



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

Pauline Farr
Interviewed by Phil Hills

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Interviewee's surname: Farr **Title:**

Interviewee's forename: Pauline **Sex:** Female

Occupation: **Date and place of birth:** 1941

Date(s) of recording: 9th June 2005

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Name of interviewer: Phil Hills

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Interviewer's comments:

Tape 1 Side A [Track 1]

[Interviewer testing equipment] This is very ad hoc; I mean you can go where you'd like to go really ...

Right, yeah.

... I mean, you know, I don't particularly want to start this you know, what date were you born and all, I mean this ... I'm not quite sure what the approach for you, or how Scope approached, how you got involved or ...

I think we saw an advert in the *Saga* magazine.

Was it in the Saga magazine was it?

Mike was it in the *Saga* magazine, the advert?

[Another voice] Yes.

Yes. Yeah, yeah. And they were appealing for volunteers.

So what drew you to it? What made you feel you'd give a response?

Because I was ... Because I'd had cerebral palsy and I was over sixty and also because I just feel it's important actually to get a full picture of, especially something like cerebral palsy where so many are affected so differently aren't they, whether it's speech or like me with my right side being affected, in just so many ways, and I thought well it will be interesting. It's supposed to be a sort of documentation of people's ideas of the ... for future reference really for, for students to study. Am I correct there, I don't know?

Yeah. Well, yeah it's a mixed bag really. Yes ... yeah, it's a resource I suppose isn't it so that people can then find out.

Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

But, so have you...[?] south I mean, what, what's your background, what ... with, have you from your, with your parents, with your education, with your colleagues?

Yeah. Well certainly I was very fortunate. My parents were the sort that didn't hide me away, they encouraged me to lead a, you know, a full life which I've been able to do I'm very pleased to say. When I was born, my mother tells me when I was born that I, it was a long delivery and I was breech. And when I was born and she was always stressed, she was well looked after, there was a doctor there, there were several nurses, I didn't breathe after I was born for several minutes and they put me in hot water and cold water to shock me and I eventually got the idea of crying [Laughs], and, and so alleluia, you know, it, I, they were very hopeful that I'd be able ...

And what date was that?

And that was in 1944 so towards the end of the war really I was born. And certainly at that time they thought everything would be fine. And when I was starting, sort of I suppose a toddler; mum found that I was only using my left hand. And she spoke to our doctor about it who referred her to a specialist, and he said 'You're a very fussy mother who doesn't want her child to be left-handed, so there's nothing wrong it's just your child's left-handed.' Full stop. So, as mum was coming out the nurse who was with them whispered to her 'Don't leave it at that.' Now I don't know quite what happened with mum after that, whether she knew anyone else to go to or not she never actually said and suddenly she's dying now so I can't ask her. But I do remember that my grandmother had a photograph of me and that her doctor looked at the photograph of me and said there's something wrong with her, just from the photograph. So in due course they obviously appreciated there was a problem. At three years old or about three, I had the tendon extended in my right leg and I was taken to hospital, left for several days while they did this – the parents weren't encouraged to visit – and then after the operation I was then sent home. I can't remember anything about this; this is just what my parents told me. And I was very lucky in so far as the, the junior school I went to, the, the primary school I went to

were quite happy to have me there, so I was able to go into mainstream education, and although I was fairly bright I didn't sadly get my eleven plus so...

Just to give a bit of background, where were you living?

I was living in Bristol then.

This was in Bristol.

Yeah, yes. My parents ran a sub post office.

Right. And did you have brothers, sisters?

Had a sister who was five years younger than me and, and she now lives in Canada. [Laughs]. It was just the two of us really.

And what were attitudes like at school? How did you find things at school?

I was, I don't ever remember a problem at school. I'd grown up in that community so people were aware of me. I think that may be why.

So it was really a quite supportive community?

Oh very supportive, yeah, yeah very supportive and very kind and friendly and ...

But how about yourself? How did you feel in relation to other children?

I didn't feel any different. No, I just felt like one of them. And it wasn't really 'til I went to senior school – my parents decided to send me to private school and someone came up on the first day and asked me what my problem was – that it started to dawn on me that I was different.

Somebody suddenly said there is a problem?

Yeah.

And you hadn't really been aware that there's a problem?

Yes, I hadn't realised ... I mean I realised, you know, things were not quite right but it didn't perturb me that much, but somebody actually came up and asked me. Which actually was a very sensible thing to do because I was able to explain and then we just got on with life. But certainly that wasn't a problem, I was very happy at that school, very happy indeed. I mean, there were always things in life, and still are. You know, they, when they interviewed me to go there they said we'll have you on a term's trial, which I suppose was fair enough really, they didn't want the responsibility of someone perhaps they wouldn't be able to cope with, but certainly it worked out very happily.

You didn't feel ... you didn't feel restricted in any way?

No, no, no; I even had a left-handed hockey stick. [They laugh] So I even had to do my bit on the hockey field. So certainly I didn't ...

...So the way though, partly it was your own personality, you're very practical and your aptitude...

...Yes ...

... and with the good support of the community behind you

...Yes ...

...enabled you really for you to take a full part in your childhood and growing up at that period.

Yeah, yeah. I think that was it actually, because my parents encouraged me to have a go. We also tried, I remember going to various people like relaxation people relax but [?] relaxation and different sort of things where they hoped that it would help. And I

certainly remember one person saying to my parents 'What she needs to do is just to sit quietly in a room all the time with nothing to stimulate her really, and then her arm -' especially my arm which is quite troublesome, been very troublesome in the past - 'will be more relaxed.' And I mean it is true but what sort of life would that have been, you know. So I chose to have a more complete life but it has taken its toll in a way. I have suffered a lot with spasms in my arm which also affect my leg to the point that it doesn't always want to go to the ground and, or it will suddenly seize up when I'm walking along and it'll suddenly seize up.

So different types of therapy have helped that ...

... Really I take a tablet at night now to help me 'cos it twitches a lot which isn't so bad in the day; you're not so aware of it, but at night, when you're lying still and it's twitching, that's ...

...And you can't control it?

You can't control it. That's very, quite unpleasant. But the pill will relax me and that is brilliant. I just take the one at night 'cos as I said it isn't too much of a problem during the day, but certainly if I was under stress with exams or, well anything really, I, I'm, I've often thought I'm the right, I'm, in some ways I've got the wrong temperament because I'm very geed up. Do you know what I mean? And I do feel stress which of course affects my arm and leg, but then stress always affects your weakest point whoever you are, doesn't it really?

Oh absolutely...

Yeah ...

...one way or another.

...Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah...

So going back to ...

... Yeah.

... you going to what's that, secondary school you were saying?

Secondary school it was, yes, yes.

And somebody said, or sort of pointing out that you [??] get an awareness of a problem.

Yes, yeah.

So what sort of impact did that have on you at that time?

Well I, I've been a very determined person I think, and I'd think right well, you know, I'll show them that I'm as good as everybody else [Laughs]. And I think because of that I worked very hard at school and although I wasn't brilliant obviously at sport and things like that, I could, I worked hard at my studies and so I did, I did OK with that, you know.

But did you, would you have liked to have done more sport? Did that affect you ...?

It didn't particularly perturb me, no. It's oh, it's interesting as recently I've started this keep-fit group, which is for elderly people and we're not so fit, and actually I've enjoyed it very much and thought I could have done this in my life and, you know, that I'd never tried it really.

But there's much more recognition now isn't there than there would have been, well I suppose what we're talking about mid-1950s?

Yes that's right, yes exactly, exactly. And so you feel there's much more encouragement to have a go at everything these days, and we'll find a way around it and, you know what I mean, whereas then I suppose, yes, you didn't want to really try anything new in case it was a bit dangerous or anything. I suppose that that's ...

Did you have any advice [?] off organisations or what would be the Spastics Society at the time or...?

No. I didn't have much help at all actually, but I think that may have been 'cos we never sought it to be fair.

Were you parents very independent?

Yes, you see and, and we got on with life and we found ways around things and, you know, even things like I was asked to top and tail some gooseberries one day and there was a table with a crack down the middle and so I lined them all up and chopped them all off which was a great [They laugh] great fun you know, you can find a way around it actually. And I mean these days there are such wonderful gadgets for gripping and, and especially undoing jars and tins. Tins I invariably seem to end up splashed in the contents of the tin as we try and do it one-handed. [They laugh]. But certainly it is ... I think it's much better in some ways. People are more aware of disabled people and accept, I hope accepting them. Certainly at the school there's a child in a wheelchair and she joins in everything that the others do.

So just going back to you ...

... Yeah ...

... to your school, you, you're sort of approach, approaching adolescence now. Were there any problems for you in adolescence? Was there again, you know, a group identity, peer groups...?

No. I had a very good friend. She and I were really close all through that, those five years I was at that school, and so I didn't really find any problems with adolescence at all really, no, no, no I was just very happy at the school and, and was coping really well with life and ...

So you would never have thought of yourself at that time as disabled?

Not really, not, not to be separate from everybody else. Maybe, yes, if you'd said to me are you dis, have you got a problem, yes, I've got a problem but ...

Well everyone's got a problem, we don't all know about it. [Laughs]

But yes, as you say. So most people, they're hidden aren't they so you don't know. But, I mean, the more I talk, especially as I got older, the more I talked to people the more I realised I'm not the only one by any means. [They laugh] But no I was accepted and, as I said, in the five years I was at [Interviewer talks over her]

Do you think partly it is your own personality, you know, and attitudes that enable you to be accepted in that way?

Yeah. And I've also thought perhaps trying to show to people that I find a way of coping and everything might help but then, 'cos we never know any of us when we might have a stroke or, or something like that ...

...Absolutely ...

... and I feel ... I've known disable people who've just been so bogged down with the awfulness of it all to the extent that their lives have just become a misery.

I mean I have tinnitus ...

...Oh right, yeah.

...and when I started very severe and I got very depressed with that for a while...

...Yes.

... but, you know, once I got over it it's just a background, I don't even think about it mostly. Yet I know people who got it about the same time who actually just focussed into it ...

... Yeah, yes.

... and just virtually walk around all day listening to it. So there's two ways ...

Yeah, that's right. You can go either way, exactly, exactly. Well my husband used to work in a day centre for disabled people and he said there were some with similar disabilities to mine who just sat and did nothing all day and so therefore I think a lot of it must come from yourself. But having said that I shouldn't, I don't feel I can dismiss people who are very disabled ...

... Oh no, no, no, no, no, it's not to say that.

...I know, no, you know what I mean, cerebral palsy affects people in so many ways...

... Everything is very individual and very personal to the person and their circumstances ...

... It is, exactly. Oh, exactly. Yeah, yeah, yes, yes, yes.

... and their environment and, and, you know, in a sense it was wonderful that you had that support but not, in the family behind you, but not everybody has that do they?

No.

There's other things that can happen.

No, no, no exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

But, but your parents, in that sense then, I mean some parents find it difficult to cope with these sorts of situations, but your parents were pretty well ...

They coped very well but I think my suff, my sister may have suffered a bit.

Right.

I think from things she's said to me I - wasn't perhaps aware of it so much - but she felt that I was sort of a bit more doted on, do you know what I mean? So she may have suffered without me appreciating it at that time.

So they, your parents might have just put a little bit more ...

Protected me, yes ...

Yes, yes.

... protected me more and, in some respects. But as I said it's difficult for me to judge; I don't remember it, it being like that, you know?

Yeah. Is she a shy, quieter person or ...?

No, no, no, no, no. And she went to the same school as I went to, but she was very unhappy there and, and became involved in a group who actually were quite naughty children and so she didn't have a very happy time; it was very different from my experience there. But there again you see I think she suffered 'cos I the teacher would say, 'Oh Pauline was a good girl.' Or 'Pauline did well in this subject.' And, do you know what I mean?

So she saw herself in contrast to ...

Yes, yes, exactly. And I, that wasn't, wasn't fair really. So I think she may have ... I don't think mum and dad would have meant her to, but I think she may have suffered a bit.

Yeah.

As a result. Who knows? I don't know. I just feel when parents have to cope with these situations it must be very difficult, it must be very hard for them to, you know, they must think what did I do wrong? And you hear it today don't you with babies that are born with problems that parents are saying what did I do wrong. I'm sure they must have felt the same. But, but I don't feel they did anything wrong.

Did your mum work or was she...?

Yeah. She, she used to help in the post office and, with my dad and she had quite a busy life 'cos she's also an organist and a pianist and so she, her spare time ...

Was that in the church or ...?

In the church yes, yes, and [?]

So you went to church?

Yes, yes, I've always been a church goer. I'm an Anglican and I think that has helped me actually, my faith.

And, again, did, did the church help you and with your family?

Not that I was aware of but, you know, I just got on with it really. It's so, it's so difficult to judge. I just feel I've been very blessed really that I haven't had ... in fact the saddest thing of all was that I wanted to be a teacher and I was turned down. And that broke my heart.

When you say turned down into coll, into training?

Yes, I got my place at college, I went for my interviews I got my qualification, I got my place at college. I went for a normal medical, you know, heart and lungs, what have you, that was fine. Several weeks later I had a ... message to go and see the college doctor; who I thought they were just out of politeness asking that I should see

him. And I stayed with him just a few minutes and in that time he said you couldn't possibly teach children, you couldn't possibly manage their coats, I, so, you know ...

That's all the grounds he gave?

And that was all the grounds he gave. And I was so stunned I didn't fight my corner really, I just came away. I remember sitting on the bus crying my eyes out, and, and I was going to France on a Fran, French, Bristol, we used to do a Bristol/Bordeaux exchange, I was doing that the very next day, so I suppose perhaps if I'd, we'd stayed we might, I might have ...

... Perhaps ...

...done more.

Yeah perhaps got, got a...

But because I was going away ...

...got a second opinion.

... then coming back sort of five weeks later, and I suppose I'd got over the worst of the upset by then. They put me back into the clearing house isn't it they have, but by then all the places had been allocated and ...

Still that's fairly traumatic if you'd worked very hard and ...

It was very traumatic and ...

... been encouraged ...

... and been encouraged by the headmaster of my primary school and, you know, people, the teachers, they were all very encouraging of me doing it, and, yes it was, it just knocked me sideways. And then when I left 'cos I, what I did was I did my A-

levels at a grammar school, 'cos my parents felt that the private school was lovely but it was a bit too secure and there were only girls so my parents felt it would be a good idea if I went to a mixed grammar school, so I went to the local grammar school, which I enjoyed as well actually. And then when I left school I had problems getting work. I did some voluntary work and it was really ...

One minute, let me get the sequence right. The grammar school... how old were you when you went to grammar school?

I would have been sixteen. I just went to do my A-levels.

Oh, just to do the A-levels, right, yes.

Just to do the A-levels, yeah. And then ...

And you had, you got you're a levels and ...?

Yeah. I didn't get them all [Laughs].

Didn't get them all but you [?] yeah.

Right, I did. And it was a ... the parents of a friend of mine who knew somebody who worked with a girl who had a disability like mine, a big company in Bristol. And they said they would see if there were any vacancies there because they felt she'd made a good impression and they, there was a vacancy and I was lucky enough to get it. And I was work, I worked as a cost clerk and I started to do accountancy exams but then I met my husband and so I gave that up. [Laughs] And we got married in 1966 and had ...

That's almost your, what would it be, 1966 so it's ten, twenty, thirty, forty years now is it married?

It's forty years next ...

...Yes, next year.

...year. Yeah, that's right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Congratulations.

Thank you. [They laugh]. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Going strong. And then we had our first son a year later so I didn't work for long really; I gave, yeah, I gave up work to have him. And then we had another son three years later and it, at that time women gave up work on the whole and brought up their families.

So this all happened about 1965, 66.

Sixty six we got married, sixty seven and seventy we had our ...

So you, your adolescence then was pretty successful.

Oh yeah.

You didn't find, you didn't find it difficult to make relationships...

No.

... or friendships or ...

No. No, no, no. I didn't have many boyfriends. [Laughs]

No, but you knew more or less where you were going, you knew who ...

Yes. That's right, yes, yes exactly. Yeah, yeah. And I've been very, very blessed. My husband's a wonderful man, he really is. He's been fantastic throughout. 'Cos not everyone would want to take on someone with a disability really, I [??] ...

I'm sure it's a two-way process though and... [They laugh]

But ... no I have been blessed in that way and, and, you know, I feel that's a compensation for not being able to teach; at least I've been involved with children pretty well all my life on a different way, you know.

But on the other hand, if you'd been able to go into teaching at that time and, you know, and increase your career in that field, you know, that would have been...

Yes. Oh yes. I would have loved it and to this day I feel sad about it and I feel I wish I'd have fought harder at the time ...

But that's very difficult, you know, we always say these things with hindsight don't we ...

...Yes, yes, yes ...

... but at the time if you don't have the knowledge and the, you know, and the confidence...

...No ...

...of that knowledge it's very difficult isn't it to argue against the status quo.

I mean I think that's, that's been my biggest problem in life: I've had people who've told me I can't do things. I fight back now. [They laugh] But, you know, I feel I'm always having to prove I, no, not necessarily now, but years ago I was always having to prove I could do it. Prove I could cope with the children and, and that sort of thing. But I mean understandably as people as wary aren't they?

And you still haven't had any contact with any other organisations that ...?

No, no, no I haven't at all really. Perhaps there's a bit of denial in me.

Well not necessarily. I'm not saying you should have to but it's just that...

Yes.

... I suppose it's just me in the way that I've worked with organisations and it's interesting meeting somebody who hasn't sort of worked within the organisational [?]

No I haven't really at all and, and ... I broke my arm five years ago – my left arm – so I couldn't do anything, and even actually even then I just asked for some help from our doctor's side, I didn't from Scope's side actually. No I haven't had anything to do with Scope at all.

How does, how, what's your image of Scope?

Well I've always felt that they perhaps help people who've got more problems than I have. Yes, I think that's, that's because I've managed to overcome problems I haven't felt I needed to seek their help or advice. It's a difficult one isn't it actually, or is that I don't want to be [?] ...

Well it's not necessarily difficult I mean because there's no need to.

No, no.

I mean the, the, you know, I'm not trying to act as a spokesman for Scope here but, you know, they're there as an organisation if needed and, you know, they probably would have, you know, they're also a pressure group for awareness and...

...Yes ...

... in society in general, and probably, and have linkages and can have things or people that they can put in touch with and they might have been able to help on the teaching role...

...Yes exactly ...

...in the past ...

...Yes ...

...you know, not necessarily just on disablement as disablement but, you know, just be able to get you in contact with other organisations, other people who, who could put, you know, put you through to other ideas or things. So I mean there, there, there's different ways of looking at it.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And with Scope...

I think we all ...

...the widest brief is quite wide. But at the same time you don't actually have to use it...

No, no, no.

... I mean there's other ways of doing things.

Yes, yes. But I think it was just really a case of we got on with it, you know and we, I suppose in a funny way we accepted that I couldn't do it and therefore, yes, got on with it. But it might have been a very good channel to have gone down and I might have found help with a career as well 'cos in my heart of hearts I didn't really enjoy [?]; I mean it was alright, it was an alright job, do you know what I mean?

But compared to the, sort of the creativeness of what you might have achieved ...

Yes, exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Certainly, yes, I suppose I do resent that, out of everything in my life that's the thing that was hardest to bear.

Of course you were very young ...

Yes, yeah, yes. And then of course, because we had a family and everything I didn't perhaps then think well I could have trained when I was an adult, or a more mature adult, couldn't I? By which time there was much more awareness of disability and ...

Well also just generally, you know, people go back to university or college [Both speak together] as mature students.

Yeah, yeah, yes. But I think because I had the children I felt I was fully stretched then in any case really. But I do feel, yes, that was a missed opportunity really, but no good crying over spilt milk is there? [Laughs]

But, so how many children have you had?

We've got two sons, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sounds lovely.

They're in their thirties now, yeah, yeah. And I've got four granddaughters.

Wonderful.

And then after, once they were older, well you know, sort of teenagers, I joined the civil service, and I worked in the civil service... Or first of all actually I found a job at a place called [inaud] where they have, they had – don't know whether it's still functioning – a factory and offices for disabled people. In fact the whole place was for disabled people; the housing, everything was for disabled people. And it was literally about a mile from where we lived in Andover.

Right.

That was just by chance. And they were advertising for someone to work just twelve hours a week, so it was three mornings a week, in costing. So I, as I said when the

children were a bit older, I got a job there. I think the day I arrived they said could I do more hours, 'cos they needed help in another department as ...

[End of Track 1]

Tape 1 Side B [Track 2]

That's the advantage of a mini disc isn't it? A mini disc lasts two hours but...

Oh right, right.

But, yep, seems to be working OK. I think. I wonder if it's high enough. Yes that's about right. Right.

Yes, so I worked there for three years and then a friend of mine ...

Whereabouts was that again, sorry?

That was a place called Enham Alamein.

Right.

Yes, it was set up from, I think, something to do with the war and people who were disabled in the war. So there was a factory and offices and housing all round.

Absolutely wonderful really for, for people.

But was it, because it was just specifically for disablement, was it sort of sectioned off from society?

Well you, there were able-bodied people that worked in our, in our place as well as the disabled. The housing was really for disabled people but people could come in to the place like I did from ordinary housing, you know, and ...

So morale was quite high and ...?

Well I felt very much that ... it's an awful thing to say really but I just felt the disabled people were sort of kept in their place, told what to do ...

Patronised.

...Yes, and patronised, yeah, very good word, yeah, yeah, yeah. And because they were given their house ... well not given their housing but because they were provided with housing, which obviously they had to pay for, they weren't always treated as fairly as I felt they might have been in a normal working environment. And so I worked there for three years, which was fine with my family ...

Was there any way of engagement in that, in the process there that people could, you know, if they felt that frustration, that they could approach the ...

Well there, there were people who, certainly they had their own council of the disabled, they had their own council and one chap I remember in particular was quite a vociferous person, but unfortunately I don't feel he always would have put the case over well. There was a certain amount of bitterness and...

So that sort of negated things ...

Yeah...

...like the arguments ...

...Yeah ...

...to a certain degree.

That's right, exactly, exactly. And I just ... I felt the idea was absolutely wonderful but certainly the management, pretty well, were able-bodied. There may have been the odd manager who was disabled but most of them able-bodied.

So they didn't really have the viewpoint from the...

No, no, no, no. But they gave work to very disabled people ...

...Who normally wouldn't probably...

...wouldn't be able to do anything. They were able to do some work here, yeah, yeah.

Did that all open your eyes so to speak to some degree?

It did really, yes, yes, yes. I felt great... it was really difficult actually to see some people they were so badly disabled, and perhaps that was the first time I'd actually been in that sort of environment where the non-disabled were exceptional, as it were. But, as I said, I just felt there was, there was too, there was too much, you know, patronising of the people, which I... to the extent that I felt uncomfortable there and I found a job in the civil service, and I was in the civil service then for seventeen

years. 'Cos they were, I mean they were just so very fair, disabled and whatever, you know they ...

What year did you start in the ...

...so ...What year did I start? Must have been about eighty five, 1985.

And what department?

I can't remember what it was called now. [They laugh] They were all forever changing names of departments, [Laughs] but it was to do with supply, a logistics supply, at the Andover MOD. It's involved with logistics and we were supplying whatever goods, you know, the army required. Well that was the theory as long as you had the money and could actually do it. And there was always the hope that we'd be able to track everything, but that was such a difficult thing to do with... you know, suddenly there was a war and everything would be flown out and it was hard to keep track of it all. But it was... it was an OK job.

Yeah, you seem to have become very much on the sort of statistical side of things.

Yes, yes I suppose the, the numeracy that sort of has a certain amount of appeal yeah, yeah. But it was, I mean it was, that was clerical work.

Yes. So if you'd been a teacher what d'you think you would have taught?

I wanted to teach primary school children, so really, you know, the English, maths, the basics. Really I would have loved to have taught like six, seven year olds, that sort of age.

So that side, that sort of logical side of you, could have come out, could have come out in a much more sort of creative way.

I think so, yes, yes, I think so.

Because you've got that lo, that very logical ability ...

...Yes, yes, yes ...

... you've, you've narrowed down to some extent in the jobs that you've done.

Yes, that's right exactly. And the civil service was very much you do what we tell you sort of everything's laid down and, and you follow a certain format and, so it doesn't give you any chance really for creativity.

Have you thought of going into education at all? I mean, as governor of a school or, or anything like that, you know [Both talk together]

Yeah, I've, I ... I was never invited to do that. I did help when our children were young and ... in the grounds, in the grounds of the primary school there was a nursery built and I used to help there, which I enjoyed very much. I did several years there just, so that, that really fulfilled a need I suppose in me, and it worked out, you know, worked out fine with the children as well.

'Cos you'd got pre-school and ...

Yeah that's right yes, yes, yes, yes. And I went there, my youngest son and I ... he was, he was needing pre-school about the same time that the nursery was opened so I used to go along and help with him and then he went on to mainstream school and I stayed and helped for several ... I did that, yes, yes, yes. I also worked as a local correspondent on the local paper.

Did you?

Used to get ...used to go to council meetings [They laugh] ...

Oh right, Andover Council was it?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And that worked well because my husband was often working away long hours and what have you, and so it gave me something to do and, I mean I could do a lot of it from home really, ringing up. Obviously I had to go to council meetings but otherwise people would often ring up with reports and things like that.

How did you feel about issues on council meetings and how they were dealt with and things like that?

Oh yes. I was quite impressed actually. I don't suppose I would have ever gone to anything like that had it not been for ...

...Another eye-opener! [Laughs]

...for this. Yes, exactly, exactly. But I did feel there was a lot of passion and people really did care about the community and I felt that was important. I remember certainly the youth, even then, you know, problems, what do the youth do in their spare time. An organisation was set up and, you know, supported by the council, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've also been fairly involved with church over the years as well. I'm ... in my last church I was church warden for nearly three years ...

That's at ...

... 'til we moved. That was in Andover.

Andover.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I found that fascinating, very interesting really. But I'd been on the Parochial Church Council for several years before that so ... I felt I was, I knew a fair amount about it but even so there was an awful lot to learn as church warden but I enjoyed that very much, and I'd retired then so I was able to ...

PCCs can be fairly controversial ...

... Oh yes!

...bodies can't they?

Yes, yes, especially when you're chairing them and you've got some strong characters. [Laughs] Yes, yes they can, yes. There again it's usually, people feel passionately about things.

Just go back to your family a minute; how about your own sons? How have they felt?

I think my youngest son was not exactly bullied but was picked on because of me at one stage. It was just after we'd moved from Bristol up to Hampshire and he started in a new class. He was never very keen, never very happy at school. And then he had, you know, had to move schools as well and he said one day that he was, he'd been picked on because of, you know, the way I was and, but we told his teacher who actually has since become a very good friend of ours, and she was wonderful and supported him and so he, yeah, he came through it all. I'm not aware my eldest son having ever had any problems. He's very upbeat and positive thinking, do you know what I mean? So whether that might have affected him I don't know.

It's like everything isn't it, you know?

Yes.

Partly it's the mixture of the personality...

Yeah, yeah ...

... and things that happen to you.

But other than that I don't think ...of course I don't know, they might not have said, told me might they 'cos they'd know it would hurt me so they might not have ever said about, about the situation. My granddaughters are lovely 'cos, well my sons were the same when they were little, you know – oh grandma we'll do this or we'll help you cut that or what have you, [Laughs] so ... I think this is it, you, I have to make – and it's the same with my husband – I have to ... he, I mean he was so easy: oh I'll do that for you, I'll do that for you, and I have to make myself do things.

Yeah...

I could easily ...

...'cos other people will take over.

Yes, they will. That's right, yes.

Good intentions but ...

Yes, oh exactly, yeah, yes, yes. Like in the supermarket if I ever go shopping on my own, in the supermarket there's always somebody wanting to pack my bags for me which is lovely and I always feel I must accept it because there might be somebody like me who is desperately in need of help, but sometimes I think oh I wish they'd leave me to it because I would, I'd put all the fridge things together and all this together, do you know what I mean?

Yes, yes. You know what you're doing really ...

Yeah ...

...and other people ...

...that's right. But you think oh I must accept their help 'cos there may be others who desperately need it and they may feel oh she didn't, she pooh poohed it and therefore I won't offer again, and I think that's important as well. I do feel quite strongly that, you know, I'm carrying a banner – not necessarily a banner – but I'm trying to make my point as a disabled person that, you know, I can do an awful lot and find a way around most things. Hopefully to take the fear away from other people who are anxious about disabled people, I don't know.

So, have you, I mean, going back to organisations like Scope, have you ever thought of working with people like Scope and...

No I haven't.

...these sort of issues?

No I haven't no, no. And really, yes, I can ...

With your knowledge, you know, it just sounds like you could ...

...Yes I ought to, I ought to try and do something shouldn't I really, yes. Perhaps ...

Well it's just a thought.

...here's an opportunity for me to ... yes, yes, yes. Yes certainly ... I suppose it's because I was so encouraged to lead a normal life that I haven't perhaps always

looked at myself as disabled so ... do you know what I mean? So therefore I haven't sought the help of those sort of organisations.

But your awareness of these issues and the social interactions and things that happen on an everyday level on the street or whatever, you know, could be quite useful to other people.

They could, couldn't they? Yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess then it would be in Plymouth would it, the local ...?

Yes, there's ...

Yeah, there's one in Plymouth is there? Yeah. Yeah, perhaps I ought to get in touch and see if I can do anything.

Yeah, it might be interesting for you to do that; it's just a thought.

Yeah. And the other thing was - that I'm very proud of - I learnt to drive, which I never thought I would ...

Do.

Never even thought about it really. [Interviewer laughs] And my husband said, 'I'm sure you could drive'. [Laughs] And I felt that was one of the big achievements in my life, to be honest. I was...

And what year did you learn to drive?

That's just what I was trying to think. My youngest son was three so it must have been seventy-three. 'Cos I had trouble learning to reverse. When I was learning I'd do, I was all right going forward, I had awful trouble learning reverse, and I looked at my three-year-old son in his pedal car and he could reverse beautifully. And it's the same principle of course. So and anyhow I had a good friend who sat with me one afternoon, we spent about two hours reversing round corners. [They laugh]

Eventually I got the hang of it. And I must say that has been wonderful and I mean, because it's an automatic car, I've got a knob on the steering wheel, and I mean these days they can do fantastic adaptations can't they?

Yeah.

Yeah.

But I suppose it's two things, isn't it? It's the practical application ...

...Yes ...

...that you can control the vehicle and drive the vehicle, and the other is the freedom of ...

Yes.

...mobility that it gives you.

Yes, that's right, exactly, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was very, very proud of being able to do that I must say. That, that [?] me. And just wonderful to, as you said, the freedom. Yeah, yes, that's been brilliant.

So, right where did we get to? You became a civil servant, that's right?

Yes, yeah.

So how long were you a civil servant?

I was a civil servant for seventeen years and I ended up as an Executive Officer and did the job of an office manager ...

Right. So you've worked ...

...which was quite challenging.

You've had no hindrance in your employment. Where you've been employed ...

No.

... you've been pretty...

No. I think, especially the civil service, they have to be so fair that, yes, my disability wasn't a problem. In fact I was given a special parking space as near to the building as they could have, which wasn't ...

...Where was this again?

...absolutely. That was in Andover.

It was Andover.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. They obviously couldn't have the cars right next to the building because of the security, but I had a space as near as they could do, and there were lifts. I mean at the end, my last job, I was in a new building with lifts and really it was brilliant. And I must say generally, I mean life is easier for disabled these days I feel with what is available as well as the car adaptations, the ramps, the special loos, you know, we're certainly getting there. [Laughs] Which I'm just pleased about.

You're looking as if there's a next stage. [They laugh]

[Husband: Well there's refreshments. Stop when you want it.]

Would you like to stop?

Yeah?

Or do you want to continue a bit longer, further? I mean, it's up to you how far you want to go, or how much further you feel you'd ...

I can't think it that I've got much more to say.

Do you want to finish off first then or [?]

Yeah? Yeah.

[Husband: You might think of something over lunch.]

Have you got any more questions you want to ask me?

Well no, no; I just go with the flow.

Oh right, right, OK.

You know you, you find, you just sort of go along and where's the natural end and where's the natural middle and ... [They laugh]

Right.

[fumbling sounds]

All right – we're back in business?

Yeah, oh yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes so [?]

So ... I'll just, just thinking a minute ... [Laughs]

Yeah, sorry I've put ...

That's all right.

...I've put off our stroke.

So your life at that point anyway was pretty full. You were a civil servant, you were active in the church, you'd become a church warden and presumably very active ...

...That was after I retired I...

Oh that was after you retired ...

...became a church warden, yes, yes, yes.

But you'd have been in the church at the time.

I was in the PCC while I was working.

In the PCC. And so you were pretty active in church affairs and people's needs and problems presumably at that time?

Yes. Oh well inevitably you get involved with that side of things, and naturally you realise how lucky you are, to be honest, when you're dealing with, meeting so many people who have so many problems. So, yes, so ...

And your family, you know, your children, you had a few problems but, but overall ...

Once Graham settled at school he was happy and really Andrew went on to become an accountant and he came down to live in Callington [?], which is why we've now joined him since we've retired; well not joined him but we're living near him now. Our other son has gone into the printing industry and he works in Basingstoke. He lives near Andover, in a village near Andover, and he works in Basingstoke. He's happily, they're both happily married and our elder son's got the four granddaught ... the four children as I said. The younger one has animals: horses and dogs. I think they're both happy, I'm sure they're both happy, yeah, yeah. [Laughs]

So when you retired, is that when you came down to Callington?

We retired in 1999, but we didn't come down to Callington until 2002. So we had a couple of years up in Andover and ...

Was that a big difference for you in life at that time?

A lot was going on really. My mum was getting quite ... well she was, she was eighty six and was not coping so well. And in fact she died not long before we moved down here. She, we had a place for her in a home, we'd booked a very nice home here in Callington and, but sadly she had a fall a couple of months before she was going to come down and subsequently died in Winchester Hospital but... We then moved down and we have been very happy here, and, and I feel, and people are very, very friendly. I certainly haven't had a problem with my disability as far as, you know, I'm aware, you know people just accept it and... And I suppose in a way at my age you're on, you're meeting people who've had strokes so the disability isn't perhaps, doesn't stand out like it might have done years ago; do you know what I mean?

But you're taking part in the community and doing keep fit each week ...

Yes, yes. And the university's a third day each, we're involved with that.

What sort of things do you do?

Well I ... it's an organisation. We meet once a month all together and have a coffee morning and I'm actually on the committee as the minutes secretary for that. And then you have spin-off groups that do different things. For instance I belong to a family history group; I've been learning how to check about our ancestors. I belong to a needle group which meets here. I belong to a French group which actually is in a, in a different [??], it's in [??]. And I could join many more; there are over twenty groups that you can become a member of but you have to limit how many. [Laughs] I do flower arranging as well, yes I do flower arranging as well. And that really, with helping a bit with the children, takes up most of my time.

And you're a church warden.

I'm not a church warden here, no, that was in [?]. No, I must say here I've, it's a very, it's quite a thriving church; there are a lot of people available to do things. So I have taken more of a back seat here, simply because I don't feel that there's the need really. I mean obviously I help bake cakes if we're holding a fete, or do something like that, but I haven't made any ...

... But over a period of time you have continued to be invited on to committees and things

The uni, yeah, the University of the Third Age, sorry [they laugh], oh it's all come apart,

Yeah it's

...oh dear, sorry.

No that's all right, I find these awkward myself. [Noise of adjustments to equipment]. That's it. Oh, sorry [They laugh].

It's a trick one, isn't it?

Yeah. These things don't seem to stay together that well. I've lost the one for that one.

Yeah, so, you know, so I haven't felt that I needed to get involved with the church. And also feel there are a lot of people who've been there a long time who, obviously it's important that they should be given the chance to be more involved really. But, you know, I support activities as and when they occur really.

But you seem to have had quite a lot of recognition as to your abilities and skills on some sorts of committees and things that you've been...

...Yeah.

... on over the years.

Yes, yeah, yeah.

So you've, you know, so you obviously have a very practical bent, your organised bent, you know, to your way of life. You know you organise, see things in perspective and...

Yes, yeah. Certainly I like to try and be very organised. Yes that's something that I would feel is one of my abilities really, being ...

... So that sort of enables your coping skills in a sense.

Yeah, yes, yes, yes. And planning, if we go out for the day or whatever, planning how I'm going to manage this or whatever the challenge is, you know. Even carrying something through; making sure the door is open before I pick up anything. That, you know, silly little things like that but really quite important, you know.

Aspects of your creative side, you know like you say, you flower arrange...

Yeah.

... and things like that. So there are creative aspects that come out of that as well.

Yes, yes, yes. I mean I'm not great one for creativity but I like to have a go, you know. [They laugh] I'm not the best flower arranger in the world but I like to have a go at it and I just love, I mean, the flowers, everything, you know, it's so beautiful isn't it, yeah, I love playing around with things like that, yeah, yeah.

So really I mean, you've had a very successful life in that way, haven't you?

Oh yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.

I mean there's a sort of regret there in terms of you as a teacher, your involvement of giving communication perhaps with other people that you could have done...

Yes, yes.

...potential communication with other people, which, which has come out in other ways.

Yes, that's true.

That's come out...

...Yeah, yeah...

... you know in a very community sense.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

But maybe hasn't quite been fulfilled within a structural ...

...Yeah, yeah ...

...sense.

That's right, exactly. So my abilities have been used in different ways but they've still, still been, I've able to make use of them.

And that's, it's a result an awful lot of your, you know, your own personality and the strength that you were given from you parents. The background, the social background, the solid marriage that you have.

Yes, yeah, yes. I mean that, that to me, my [inaud] is the most important thing really; family life and, and marriage and children, yes. I've managed that and I'm proud of what I've achieved really.

Any thoughts on the future or ...?

There never seems to be enough time in the day even though I'm retired. [Laughs] I do have serious worries about what will happen in the future because I have osteoporosis, so I'm more likely to break bones and things, and that, that is a big concern of mine really as I'm getting older.

Medically there's a lot of, there's a lot more advance now isn't there?

Yes, yes, I take a pill once a week – once a week; it's amazing isn't it – which is supposed to be stopping it getting worse and hopefully strengthening the bones. Yes, yes, all the time there are advances, aren't there? I do have fears for the future because even if you're fit and well you have problems in the future don't you and, you know, if you're already starting off with a disadvantage it's going to, could become more of a problem but ...

But you've got overcome things before, so you know things can be overcome.

Yes, exactly, yes exactly yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And you just have to get on with it like when I broke my arm, you know, it was awful but I just had to cope with it really. And I didn't find a lot of help either from my doctor or the hospital, they just patched me up and sent me home and my husband had to look after me, and you can imagine that I was absolutely useless, couldn't do anything.

Well certainly that was the one thing that you've always relied on in life...

...That's right ...

... I suppose in a way, isn't it.

Yes, yeah and my good, which I thought I'd never break. [Laughs] And, yes, yeah that, I mean ...

But even in the end, whatever the doubts that you would have felt in that process, that has also taught you that ...

Oh, it has, yes it was a really quite a salutary lesson, you know, to, to find myself ... I mean for about the first ten days totally useless. I mean, after that I could manage to feed myself and do the basics, but 'til then I couldn't do anything and that was awful, it really was horrible.

And I suppose that was a sort of process where you had to rely on a person's help for that period.

Yes, yeah I had to rely on my husband, I could not have managed on my own, an if I'd been on my own I suppose I would have had to go into hospital, I couldn't have looked after myself.

But again, you know, because you've built that solid foundation of community and family within your life, then that support was there.

Yes, that's right, exactly, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Anything else you'd like to say?

Not really, other than that, you know, I'm very impressed with the help that is given to disabled people these days with buildings being made more suitable, and I just hope that people are being treated fairly. I'm not always sure. There's always an excuse why they can't, you know, why they can't employ a certain person because of a certain thing, and I'm not totally convinced that we're all equal still but I think we're getting there.

OK. Shall we finish on that one?

Yeah, OK.

Thank you.

Right. Well thank you.

[End of Track 2]

[End of recording]