



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

David Mills  
Interviewed by Samuel Burch

British Library ref. C1134/29/01-02

## IMPORTANT

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

Should you find any errors please inform the Oral History curators:

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

+44 (0)20 7412 7404  
[oralhistory@bl.uk](mailto:oralhistory@bl.uk)

This interview and transcript is accessible via <http://sounds.bl.uk>.

© The British Library and Scope. Please refer to the Oral History curators at the British Library prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

## Interview Summary Sheet

<b>Ref no:</b>	C1134/29/01-02	<b>Digitised from cassette originals</b>	
<b>Collection title:</b>	Speaking for Ourselves: An Oral History of People With Cerebral Palsy		
<b>Interviewee's surname:</b>	Mills	<b>Title:</b>	Mr
<b>Interviewee's forename:</b>	David	<b>Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Occupation:</b>		<b>Date and place of birth:</b>	1953, Lambeth
<b>Date(s) of recording:</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> January 2005, 21 <sup>st</sup> January 2005		
<b>Location of interview:</b>			
<b>Name of interviewer:</b>	Samuel Burch		
<b>Type of recorder:</b>	Marantz CP430		
<b>Recording format :</b>	D60 Cassettes	<b>Number of cassettes:</b>	2
<b>Digitised as:</b>	4 WAV files (16 bit 44.1kHz 2-channel, 1411kbps)	<b>Mono or stereo:</b>	stereo
<b>Total Duration: (HH:MM:SS)</b>			
<b>Additional material:</b>			
<b>Copyright/Clearance:</b>	Open. © The British Library Board and Scope		
<b>Interviewer's comments:</b>			

**Tape 1 Side A [Track 1]**

*Samuel Birch, interviewing David Mills. Tape 1, Side A. Hello, David.*

Hello.

*Can you tell me a bit about yourself? I'd like to begin by asking you, when and where you were born?*

I was born in [tearing sound] the General Lying-In Hospital, Lambeth, on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1953, probably about a quarter to nine in the evening. [General Lying-In Hospital Lambeth, closed in 1971.]

*Right, and were you told much about the circumstances of your birth?*

No. I only found out that I had cerebral palsy, or then [rustling/tearing sound, heard intermittently, throughout David's dialogue] 'spastic' as it was known in those days, when I was four years old. When my father died in 1999, we came across a piece of paper saying that I was going to be 'mentally-retarded'.

*Yeah. And how did that make you feel?*

Well, considering we only found it about six years [ago] and I done so much, I think that was a very laughable thing.

*Yes.*

Anyway, as far as I remember, I can remember most things, but one of the things that I do know, was that they found out that I had cerebral palsy (then 'spastic') when I was four years old, and they advised my father to join what [was] then a local group.

*Was there a lot of support, when you were first diagnosed with [talking together] cerebral palsy?*

I don't think there [was], no. There is not the support as there is today, because now people are born with cerebral palsy, and you know straight away. In those days, people did not know, and that's why I can understand why there was so much confusion what I had. I nearly died a couple of times because various reasons, but I came through. I had all the things that any child did in those days – physiotherapy, speech therapy – and my mother and father were quite enthusiastic to get me sorted out. But I didn't have [aircraft noise] any schooling until a home tutor came round when I was six years old.

*And did you have any siblings: brothers or sisters?*

Oh, sorry. Yes, I have got a sister. She's about four years older than what I am.

*And what was your relationship like with her, how did you get on with her?*

Oh, we got on fairly well, you know, like all brothers and sisters do. [Laughs.] Mm.

*And what was your relationship like with your parents? Did you -*

Well, I thought, you know, in those days, they were very supportive, but they didn't have the knowledge that parents have now.

*Yeah.*

You see, where I see... Hang on, I want...

*Sorry. Was your parents given any medical advice when you were first born, about the condition of cerebral palsy?*

No, they didn't know. That's why I said, 'They didn't know what I had...

*Yeah.*

...until I was four years old.'

*Yeah.*

Which I think is typical up [of] people who were born up until quite recently.

*When you were diagnosed at four years' old, did your parents get given any advice or help at that stage by the doctors, and the medical staff?*

They did have some advice, you know, like physio [physiotherapy] and that, but to be honest with you, they probably did not know. They joined one of the local groups, which was in... They moved in 1955 to Barnhurst in Bexley Heath, Kent, and wasn't only like the local group support: there was little bits of support, but it wasn't like it is now.

*You say you didn't have any schooling,*

Yeah, I...

*till six years old, but - [Inaudible. Talking together.]*

Yeah, I think it was six. I can't remember what year Mrs Lerner did start, but I think it was 1959.

*What were your memories of the houses that you were living in, when you were younger?*

Well, the house that we lived from 19..., well, I think they had a flat, but I can't remember that, in Walworth, but then they moved to Barnhurst, Bexley Heath, in Kent.

*Can you remember any of your time in Kent?*

Yes, I do, because I lived there from 1955, apart from when I went to residential school, which I'll tell you about in a minute. But, in the school holidays, I lived there and I stayed there until about 1986, when my mother died: but my father still lived there until he died in 1999.

*Yes, and -*

He died there.

*Yes, and so you mentioned – I can't remember the name of your tutor – that she...  
[Inaudible. Talking together.]*

Yes. They were quite helpful, cos she...

*What was her name again, sorry?*

Mrs Larner.

*And what was she like? Was she quite an influence on your early stages?*

I think, yeah because, I mean, she taught me how to read and, with help from my parents, taught me how to read and do all the things that everybody else did.

*Yeah, and was reading quite important?*

Well it is, but what they didn't know, and what they should do, and I'll explain to you now, I'm registered as partially-sighted, but they didn't tell me. I could have had a lot more help as well.

*Yeah.*

So really, there was some support, but it's not like it is now.

*Yes. And does that make you feel angry? Or do you kind of – [Talking together.]*

Well, the thing is, thinking of it, I think I'm lucky for some of the people of my age, even people younger than myself, because I always wanted to know what was around me.

*Yeah, and what memories did you have of being looked after and helped, in the early days?*

Well, although they did everything, they didn't, you know... As far as I remember they used to lift me up, and lift me everywhere; like you're not meant to do that nowadays, I mean...

*Yeah.*

But, that what's they used to did [do], and of course I didn't walk until I was seven. I used to have a pram, cos I was like most people with cerebral who were born disabled, I wasn't developed that big, so I could probably get away with pram and push chair up until quite a later age.

*And did you have any friends when you were growing up, who helped you around?*

Apart from the person that lived... A couple of people I knew. I didn't have a friend proper, the people I knew that I used to play with.

*Tell me a bit about the people you knew.*

[Under breath.] Oh God! I remember the person next door, called Celia Comber. Comber? I can't remember her name now.

*Yeah.*

Anyway, and so I used to play with her and some of the people in our road.

*What sort of games did you play?*

I can't remember what games we played. The usual type of games that were around those days.

*Yeah, and what sort of memories do you have of your mother and father, and your relationship with them?*

Very good for the time.

*Yeah.*

And I say that although it wasn't right, it was better than (what I can gather) what a lot of other people who were born in the forties, fifties and sixties were...

*Yes.*

... or even before.

*Yes. So, what was your early schooling like? You went...*

Right, suddenly, at the age of about 1960, for about two and a half to three years, I went to what they called The Phoenix Centre. I think it's still there. It was in Farnborough in Kent, and I learnt a lot, and we played with various people, but I think I could have done a lot more, because I don't think they really knew how to teach disabled people in those days, even though everybody was disabled.

*What were the lessons like?*

I thought it was very basic, just the usual things that you -

*Could you go into detail? Tell me a bit about the lessons.*

I think it was like the usual, reading, writing, and of course, I couldn't write in those days. I can't write too much now, but the thing was, what held me back because I couldn't do any writing. But anyway, I persevered, and then in the beginning of the winter of 1963, I went to [a school called Vallence School in] Westerham, Kent, which is residential school run by Kent County Council, for all types of disabilities, and that was quite good. There was one bit of information I s'pose I should have told you, but I couldn't really walk until I was seven years old.

*Yes.*

So, with some... [inaudible]... the usual type of people that we had around in those days.

*And what was the routine like at school? Was it a boarding school, so you... [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

Yes, it was a boarding school.

*So what did you do the times when you weren't at lessons?*

The usual things, what everybody else did.

*The usual things, being -*

[Talking together.] Yeah.

*... what, playing and eating, and...*

Yeah, it wasn't really good. I think I would have been, looking back on it...

*Yeah.*

... I would have been better to stay in a school nearer home, where I would have met the local people.

*So did you enjoy your time at the residential college?*

At school. Not at school, well yes and no. But I think at all these three, I could do a lot more. I could have done a lot more if they married all the different problems that I had, and valued it, and that was the problem I had, and I think I could have done a lot more. But saying that, there are the other physical barriers that I would have come across, which I would have done, regardless.

*What was it that you would have wanted to have done, when you say you wanted to do more? Was it, get more involved with the lessons, or get more... [Inaudible. Talking together.]*

Well, I think I could get a lot of help, I think I could have... yeah, I could have had a lot more help with lessons. I could have a lot more help, you know, the way they treated disabled people in those days wasn't really, you know, they bullied them. They couldn't fully understand what they were, even though they were trained, though they say they were trained, but I don't think they were.

*Did that make you feel angry and upset that you... [Talking together. Inaudible]*

Yeah, because I think there was certain people they preferred, than others.

*Yeah.*

And that's it.

*Yeah. Was there quite a strict discipline code at the school?*

Not as far as I know: it was a very similar thing that any other school would have done, but I think what it is, it was different times, they didn't fully understand the needs. I got the general feeling, looking back on it, that they didn't really want people to achieve anything, because it was easier that way, and I still think that is still the case, in some cases today.

*Yeah. [Laughs.]*

They don't value the people around them.

*And does that make you feel angry or...?*

Well, in a way, yes, because when you're young, you don't know. You go around, you know, although when you're young, you know you want things, but it's how you achieve it: you didn't have that experience. It's like anything, any help that I needed, and that's really...

*Did your parents help you out when you were at school, and you were having difficulties? Were you able to talk to them about it, and have contact with them?*

Well, we had various problems, like anybody else did.

*Yeah.*

Right? So that really was it, you know... [Pause]

*Yeah, OK. Were there any exams or stuff that you - [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

Ah, they wouldn't let me have any exams. There were people there that did exams, but it were like the chosen few.

*So there was a divide between?*

Yeah, there was. I think when I discovered this piece of paper about me, thinking oh, David is mentally retarded, I can see where they were coming from, but of course, that wasn't the truth: they didn't even want to give me the chance, and I think there's a lot of people who've got cerebral palsy, who are, let's say, 40 or even 30 plus now, that could have done better. All right, fair enough, some might have learning difficulties, or other disabilities, the thing is that people did not evaluate the people.

*Yeah. Do you think that's changed now? I mean, have you had more opportunities as you've got older?*

Well, I have got more opportunities since I've been here, and I had more opportunities as time went on.

*Yes.*

But the thing is people don't see you as equal to anybody else. I would say, up until probably the late seventies to early eighties, it wasn't till then that I felt that I was a part of what everybody else was doing: and I'm not saying I wasn't, but that, you know, you know what I mean?

*Yeah. And so did you have groups of friends that you were close to at your school or later on?*

Not as such. There were people I know, but I couldn't call them friends, because I don't think, there again, anybody was different: it wasn't a school run by Scope (or then The Spastics Society), it was for all disabilities, all people with different disabilities, and I don't think that was the problem. I think the problem was that they didn't care. I think what it was, I think in those days as long as the people – and I don't know if you agree – as long as they've got the money, and got their wages, that's all that matters. I didn't think about it then, but that probably was the truth.

*Do you think there was a pecking order of disabilities at the school?*

Well, as far as I knew, it was people with cerebral palsy, people with heart problems, all the ones that people can be born with so, you know, heart problems, and course people with polio, anything that happened round that time.

*Yeah.*

Yeah.

*What options did you have towards the end of your time at school?*

Oh well, I said I wanted to do something, and all right one of the things I could understand even then, but I know I can't: I said I wanted to get a car when I was 14. I can still remember that.

*Do you have a car today?*

No, I don't have a car. I can't drive because of my vision.

*Yes.*

So I knew I could never have done that, but the thing is, that's something I... 'Cause I like going out, and I suppose that's still true today.

*Did you have any ties or relationships with people as you grew up, that you became close to?*

Yeah I did, but people in those days didn't really under... They didn't want people to have any type of relationship, regardless of sex or gender. It was because they didn't expect it in those days, and so if you did have a relationship, which was existing, you know. I didn't have many: there were people I liked, but it was always with people who were more fitter than me, so I lost out.

*[Laughs.]*

But, the thing was that it wasn't thought of that highly. You know, men or girls or boys – they wasn't things that disabled people (unless they could get up and go and leave) go together. But if you couldn't, then that's it. [Laughs. Pause.]

*What was your memories of your first house after you left school, the flat that you were living in? Did you come straight to here, or did you -*

No. I went, as I said earlier, at the top, that they purchased this house in Barnhurst, which wasn't accessible for disabled people at all, and when I left school they did put rails up for me to make it easier for me to go up and down the steps.

*Were you walking at that stage?*

I could walk. After [I] was seven I started walking, not very well. I did have a couple of operations in 1962 and 1967. I should have put that in before.

*Yeah, well that's an interesting point. Just to draw onto that a little bit: what were the operations for, and how did they affect your walking?*

Well, I personally think I would have probably walked worse than I do, but I could have walked a bit longer. I think I got better; once I got round about 10 I was OK. From about 1965, no, 12, probably from about 1965 to about 1970, I actually thought I could walk a bit further, and I felt very confident. And then, suddenly, for some unknown reason (and my father thinks it was because I had the operation) I started going onto one side, and caused... I got a curvature of the spine,

*[Talking together.] Were -*

... which,

*Sorry.*

I don't know how I got [it] because I wasn't like that, but obviously it occurred: I don't know how it happened, but now I walk like I do today, ever since.

*And so did you think that the operation was a success, or would you... [Inaudible. Talking together.]*

Well they also promised that I could wear proper shoes, so I didn't have to wear these surgical boots. I did have surgical boots before the operation, but they said I will never wear surgical boots again. Of course, that is not true: now I've got a boot on one leg, which is built up inside.

*Yeah, so do you feel that they lied to you in some respects?*

Pardon?

*Do you feel that they lied to you, in saying that you wouldn't have to wear surgical boots?*

I think it was all made up. I don't know. I don't really know if they had the knowledge that that they do now, because I don't know any young disabled people at all, I can't... the opposite of what you're doing with me, but you know what I mean.

*Yeah, it's a difficult area, isn't it?*

Yes.

*How did you spend your leisure time, when you were younger?*

Are you...

*This was later, sorry; when you left school. When you were a bit older.*

By that time, we had a car since about 1968, '69, and I managed to go out, and I still could walk for some distance, anyway. But we used to go for all different places. I enjoyed it, and I still do.

*Can you remember any places that you went to that you especially liked?*

Oh, most places in Kent, and we used to do some of this before I left school, and...

*Yeah, for people that don't know Kent, can you be more specific?*

I went through most of the beaches and towns in Kent, and Surrey, and Sussex, and for many years, from about 1969 till now, on and off. I've got an aunty who lives in Hereford [children's voices in background] and we used to stay with her, but the new place she has, it got a bit small. I couldn't go. So now we go somewhere else, but I won't explain: I'll save that for another time.

*Yeah. And so what courses have you done, education-wise, since you left school?*

Ah! I haven't done any courses. This is because of various reasons. For a start, there wasn't many courses for people with cerebral palsy or disability in the 1970s. I think this all started around about 1978, '79, until then. By that time, well, I was too old, I thought, to do any course work, and I wasn't thinking. I was so happy where I went, and it wasn't what I wanted but it was the best thing I had at the time. Now, looking back on it, I could have done a lot better, but the thing is times have changed. You see, if I were growing up now, all people over the... you have further education organised for you, you know, I mean I know I had chances here. I don't really want to do it now. It's not going to help me, now I'm coming up to 52 in May. I'm not that bothered about it, but if it was, if I had the right help at the right time, in the 1960s, and all along up to that time up till about 1971, when I left school, when I was 18, I think I was still getting into it, but they were different times than we have got now.

*Yeah, and you said you didn't work, or do any qualifications after you left school. Do you have any hobbies or interests that took your... [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

Well, I like more or less things: music (I like rock, folk, country, blues), all the things that I... and I like going out eating. I like going, well, I go to the folk club now, but I like going to the odd concert. But I didn't – even in the early 80s – do many concerts or anything, because disabled people didn't go.

*Yeah, I mean that's changed now, so have you not been tempted recently?*

What?

*To go to a concert?*

Oh yeah, I do go to concerts, and I go to the folk club every week now, but in those days, if I turned up to go to something like that, they wouldn't expect it. But now, I'm

just someone that comes, and I'm part as everybody else: that's what I like about it. When I left school, I did go and join Phab Club in Bexley [Phab: national charity dedicated to the integration of people with and without physical disabilities]. It was quite [a] good experience, but there again, the times wasn't like they are now. I didn't feel I was equal: I felt equal in some ways, but in others, I wasn't, and that's how it is.

*When you say you 'felt equal'; did you feel intimidated by the other people that were around you, or - ?*

Not really. I think what it is, because I think everybody lacks experience with disabled people and though they're meant to be joining in with everybody else, they didn't actually see you as part of them, if you see, on a general purpose: and if it did, it went wrong, they didn't have the experience as to how to look after a disabled...

**[End of Track 1]**

**Tape 1 Side B [Track 2]**

*... just before about the Phab Club. Can you...*

I actually went to this Phab Club from about 1971 to about 1978. I was about 25 when I finished with it, cos everybody was getting a bit younger and I couldn't relate to them, so I started doing my own thing, but it wasn't very good. I do listen to a lot of music, and reading, and things like that, so...

*Yeah. Tell me a bit about the music you like: what sort of modern-day rock stuff that someone like me would be able to relate to? What do you know...*

Well, I like the stuff in the fifties, sixties, seventies.

*Buddy Holly?*

Oh yeah, Buddy Holly.

*Elvis?*

I'm not a great lover of Elvis Presley.

*Yeah, The Big Bopper.*

Oh yes, The Big Bopper. No, he'd only made one or two singles in 1969. How old are you?

*I'm 23.*

You're 23, so...

*Twenty-two, actually.*

Twenty-two. So you actually know all the stuff in the eighties, nineties, and up-to-date stuff?

*Yeah, but I...*

I don't like all the modern dance stuff.

*No, I don't either.*

But I quite like some of the modern stuff, I do think it repeated what happened before, like Keane and Coldplay, they're quite modern, and other things like that. So yeah, I quite like my music, and so that's what I do, and I like going round to various churches, and history and geography: I was quite interested in that.

*Yeah.*

That was the type of thing I was hoping to do, but they said, 'Oh, are you good at maths?' when I was leaving school. 'No, I'm not very good at maths.' 'Then you can't do anything for the Ordnance Survey Maps, or for the AA.'

*Oh dear, that's no good is it?*

No.

*Yeah.*

But I can understand some difficulties, but it's the way people treat disabled people.

*Yes. You live in a Scope home: have they changed your life in... [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

Oh well, I personally think, and we wasn't going to get on to this, but I think it will help me, cos I managed to get a lot out of here. It's like a continuation of what I've done. I didn't want to live here, and in some ways I don't, but in others, I do. I get on well with the staff, but there's no one here really that I can really talk to, and if you do [interview] anybody else here, you'll probably find that out pretty quick. You would probably have been gone by now.

*[Both laugh.] Yeah. You mentioned that you like going to churches. Is it...*

Yeah, I like history and that, but I'm not that religious. I am Church of England, but I don't go to worship, or go to many services: I might do once or twice a year, but I'm not that fussed, really.

*Yeah. [Pause.] Was religion brought to you as a child?*

Oh yeah, we had religion, but I found it a bit boring. We had to have assemblies, but the thing is that I found it really boring, really.

*Yeah, so again, did you find you couldn't relate to it because of your disability, or - ?*

No, it wasn't to do with disability: I just didn't like it.

*Yeah.*

I'm a bit more aware of it now. It wasn't something I wasn't aware of: it just didn't appeal to me, it just didn't get into me, you know?

*Yeah.*

Like some of the other things that they provide now. I think all these subjects wasn't taught to me properly. I got the feeling that, you know, you either did it or you didn't, and I'm not that keen. I mean, did not [do?] much, but I do understand at it now. OK?

*Yeah. So, do you read? You seem to read a lot. There are a lot of books in your room.*

Yeah.

*So what sort of books do you read?*

I've got books on, 'specially books on places of interest, and things. Yeah, yeah.

*OK. There are some photographs in the room. Do you want to talk a bit about them, or - ?*

Oh, some of the photographs: I had a lot more up there, but they got a bit faded, so my sister took them down.

*Yeah.*

Yeah, those ones are like major events, of ones that I sort of...

*Yeah.*

We'll come on to those later cos some of them are when my sister got married in 1972, and... [moving away from mic, as if moving towards photo] another one's a group photograph... and there's me with Lord Soper – that's quite recently, about 1996, I think.

*Yes, and do you still see your sister?*

Oh, yeah. I see my sister.

*Has your relationship changed? [Inaudible. Talking together.]*

Well, it hasn't made too much difference.

*Has she -*

I stayed with her over Christmas period, and we went to see my aunty in Hereford, and then went to Birmingham, and I've never been to Birmingham before.

*Tell me, what was that like, cos I've been to Berlin, and it was fantastic.*

Birmingham.

*Birmingham: oh!*

Not Berlin.

*No, right.*

[Laughs.] No, although I like travelling, I'm not very good on going on aeroplanes. I know the problem with aeroplanes is not very good.

*So, tell me a bit about your relationship with your members of your family, like your sister and your aunts...*

That's it. The ones that are my close family, they're quite good, but the others, well, they're somewhat distant, in some ways.

*Yeah. Do you feel a bit tired? Do you want to stop for a bit?*

No. Where've we got to now?

*We're doing OK for time. Shall we carry on for a bit?*

Yeah.

*Do you have any big memories of any big parties, or birthday parties, celebrations, or celebratory events?*

Yeah, I remember my 21st, and they made a cake in the shape of a record player.

*Oh, wow!*

[Laughs.] That, and in early days, I think, yeah, I had a lot of parties. [Yawns.] Sorry about this, I'm yawning. You'll have to edit it that out.

*No worries. Someone else's job. I just ask the questions.*

Oh, right. I'm sure there's a lot more I could explain.

*Yeah. So do you remember much about your 21st?*

Some people from the Phab Club that I used to [go], were there, that's all I can remember. [Laughs.]

*Do you have much memory of your aunty's house in Hereford?*

Oh yes, I remember that. It wasn't that really accessible. It was an upstairs flat, and one had to hold me in the front, and someone had to hold me behind, but see we only went there from 1969 until she moved to her new place in 1992, but we didn't always went there.

*Shall we go back a bit, to when you were at school, again? Any memorable events from school? Any achievements or such?*

Not achievements as such, but I remember they used to have the hill climb.

*What's that?*

It was like for cars, going up the hill, and I remember that; and they had various fetes and they probably still do, and various things. Entertainment every Saturday, I remember that – they used to have a film on. I can't bear sitting in there watching a film.

*Were they films that you liked, or...?*

I'm not a great lover of cinema.

*No.*

[Laughs.]

*Do you think the books are better than the films, generally?*

I don't read fiction much. Anyway, that... yeah.

*Tell me a bit about... you said you liked History and Geography? [Inaudible. Talking together.]*

Yeah. I always like finding out. I go out, if I've got the chance, I go out more often. I like finding out things about things.

*Yeah.*

And I still do that.

*So you've got quite an exploratory mind. You like -*

Yeah, I think if I could get up and go off, I'd be out most of the time, but then again, I wouldn't be sitting in here talking to you, would I? Probably wouldn't be, if I was able to, I probably wouldn't be sitting here.

*Yeah. Do you find it difficult that, not being able to move about or get out and about?  
[Talking together. Inaudible.]*

I feel quite lucky, but saying that, I wouldn't mind going out a lot more, but there you are. But then there are people in this building who would prefer not to go out at all, and you will probably do if you do some more interviewing. [Laughs.] Mm.

*Yeah. There's one thing I forgot to ask you about: have you ever had any pets?*

Yeah, we did have. We have a terrapin, and we also had a cat as well.

*Yes.*

But to be honest with you, like most children you say you want something, and then you wish you'd never had it. That was an experience. [Yawns.]

*Yeah.*

Mm.

*So you had a cat and a terrapin when you were growing up?*

*Yeah.*

*Yeah. Are you OK, or shall we wrap it up for today?*

Maybe. I can't. Probably a lot of things I can tell you about, but I don't know how much depth and how long you want me...

*Oh, we've got time, but maybe... These photographs; you're looking quite happy in that one.*

Mm, I was. I think some of these are quite old ones: some of them are newer.

*It doesn't really matter. Just tell me about what was going on in your life at that time.*

Mm. Well, one or two of them go back to about... I notice there's one [of me] in my car that I had when I was very young. They used to push me around the garden in it.

*Yeah. Well, who did that? Was that your sister? Did she take good care of you, as you were growing up? [Inaudible. Talking together.]*

In a kind of way.

*Yeah.*

So, right, I think we've done...

*Yeah, OK.*

There's probably a lot more I can explain.

*No, you've done very well. I've -*

You've probably... Because I've got a rough idea of what we're gonna do,

*Yeah. OK.*

and I know what I've done; it's trying to piece everything together.

*Yeah.*

Because I do remember one of my aunt and uncles used to come over and take us out, before we had the car in the 1960s, and they used to explain to you where we went, and everywhere.

*What was life in the sixties? I've often wondered cos they had quite a cultural time. And you liked history, so you must have thought... [talking together, inaudible] ...the sixties.*

Yes, growing up, you know, it was an interesting time, generally. I thought so, from the musical types of thing, it was a very exciting time.

*Did you get to observe a lot, when you were in your pram? [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

When I was very young, I think I observed everything. I wanted to know everything what was around, even things like manhole covers and fire hydrants. I always wanted to know. A bit stupid for people, but it fascinated me, you know: different things that I can... and where the post boxes and the telephone boxes were, and all this type of thing. I s'pose, you know, if I could, I'd go down all the roads of the world (which would be impossible, but you know what I mean).

*Yeah.*

There's always something interesting.

*Yeah. So tell me, did you have many friends that you went to concerts with, and stuff?*

Well...

*Did you - [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

... not so much in those days, but I didn't go to any concerts in the sixties or seventies, or in the early eighties, because disabled people didn't do that type of thing. All the disabled people used to go with their parents, and their parents used to take them to all... you would probably find this. I'd be interested to find out if I'm still right, but when I was growing up, most of the disabled people did everything what their parents did.

*That's not quite the same, these days.*

No, but that's what it was when I grew up, see, because that was the only way you could grow up.

*Did you ever want to rebel against that, inside?*

Oh, yeah. I was really... and I s'pose that when Roger said, 'Oh, you can do what you like' when I come here, I thought, 'Well, that's good because that's what disabled people should be doing'. But in those days, I would think there was two different things. One thing: disabled people wasn't expected to live that long. Two: I don't think people generally – parents or whoever – didn't see them as equal people. As far as I could see, as far as I know, most of the disabled people that I knew didn't even would [seem?] that modern. And I'm not saying that is strictly true, that most of them wasn't that interested in what was going on, or didn't have the experience of what was around them, and I s'pose that's why I didn't rebel. But I was probably a bit more... I could, if I was a bit more able to do things, I'd probably more likely to go with the more able people than with the disabled people. [Laughs.]

*Yeah. So you felt quite active and able-bodied?*

In a kind of way: I wasn't, but I pretend I was...

*Yeah.*

...because a lot of them, there was not many disabled people who wanted to do it. I wanted to. I didn't do it, but I was more in tune with what was going on than some others were.

*Yeah. [Pause.] So, when you said you were in tune with things, do you follow politics and news and...*

Oh yeah. I'm still like that now.

*Yeah. So what was your politics like in your early days then? Did you try and ...*

I wasn't -

*influence other disabled people to your way of thinking, or...?*

It wasn't like that in those days, because, like flying, I didn't know too much about politics. There might have been some people in there that had more experience than what I had, but I do feel that a lot of... that they thought that I shouldn't be part of certain group. But really, I should have done. I should have been a par... You said, 'Did I go to college?' No, but thinking of it, I should have done.

*Yeah.*

But that will never happen, so... But, you know, there are things you do at the time.

*Yeah, but you have no regrets. Or, do you?*

Well, I can't say anything, cos it's a different time scale. This is it, see: parents of disabled people didn't know, they just went along with [what] everybody else was doing. A lot of them struggled. My parents struggled to sort out what I needed. I could

go into too much depth, and if I would it might be a bit boring, and I can't remember all the finer details. But to be honest with you...

*It's not boring, it's important.*

[Talking together.] It is important, you know, but will I want to try and explain?

*Yeah.*

I mean, it's been an uphill struggle, and I think it still is, to get a disabled person to do full-time things, to do what everybody else is doing, to do whatever they want to do.

*Yeah. I think it's becoming easier.*

Oh yeah, it's becoming easier.

*I've found it easier, yeah. So, do you feel grateful to your parents for the way that they did support you,*

[Talking together.] Well,

*... cos you seemed to have -*

when I look back at it, they did me better than what most of the other people did.

*So you have quite warm feelings for your parents?*

Well, I can't complain, really, because I s'pose they did the best of what they could do, at the time. But we're at a different, you know, as I said they lived in a different age.

*Yeah, cause I suppose it was only around the seventies or eighties, late sixties, that things started to change.*

Mm, yeah. You see, I'll have stayed on until 1971, when I was 18, but I could have left in 1969, when I was 16. Now, looking back, that might have been a better option. But we only touched on some of the aspects – I always have had the more able-bodied people, some of them seemed to have seen me as one of them, although they didn't say. But I think that is... We can actually discuss that another time, couldn't we?

*OK, yeah.*

I mean, I think you only wanted to talk about the early years, but we have done. There might be some more information on that, but I can't really...

*You've done very well.*

I've done the best as I could do: probably better than some that you probably would be doing.

*Yeah, no, you've done well. I'm very grateful, very grateful indeed.*

**[End of Track 2]**

**Tape 2 Side A [Track 3] [Recorded 21<sup>st</sup> January 2005]**

*... going back over what we did last week and ask you: did you feel opportunities such as exams were lacking, as you were growing up?*

They wasn't offered to me – it was only the people who they really wanted to give 'em to.

*So, did that make you feel -*

And it didn't matter what the disability was.

*Did that make you feel excluded in some way?*

I didn't think so at the time but, if you look back on it now, it probably would be.

*Mm. And so, did you feel an equal part of the group, as you were growing up?*

I don't think anybody... some were more equal than others. I think you will find that a lot of disabled people, even though they were with other disabled people, I don't think they were ever valued and were equal at school. I think they see disabled people, in those days, third or fourth-rate citizens. I didn't think of that at the time, but when you think back, you know, disabled people wasn't valued, unless you could get up and go, and you could survive. I started off with the home tutor, as I said last week, and the Phoenix Centre. And I was quite lucky cos I had good parents. I think I still got on better than most, but I know that I could have done much better, but they didn't expect it because I don't think a lot of people could handle disability (how a disabled person wants), and that's in all areas, from caring... all over, every aspect of one's life in those days – unless you were a person who could walk around and get up and go, and you could do exams.

*Do you have any regrets, looking back on your childhood?*

Any regrets? I don't think I've got any regrets, because we lived in different times than we do now. If I were growing up now, I probably would expect everything and everything, and not what I should expect. But, you know, you don't know any different.

*OK. And have your circumstances changed as you've grown older?*

Things had improved, I would say, in some ways in the last 20 or 25 years, because I've been lucky to meet some more people who appreciate me as a person, and I don't think, apart from your parents and your close relatives, disabled people wasn't expected to see one another, or see people as they were, as they are.

*When you say 'you felt lucky to meet people close to you', is that sort of like a girlfriend-type situation?*

No, I meant the family situation. I didn't have a relationship because, again, it was the lucky people who had relationships. I think, if I did have relationships in those days, as you know, a lot of people didn't really expect disabled people to have relationships. Again, I was lucky because I had good parents, and I got on well. They were good, to a degree, but the times we lived in were different than they are now, and my mother was at home. She never worked after, so you've gotta think generally speaking, the man went out to work, and the lady stayed at home.

*Was that dynamic changed by your disability?*

No, that was the way people were in those days. Not many ladies went off to work, in the 1950s and '60s. It's only in the last 25, 30, 35 years that the ladies went off to work.

*A lot of that changed in the sixties, when you were growing up? [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

Yeah, that's right.

*What were your memories of the sixties, and the changes that were going on at that time?*

Well, I think it was a good time, generally. Like socially it will have worked out quite well, but because I couldn't move, walk away: if I could get up and go, I probably could have done a lot more. But then again, the people who were doing it, the elderly people didn't expect disabled people to do much: and that's the way things were.

*Can you remember many of the events in the sixties, like the moon landing, or the - ?*

Oh I remember the moon landing, and I remember a lot of the other things as well.

*Like the assassination of John F. Kennedy?*

I couldn't remember that one so much, cos I was only about 10 years old, and I didn't really fully understand it. So that was the type of thing.

*Yeah. Could you tell us a bit about your memories of the moon landing? [Talking together. Inaudible.]*

Oh, I remember seeing it; it was quite an experience at the time.

*Yeah. Just careful, cos you knocked the microphone a little bit.*

Oh sorry.

*No, that's all right. And do you remember the Queen's Silver Jubilee?*

Yeah, we're going on a bit. We're going on to about 1977 now.

*Yeah, true.*

I was, yeah I do remember that. I thought you wanted more in between.

*Well, yeah, sorry. Do you have any memories of some time from the sixties?*

From the sixties? Oh, I remember all the music. Yeah, you know, I remember all the great music that we had: well not all of it, you know...

*Do you -*

... your... and, you know.

*The Beatles?*

Yeah, and I knew all about, yeah, I was really interested to the music that we had at the time. Mm. Right, so that's it.

*Can I just ask you about your relationship with your sister, cos you mentioned it before in the earlier interview you had. How close were you to your sister as you were growing up?*

She was quite helpful at the time. Yes, she was quite helpful and, you know, like everybody else does when they grow up, they're quite helpful to me.

*Helpful in what way?*

Well, we used to play games with some of her friends, cos I didn't have many friends round, because I went to the boarding school. I didn't actually meet too many people on my own terms, which was a bit of a shame. I think that was the other reason, cos if I went to a school local, like a lot of disabled people now, you would be more part of

the community, and you had your own friends. Instead, I used to play with a lot of my sister's friends, or play with the girl next door that we had. [Pause.]

*Mm. Earlier in the interview, you mentioned about having operations, so you could walk*

Mm.

*better. Do you have any memories of your time in hospital, around the operations?*

Yeah. I do remember, it wasn't very good experience. I thought I was gonna get, you know, when they promised you this and that, I don't think they fully understand disability, and I don't think they fully understand more now than they did then. But, to be honest with you, all I can remember [is] that my mother used to come and see me, and I remember her actually bringing in clothes, and that's all I can really remember.

*Does it make you feel sad, looking back on it?*

Well, yes and no. Not really.

*Do you feel quite objective towards it, quite blasé?*

Yeah when you... Mm. I think I could have done a lot more, but... [Inaudible.]

*Did you feel, when you left school, that you had any missed opportunities?*

Well, I couldn't do what I wanted to do, because I didn't have the qualifications, so I went to a centre run by the local group, which was printing, which I hated, and I stayed there for two and a half-years, but I couldn't do it.

*So tell me more about this local centre: what was it like?*

It was in a hut, in Erith, and there was about four other people beside me, and it was meant to keep people satisfied. It wasn't good as some, but it was, you know. It wasn't very exciting, it wasn't. Disabled people now wouldn't even expect to go to a centre now, they want to have jobs.

*Do you have the desire to have a job now, of voluntary work, or - ?*

Well, I do a bit, I have done – I'll tell you about that for another time, because we've got a lot to talk about, because we're only in the late sixties, we're now coming 1970, and if we jump a bit, we might miss some opportunities.

*Yes, but just briefly, tell me about your choices since you left school, and any desire you had for voluntary work.*

Well, I never had much desire; I just accepted it as the way life was at the time. It's only by chance, see when I was at school, one of the things I couldn't do was write: and I can write my name now, and I can write a couple of things, but it's not very good. But, the thing is, I think what it was that they didn't want any disabled person to achieve, so of course, I left. But I couldn't write, but I could read all right, so I think it was lucky, it wasn't like as some people said, 'I've got learning difficulty,' mine was more like the lack of opportunities at school. But someone at the centre I went to from 1974 onward, helped me to learn to write, and I can write a couple of things. I mean, when I was at school, they gave me a typewriter because it was easier to write, which is true.

*Talking about typewriters, has computers opened up any new worlds to you?*

Oh yes, it has, mm. Yeah, computers: wonderful, cos I mean I can use a little bit of skills that I learnt with my typing, and just follow my nose.

*Yeah. Now, this centre you were in – in the seventies – what was that like?*

Well, the first centre I went to was in Erith, it [was] run by the local group.

*Was it run by Scope?*

No, it wasn't. It was run by one of the local affiliated groups by Scope (or then Spastics Society, as it was known then), and a lot of it was that they didn't expect... That's all we did: we did printing three days a week, and I was at home with mother two days, and then after that, in 1974, I went to another centre in Dartford, where they taught me to write. They were a bit... we did do some industrial work, but I wasn't... Eventually, I managed to organise some events, but of course my family used to take me out quite a lot. When my father and my sister learnt to drive in the late sixties, early seventies, I managed to get out a lot more, and I can go... One of my uncles used to take us out and we used to go here, there and everywhere, on the odd occasion. I, sorry, I started going out, but I needed to explain.

*Can I - ? [Break in recording.] OK, carry on.*

Yeah. [Sound of pages being turned.] Yeah, I used to go out. I used to go out quite a lot with my family.

*What were your memories like, going out with your family?*

Well, we used to go a lot of the places. I used to find places where I wanted to go, and of course, it was not pot luck, and I could walk a little bit further than I do now, in like the sixties, and up to about... I could walk a bit more, and so I did enjoy it cos we went to a lot of the churches and cathedrals in the South East, and we'd visit Hereford, where my aunt lived and various other places. We even, at one time, I don't know when it was (I was talking to someone about it, and how I managed to do it was beyond belief, but there again, I always like to try things out, and I'm a bit more... and all that), we went up Leaf Hill Tower some time, round about 19, in the late sixties, or early seventies. Now Leaf Hill Tower is a big tower, with a lot of steps. How I managed it, I don't know, cos it was dark, but I remembered it and that we did

that, that was one of the things. We also went up the Malvern Hills. Now this was when I could walk a little bit more than I can do now. I mean, if we were going up I wouldn't even try to go up in the Malvern Hills, but by walking, cos I couldn't do it; but of course I s'pose I could walk a little bit further than I can do. I know I couldn't walk very well; at least I could walk a bit further. And all these different things, I think I could have done quite a lot more, in some ways, cos I used to enjoy going out for walks and drives and things, when I was young, and even still for today.

*And tell me a bit about your aunt in Hereford.*

Yes, she's still alive. Yes we used to stay with her in Hereford, but her flat wasn't big, so was [not?] accessible for wheelchairs, but of course I didn't have a wheelchair in those days (I didn't have a wheelchair until 1982), but I managed to get up the stairs with one person to hold me in front, and someone holding me round down the back, I managed to get up those stairs.

*Yeah, and so -*

Disabled people didn't criticise things so much as they do too much today, because they haven't had the, you know.

*And do you think the way people treat disabled people has changed over the years, cos you say that disabled people are more vocal now?*

Oh, I think they are. In fact, well, when I've been to meetings that I've done, and I will clarify all this later today or next time, or whatever, but I do find that the younger disabled people are not interested. People under the age of about 40 are probably not really geared in doing stuff for like Scope, because they prefer to do [and] want normal work, they don't want to get involved in volunteering for Scope for too long, or want to stand on committees, they want to do proper jobs, I think. I know that society would find it easier for all disabled people to stay at home, or stay in the unit,

or they prefer [they] go to a centre, and that would be easier for everybody, instead of them... because now disabled people would prefer to have proper jobs.

*Have you felt, at any point, as a disabled person, patronised as you've grown up?*

I s'pose I was, but of course I didn't see it in that time, because I'm a friendly person. I see anybody equal, but I don't think they see us (the people who are born disabled) equal on their own terms. People who become disabled, people that have strokes, and people who have MS [multiple sclerosis] or those types of disabilities, they expect a lot more, even in those days. But the younger ones (who were born disabled people) are the ones that didn't have too much opportunity to get on.

*So in your view, there's like a pecking order, in disabled society?*

I think there was. I don't think there is now, but there was. I think those people who've got cerebral palsy were born disabled people, I think they could do quite a lot, but we didn't have computers, for a start, so, if you couldn't write, or whatever, they sees you, 'Oh well that's got learning difficulties,' which is not strictly true. But looking back on it now, I do expect a, you know, I think I learnt, I become myself in the last, let's say, 30 years.

*How has life changed for you, as you've grown up?*

How? Well, I mean, I like to work, and people started badgering me, in the late 1970's, only a few, but now they didn't see; they thought that people should be getting more involved in what was the running of centres, and things like that, so there's a lot more things – and I went to the Phab Club [Phab: national charity dedicated to the integration of people with and without physical disabilities], which I did enjoy. I did serve on their committee for about a year, so I had some experience there, which I keep on forgetting that I've done, but I was treated a bit more equally, but not as equal as I would like. But the thing is, people didn't see someone like me doing too much.

*You said you 'didn't feel people saw you as equal' when you were at the Phab Club as such, and I was just wondering, what did you mean by that?*

Well, I think some people did, more than they ever did at that time, but looking back, I could have got off on things there that I could have done, but there again opportunity didn't turn up for a start, and I could have done a lot more, but that's the way life goes.

*Did, so d'you think you missed some opportunities at Phab Club?*

I think I probably did, but I think a lot of opportunities didn't come my way, in the sixties and seventies, because they didn't expect someone like me to do too much.

*What sort of things did you want to do?*

I don't know really. I was told I couldn't do this, I couldn't do that, because of my disability. It goes back to the school days. You see, I think that if I could have done the usual thing that anybody else did, that would be a shot in the arm for everybody else. But life, you know, chance didn't come, so there you are.

*So do you think the way people treat your disability has that changed as you've grown up?*

I personally think that people have got more respect. I say it could be slightly better, but, there again, I think I've got more respect now than I ever had since I've been here, and even before. I think I did have a lot more respect, they saw me more equal, but I think things keeps on moving, it's moving the goalposts, and I think things got on a bit easier.

*Mm. Yeah. [Sound of turning pages.] How important an influence has things like Scope been in your life?*

Well: how important? Well, I said to you last week, my parents were part of the local group. My father was the secretary for quite a while. Definitely, they joined in 1957, but they left when I went to The Phoenix Centre (which I mentioned last week) because they needed a committee on there. But then he really got into it again, about '90, and when I went to Vallence School, [Westerham, Kent] they were on one of the committees there, so I would think from about 1969 onwards, I think he – my father – was like the secretary of the North West Kent Spastics Group, as it was then called even after I came here, until probably until about 1989. So, to be honest with you, that was being part of Scope. So after I went to a unit, a centre, in Erith in 1971 till about 1974, then I went to the Brent Centre (or as it was called then, the Brent Day Centre), from 1974 to 1987. Right?

*Yes.*

And that was the end, that; Brent. I did get involved in running activities cos they knew I was interested in music, so I got involved organising the music groups and various things like that till about '84 onwards. So, things moved on, on and off, from about '83 onwards, but when they started doing activities at the Brent Centre, that was a big opening to me.

*How did that influence your life?*

Influenced me? I could start getting involved in things in those, you know, some of the staff didn't like me getting involved, but I was.

*How did it make you feel?*

I felt that I was part of something, which up at that time, I wasn't too much. I don't think I was organising little things, but people. Some people really were enthusiastic. Some staff, who'd been there for ages, didn't want disabled people to get involved. They wanted them to do industrial work that was boring, and didn't want to get

involved, you know, they just didn't. But, you know, it's chance. The guy who runs this was a man called Nigel Coates, who I have unfortunately lost contact with, but he was very good. He was very interested in music, and we got on quite well, and that was an opening door. Found someone on my level, and we got on quite well to organising it, and I'm very keen. For like a person, you know, it was a little bit later than I would have, if I'd got on to that.

**[End of Track 3]**

**Tape 2 Side B [Track 4]**

*It'd be great if you could continue with what you were saying.*

Yeah, I think I'd gone... Yeah, so I organised part of this music group, and we did a concert in a main hall at the centre. We also played at an old people's home in Swanley: I remember that.

*Do you think [it] was it an opportunity to get out, when you were doing these concerts?*

Yes it was.

*Was that quite [talking together] empowering?*

They were quite, yeah. One little bit: we did go out on outings, which I wasn't very keen on, but we did do them. That was before the activities, that little bit of information I meant to put in. Yes, it gave me a chance to, you know, it helped me [inaudible] anyway. So, that's brought us up to... we've leapt quite forward.

*Yeah, and going back to the seventies: where were you? Which centre were you at when the Queen was celebrating her Silver Jubilee?*

Oh, I was at the Brent Centre. I think I remember watching it... yes, it was a great experience at the time, if I remember it.

*And -*

I think, yeah, there was lots of parties in the street, and things like that.

*Were you with sister and mother when it was going on?*

Yeah. I can't remember too much about what we did actually, but I know there were a lot of problems going on. Anyway.

*What were the problems?*

No, I can't think what it was now. It doesn't matter.

*And so -*

Yeah, in 1975 my sister had... there are a couple of bits we've missed out, but it doesn't matter. 1972; my sister got married and I went to the wedding.

*Is that what that photo is, on the - ?*

Yeah. I think we've got things in rather a muddle. Does it really matter?

*No, it doesn't matter. Tell me a bit your sister's wedding. Did that make you feel happy? Was it a...?*

Well, it was an experience and... yeah. So, that -

*Well, what sort of experience was your sister's wedding?*

It was quite good at the time. Mm.

*Tell me a bit more about it.*

[Pause.] [Laughs.]

*So, how has life changed for you over the years, David?*

Well, that's what you were asking me. Yeah, my sister got married in 1972 in September, and then, in 1975, she gave birth to my nephew – Gareth – and in December 1977 she gave birth to my niece, which is Sarah.

*You haven't mentioned that your sister had children. Are you close to them?*

Oh yes. They've been quite helpful to me. I didn't actually say anything cos I thought last week we were talking about the early years, weren't we?

Yeah, we're moving on a bit now. Maybe you could elaborate a little bit, about your relationship with your nieces and nephews.

Oh yeah. They've been quite useful to me.

*'Useful' in what sense?*

Well, [talking together] we -

*Just move your hand a bit so we can get the microphone.*

Oh, I'm sorry.

*'Useful' in what sense?*

Well, they help me quite a lot when they started growing up, so yeah. So, what have I been doing? Right. [Pause.]

*So you say 'they helped you quite a lot.'*

Well, I mean they helped me with some of my personal things: well, not very personal things, but they did help out when they were a bit older, and they still do. But yeah, it was an experience. It was a different type of experience. Mm. [Pause.]

*So are you quite close to your nieces and nephews?*

My niece and nephew?

*Yeah. What are their names?*

Gareth and Sarah.

*Gareth and Sarah.*

Yes, they come and pick me up. Yeah.

*Do you go out on trips with them?*

Yeah, they used to, but my nephew got married last year, and now my niece has got a boyfriend, so I'm not quite sure whether they'll help me as much as they used to, but we'll soon find out.

*Yeah.*

Right. So, what I have done since... No, right, so that's the 1970's. Mm. Or eighties.

*You mentioned earlier about computers being quite an influence [talking together] on your life. How has that changed?*

Oh yeah, right. Well, let me go back slightly because computers only played a life in the last... Yeah, I s'pose it's quite a way since I've been here, since 1987. Word processing: that was a new adventure in a kind of way, cos I had done typing at school and I hadn't done any typing, not much, I might have done a little bit at home now and again, but I just used to... When I came here I asked Roger, [Roger Hughes, Centre Manager] 'What did the clients do?' and he said, 'Well, you know,' he said,

'they go to a centre.' There's another centre that opened in Honeycroft, which is very similar to what I've done before, I thought that it wasn't a good... But anyway, it gave me an opening to find out what was going on round here, so in 1989 I organised an Arts Day at the Beck Theatre [Hayes] and Grassy Meadow Day Centre [Hayes], and that was an experience, and I really enjoyed it. I done a number of charity [events] in this area, for things I done.

*So this is all sort of voluntary work that you... [talking together: David inaudible]... didn't mention before that you've got involved in.*

Yeah. These are the things that I wanted to do, which I thought I could do. It was just opportunity came my way. It was an expense; it was similar to what... I didn't want to do any more industrial work, I just didn't, it never was my type of thing cos I like getting involved with different things like that. So I've done a lot of... Since I've been here, I'm on the Service Users' Committee – well it's not committee, I'm the Service Users' Representative here, and I've been on there more or less since I've been here.

*What does that involve?*

That involved showing people round, sitting on the interviews for staff... I'm on the Quality Standard Meeting: anything that we do in the Unit, I'm like the service users' or clients' representative. And that's what I do here, I just explained that. Other things I've done, like I've been on (as it was then) the existing Working Group for the London Partnership [Committee of Scope]. I've done that.

*So you're quite politically active?*

[Laughing] In a kind of way. And recently I was Vice Chair [of the London Partnership Committee of Scope] for a while, and actually took a Chair meeting (and that was an experience), and I was asked to represent service users on the Quality Standard Meet – not the Quality Standard, the governance of Scope – so I was on two groups there. I've been on various committees in Scope. I was in the London

Partnership; I also did the Millennium Awards, which I did enjoy, in the London area. I done interviewing for some staff in Scope, but to be honest with you, that's roughly where we come up to now.

*Yeah.*

A couple of years ago, I did try and stand for the Executive Council of Scope. The first time, I got 36 percent, and the second time, the nominations, the two of the nominees didn't send in their forms after I emailed them.

*Yeah.*

So, going back to saying about the computer: yes, I did learn about computers when I went to [interviewer starts to say something] Honeycroft and that helped me to do letters, and

*So -*

then I got a better computer, then I got one to come here, and I used to work in the lounge in there.

*So [talking together] computers opened up the politics for you?*

Yeah, because I could do things here. I didn't have to go anywhere.

*Yeah.*

So then I got another computer, better, well it wasn't, well, a little bit better. Then I started to get one, well I wanted... What happened was that I didn't have a phone in here. We've got a phone booth next door which is not very wheelchair accessible, and I used to sit in there. It's better than we had when I first come here; we used to sit in the hallway, and take phone calls. It was a bit chilly, and you felt the chair wasn't...

and especially the type of people, the things I've been involved with... So then I got this other computer, with I've got from Ability Net [the computer advice charity], and, you know, I've got email and I go on the web, I know exactly what I want. Other things I do in the Unit: I discuss about the Scope introduction video with the nurses that we had, you've just missed them, they just left about five minutes before you arrived. We have them for three weeks at a time. So, that's the type of thing that I do now.

*Yeah, and what do you think about the politics of disability, and the disabled rights movement in general? Do you think it's quite good and strong, or could be stronger?*

I personally think it's better than it has been, but it could be improved.

*How, would you think?*

I think the general public needs to be more aware of what a disabled person's needs are. They've still got a long way to go.

*Yeah.*

I still generally think the person's family, and with my case, I know a lot of people through going... Another thing is, I go to the folk club and I sing in the folk clubs, but that only because I started organising these things at the centre, and they said could I sing? And what I wanted was... I do sometimes sing in folk clubs. I did make a tape, a cassette, a demo tape in 1991, which someone suggested I should do. But, you know, it was a waste of time really, but it was an experience at the time. So, that's the type of thing I have done. I think I have covered everything now. I'm sorry; did I race through that last bit?

*No, you did well. I was just gonna nip back and just ask you a question: how restrictive do you think your disability's been over the years? Has your mind outgrown your body in that respect: with the activity of your mind?*

Oh, I personally think I could have done... Yeah, outgrew the mind. I think the chances I had... mm.

*So, you're still quite active with the books that you read, and [talking together] stuff?*

Oh yeah, I'm still active. I'm not on any committees at the moment, within Scope. I'm still looking for things in, like Disability Now, because I had a slight problem on one of the committees, well it wasn't a committee, it was something I was on, and the person who was running it insisted that I did something, and I said, 'No, I'm not doing it,' you know. I've got all this life experience: didn't need to do it. I won't say who it was, but it's now a genuine...

[Break in recording.]

*OK. I think that...*

Right. Is that OK now?

*Yeah. I think so. I was just wondering about your early recollections of events, just when you were in your different centres, and can you remember, do you rank this one as being a better centre than the other centres, or whether the other centres are better than this one?*

Well, right, let me put it this way: I think I was on the board of leaving the centres behind before I got here, but because that all I knew, when I got here, probably what I done, it wasn't that good, so I personally think the way I look at it, the Brent Centre was great at the time. The Honeycroft one I went into in Uxbridge, [someone shouting in distance] was generally good but I could have done a lot more, although they was the ones who got me up and running with the Arts Day. But what upset me at the time was because they had a genuine problem there, I was meaning to do something, and I couldn't do it, and it was urgent, and [talking together. Inaudible.]

*What?*

It wasn't a problem with me. They had a flood and I needed to do some stuff, and I needed to print something off, and I couldn't do it, so I think, having a computer, and doing all the things here has helped me in some ways. Yes, I still go to the folk club, I still go out to do my own shopping with members of staff, and friends, and relatives, and whatever, and I've [I'm] still hoping to do something. I have got one or two ideas what I want to do. I've got my friend Colin, he helps me when we go away on holiday and times, and help me with some of the meetings I've been. I also sometimes use agency staff to help me with other meetings because we haven't got enough staff here, and sometimes I think it's better if the staff didn't go.

*And is there ever a time where you've wanted to live in a flat, away from [talking together] this centre?*

I did. Oh, this is something I tried to do, but I didn't like it. I did this in 1991 cos Roger was trying to get an independent group going, which has now become the Outreach Group, but the thing was that I tried it for about a week. I did put my name down for a house, but I'm not a person who likes living on their own. I like company to a degree, although I don't get much company here, [Laughs.]

*Yeah.*

because I can't communicate with them, apart from the staff, to be honest with you, yeah. I think it was a good opportunity, but I tried it one week and I found I was lonely. I didn't really like it. I liked the idea of having some responsibility, but I think it was too little, too late. I think if I had the opportunity, if I was 20 years younger, I would have taken it on. And I have got on, but when you're in your... ah, hang on, how old? De de de de; in your late thirties or forties, or when now, fifty, I didn't, you know, it becomes a bit too late. I think [talking together, both inaudible] the time to do something, all these things: having a flat, you know, relationships. Disabled people

have got to get in there at the same time as everybody else has been doing it. Like in their teens and early twenties. You've got to do it. You can't just say, I know some people in some able-bodied families are still living at home until they're 30, but the thing is, a disabled person has got to get in if they're gonna do it. They've gotta do,

*[Talking together.] Careful of the microphone.*

and that's to do with work, relationships, anything they want to do. They've gotta do it, they've gotta get into it and plan it. And if it's going back to the younger disabled people, which it is, I would tell them to get involved with other disabled people, or with an able-bodied person, but make sure that you've got the same interests as the other person, cos that's where a lot of general relationships go wrong, as I can see.

*Yeah. Well, have you got any hopes for the future?*

Hopes for the future? I just hope that things gonna get improved. I'm always looking for improvement all the time, and I think, eventually, a disabled pers... I mean, I have got a Freedom Pass [allows free travel on London's public transport for people aged 60 or over and for some disabled people] to go on the tube and the buses to a degree, and I have got a Disabled Person's Railcard, but I can't use those effectively because I don't go out as often as I should. You know, if I could get out a lot more than I do, and I'm not criticising, but then it would be a bit more meaningful. Do you understand?

*Yeah, I think I do.*

And I s'pose you're hoping the same thing.

*Yeah, I am. I think it's very true what you say about having to do things early on.*

You see, Reading,

*Yeah.*

which is like a different place: it's more than round here.

*OK. Are you happy to finish now, or...?*

I think – have we covered everything?

*Yeah, I think so.*

I didn't wanna have you coming week after week. [Break in recording.] I was gonna plan out to 1980s, but as you were asking questions, I thought I'd carry on [inaudible].

*No, but is there anything from the eighties that you wanna especially remember?*

From the eighties? No, from the eighties onwards I think we've covered everything I've done. There might be the odd bit of information, but nothing really exciting, nothing really.

**[End of Track 4]**

**[End of recording[**