all three. In fact, some people say I do too much talking.

And [Sheila laughs] have you endeavoured then to, if you like... show what can be done?

I've tried to set examples and show people what can be done if they think about it. At Brownies, for example, one little girl was a bit slow at skipping. Well I can't skip to save my life because I can't take two feet off the ground at one time and go over a rope. But I taught this little girl to skip because I told her, 'Accept me, what to do, when to do it' and within 10 minutes she was skipping. Now I didn't do it. Now another Brown Owl tried by showing her how to do it, she got nowhere. But I just told her what you did, I just did it very gently, very slowly and very deliberately and she, as I say, she got it within... And I did that with quite a few of them, so if Brown Owl was having any difficulty with any of the slower ones, which you do get every now and again with the Brownies, she'd send them over to me and with a bit of patience I got them. I wish somebody had been patient with me when I was a youngster and I'd have got sewing. I can't sew for a toffee.

And in approaching different things in tackling new, different things, do you feel that you have, in different ways then, been able to demonstrate to the doubters?

Yes. If you want to do something you will do it, however difficult it is and how [laughing] many obstacles people put in your way. You'll get there; you'll get there in the end. It takes time.

And I suppose determination as well is one of the characteristics?

[Laughing.] Oh yes. If you want a thing you'll get there.

[End of Track 7]

Tape 4 Side B [Track 8]

Right. There you were then, Sheila, working as a housemother at The Wilfred Pickles School and altogether you were there?

Two-and-a-half years.

Right. Two-and-a-half years, yeah. And then came the decision to go to college?

Mum decided to enrol me for college because what she thought was, if I got 'A' levels, 'O' levels, I might get a better, inverted commas, job. I was very happy where I was; I knew nothing about this, so when the letter came that I was going. I, well, I went but it was hard going because at school I had to do the same thing at home, at college; borrow everybody's notes and do twice as much work as everybody else. Also, I had four or five weeks to catch up on, which nobody had explained to me that the college started on the 3 September and I went in October. [Laughs.]

So, you arrived

I arrived halfway through the course. Well, halfway through the first term.

And what was your reaction, you know, to learning, going back to learning yourself again?

It was a blow to the system because obviously I'd been learning all through Wilfred Pickles School because, well, we're always learning what to do with the children. All the time there were always new things coming up and I had, I was learning with the physiotherapist, the occupational therapist – particularly the occupational therapist – teaching the children how to do basketwork but first of all they had to teach me how to do basketwork. But we had one little boy who did basket work with his feet. Now he made a very good job of it, better than I do with my hands, I can assure you.

So, what size of baskets was this little lad working on then?

A fruit bowl but a smallish fruit bowl, that he could get between his toes and he worked like that – couldn't use his hands at all.

Criss-crossing the

Criss-crossing the wires and everything else and going in and out of the uprights.

And in, you know, doing basket weaving with his feet, what other things did he do with his feet?

He wrote with his feet. He could draw with his feet, painted with his feet. Virtually everything at school.

And this kind of arrangement was encouraged was it, at the school?

Well, it was the only way he could do anything, so of course, we used to encourage him. We used to play games with us, you know, draughts and things like that.

And working as you did as a house mother at Wilfred Pickles School, coming across different children with particular needs that they had and that was perhaps the first time, was it, when you'd come across, other people with disabilities?

Yes, to a certain extent. And of course, I could do things that they couldn't do and they could do things that I couldn't do. One big boy was doing a stool with sea-grass and the headmaster kept coming in watching him do this and he said, 'You're taking a long time John, doing this work.' And he came in the next week, John was still doing the work, so he said – we couldn't have said this, but he said – 'Mr Feather, there is the stool; there's the sea-grass; do it.' And Mr Feather had a challenge of making a stool with sea-grass and if you've ever worked with sea-grass you know what hard work it is on your fingers and everything else. Anyway, he came back the next day

with it done, funnily enough, but his hands were all scraped and everything else. He said, 'Well, I've done it.' John said, 'Right. Leave us in peace now.'

So, John was the pupil who'd laid down this challenge to the head of Wilfred Pickles?

Yes. Nobody else could have done but he was so fed up with him saying, 'Why don't you do this? What's taking you all the time?' But he thought it better to do something to quieten him. He did.

And so, at the Wilfred Pickles School then, what was the sort of mix of subjects covered in the curriculum?

Everything, that goes on in normal schools: English; French; geography; history; the lot.

And there were boarders and there were some people who came in from the locality, and as I understand it, there was a unit as well for children who had hearing difficulties?

Not in those days, bit later on. By the time I'd left there was and also they started cookery classes and all kinds of things there but when I was there, there weren't. And they even got a swimming pool after I left, because I went back with the ladies group that I used to talk to, give talks, so we arranged one of our parties to go back and see what it was like, years later,

So

After I left.

So, how long afterwards was this?

About 10 years. Still going strong, Mr Pedder was still there but it was quite a different set-up. There were still going to school in the, you know, in the classes and so on.

So, going back 10 years after you'd left, by this time you were married and you'd had Sylvia.

Yes.

What did it feel like going back?

Well, it was lovely. The children were different, of course, but the little ones were now grown up. I met some of them, they were still there and it was nice. They didn't remember me, of course, after all these years but very good. They made a film on it and it's called *Forbid Them Not*. I still haven't got a hold of this film; I would dearly love to know if the Society has still got a copy of it. It was made after the BBC came to us because *Every Eight Hours* was with all the schools. Actually I'm on it for one fleeting second because it's funny, this film crew and I escaped into another room as quickly as I could, out of sight, [talking together] out of mind.

*So this is **Every Eight**... This is **Every Eight Hours** you're on, is it?*

Yes. That one is.

And the commentary by Richard Dimbleby?

That's right.

And I think, in its time, made quite an impact?

Oh yes, it did. So when I went to college in Nottingham somebody... we had a choice of things to write about in our GCE 'O' levels and when I came out somebody said, 'I

know what you've written about; the television programme.' I said, 'I've written about a television programme.' I said, 'Why?' She said, 'Yes, you've chosen *Every Eight Hours*.' I said, 'I haven't you know.' I said, 'I chose climbing a mountain – the Jungfrau' which I did myself you see, so I knew what Richard was talking about – Richard Dimbleby did that one as well.

[Talking together.] So he

And she was so surprised. He did a programme on climbing the Jungfrau; that was another film we made for the BBC.

So, the very mountain that you had

The very mountain I climbed five years before. Yes.

And when you climbed the Jungfrau then,

By train, of course.

Right, there you were, as you say, an early tourist in Switzerland. What did it feel like, being at the top of the mountain?

Lovely and you could see the little dots, or they looked like little dots of people climbing it 'the hard way' as I call it, walking it. And it took about two hours to get to the top: and we could see them. It seemed like only a couple of yards away from us but it took that long in the atmosphere.

*And just to return to **Every Eight Hours**, the other famous film with the commentary and appearance by Richard Dimbleby... So, the shot of you was when you were as a housemother then at Wilfred Pickles School?*

Just going from one place to another with the children but I mean, unless you know it was me you wouldn't know I was there. I darted in very quickly, I can tell you.

And

I wasn't going to be filmed thank you very much.

[Talking together] And in

It was bad enough for the SOS Award [Stars Organisation for Spastics] years later.

And in the sense that it was raising awareness about the fact that there was a child with cerebral palsy born every eight hours, what do you remember, what was the impact of the film itself?

I think it was a good impact – well I hope it was. It brought to people that didn't understand what it was all about a bit of knowledge but I don't know whether it made any difference or not to the world.

Shown on

BBC One.

In a time, of course, when there were just... I'm not sure if ITV... it was in its early days anyway... Certainly only two television channels.

That's right, yes.

*And **Forbid Them Not**, what was the circumstance of that?*

It was a little programme that Mr Pedder made himself. I wasn't there, I'd left but I dearly wanted to see it because it'd got all my children on it and I've got pictures of it.

It was in the *Disability Now – Spastics News* as it was then – so I kept those but I've never seen the film and I'd have loved to have seen it.

And besides the trip that you took 10 years after you'd left, did you have any further contact then with the school after that?

Not after that, no. Not with the school but a few years later Mr Pedder invited everybody to go to a reunion and I got a friend of mine who had a car to come and get me and we went and spent the night at Stamford. She and I went to this reunion in the evening – on Saturday evening – and I met there the head girl who was like the head girl when I was there. And one or two more including one from Amersall House, which is just down the road from where I live here. And these two, little boy and little girl, who were when I was at The Wilfred Pickles School, got married in Amersall House and now they've got the first Blue Peter home in South Wales. And she came up, he didn't want to come but Brenda came up and we had a good long chat. She's now grown up and as I say, married, in her forties and so on. Shows how old I'm getting and we had a long conversation and it was lovely to meet six at least and then one young man said to me, 'Hello Miss Lead.' And of course, I said, 'Hello' because he knew me as Miss Lead you see. He said, 'You don't know who I am, do you?' He was a deaf lad. Now I knew there was some deaf lads in the school but could I place him? So I gave quite a few names, eventually I got him and he said, 'Oh you do know me then?' I said, 'Yes' and he remembered from all those years ago, which is lovely. He gave me a hug and a kiss and made a fuss of me again. So, I was appreciated I think – must have been.

And what was it like, seeing the adults having last seen them as young children and then you were, these years later, seeing them as adults?

Well, it's hard to believe that they'd grown up so quickly but I recognised them soon as I walked in. I knew who I was talking to, I knew completely. Just as I did in Blackpool. The voice gave it away.

Blackpool where you met Tony who you'd previously

Yes. Yes.

Known as a

I mean that's going back you see. I mean, this was going back even longer.

And since that reunion and since meeting Tony at Blackpool in 2002, I think it was, wasn't it?

Yes.

As a former pupil, in the intervening years, have you heard of other former pupils that you knew?

Not lately, except Pat Bilney, [the other house mother at Wilfred Pickles School] who, of course, keeps in touch with me at Christmas but I only hear from her at Christmas now.

[Talking together] And she was a

There's nobody else now.

She was a former [talking together] colleague.

Worker with me – she was another disabled cp lass.

So, as we say, there you were at Wilfred Pickles, then came the year at college, to get a couple of 'O' levels and when you got those couple of 'O' levels, how different did you feel?

Well, Mum thought I could get a better job, so I applied again for a children's job. I went into the interview; they were interviewing a lot of people for a day nursery. And we went in, the interview went fine, I'd worked with children, I'd worked with handicapped children and then the crucial question came, 'Have you worked with the under one-year-old babies?' And I very truthfully said, 'No.' And she said, 'Right, we can't have you then because you won't be able to handle them. We have a lot of babies in day nurseries.' So, I went out, waited for the next person to go in and they asked her the very same question and she also answered, 'No' and they said 'Well, we'll teach you. That's all right; we'll teach you how to handle them.' No such luck for me [inaudible]. But when the question came, 'Have you handled babies under six months?' I said 'No, but I have handled two under six and seven, who are just as helpless as babies under six months old.' And she still said, 'You can't have the job.' So, when I got home my cousin rang me and she said, 'How did you get on with the interview?' and I said 'Well, I didn't get the job' and she said, 'Why not?' And I said, 'Because I can't handle babies under six months old.' She said, 'In day nurseries they don't have babies under six months old.' So, she said 'That was a trick question, and you fell straight into the trap' and she said 'She had no right to have asked you even that question.'

And what organisation was this then Sheila?

It was just a day nursery for people who worked in factories to look after their kids while their mums at work.

So, it was a private day nursery?

It was a private day nursery and that was the answer we got.

So, what other... endeavours did you make to seek out?

Well, we tried various places. I even went to see a home that my cousin worked at in Wales. We were on holiday in Wales, so I went to find out if she could help us, not

that we were in that area at all. We were still in Grange-over-Sands but of course, she showed us all round but it was a home. I mean, I couldn't have worked in a home when they went out at school every day and I wanted a school like Wilfred Pickles School and that was on the premises, so we were all involved all day long. But I couldn't have done that just from, you know, first thing in the morning and then last thing at night when they came home from school. So I went to another one but I didn't get the job there either.

And did the thought occur perhaps to maybe see whether there was opportunity back at Wilfred Pickles School?

Well, I'd left by that time and I mean, I'd taken GCEs, so no chance of hoping to return and by that time I was engaged anyway and thinking of other things.

To David who you'd already

Met 10 years earlier

Already then met. Yeah.

He knew me all through the Wilfred Pickles schooldays.

And we should relate as well I think Sheila, it would be interesting to describe a time where you missed a particular train.

[Laughs.] Yes. That's going back to Wilfred Pickles School again. Yes. I got on at Ketton, which is the next little station to Stamford and changed at Leicester, and Mum and Dad picked me up at Nottingham. But this particular time the train was running late, well it wasn't when it started off at my end but outside Leicester it stopped and we stayed there for at least half an hour. Well, I knew I'd only got five minutes to get from one platform to get the Nottingham train, so when we arrived eventually in Leicester there were no trains to Nottingham, they'd gone. Well, that one had gone

and they were closing the station as well. So I rang up Mum and Dad at home, of course they'd already gone off to meet me. So luckily, although it was half past 11 by this time, a friend of Mum's was still up and he said, 'Right, hang up now, ring me back in 10 minutes and reverse the charge' because he knew I'd run out of money by this stage. And he said 'I'll contact your mum and dad.' Well, Dad was a Doctor of Philosophy not a doctor but he put over the tannoy, 'Is Doctor Lead around?' and of course, they thought it was a [medical] doctor wanted you see, so of course, the message got through very quickly to him. And they talked to each other and you know, Mr Meacham told them – Mum and Dad – what had happened. And then he rang me back and said, 'Well, as the station's going to be locked up, go to the police station, which is only down outside the gates, down the road and you'll find it.' So he gave me instructions how to get there and 'Just say that you missed your train, your mum and dad are coming for you from Nottingham, and go in and wait.' So I duly walked down to the police station, went in the police station, they gave me a lovely seat to sit on. They gave me a drink to keep me while I was waiting and I sat there for three-quarters of an hour until Mum and Dad arrived in the car and took me home. So the next time I went on the train, the stationmaster knew about this because I told him and he said, 'Right' he said, 'I'll announce that there's somebody wanting a train at Leicester, to Nottingham.' And he said, 'You put your head out every now and again at intervening stations and tell them that you're on the Nottingham train.' We were stuck outside Leicester station but when we got to Leicester station there was a porter waiting for me – found out which carriage I was in from the man at the Ketton I suppose – and he escorted me over the bridge, to the Nottingham train. And he said, 'Where's everybody?' I said, 'There's only me' and we both had a good laugh because I told him the story of what had happened, and he said, 'Well, good for you, you've done the right thing.' So after that, every time I went home on a Friday night I did the same thing, so I always caught me train after that.

So how was he expecting other people then?

Because I'd put my head out at every station, well every other station on the way down, so he thought quite a lot of us. He got the message that there'd been several people asking you see and there wasn't, it was just me.

So with each station then,

Making sure.

The message passed down the line

Yes, it passed through.

Each as a separate message.

Yes, each as a separate message.

And

So I was escorted down. We both had a good laugh over it.

And generally, you know, getting about and so on then, you used trains quite a bit then did you?

Yes. I had a half-mile to walk to get to the [rail] station but in those days I could walk. I went home by train, well Mum and Dad couldn't, they brought me back on a Sunday because Sunday was awkward to get trains anyway.

So, you know, at weekends then you travelled from, [talking together] sometimes,

Not every weekend but one in three or four I wasn't on duty. When I was, even when I wasn't on duty I was on duty, you know what I mean? I was always around the kids, couldn't help meself. **[End of Track 8]**

Tape 5 Side A [Track 9]

And at the meetings in Doncaster Sheila and indeed your earlier meetings – Spastics Society meetings – what kinds of issues were raised? What were people’s concerns?

It depended on the day of the week or what we were doing that particular day. We organised fairs and all kinds of things and I helped at most of them, as did a lot of other people.

And were people...

And as I say Mrs Margaret Baxter was the secretary [of the Doncaster Spastics Society] when we first came.

In Doncaster?

In Doncaster, yes.

And,

We’ve had about five since then.

And so the membership, what comprised the membership? Was it people with cerebral palsy and

Yes. On the committee there were mums and dads and, you know, different... somebody connected somewhere along the line. The secretary didn’t have any disabled children but I think she was the only one who hadn’t.

And you know, people with cerebral palsy joining. Were there people of, you know, different ages with cerebral palsy becoming involved, or?

I was the only one at the beginning – on the committee.

And you know, in being involved, and living daily life as well, and raising your daughter and homemaking – as it would now be described – how did that feel, if you like? Just getting on with daily life as it were?

Well, I just got on with it. I mean Sylvia and David were both at school, one in Mexborough, one just down the road a few yards away. And she insisted on coming home for lunch every day. So, I mean, she was annoyed with me because I used to go down with her, take her to school and then go back at night, and she didn't particularly like that but it was a nice outing for me anyway.

And did you come across, you know, in your comings and goings, many other parents who may have had a disability at all?

No. There was one lady that I met a few years later, well a year or two later, in a wheelchair, on her scooter, she used to go down to the fairs and things like that, you know. But otherwise no. And Sylvia, until they started talking at school, Sylvia'd been brought up with me didn't even realise I was disabled. I was just, 'Mum' and then, when they started talking at school I mean she, well, got teased a bit. Never mind, she took it all in good faith and all in her stride and she'd not told me 'til recently.

This is other kids

Yeah, I know and mums and dads. You see, they did in those days. I wasn't, well, I was accepted, I thought I was anyway.

So

Apparently not. I don't know.

So comments, I suppose, might come from children because they haven't...

No, they came from their mums, according to Sylvia. Yes, quite.

Right, well.

Yes, quite, what more can you say? I don't get them now. I mean, we made friends with a lot of them.

And what do you think, you know, in the intervening years then has changed to make that less likely, potentially, to a young mother in the same situation as you were in then?

Well, I just joined in, so I don't quite know how it happened. I didn't know anything about this. I mean it's Sylvia who's told me in latter years because everybody was, well just accepted me, I took it they did anyway. I never thought about it.

And in the sense of, sort of reference points, of joining with other disabled people, what was your own reaction to that? What was your motivation for joining with others, joining Scope, joining the Spastics Society?

Well, I'd already joined them, you see, so I mean Mum started me off in Preston, then wherever I went the natural thing to do was to join them and see if I could help in some ways. I mean I tried to set up the younger people. In 1984, I joined what is called 'Stepping Stones' in Doncaster, which is a playgroup for the under-fives – disabled ones and able-bodied ones – and there I met quite a few people, I keep in touch with some of them already.

And so what was your role in belonging to the group?

I just went as a helper but there I took the NVQ course in playgroup management... playgroup studies... PTA, [PPA?] [inaudible] and got the... Well Sylvia and I took it, both of us, she became a childminder.

So there you were

I just wanted my brain to be more active.

So there you were then, you know, working again with children.

Oh yeah. Oh I enjoyed it as well.

And you know, besides your homemaking duties and well home-based work – looking after your daughter and your husband and yourself – had you in the interim looked for outside work at all?

No. Well, David in the meantime had died. He died in 1979, so I joined... I wanted a job with children and again, I just heard... First of all, before David died in 1978, our welfare lady – we had a home visitor in those days – came in and said, ‘We’re starting an RDA group, riding for the disabled up in Tickhill, and they want some helpers.’ So Sylvia and David were both in the room at the time because they came to these meetings with me and they both looked at me and I looked at them and they said, ‘Yes we’ll help’ and so we all went. I went with the dog, and couldn’t lead a horse for love nor money. I mean I couldn’t keep up with a horse anyway, so they helped and I talked to the mums and dads about my experience and they told me their experiences. And then they said, ‘What happens to us when we get to 16? because this RDA was only for children and they all, I don’t know why, but they all look at me, so I said, ‘All right, we’ll start a group for the older ones.’ So I spent three years going round talking with films, all the RDA films and eventually, 1981 Year of the Disabled, which was very handy, I started a group for the older people.

Right, so this would be for young people, older than 16?

That’s right.

Riding for the Disabled group.

And in the International Year of the Disabled, which was handy.

And Tickhill is local to Doncaster, is it?

Yes.

Yeah. Right and so when you went round talking and presenting Riding for the Disabled

[Talking together.] Films

Association films and so on, what kind of groups were you talking to?

Teenagers mostly, we wanted helpers – leaders of the horses. We got quite a few, at least we said we had but nobody turned up on the day. Typical. So after two years then I started going round, writing to various stables. Nobody answered for ages then eventually Finningley [Riding School] answered me and they said they'd be willing. They didn't know the first thing about disabled people or anything else but never mind, we all fell into the pool at the deep end. And they started, they had the helpers and they had the horses that were capable of, you know... it was a riding stable anyway so I mean, they didn't have the expertise, they didn't know what they were doing but at least they could hold a person on a horse.

So this was a pre-existing riding stables that was willing to host the RDA [talking together] meetings.

Yes, yes.

And when people were talking to you, asking 'How can we join another RDA group when we're, when we're older than sixteen?'... When they were asking you about your experiences, what kinds of questions were they asking really?

Well, they just wanted to know if they could get on a horse after they were 16, that was basically... Now talk about this, I'd no experience of horses. I'd been on one once that threw me off very quickly and I ran, well, [laughs] he went home – the horse decided to gallop off home and leave me but never mind. That was in Derbyshire, when I was seven.

And what were people getting from belonging to the RDA group, do you think?

Independence, things that they didn't think they could manage but they did and well, you get more confidence in yourself.

And when you were going round, you know, raising awareness about the hopes of forming a new RDA group and looking for helpers, talking to people, was that the first time then that you'd been round in public, if you like – talking, speaking?

Yes. I'd already been down a few years before when we lived in Boston, thanks to Bill Hargreaves again. He organised speakers' weekend and he asked, I don't know why, would I like to go down. Sylvia was as I say, was only three or four at the time. So Mum and Dad came over, thinking Dave couldn't look after her by himself. Again, these mums and I went off to... they took me to Peterborough. I went off to London on the Saturday morning and then all of a sudden Saturday afternoon he [Bill] said, 'Everybody's got to give a talk for 10 minutes.' Now, none of us had done any public speaking. We were all disabled people, all people with cp on this occasion. Rosemary Dawson-Shepherd was there and one or two more I knew. I've forgotten their names now. She's dead now isn't she? And anyway, he said, 'I'll give you 10 minutes, to speak on anything you like.' So I thought, well, the 62 Club has been going a bit, not long but it has been going a bit, I wonder can I talk about that? So I got up and in my three-and-a-half-minute talk and I said, 'There are now 36 62 Clubs.' He said, 'Get your figures right, there are 43.' I thought to myself, 'Oh, rrrgh.' You know, he's going to put me in my place he is – which he did many a time and oft – but never

mind we were great pals. Anyway, I did my talk, got away with that and then of course he came up once or twice to talk to us and stay with us.

And you talked... right and how would you describe the importance of having people around who have cerebral palsy, perhaps people in positions of influence. What, do you feel is the legacy of people like Bill?

He's left us a lot and he told us not exactly what to do but how to do it. And he gave us the confidence to get up and jolly well show other people that we are able to do these things – and not as some people say – no good for anything but we just sit at home doing nothing. Well that's one thing I've never done in my life and I don't intend to do it now. I'm going to get up and work.

And if you had a chance to address the physician who talked to your mother just in the very first few days of your life, what would you like to say to that person?

Well I'd like to say, 'Give everybody a chance and really make the most of what you've got.' I mean quite a few people I know can't do anything for themselves. I had one little girl at Wilfred Pickles school, her arms were folded up and you had to prise them open to get her dressed and she couldn't do anything for herself but my word, her brain, she was a terrific person. I don't know what she's like now, she's called Elizabeth and she lived in Croydon but honestly, she was a gem to work with and whatever she learnt, she told you that answer the following week. She knew what she was doing, so saying that we're all daft... 'He's not as daft as he looks' as somebody said to Ron Firman on one occasion, to his mum when he passed to university. I'll never forget that one, he tells it as a great joke now of course.

This is Ron Firman from...

Yes it is, from Nottingham.

Why what was the story he tells?

Well, he couldn't walk and he couldn't talk, well he could talk in his own way. He's not a good speaker now but he can talk. I mean you can understand him; I can. You've got to get used to him though and his mum used to take him round in the pram in Nottingham – this was in Nottingham apparently – when he was a little boy, and older. And there was one lady who used to say, 'And how is the poor dear?' to his mum, never talking to him of course. 'Oh all right. He's getting on all right, he's getting on all right at school' etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Anyway, she stood [?] by him one day and he'd just passed the university and he was still in the wheelchair by this time, he wasn't in the pram and he said to mum, 'If she says something you answer her.' So he did, she said, 'Oh he's doing very well he just passed for university.' 'Oh,' said this lady, 'he's not as daft as he looks then?' And Ron tells this story with great glee, he really does.

And what was Ron's reply?

Ron looked at her with a big look and a big grin.

[Talking together.] And

And she didn't know where to put herself. She just went off and didn't know where to put herself at all.

Did he reply then, or?

No, he never said a dicky-bird he kept quiet because she said he couldn't talk – she thought he couldn't – but you see he's become a lecturer at Nottingham University. How more plainly can you get?

And in terms in your own experience of attitudes there is talk of things like discrimination. People talk sometimes; you referred earlier to the fact that parents had some views. What has been your own experience, would you say, of things like discrimination?

I can tell you a good story, I don't know whether it's discrimination or not but we were doing a fundraising thing in Doncaster at the little theatre and there were doing the play, *The Story of Joe Egg*. I don't know whether you know it or not? Anyway, Dave, Sylvia and I were outside in the foyer, we didn't go in because we were selling, you know, collecting money, so we didn't go in. And after we collected the money all right, when they came out and they'd enjoyed it – most of them – and then one lady came in, 'I'm not helping people like them.' She said, 'They should have been put to sleep when they were born. They're a disgrace to the community' and Sylvia looked at me and David looked at me, and we said nothing we let her pass. It's all in the book; I put it down in my book.

This is somebody having seen the play,

Yeah

Coming out of the play,

Yeah.

The play, which I think, charted the life of somebody with a disability?

That's right.

Right.

That's what she said and you're still getting these comments like that unfortunately, I keep hearing them.

What are some of the comments you've heard that you can recall recently?

Well, they're not... they'll be drag up for... They've got to be looked after the... into the way, which they haven't, most of them... Most of the people I know have had families of their own. Mind you, sometimes the families are taken away from them because more able-bodied people say we can't cope. Luckily for me that never happened to me but there are some – quite a few people – it has happened to.

So you've been aware then of incidents

Oh yes.

Where somebody with a disability in a marriage or partnership, they've had a child and

Yeah.

And the child's been...

Taken away straight away. I know somebody at Sheringham. I put my foot in it actually. We went for a day, we lived at Boston, so went for a day and I knew Joy, I'd known her for years and I said, 'I want to go and see Joy while I'm there.' So we went in and she looked at Sylvia, three-year-old, and she burst out crying you see and I couldn't make out why. And she said, 'When our little son was born three years ago' the same time as my daughter Sylvia, she said, 'Mum and Dad, my mum and dad took him away because I can't look after him.'

So this was somebody with a disability who'd had a child [talking together] the same time as

Cerebral palsy again.

She had cerebral palsy?

Yes.

Right and the parents elected

The parents.

The mother's parents elected to take the child away?

Yeah. Have him adopted. When he was seven, he was allowed to go back. Now what's a seven-year-old like? I mean you've got more trouble with a seven-year-old than you have with a baby. I mean, at least you know where babies are.

And when you were, you know, bringing Sylvia up, did you feel yourself to be in a pioneering position as it were?

Well looking back I think I was. Because I've heard so many stories like the one I've just told you, of people not giving us a chance. Now Mum and Dad, Mum rather, didn't want me to get married in the first place. I've only found that out later – thought David was no good for me, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera and we wouldn't cope:

Was their..?

But we did.

Was her reaction do you think more a general reaction or more a reaction if you like, perhaps in particular to your husband or to the idea of you getting married at all?

She didn't want me to get married. I was leaving home and she didn't want it again. I mean I'd been away from home once or twice and I think she wanted to mother me, [laughs] look after me. Anyway, the tables were turned in later life because they came to live next door to me I insisted on them moving from Nottingham, so that I could look after them and I did look after the pair of them but yes.

And was this at a time when David was still with you, or?

No, after. Yes. I moved here long after David died. Five years after David died, I moved into a bungalow. But going back to Stepping Stones, I don't know whether you remember the *Going Live* on television, a Saturday morning programme. Well apparently they asked for the children to vote for a favourite programme and a favourite comedy act and so on, to be broadcast on television. And at the bottom it said, 'Vote for somebody special' something like that you see. Anyway, Sue Endicott, who worked with me at Stepping Stones came round with this piece of paper and said, 'Well really it's for children. It's not for us, it's for the children to vote for their programme' and she didn't say any more. And apparently, they'd all been voting for a special person and that happened to be me, so I was... somebody rang me up at Easter, this particular year – 1987 – and said, 'I am Chris Bollinger from *Going Live*.' I said 'Oh yes,' I thought, 'this is a hoax, this is.' So he gave me more instructions. He said, 'I'm from London, BBC' and he said after a while, 'You don't believe me do you?' I said, 'No, I don't quite frankly because it's a hoax.' He said, 'It's no hoax.' He said, 'You've been voted for this award.' He said, 'I'm coming up to see you.' He said, 'Would you like it in writing?' I said, 'Yes please.' I thought, if I get a piece of paper then it wasn't a hoax. Anyway, the next morning a piece of paper came. It was during the Easter holidays and I went down to Stepping Stones and somebody said – I didn't even show the letter – and somebody said, 'Did somebody ring you up three days ago?' I said, 'How do you know?' And she said, 'Well, um, I'm not telling you' so I said, 'All right.' This was in the office, so when we got back I got this letter in my hand and I said, 'One of you has done this trick on me, who is it?' And everybody said, 'No. No, I haven't done it. I haven't done anything. What are you talking about?' In the end I saw a little gleam of light coming from somebody's face. I said, 'You are the culprit.' She said, 'I'm not.' I said, 'Well you've something to do with it.' She said, 'No, my eight-year-old son has. He wrote it in.' He said that I was the special... he'd never seen me in the... well he'd been once or twice to Stepping Stones, he was at school. Anyway, a few weeks later, down came Chris and interviewed me and interviewed the children, then made a film. You probably saw it, on television – 1987 – Whit Monday.

And this was a filmed item for Going Live was it, or...?

Yes.

Yeah and how did that...

It was the first SOS Award and that's it in the corner.

SOS – Stars' Organisation of Spastics I think?

That's right.

And so they presented you with an award, did they, after the...

That one

You've got it on display here, after the film?

Yeah, I've got pictures of it as well in those

[Talking together.] And how did that,

Picture cabinets.

And how did that make [you] feel?

Oh it was wonderful. So, then we arranged who should go down with me and I was told... Oh, Sarah Greene came up to see me and Chris Hollinger came, and the crew came and we had a conversation in the garden – interrupted every now and again by the kids – [laughs] and then we went to the farm and had a bit of RDA as well, with them. And of course, I told my life story like I started off with you, and she was all aghast with it – given four days to live and she just couldn't believe it.

Sarah Greene of course, the television presenter.

Mm.

And that must have been for you then a very special honour really to receive that recognition?

Yes, and then when we had taken the film Chris said, 'I want you to take one of the riders with you but who's a cerebral palsy one?' Well, there was a little boy of six, who we thought would be too young, you know, for the evening 'do'. We would be going to about midnight, so we didn't do him at all. Then there was somebody else who hadn't turned up that day, so we couldn't very well say 'Yeah' to that one. But there was a 15-year-old and you should have seen her face when we told her she was coming down with us and she was absolutely thrilled to bits.

So it culminated, did it, in an evening 'do' as it were, a presentation

Down at the BBC, yes. They showed the film, they showed everybody else who was the awards for, you know, best actor and actress and all kinds of people.

[End of Track 9]

Tape 5 Side B [Track 10]

The thing that pleased me most about this was the person just before me, the BBC presenter was Sarah Greene, and she was awarded one of the SOS medals as well. But she was suppose... that was for Blue Peter and she was supposed to be with me, to help me up the steps. But seeing as she got the award immediately in front of me, was a bit tricky to say the least because she was told to go to a certain place and sit down and of course, she couldn't because she had to come and help me up the steps.

So, just to put it into context then, they'd done the film, the television film, which they showed at the evening ceremony,

They'd showed a little bit of it.

Right and the SOS – the Stars Organisation of Spastics prize – the award of that how did that fit in then with the scheme of things?

Well we had all the others and then this came and she as I say, they showed the film of me, while Sarah got down to me. And then we walked up and the shock of my life, which is very pleasing but Noel Edmunds was commentating, all the thing, but who should come down the steps was Bob Monkhouse. Now Bob was one of my favourite – I don't like him as a comedian, but I liked him as a person – and to me, that really got me all het up, it really did because the shock of my life that one. I'd already got Sarah Greene, who I loved dearly and still do but to see Bob coming down those stairs, well I didn't know where to put myself.

And he of course had a son with a disability?

Yes.

And

He did.

So the evening was hosted was it by SOS?

Yes.

And they were awarding people with different awards were they, for different aspects of the portrayal of disability was this it?

No,

No.

I was the only one for that.

Right.

But this was a children's television programme *Going Live*, which nominated all the comedian and you know, best thing they liked,

Yes.

In their programmes.

Right and you've also met, I see, Princess Michael of Kent?

Not Michael,

Sorry.

The other one.

[Break in recording.]

And you've also met, I see, the Duchess of Kent. What was the circumstance of meeting her I wonder?

Well, when they saw me at *Going Live* on the BBC. Somebody from Scope phoned me and said, 'We'd like you to come down to the AGM.' I couldn't get that year because I was looking after my mum and dad. But they said, 'We would like you next year to come down and present a bouquet to the Duchess of Kent' who's awarding things to people who do computers for disabled people; can't remember what the company is now. So she was presenting all the awards to them, who did all the computing for schools and things. Would I come down to London? The Hilton Hotel of all places. So I said, 'Lovely' and they said, 'You can bring a friend', so I chose Sue Endicott from Stepping Stones, the one who put me up to SOS. I thought I'd get my own back here, so I took her down and we met all the people who were going to get the awards and then we went and sat where we were told to at a table meeting all the people again. And then they said, 'Well we'll put your basket nearby but where she can't see it and we'll tell you when to get up and present.' I said, 'Well, what do I have to say?' She said, 'You don't have to say a word.' She said, 'This is where you keep quiet and just give a little curtsy if you can, don't worry' and I was afraid of falling over in front of her. I didn't and I presented her with that, so you've got the picture in the [frame nearby] which is me presenting.

So yes, you've got the very bouquet here have you in your room here that you presented to her?

No, I've got the basket there; it was a yellow... It was a basket of ... arti, no real, daffodils, yellow.

Right. The actual basket there that you, that...

The actual

Yeah.

No, on the picture

Oh. I see, I understand, sorry.

Yes, [talking together] I haven't got the...

On the actual picture. Right, sorry, sure. So over the years as well then, you've been able to attend a number of meetings of the Spastics Society, AGMs and so on?

Oh yes, and after this we went home again and another letter came for me, saying 'Would I like to go to the Garden Party for Buckingham Palace?' This was the following year: 19... oh I don't know where I'm up to now... '7. '88. '99. So I said, 'Yes.' This was the RDA who recommended this one, so I said, 'Yes, what do I have to do for that?' She said, 'Nothing; just take somebody with you', so I wrote an article about that – going into Buckingham Palace, going down the steps in the Garden Party and so on. So Sylvia came with me for that one and hence a photograph, another photograph will accompany that one as well, outside the gates.

And did you get chance to either meet royalty or?

Not quite. We were put into lines, the guardsmen got us automatically into lines, we'd just got there. I don't know how they did it, they didn't say a word, they just did it. The Queen and Duke came down our line and next to me or near me was a lady with a dog for the blind, guide dog for the blind. And the Duke of Edinburgh was with the Queen on the other side of the aisle, he spotted her and over he came, he left the Queen going along the row by herself, he shouldn't have done it but he did, this was in Buckingham Palace anyway, the garden. he came across to talk to the dog and the lady and of course, somebody said, 'The Duke's coming over to talk to you.' I could hear this going on and she said, er, what do I say?' And she said, 'Well, you don't say anything you just, you know, talk to him.' And of course he came over 'What a lovely dog.' It's the worst thing he could say to a guide dog for starters but that was one. Anyhow he had a long conversation with her and then when they passed we decided

to turn round on the next row to see if we could find anybody else. And there was Charles and Diana coming down the next line. Well of course they'd got individual people to talk to because they were pulled out, you know, in front of line and she started talking to a lady and this lady said, 'Where are your boys?' Now Charles was, what, four, five?

William, sorry was it?

William yeah, sorry that's William – the older one – and she looked at her watch and she said, 'Nanny will just be taking him out of school now, half past three, going home for his tea.' Just like an ordinary mum would talk to anybody, she was that type of person Diana was. Anyway, they passed that way, so we thought, well the very person we've come to see we haven't spotted yet, Princess Anne. She's our patron of the Riding for the Disabled. Could we find her? There's no finding her, so that was a, well it wasn't a dead loss no, it was lovely.

So how did you feel about the recognition then that you were getting, you know, from the television film, the SOS award and from being invited to Buckingham Palace Garden Party?

It was wonderful. Absolutely wonderful, it really was. I mean the RDA, Stepping Stones recognised me – I don't know why because I was just a helper there – because I must have had some influence on the children or something. I mean I must have had, two of them keep in touch with me now, although they're grown up.

And you referred earlier to your involvement in the Brownies, could you describe that to me?

Yes. I joined – well my daughter was seven when we came here, nearly seven – and we'd already enrolled at Boston but of course we left just before her seventh birthday. So we thought straight away, is there a Brownie Pack? And they said there was one at the Methodist church just down the road, not far away. So off David and I trotted with

Sylvia and we walked in and we said, 'Can we join the Brownie Pack?' And they said, 'Yes; start next week.' There wasn't a waiting list or anything it was lovely and then I said, 'Can I come to help?' And I said, 'Well, I've done some Guide work with the disabled when I was at the Wilfred Pickles School. We had a Guide company nearby that we used to go to once a week – that was an extra job of mine that I took on and not paid for – and so they got me involved there and poor David said, 'Well what do I do? I'm left out of this. Sylvia's going to be a Brownie, mum's going to help.' She said, 'You can be one of the testers.' So David and I both started as testers to start with. Then after a while this Brown Owl left and Edie, who's still with them, came on the scene. She became Brown Owl and she said to me, 'Would you like to go in and become a Guider?'

So first of all, what did testers do then?

A tester of various badges. You know, the housewifery one where you have to dust and tidy up and they came up here and used the vacuum cleaner and cleaned the sink and odd jobs that they had to do for that one. To tell you the honest truth, I didn't know the first thing about Brownies. I knew a lot about Guides because I'd already been a helper there, so I'd been enrolled by Alice Moira of all people, again. She in a wheelchair taking me along. She made me learn. [Laughs.] She was a fighter. [Laughs.] She was a lovely little girl as well. Anyway, we started, so I continued there 30-odd years, well I had to retire at 19 years but they kept me on as, you know, a helper.

So you became then, after being a tester, one of the leaders of the troop?

Yes, one of the leaders of the troop. I got my warrant and then I gave up because Sylvia suggested that it would be an idea if I went swimming. And I said, 'Right, what day of the week is it?' And she said, 'Monday evening.' I said, 'Right.' This was one way you can get out of Brownies. They didn't want to sack me and yet I wasn't supposed to be there. I was only there as a helper because you've got to retire at 65

and I was, well nearly 70 by this time. Anyway, I went swimming, which I've done ever since but I still keep in touch with the Brownies.

And how do you look back on your time, you know, with the Brownies then, really?

Well there again I was working with children, working with girls. Just what I wanted, so really – unpaid – every time I've worked with children, except at the Wilfred Pickles School, I've not been paid for it. But I've loved every minute of it and I'd certainly go back to any of the jobs I've had with children. I absolutely adore them, still do.

And you referred earlier to the time when your parents moved, was it next door?

Yes.

And by this time David unfortunately died and you then took on the caring role then, mainly for your parents?

Yes, so I had to leave Stepping Stones. I had to give up everything then. I didn't give up Brownies because that was only in the evening but Stepping Stones was three times a week in those days and well, they couldn't be left. And then Mum died, so the worst of it was I had to go and move in there, so I had to look after this house, look after their house.

Looking after your father in the meantime?

Yes and then, of course, I started to do the cooking for him. Well, he said when I was a little girl I was a dunce. He told me that because I couldn't do some of the schoolwork at home. I was no good at maths, sums – now he was – so he said I'm a dunce. He told for that when I was 10 years old. I never forgave him, I never in a month of Sundays forgave him at all but when it came to the push I look after him and I look after them both. Then Mum died in 1991, I think it was, or '92 – she was 93

mind you, just before Niall was born, the youngest grandson. And I kept on looking after Dad. Course, when Mum died I had to more or less move in altogether with him and then, of course, I had to do the cooking and he realised I could work and I could do things. Up to then he'd not the faintest idea what I could do, although I'd lived and been married for years and years and years. He never, he still thought of me as a little girl and well, he just, he didn't appreciate me at all. I'm sorry to have to say all this about my dad and mum, but Mum was a gem. Now my dad was all right, I must give him his due, he did accept me in the end but when I was a youngster he never helped. He never hindered, but he never helped.

Do you suppose that's perhaps partly a consequence of the time if you like? The fact that we're led to believe anyway, traditionally, that you know, men had less active involvement in, if you like, household matters.

Yes, definitely. He was absolutely no good at cooking. Absolutely no good. He'd put on potatoes to boil and go off and do the gardening and 10 hours later... not quite but an hour later he'd come with a burnt pan. [Laughs.] Quite. He was hopeless.

And looking back on your life so far, how do you feel about things?

Well, when one door closes another opens. I started swimming two-and-a-half years ago and I am still at it every Monday night and well, I will be until I go to France, then it will change again. Hopefully I'll be able to continue there but heaven only knows what we will do in France yet.

Yes because you are about to begin a new chapter in your life in that you're moving to France. Could you...

The Loire Valley.

Could you tell us about that?

We're going to run a campsite which is already up and running. It's on the website I'll give you a card later. My daughter and son-in-law are the real owners – well will be, they will be when we get there – so I do the jobs that I can and be there for support and things like that. My granddaughter, now aged 16, has told me that I'm going to sit at the telephone all day and answer all the telephone calls – except of course, they'll be e-mails and they won't be telephones. But never mind, that's what she says and she went to the school, is going to Disneyland in Paris and become [the Disney character] Goofy.

And your grandson is going as well is he?

Both grandsons are going. The big one is trying to get a job at the moment but without success. He did have a little job in France but it didn't work out, so he's come home again. And at the beginning when we first was debating all this, they all said, 'We are not going to France.' But then they saw the photographs. It changed their minds completely and then they went, when they went to see it, well I'm the only one now who hasn't seen it, so I do not know where I am going or what I am doing but it will all work out in the end hopefully.

And your two grandsons how old are they?

One's 18 and the other's 14. Anyway,

So they

And then Hannah in between is 16.

So the 14-year-old, will he continue his education out there then?

They both will. The two younger ones will, yes.

Right.

So now Hannah, apart from learning French – she'll be in a French school so that should be no problem – has got to learn French and another language, I've forgotten whether it's Italian or Spanish. Spanish. Well, so she's got her work cut out. As I say, I did take French when I was a 16 or a teenager or in my early twenties, in the college, so, I'm hoping that some of my memory will come back in French and not in English.
Because you studied French when you were at school of course?

I've got GCE yes, 'O' level.

And if you had somehow chance to address the doubters – people who would see the disability and not the person – what would you say to people?

Think of what the person can do, not what she or he looks like. Because the brain use, nine times out of ten, it's more active than the body.

And in that, initially you were only given what was it, four days

Four days to live

To live, how does that make you now feel?

Jolly glad that this nurse had the foresight to put me in Mum's arms and tell her to go off and see what she could do for me.

So this was the nurse's message to your mother then?

Yes.

To say

Definitely. Yeah and when I went into hospital when I was six to have my tonsils and adenoids out, Mum and Dad were not allowed to stay and I was put into a ladies

dormitory, with no toys, no nothing. So one of the ladies at the other end of the room very kindly went into the children's play area and got me the greatest, biggest teddy bear I've ever seen in my life. I was having my tonsils out and when they came to take me up to have the operation – I can remember this, I was six – they took me in a wheelchair put me in a room, nobody in it, at least that's what I thought and just stayed there. And in the end I looked around, a mask was put on me and that was the last I knew about that one.

I suppose,

For those were the day – good old days that everybody keeps talking about – I say 'bad old days'.

I was going to say that's...

I've had one or two experiences like that.

That's a consequence of, you know, what was I suppose common practice then in...

Yeah,

In hospitals?

Very common practice. Mum wasn't allowed to stay anywhere near me. Nowadays mums sit, well, they go in and stay with their kids, don't they?

And when you come across, you know, other disabled people maybe younger people with disabilities do they ask you for your reflections at all?

I go around giving talks. I do a lot of that and I show my film, or the RDA films or whatever. I started off talking after Bill Hargreaves got us all down to London that weekend with a film. I've forgotten what it was now, about the disabled little girl, the

baby. I think Bill is at the beginning of it somehow, if I remember rightly. Such a long time ago.

Oh, Every Eight Hours. [Talking together.] Could it be Every...

No it was before that one.

Right.

Before that one. Oh long before that one.

And so who do you give talks to then in fact? What kind of groups?

I've given them to schoolchildren, the youngest being seven. They were lovely and women's groups and all kinds of things. For the children I give them things to do. If I want them to pretend they're blind then I give a scarf to one of them and they put the scarf on and I tell someone else to lead them and it's amazing what mistakes they make – the ones who can see, thank you very much. We've had some very near crashes. [Laughs.] For the physically disabled, what I do with the older ones – can't do it with the little ones because they can't stand with but I've got things for them as well – but for the older ones I give them a pair of gloves and then I give them a needle and thread and tell them to thread a needle. They can't. The gloves stop them.

And what kind of questions particularly – there you are again working with children of course – what kinds of questions do children in particular ask of you?

How I do things. So with the younger ones I always give them things to do, I always keep them active. When I say, I get a blackboard, I get it beforehand and chalk, and I say to them, 'Who'd like to write their names?' Well, of course little hands go up all the time. I said, 'Right, come on out you come. Put your name on this board.' And I said, 'Which hand do you use?' So if they said, 'Right hand', I said, 'Right, put that behind your back' and they say, 'Pardon?' I said, 'Yes, put it behind your back' and

of course, I'm laughing all the time about this because, well you've got to laugh with them. I said, 'Now, pick it up with your left hand.' 'I can't.' I said, 'Pick it up with your left hand.' If you try, it's amazing how many, they can't do it. They do in the end. I said, 'Now write your name on the board', so by the time the first person's done it, everybody wants to come out and have a go, which is lovely. Another thing I do is take pennies and halfpennies, which are very tiny and put them on a table and I tell them again, 'Pick up your gloves. Put your gloves on, now pick it up.' They can't.

This all to give children an idea of what it's like to have impaired fine...

Yeah.

Motor skills?

Yes. So one little girl craftily, I thought it was lovely of her, she got the other hand, put it under the table and just scooped it to the edge. I said, 'Right you've fathomed that one OK here's another one. Put it on the floor.' 'Pardon?' I said, 'Put the coin on the floor, the same coin. Now pick it up.' She couldn't. She got her foot on it to try and you know, to try and bounce it up, it wouldn't bounce. She said, 'You've won here.' I said, 'Yes love, I've won here, haven't I?' because we have a laugh about it you see. But I daren't give a needle and cotton to the young ones or the blindfold, so everywhere I go is different. I've got older people and you can't really do that with older people either, so we just talk generally and they ask me questions and I answer them;

And

So I talk to any age from seven upwards. I think my eldest was 80.

[End of Track 10]

Tape 6 Side A [Track 11]

OK, we thought then Sheila we'd recount your memories of the outbreak of the Second World War. What do you remember from that time?

It was 3 September 1939 that War was declared and we happened to be on holiday in North Wales, camping in a tent, with cows in our field with the tents – among us. And Dad went up as he usually did for the nine o'clock news and came back looking very sad and bewildered. He'd heard the outbreak, that War had now been declared after Chamberlain very firmly told us it wouldn't be. So.

So he had gone to what, to hear the news on the radio?

He went up to the farm to hear the nine o'clock news. He came back to the tent and told us that War had been declared, so Mum went up to hear the 10 o'clock news, which there was in those days on the wireless of course, and then we wondered whether to have our holiday or go home. But we'd only arrived the day before on the second for our annual holiday of two weeks, so we decided – I think it was wise in the end – to stay. When we got back home of course, from Hayfield where we lived, we could see the German aeroplanes as they flew over to bomb Manchester. Because as the crow flies it wouldn't be more than 10 miles, probably 12 miles away. We could see the, we could hear the bombs being dropped; we could actually see the smoke rising, which was really very disconcerting because it was so near. So far and yet it looked as though it was only a stone's throw away from us. And Dad joined the ARP – Air Raid Precaution. He was a warden and one night while the bomb was there just over Lantern Pike – we had Lantern Pike in front of us and Kinder Scout behind us, well-known places in Derbyshire – and he reported that a bomb had dropped in a little village or hamlet called Rowarth but over Lantern Pike he said. Anyway, they all rushed around to find where this bomb was, only to find in the middle of Rowarth it had landed. But there were two fire crews; one from Hayfield – one side of Rowarth – and the other from New Mills [ph] and they were having a discussion because this bomb had landed right in the middle of the river, a little stream, and it was on no

man's land. Hayfield didn't own it because it wasn't on their side, New Mills didn't own it because it wasn't on their side and Dad, who'd arrived then, they said to him, 'Who was the idiot who told us about this bomb?' So Dad shut up right, and didn't say a dicky bird that it was him because he was an RAA [RAP] warden and he should have known better. But was he to know? It absolutely arrived, dead where he said it had arrived and nobody could believe.

So it was an unexploded bomb, very obviously and

Well it turned out to be, yes.

Sat there in the middle of the

Sat there in the middle of

Of the stream

Of the stream... and nobody would rescue it because nobody owned it.

So how did they resolve the situation?

I don't know I wasn't there, I didn't want to know. Dad was laughing about it when he came home but the way they were all fighting who's it, you know, diffused the thing.

And do you remember, you know, changes in civilian life then?

Well, I was still at school at this time and we all had to carry gas masks and as soon as the alarm went off we all had to evacuate the school and go to somebody's house. And luckily for me my teacher, Miss Hadfield again, suggested that I just cut across the road and went to a cottage that was quite near us. We had another little girl in a wheelchair and she was also evacuated to this cottage. Everybody else went all over the place. The bombs of course, didn't land in our village, except one, who killed the

May Queen's mum, who happened to be out collecting rent at the time and that bomb was supposed to be for Manchester and it landed in our little village of Hayfield. The one and only, thank goodness.

So, was this Edie's mother?

Yes.

The girl...

The May Queen.

Girl who you became attendant to the May Queen later?

No, before.

Right, yes, before that happened.

[Talking together.] Yes.

I see. And you referred there to another girl who was using a wheelchair. She arrived an evacuee in the village, or?

No, she was one of our members but she wasn't in my class. She was in another class. She was older than me, so I didn't really see much of her but I knew she was in a wheelchair and quite a few operations and so on.

[Talking together.] And do you know

But I don't know what became of her or anything.

And what was the nature of her disability?

No idea.

Because I suppose it was fairly unusual to have, in a small village school then, two children at least with apparent disabilities.

There were three of us actually but we weren't in the same class.

And what was the circumstances of the third pupil?

I don't know. As I say, she wasn't in my class.

No, you said there were three of you altogether then,

There were three of us disabled.

Yeah.

Yes. [Talking together.] In the school.

So who, what was the situation of the, there was the girl using the wheelchair, and the third pupil?

I don't know, she was older; so I mean she was in a different class altogether.

Right.

But she got a job, the one who could walk, I met her years later up at the swimming pool because they had a swimming pool on our estate where we lived at little Hayfield, and she came up one day and we got talking. She knew I was disabled and she was disabled so we got talking. We didn't realise we had been to school together at the time. And she said that when she got a job in a shop she had so much standing to do that she just had to give up the job because they didn't give her a seat to sit on,

which I thought was a bit cruel. But those were the days, the good old days as they say, some people say, 'the bad old days' as I say.

And what other memories do you have of Wartime years then Sheila?

Watching the bombs because we could actually see the bombs leaving the aeroplanes 20 miles away as the road goes and listening to all the noises of the bombs, wheeling down. Fireworks these days have now gone, unfortunately I think, gone to the bouncing bomb: not bouncing bomb exactly, to the noisy things that remind me very vividly of Wartime and I hate 5 November.

And do you remember the cessation of hostilities?

Not really because as I say, we lived in the village. Mum and Dad took in three evacuees I should say, from Manchester – a brother and a sister and another girl. The girl was 13, I was about eleven at this stage, she was 13 the older one, she was lovely and then the two – brother and sister – they were nice as well. But three of them in a two-bedroomed bungalow didn't quite match up.

And after a time they returned home did they, or?

No, well we shouldn't have had three in the first place, so one was taken off [background noise] just up the road to me, still on the same estate. So I still could see her and play with her and I saw her, and the other two. I don't know where they went to but Mum shouldn't have had the three of them. Not with me as well.

And how would you characterise your mother, if you had to in just a few words: unfair perhaps to ask that but?

[Laughs.] Characters. She was outgoing. She was... some of the things she was a bit strict but in some ways yes because I feel being strict with me, she had to be or I wouldn't have done the things I have done. She didn't exactly force me but as I do

with children myself, guide them in such a way that they think they're doing it themselves but with the influence of the grown-up. I think she's kind, considerate and got you to do things that you otherwise wouldn't necessarily have done. So I think if I'd got another, different mother I might not have got as far as I did do with the mother I got.

And as I say, what difference do you think, you know, having your mother's influence made to you?

I think it made a lot of difference because she... during the War of course, with clothes we always handed them on, if they were still wearable we always handed them on to somebody else and I remember a friend of ours who was judging. At the May Queen we always had a fancy dress thing and one year a very dear friend of Mum's, and mine was invited to go down to the village school, the village fete and this lady knew that some of the people couldn't make things, they couldn't do things. It was Wartime but the children all looked reasonably dressed and in their nice things but she said, 'I can't give that, you know, one has something', so everybody got a little gift – sixpence I think it was – two-and-a-half pence as it is today. Sixpence and were they pleased as punch. Everybody got the same because they could not leave one person out. It was very fair.

And when it came to be your turn be a mother how did you feel about that?

Oh it was wonderful. Going around was a bit hectic, especially on the last couple of months because I was so heavy, and believe it or not the doctor put me in callipers again – once again – because the weight was too much but I didn't wear them. [Laughs.] I objected, particularly as it was a hot week, a hot summer year again, 1964.

And you know, as a mother did you feel differently in yourself, in your own view of the world as it were, once were yourself then a mum?

Not particularly. I'd got different jobs to do, different ways of thinking but I took it on myself to do what Mum had done with me and talk to my child and encouraged her to do little things. She probably doesn't remember all this but I do. You know, if she wanted to do something, give her a dustpan and brush. If I was sweeping the floor she had a dustpan and brush to sweep the floor with me and things like that, which any mother who was thinking will do.

And shall we cover as well Sheila, again moving to the time when you were at Wilfred Pickles School. Of course, that was the time before you were married but you still had your maiden name then, I think. There was another Sheila as well was there at the school?

No my, when I went to school myself.

Oh yes.

[Break in recording?] [Laughs.] Yes thought you might be.

I meant really to say when you were at school yourself what was your maiden name then?

Lead. L E A D. And there was a Sheila Steel there as well, so they always played a trick on us, 'Which was heavier, lead or steel? Which of you is heavier, lead or steel?' Funnily enough we both have our birthdays exactly the same time as well. I don't know how common we were. If we'd have been born together, we'd have been twins.

And are you still in contact with her?

No, I only saw her at school.

And your middle name Sheila, what is that?

Sylvia, goddess of the trees supposed to be. I don't know where 'Sheila' comes from. Celia I think, which is Irish isn't it, or something. Isn't it something to do with the goddess of music? Something to do with music, so I've got music and trees. Well.

And moving again rapidly across time, your husband was a teacher and I think in the last job he had, he worked then with disabled children?

He worked with disabled children at Fernbank which is a school at Adwick, at Carcroft I mean, and that was from five until 15, 16. And he loved it and he wished really he'd got into that years earlier but he wasn't trained for being with disabled children. But he was trying still to teach them gardening but I don't think he got very far with his gardening bit.

And what was his attitude to disability?

He wanted to do something to help them like I did and well, he enjoyed his last two years of life and I only wish he could have got there a bit earlier and had a career that he liked. He didn't particularly like teaching teenagers gardening; they weren't very co-operative to say the least.

And altogether then he spent what, how many years teaching?

Ten years, more or less.

And shall we talk about your role in the Doncaster and District Spastics Society, as it then was, Sheila? How did that...

Well we joined the – as we did with every town and city we went to – we joined the group. We had seen a notice in a shop that they were having an autumn fair, so we decided to go round and it gave an address to take our things to. So David, Sylvia and I went round to this house. Nobody was in but we saw a neighbour, so we knew we'd got right house and left the marmalade that we made for them on the doorstep. A few

weeks later we had a phone call asking, 'Would we like to go on the committee?' So I was the committee member and David and Sylvia came and did their homework, sitting at the other end of the table while I was on the committee. And then I was asked if I'd like to join the 62 Club, which was newly formed then. It had been formed the year before, so I joined that and very soon I became the secretary and David became the driver, so that continued until, well until he died so.

And so, in terms of the different activities of the Society, what were some of the things that you did?

We had talks on various subjects, like we did in Nottingham, and outings going down into York, organised by the York group. Told us where to go and what to do and also sent us a map that they'd published as to where to get in and what, you know, what we could visit and what we couldn't visit because of stairs and steps... and which cafes, where the disabled toilets were, everything we needed. So York is a wonderful place to get round, least it was in those days and we all went. I took my dog as well and we weren't allowed to go on the walls with the dog, we weren't allowed to go in the cathedral with the dog – the Minster – so we missed out, so we had a lovely walk along the river. [Laughs.]

And so, you had a dog then for many years, or?

That particular dog, no, but I'd always had dogs. When one died we'd get another one.

What was your favourite breed?

Labradors. Golden Labradors.

And quite an intelligence really?

Oh yes.

What changes Sheila have you noted, perhaps in your own mobility then, you know, over the years?

When I was going to the AGM in Blackpool, many years ago now, I wondered how I was going to get around. Would there be steps? Would there be a slope? I should have known better because there was everything there. I wondered whether to take a wheelchair or a walker. In those days I had a basket, which is like an Asda basket on four wheels and I managed with that. But as it was March when I decided to go... I heard about it, I decided to wait a bit longer to find out if anybody could come with me and what the circumstances would be when I got to Blackpool. Eventually when we did go I decided to take the walker, so that I could be independent, I wouldn't have to rely on somebody all the time. And my friend from Boston, who had helped me quite a lot when I was there, said she'd take me in the car, so we had a wonderful time. The Norbreck Hotel is lovely and we got a sea view and it was blissful, fine and everything was fine. We met a few people we'd known from right, left and centre, years ago including Bill Hargreaves, Ron Firman and quite a number more; too many to be named.

And so, this was as a Spastics Society AGM and this was the first time was it when you came to the conclusion that, you know for mobility you, at least for some of the time, may have to look to other solutions then, or?

Well yes I'd, I hadn't got a wheelchair then or a walker, I'd just got this handle on wheels like a trolley. But soon after that I went to the doctor and said, 'Could I have a wheelchair?' And he said 'No problem, yes.' I was going to give all the information I needed to give; he didn't need any. He just said, 'Yes.' But that is rather heavy. I got one from the government, I've still got it and it's rather heavy. Too heavy really, cumbersome, so I decided to get a walker after that, so now I can't do anything, without either the walker or the wheelchair. Sticks are no good to me, I've tried that but as my right hand doesn't... too easily that was no good to me at all.

'Walker' is a frame on wheels and generally over the years, how have... You referred earlier to when you were carrying Sylvia, to the fact that the doctor was suggesting you wore callipers and specifically in regard to cerebral palsy. How have you found the reaction of GPs over the years?

In the first few years I don't think they knew what to do and what was what but I think gradually over the years I think they've learnt quite a bit. But I think the disabled themselves can teach doctors a thing or two.

What are some of the things you think that need emphasising?

I don't know in some ways. They think you should be able to walk, but with balance, you've got to hang on to something, to move. I know I could walk ordinary until, well a few years back, but I felt as increasing age caught up with me that I needed some help, gadgets in some ways. I can't stretch to put anything on coat hangers, if they're too high up, I just can't do it now because I haven't got the balance. You need three or four hands to do jobs; two to hold on to and two to do your job with and we haven't got four hands, so therefore you don't do the job.

And looking back Sylvia, what have been some of your proudest moments do you think?

Proudest? Oh, being recognised for the things I've done, which I haven't done. I mean, I've done things but I didn't know I influenced other people as much as I have been apparently. I've been told that I influence quite a lot of people by just simply listening and thinking and trying to advise them in my own particular way.

And if you could somehow talk to yourself, you know, if you could meet your young self, perhaps your seven-year-old self, what would you now say to that seven-year-old?

Get on with it [laughs] and just keep trying. Do your best. Do what you can, as the Brownie motto says, 'Do your best.' And hope that you get somewhere but obviously people have noticed me even more than I've noticed people because quite a number of people have said how much they've gained from my knowledge and I say 'I've done nothing.' They've said, 'You have, I've been there and just listening.' There was one little boy at Stepping Stones and he just came in, he wouldn't look at anybody, he was autistic and he wouldn't think of anybody, he just went his own way and that was it. If his mum went out of sight he was absolutely screaming his head off and doing. Anyway, every time he came we just said, 'Hello' to him and he took blind bit of notice of us. After about two years, one morning he came in this little lad, he said, 'Hello Sheila' and went off and everybody looked at me in... I said 'Hello' back of course. I didn't let on that I, you know, was surprised, but I got the breakthrough and I found that I'd done it. I'd done nothing, absolutely nothing except said 'Hello' to him each morning. And so he must have taken it in, you know. Things like that pleases me no end because although I've done nothing I've done a lot. There was another little boy who came into the place and ran circles – absolutely chaotic – and nobody could stop him and they kept chasing him. Well the more they chased him, the more he did it so I just...

[End of Track 11]

Tape 6 Side B [Track 12]

The little boy ran around in circles getting nowhere and I just sat. They couldn't catch him, so I sat on my seat because I couldn't chase him and I wasn't going to bother about chasing him round. Sat with a jigsaw on the table ready for him and the next time he came round I put my hand out, grabbed him and sat him down at the table and he did his jigsaw. Now his mum looked at me, 'You've done nothing but you've got him sitting down, how've you done it?' I said, 'Just waiting for the opportunity to grab', which I did. But another little boy came in and we had a table with some books on and he just came in, knocked them all off. So, of course, one of the helpers picked them up, put them back on the table, so the next thing he did was knocked them off again. It was a grand game this was, he was absolutely marvellous, for there was I just watching, didn't do anything. Next time he came round, I said to the grown-ups, 'Don't pick them up' and they wandered off – didn't bother as if they were doing something else. And this little boy came, he looked at me, he looked at the books and I said, 'Yes, you put them on the floor, pick them up' and he picked every one up, put them back on the table properly, went off and he never did it again. Never did it again, so just by doing nothing, again, I did a lot.

And so, by working with children and young people and by helping others, that's very clearly I think then one of the main strands of your life so far?

Yes. May I keep on helping other people for many, well for a few more years to come.

And in terms of, you know, what you still would like to do, what remains within your ambitions, if you like?

Well the ambition now of course, with my family is going to France and starting a new life altogether. This is come as quite a surprise to me at my age but I'm up for the challenge.

And the very best of luck with that Sheila, you know.

And if you come over I'll start again and tell you all about it and continue my saga.

That a deal. Well, good luck with that Sheila, as I say,

Thank you.

Your new life in France.

Yep.

[End of recording]