



Geoff Webb Memories of Polio

Self recorded reminiscences of a polio sufferer and activist for independent living facilities for the disabled, recorded around 1975.

British Library ref. C1383

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

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|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Ref no: | C1383 | Digitised from reel originals | |
| Collection title: | Geoff Webb Memories of Polio | | |
| Interviewee's surname: | Webb | Title: | Mr |
| Interviewee's forename: | Alexander Geoffrey | Sex: | Male |
| Occupation: | Activist for independent living facilities for the disabled | Dates, place of birth: | 1927 - 1975 |
| Date(s) of recording: | c. 1975 | | |
| Location of interview: | Interviewee's home | | |
| Recording format : | Tape 1 reel 15/16ths ips 7" BASF polyester tape. Half-track mono recording (side A only: side B blank). Tape wound head-out. Low signal level and earth hum throughout. | | |
| Digitised as: | Replayed at 4.75 cm/s and digitised at 96kHz. Fmt chunk of WAVE file header adjusted to 48kHz to produce half-speed (i.e. 2.38 cm/s) transfer. | | |
| Total Duration: | 6 hr. 18 min. | | |
| Copyright/Clearance: | Open. © The British Library Board | | |
| Recording notes: | Geoff Webb self-recorded reflections were intended to be the basis for an autobiography. As a result of polio Geoff Webb was paralysed and on a positive pressure respirator and this dictated the manner in which he spoke his testimony. He was sometime editor of 'The Responaut', a magazine for the community of people in this position. This recording was made shortly before his death from cancer. As an audio autobiography it contrasts with other elements in this package. | | |

[Track 1]

I am making an attempt to write a story in a series of letters which will cover a whole period of my life in a way although the first years cannot be done in letter form. The whole idea is for me to date the letters so that they can be typed out and fresh letters inserted between dates if necessary. I would like each letter to be on separate paper so that no two letters come, come on one sheet of paper. That will make it much easier to try and edit the story later.

I could not read until I was seven years old because I had hardly been to school until then, but once I got to boarding school in England, in 1934, I soon learnt to read and write and there my story begins with my first letters to my parents. I was born in 1927 in Peshawar on the northwest frontier of India. My father was in the Indian Army and during those first years we travelled about backwards and forwards to different Indian stations and also back to England several times. This made me fairly independent particularly as I was an only son although I was fairly well travelled, I was younger than the boys I found myself with when I was left at a prep school in Eastbourne in the summer term of 1934 and I felt very unhappy for at least a year. I was not quite up to standard in education even for children of my own age although I had had a term or two at a little school in Aberdeen where I used to stay with my mother's father. My grandfather was always a very great friend of mine and in the years to come he played a big part in helping to bring me up.

[07:18]

This is my first letter.

1935 Aldro School; Eastbourne. The spelling of Aldro is A L D R O

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Thank you very much for the magic box you sent me from Japan and all the postcards you sent on your holiday. I hate being in school here because I have to learn French and Latin and also the clothes are so funny that we wear. We have a straw hat and an Eton collar and every day we have to go for swims either in the plunge in the gym or either running down the cliffs to the new lighthouse to swim in the sea. I love going for runs on the downs and we often watch the Duke of Devonshire's horses pulling its plough with lots of brass all over its head and neck. I am so glad you

are coming home Mummy although I am sorry to hear that Grandad Webb is so ill in Dyke Road, Brighton. I hope we can go and see him in the holidays.

Lots of love,
Geoffrey

[10:54]

Letter number two, 1937

Dear Grandad Bell,

Mummy and Daddy have bought a house in Worthing for their long leave and I am so glad they have taken me away from Aldro School and I now go to Broadwater Manor House where I can be a boarder next term when they go back to India. I have lots of new friends where I can stay on different holidays and I am also looking forward very much to coming up to see you in the summer to spend the holiday in Ballater.

Lots of love from
Geoffrey

[12:44]

Letter number 3, 1939

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

I am staying on Deeside with Grandad and having a lovely time. I am playing golf and fishing for sea trout and going to the Highland Games. I heard the wireless announced that war has started. Nothing much has happened here of course, but I don't suppose I shall see you till the end of the war. I have got to go back to school in Sussex next week. I wonder where I shall spend my next holiday.

Lots of love,
Geoffrey

[15:01]

Letter number 4, 1941

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

I am glad that I was not evacuated to Canada as you arranged. Aunt Phyllis has brought me to Wellington College for my first term which is rather frightening because there are so many boys but we all have our own little room. Next holidays I have to spend with Aunt Phyllis in Barnstable. I will try and work on a farm there because I love to help with the harvesting. Do you realise that I have spent nearly every holiday in the last six or seven years with different friends? They have all been very kind but I would love to have somewhere which I could call home. I hope that you are alright in India and that Dad is managing his regiment in Persia although there is so much dysentery amongst the soldiers. I don't suppose that India is nearly as much fun as you had in Hong Kong for the last three years.

Lots of love,
Geoffrey

[18:52]

Letter number 5, 1944

Dear Uncle Dick, and Aunt Phyllis,

I hope everything is alright down in Tawstock. Next week I am going for selection board for the Indian Army. I might as well volunteer to follow Dad rather than wait till next year to be conscripted. I have been to a harvest camp at Chipping Camden picking tomatoes, all very boring as it rained most of the time we were there. The tent I was in leaked an awful lot.

Lots of love to you both and Nicholas, from
Geoffrey

[21:00]

Letter number 6, Christmas 1944

Dear Aunt Phyllis,

I have got to join up in the Queen's Royal Regiment next month and report to Maidstone Barracks meanwhile I am here with Mum and Dad who have just come home to an Indian Army camp in Norfolk where they are collecting Indian stragglers on the desert, who were taken prisoners. I think we will be private soldiers training at Maidstone for about three months and by April next year, we will be in Bangalore training to be Indian Army Officers. I hope I may see you before we go abroad.

Lots of love from
Geoffrey

[23:15]

Letter number 7, 1945

Dear Grandad,

The war has finished and I have been commissioned into Dad's Regiment, The Sixth Rajputana Rifles. I am joining the Fourth Battalion because it is a parachute battalion and I felt it would be rather good fun to do some jumpings. We will be based near Karachi. I don't suppose that I shall see much of Mum or Dad for a while yet, but I don't know how long I can stay In the Regiment because India wants its independence.

Love from
Geoffrey

[25:22]

Letter number 8, March 1947

Dear Aunt Phyllis,

I have just got back from India and out of the Army. I have come straight to a hospital in London because I have nowhere else to go and haven't quite made up my mind what to do. I am thinking of working on a farm in Sussex to learn about farming as I don't quite know what I could do when I was trained. I think possibly I might join a firm of land agents in Lewes called Strutt & Parker and take some exams to become a land agent. May I come and stay with you a few days to discuss the future?

Love from
Geoffrey

[27:59]

Letter number 9. 1949, March

Dear Grandad,

I am living with Mum and Dad at the moment in Lewes and I am busy taking lots of exams to be a surveyor and land agent. Next month Ann and I are going to get married, but we have not yet found a flat or anywhere to live. Luckily I have got my motorcycle so we need not live to near the town. I am afraid that we won't have time to come and see you at least until I have taken my finals.

Love from
Geoffrey

[30:00]

Letter number 10, 1952

Dear Gordon,

I have finished all my exams now and am on paper at least a qualified land agent. Strutt & Parker is a jolly good firm to work for because the work is very varied and I am getting a lot of experience on farm management as well as other things. The flat in Barcombe is a great success. We were lucky to get it at such a reasonable rent. Even so, money is a bit tight and I think that we may have to take a resident land agent's job fairly soon. This will make even more difference to the old income. Ann is pregnant and the baby is expected in September. See you soon.

Geoffrey

[33:03]

Letter number 11, February 1953

Dear Mr Galbraith,

Thank you for arranging my interview with the Baroness Burton. I am so glad to hear that she has accepted me as her sub-agent at Rangemore to work under you. The estate certainly has potentials and has had no money spared on it at some time in the past. Rupert is only six months old so we shall have to arrange to move house when it is convenient to the Baroness. We cannot really stay in a hotel until the farmhouse is vacant. I look forward to seeing you again as soon as you can visit Rangemore.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey

[36:26]

Letter number 12, 1956

Dear Lady Burton,

I have had three most enjoyable years working for you here, but I now feel that I should try to advance myself by moving on to another estate. I have accepted a job in Oxfordshire, working for

Colonel Peter Fleming, the author. From his office it is hoped that I will be able to develop a small rural land agency to practice of my own. It will be sad leaving Rangemore and I hope that my successor will be able to continue all our plans for increasing the productiveness of the estate.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey

[40:25]

Letter number 13, 1956

Dear Robin Williamson,

By coincidence I have accepted an appointment as Peter Flemings agent and will be living in Nettlebed, only two houses away from you. I have never met cousin Mary but I am looking forward to meeting you all. Presumably you will be our doctor. Ann and I have two boys, Rupert and Robin, who are now four years and two years old.

We shall be moving into Appletree Cottage some time in the spring and will let you know when we arrive.

Best wishes,

Geoffrey

[44:25]

A comment on these foregoing selection of letters. I have sketched in, sorry; I have contrived these fictitious letters merely to sketch in my early life, a life which can be distinguished only by its ordinariness. I was a typical middle-class young professional man with a fairly good education, but not quite enough brain to get a university degree. I had hardly had a days illness in my life and my work as a land agent was healthy and happy. I was a good land agent.

The children were at their first primary school and I think of that time that my wife Ann was showing signs of more nervousness than one would expect of a healthy woman of her age.

I was twenty-eight when I went to Nettlebed and thirty-two when the crash came. The letters may indicate that we did not have very close family relations and that possibly I had been a rather lonely child, with no fixed abode. Somehow this had not mattered very much since we had friends all over the place and seemed at last to have established a family home, alas this was not to be.

For no particular reason, I suddenly succumbed to a very virulent polio infection on September the 29th, Michaelmas Day, 1959. Had it not been for this sudden attack, there would be no point in my making a record of my life. There can be no more letters for the moment, so I will continue to describe what happened as accurately as I can remember it.

[End of track 1]

[Track 2]

Michlmas Day, 1959

I was out shooting partridge and feeling pretty rotten. It was to be my last walk on the estate, or indeed anywhere else. I crawled back to bed in the afternoon and I remember staying in bed all day on Sunday, being very sick and losing the use of my left arm. It was Rupert's seventh birthday. I couldn't be bothered to get up and shave, which was a fairly unique precedent. Then on Monday morning my doctor, Robin Williamson, told me that he suspected polio and that I would have to go away to hospital for a few days. Obviously I acquiesced. I remember the ambulance man carrying me downstairs and away in the ambulance. Then there was a blank.

Two or three weeks later, I woke up in hospital. I was told that I had been very ill and only the skills of modern science and modern nursing had saved my life. I was absolutely terrified and this fear dominated the following months. There I lay stark naked, stripped of everything I owned, stripped of any false modesty which I may have had and entirely in the hands of strange people I did not know. I was terrified of hospitals, even when I was well and this alien world completely bewildered me. Slowly I took stock of the situation. I was totally paralysed and presumably would remain so. I could move my left toes a little bit and I could move my neck half an inch. I could not see because my eyelids had been sewn down. I could not talk and above all, I could not breathe.

[07:05]

Every now and again a nurse would come along and squirt milk down a tube in my nose to keep me fed. I could hear them talking and I didn't much like their sullen stage whispers. There was a much larger plastic pipe stuck into my neck, connecting my lungs to a respirator, which made a rather groaning ticking sound behind me. It pumped air into me at the approved rate to keep me breathing. Every now and again I was disconnected from this respirator which frightened me even more. They had to do this for nursing practices. Every hour or two people took my temperature and so on and there was obviously a great duty for the hospital staff to keep me alive.

I believe that I had been packed in ice for a week to get the fever down and one of my first thoughts was, why there was all this fuss. I lay there, a helpless hulk, costing the country goodness knows what. What was the purpose of it all? The medical authorities appeared to have a duty to keep one

alive [by fair?] means or foul at their own expense and yet, as I was soon to find out, there were absolutely no provisions for taking the next step towards coming out of the cabbage stage, back into society. I was rather bitter about this, but it is very difficult for doctors to make a decision as to when to let an otherwise healthy body, gently pass away. Luckily I could mouth words to the girls who were superb lip readers. My requests could only be the most simple ones, but at least it made life a lot easier. I cheated [ph] a little bit through the stitches in my eyelids and my first recollections were of ankles, usually black stockinged, and black shoes.

[15:31]

The whole place had the most forbidding hollow sound. The shoes clapped on hard floors, there was a constant rattle of metal objects which never stopped. I suppose they were bed pans and clinical equipment. I grew to hate the sight of steel trolleys, which appeared to be the main armament of the nursing staff. I saw a few doctors, but mainly I had been thrown into predominantly female company. The ward physiotherapy I thoroughly hated, because they came along three or four times a day to pummel my body. These girls were in fact to become some of my best friends, with whom I have kept in touch with until the present. I reckon they had to be nice to be tolerated at all by the patients, not that paralysed patients had any say in the matter at all. I was entirely at the mercy of anyone who was obliged to come near me.

[19:47]

During those first few months, I couldn't make up my mind which I was more frightened of, of living or of dying and in fact my mental state was certainly unbalanced for several months. I think the worse thing was being in the hands of competent people but without any say at all in ones own destiny. Even to ask for a glass of water, as I gradually began to swallow again, was a request which was thoroughly queried by the nursing hierarchy and either accepted or refused.

No longer was I a free citizen far less so in fact than the most hardened criminal, serving a life sentence in a high security prison. Meanwhile the relentless ticking of the artificial lungs behind my head never stopped. There were in fact frequent minor breakdowns, but these were familiar to the staff who soon put them right.

[24:04]

As the autumn turned to winter and through Christmas, I slowly regained some sort of balance and my thoughts turned to the future. Not to the long term, but at least to the coming month. I was allowed visitors in the afternoons, so long as we kept very quiet. This was not too difficult as I could not yet speak. My children I only saw on very rare occasions, certainly not once a month. My wife had completely broken down when I disappeared from the family home, but she came to see me every day and most of her conversation was connected with her own insecurity. I felt very sad about the situation but as there was little I could do, I could only smile and hope for the best. My job had gone as well as the house that went with it.

Peter Fleming was my staunchest supporter. He allowed my family to move into another house of the estate, really a very nice one and told me that he would have the rates paid so that Ann and the children would at least be securely housed. I don't think that Ann believed him, nor in fact believed anybody else who was trying to comfort her in a tragic situation.

[29:57]

As I disappeared from normal life, so most of my friends found the situation just too unbelievable and the general attitude was to shy away from the unknown. Only my very best friends of long standing kept in touch and waited until they could do something practical to help. In any case only the very close friends and relatives were allowed to enter the holy precincts at the hospital ward, so communications were effectively cut off.

As with all living creatures there is a built-in defence mechanism against tragedy. I personally learned to become completely hospitalised. I identified myself with the four walls around me and did everything I could to cooperate with the medical bureaucracy. A great many of the things that went on were unnecessary, unkind, downright impertinent, but still I lay low and slowly wound round myself a protective cocoon. There was no clear demarcation line between the first utterly passive stage and the next period of a gradual, more constructive approach to the situation. It took about six months for my physical condition to reach the state in which it has remained statically for the next fifteen years. I could eat normally, I could see normally, I could feel all parts of my body even though I could not move them and my speech, although I could only talk in four words at a time, became reasonably clear for conversation. My breathing was still completely dependent on an electric motor, but I had learned to manage without being connected to the pump for a minute or more, which made it much easier for the nurses to move me about and perform their constant bed changing and so forth. So long as one looked clean to the visiting matrons, it mattered very little

how uncomfortable ones aching body was between the sheets. The important thing was to grin and look happy.

[40:39]

This is the beginning of a new chapter. 1960 and 1961.

Both these years were spent lying in that room. During this period, I think any hospital authority today would make sure that that time had been spent on making preparations for a more constructive life, if only to make me vacate a very expensive hospital bed. There were rumours at one time that I might be transferred to another place for some rehabilitation, but this was never discussed with me, being only the patient, and I was too stupid to start asking questions about my future. I had a vague notion that some fairy godmother in the health service would come along one day and start discussing the subject. Nothing like this happened and in fact whenever I did murmur about going home, trying to do some work or anything else, I was very quickly told that my chances of ever living that room, were remote indeed.

However, little things began to happen, all of which helped in the end. First of all I started to get up into a chair for two or three hours, several afternoons a week. The chairs had been taken out of worn out aircraft, thus they were light in weight, narrow and had good head support. Castors had been fitted on to these chairs, but although it made a pleasant change of posture, one was still not mobile because the chair had to be placed close to the respirator.

At least this is a start although the method of lifting a man in and out of bed with three nurses, however staunch they were, really was quite unnecessary and somewhat cumbersome. Remembering that I no longer had any clothing or other possessions, my grandfather now 90 years old, stepped into the breach and had some very nice pyjamas tailor-made for me. I really must have looked stupid sitting there with loose pyjamas hanging around my wasting arms and legs.

[50:06]

At this time my mother and father were coming to see me every week, quite a long drive from Bournemouth where they lived. I don't think they ever got over the shock of seeing me paralysed, but they were very anxious to do what they could to help. In fact they donated to me my first two

possessions, a transistor radio with an ear plug which would not disturb the other very ill patients and also an ordinary music stand on to which newspapers could be clipped. At the same time my dad started a Trust Fund which gave me an income of £2 a week.

My wife was tending to reduce her visits to twice a week and I had become so in tune with my tiny hospital world that when she or my parents came to visit me, I had very little to say and could not sustain a cheerful conversation. On the other hand, I was able quite easily to chat to different members of the staff and also to other casual visitors who were not basically connected with me. It became obvious that however inert my body was, I must try and keep the mind active. I used to try crossword puzzles from the newspapers and listen to the radio and so forth. There was a television stand in the ward, but it was only switched on once while I was there. Along came the occupational therapist to see how I could amuse myself. We started off by trying to paint. I held a brush in my mouth and made the most complete mess of anything I tried. This was mainly because I couldn't control the brush, but anyway I had no artistic talent. After painting came the typewriter. An old electric typewriter was pushed up over my chair and I was given a 15 inch length of 1/4 inch wooden dowelling to hold in my mouth. Slowly I learned to hit the right keys with the other end of the stick and before long words were coming out on the paper. After a while I got quite good at this and could write short letters, but I wanted something very very simple to do each day. I hit upon a simple little scheme. I read my newspaper in the morning and chose from it a little item of news. I then lay there and made up 12 or 20 lines of verse. It was very bad verse, but I retained the memory of what I had made up until I got up in the chair after lunch. Then I would set to and type out my dreadful composition. Once or twice the small respirator was attached to the chair with a battery and about three girls would push me round the hospital grounds.

[01:02:57]

It must be obvious that all these tiny accomplishments were all done to keep me happy and amused. I suppose I was of some minimal value to the ward as guinea pig for nurses training in that particular type of work. I was also used in the laboratory where I was pushed in the bed for a number of experiments by research doctors. My body was the subject of what had now become the standard work on some type of neurology. These experiments were rather unpleasant because they involved heating my body and then cooling it down and then heating it again and then cooling it again. During this time they were taking readings of various parts of my body mainly to do with temperature and oxygen and carbon dioxide and things like that. The method of heating and cooling

me was fairly basic. Huge lamps were put over my body, which lay naked on the bed, to heat me up. Just as I got to enjoy this pleasant glow, the windows would be fly open and my body packed round with bags of ice on to which fans, electric fans, blew cold air. Anyhow, I did have the feeling that my time was not entirely wasted.

[01:08:24]

At this time in my life along came Janice Carver. She was a girl who lived near my aunt Phyllis and had come to the neighbouring training school for occupational therapists. They weren't usually allowed into our ward in case they caught some horrible disease, but she got permission to come in the evenings and give me my supper. She collected half a dozen of her friends, all girls of about nineteen at the same training school and she arranged a sort of roster so that one girl came nearly every evening. This really did help to keep me sane because they were normal people from the great outside world. We used to talk a lot and it is rather curious how I learned so much about the private lives, not only of these girls, but also of many many nurses who would often have an hour to spare just sitting there. During the nights, which could be very long, this could be a great comfort to me and sometimes quite a help to girls who wanted to tell somebody about their current troubles and I was rather a convenient body to be talked at.

End of chapter.

[End of Track 2]

[Track 3]

I had a few thoughts on religion during the, during this period. I was never a very convinced Christian, but every Saturday I used to take the Holy Communion. Then I came to terms with myself. If there was no guiding spirit on a religious level, then there was no point in taking Communion. But I felt somehow that there was something just beyond the material things in life. Even so, if I had been saved in this very unusual fashion, then surely it must be to some purpose towards mankind in general. I had this feeling quite strongly although it just sounds a bit conceited. Anyway I came to the conclusion that if the guiding spirit needed me for his purposes, he certainly didn't require the mumbo jumbo of Communion and other rituals. In short, I have always been agnostic to some extent and my attack of polio did nothing to effect my spiritual feelings either way.

[05:38]

Thoughts about religion led me on to think what could I achieve in this helpless condition which could possibly effect the world, even my little world. Certainly I must stop costing the country so much just to keep me alive. Having decided that, I was really stuck because I didn't know what else I could do about it and so I lay all through 1961 cogitating on these matters. I was just lazy because I could have forced the issue a little bit, at least nine months before I in fact did so.

[08:37]

This is the time that machinery began to play a part in my activities. The typewriter was a very great blessing so far as it went, but plainly it could only be used for writing letters and other short articles. While I was in hospital I never actually sold anything written by me on the typewriter. Then came the problem of trying to read books. At that time there were two or three types of page turner, which different people were able to use, but none of them were very satisfactory. Duncan Guthrie sponsored the production of a microfilm projector. He was in charge of what was then called 'The Polio Research Fund'. A simple little projector was developed onto which each page of a book borrowed from the public library could be put onto microfilm and projected onto a little screen which protruded from the projector. He came along to see me with one of these machines, but unfortunately the switch, which would turn the pages forwards and backwards, was incorporated into a sort of shoe. I was supposed to wear this shoe and operate the switch with my

big toe, but the design was not good enough to enable me to do this. Luckily Reg Maling came into my life at this moment. He looked at my reading projector and fitted one of his own micro switches to operate it. This I did by puffing and sucking down a little plastic tube. I was then able to read as much as I wanted to providing they were books which had been filmed by the PRF. If the book I wanted was not available, they would go to the Westminster Public Library and film the book I wanted. This was a free service and it was carried on over the years although the projectors had been slightly modified and improved from time to time.

[17:38]

While the projectors were being designed by the PRF, my uncle Vivian, a retired Vicar, was also trying to help me by designing two sorts of reading apparatus, one for books and one for newspapers. He brought these to show me when he had finished them, but I never saw them because the rather unhappy nurse in charge thought, quite rightly incidentally, that these two machines would simply take up too much space in the room and no other storage places were available. However, they were a good try and these machines were an indication of the sort of private enterprise which was going on in different parts of the country to developed suitable bits of equipment for paralysed people. Reg Maling who I have just mentioned, is one of these people. In his mother's front sitting room, he spent his evenings designing equipment which could be operated by the mouth or in fact by any small movement which the individual might have left to him. After fixing up my reading projector, Reg brought along to me his first type of environmental control system. It consisted of a sophisticated electronic canal, which fitted on to an ordinary wooden trolley. There were about ten plugs connected to it and the idea was that one could control anything electrical switched in to these plugs, all with the same little plastic mouth tube or other microswitch. He called his gadget a 'Possum Control' and I had a good look at it, but it seemed to me that as there was always somebody near me, its value for my personal condition, was rather limited. If I wanted the light on, it was really easier to ask than to have this machine to switch it on myself and the same applied to various other operations such as radio and electric fires. They didn't apply in hospital, but I could see that they might be useful at home. I asked Reg whether he could extend his control to work an electric typewriter and in fact he had done this, using a very simple code for all the different letters. I tried this machine, but it was really too simple and actually slower than I could work the typewriter with my own stick. I pointed this out to Reg who immediately took up the challenge and started to work out a very much faster and more sophisticated coding system, which had possibilities of commercial value by way of earning

money. This new control for typing took another year or two to perfect, but at least the idea was there.

[30:26]

In the latter part of 1961, the question of money and potential earning are again to loom large in my thoughts. The health authorities side stepped the issue very neatly by offering a 'possum' controlled typewriter to anybody who could use one and earn £5 a week with it. Since it took a long time to learn to operate, nobody could guarantee to do this and therefore the flow of 'possum' typewriters was minimal and very largely confined to schools and similar institutions. I had been told that I would need at least £3000 a year to live at home on my respirator and my income at the time was £100 a year from my father's trust. The other main hurdle towards leaving hospital was trying to persuade my wife to co-operate with my going home. We didn't talk about it very much, but it was clear that she felt the responsibilities were quite beyond her own capacity and so the months went passed until Christmas Day 1961. This day was the turning point of my life. For practical purposes the hospital kept me on a diet to stop me getting too heavy to lift about. This was a great help because the diet food was much better than the ordinary menus from the hospital kitchens.

However, on that Christmas Day I asked for a piece of Christmas cake and was refused it by some particularly narrow-minded member of the staff. It was not on my diet. That incident made me vow to my self that I would leave the place as soon as I could, whatever the problems. I had no visitors that day because my own family had gone down to Sussex for the holiday and I felt very lonely. It was my third Christmas Day in that room and I felt it was high time to put my foot down metaphorically speaking. At last I had accepted the plain fact that if I wanted to do anything with my life, the initial motivation must come from myself. I lay there and considered the problems. I decided that if I wanted to go home and could afford to, then I would take over the downstairs of our house and let my wife live upstairs, having as much or as little contact with me as she chose. She accepted this all be it grudgingly and then I turned my thoughts towards the question of financing a home life.

[40:06]

The biggest difficulty was that the methods of nursing in hospital were quite suitable in such a place, but would be far too expensive to try and follow the same routines in one's own home. I

calculated that by changing my whole system of being nursed, I could reduce the hospital's predicted three thousand a year by half. This still left me with the problem of finding fifteen hundred a year when I only had one. I set to think about this. It was to take six months from the Christmas cake episode until I went home. In all I was a thousand days in that room. All this time, Peter Fleming was a constant visitor, keeping me in touch with normal activities of his estate and the outside world. This helped me a lot to maintain my sanity. Luckily his secretary, and Jill Mackenzie, also came to see me some evenings, too kept me in touch with state matters from a different angle. In those last six months there were a great many details to think about and the fact that I could write my own letters with my mouth stick, was an enormous advantage. I set about working out what I would need and an architect friend, Peter Bosanquet, supervised some minor alterations to the ground floor of our house in Nettlebed. The room I would lie in was enlarged slightly and the intrepid Reg Maling had it wired up to take the 'possum' equipment which I was to have. He had not at this stage developed the fast typewriter, but I had control over heat and light and also the loud speaking telephone. Most hospitals now had portable telephones for the use of patients, but we had nothing like that which rather made communications less easy and I was even more dependent on the typewriter.

[48:23]

The overriding question was the extra fourteen hundred pounds I would need in a year, discounting inflation. I bought a copy of a register of charities. I argued to myself that whereas nobody could possibly finance me to that extent by themselves, it might be possible to get a number of charities to come together and each help me a little bit. I wrote off to everyone I knew and several that I didn't know. I contacted the Countess of Limerick. She was number two in the British Red Cross at that time and in the old days I had helped in the running of the Earl of Limerick's small estate in Sussex. She was very helpful and the Red Cross bought me a second hand electric typewriter which I later used at home. The firm of IBM had a great scheme whereby they would sell us, that is to say people like me, their second hand reconditioned typewriters at a nominal cost and also maintain them. The advantage of an electric machine is that the keys have a very light touch, suitable for pressing down in the end of a long stick. I have had this machine ever since and it has been one of my greatest assets.

[53:40]

Peter Fleming then helped me to write a letter to *The Times*. The gist of this was that I was costing the country five thousand a year whereas if they could help me to the tune of five hundred a year, I could live at home at no more expense to them. It would therefore benefit the treasury quite apart from the humanitarian angle of getting me back into circulation. The official reply was that the Health Service simply had no machinery to do such a bargain. As a result of that letter to *The Times*, one or two individuals offered to help me privately. I accepted their offers with gratitude, so this was a start towards my income. In fact I have never met these benefactors although we have corresponded regularly. By chance, one of them was Ernest Kleinwort, head of the merchant banking firm. By further chance, he lived next door to the Countess of Limerick and got talking about me.

This was just one of the lucky coincidences which followed in the years to come. Meanwhile we did not give up on the Health Service angle and finally, before I went home, I did manage to suggest a way whereby the Home Help Service could be used to channel a small annual income to get over the anachronistic situation to help us both. In fact the Minister of Health, personally intervened and it got through. Mr Enoch Powell was the Minister of Health at that time and although I found that his politics in later years were unconventional, I never forgot his personal help.

[01:01:18]

The strange thing was that once I had stirred myself out of the state of apathy, other people all started coming to my aid. Jill Mackenzie involved Robin Laird, who was a senior chartered surveyor and five or six benevolent funds wrote to me with offers of help. Finally, before I went home, my income, or at least my estimated income, was secured. To all my benefactors I pointed out that I could see no way of ever paying back their generosity, but at the same time I resolved that my life work would be directed towards at least becoming self supporting. It was a fairly bleak hope at the time. From the hospital's point of view, I was to be provided with a respirator, a suction apparatus and various medical bits and pieces. No bed was suggested, nor any refinements such as a bed pan or a chair or any other sort of mobility. I investigated the availability of beds and I chose one which could be tilted up into various positions and ordered it. So there I was ready with my basic equipment to go home.

[end of track 3]

[Track 4]

At midsummer the great event took place. I was put on to a stretcher that was attached to the battery-operated respirator. Trundled into an ambulance and taken home. I lay on the floor on the stretcher for an hour or two while the equipment, including the new bed, was got ready. I was put on to the bed and that was that. My poor wife was so nervous that she did not greet my arrival although another friend was there to make a cup of tea. My two children, now aged seven and nine, appeared to accept my sudden presence quite casually as though I had been out for the day, rather than for nearly three years. I had advertised in the press for some staff to look after me and the hospital very kindly allowed the chosen people to work in the ward for a week or two before I left. This was quite essential, but was rather unfortunate because they took the attitude that I would be a patient just the same as in the hospital only in a different place. I of course, after these years of doing what I was told, had other ideas. I would be master of my own destiny once again and they would do what they were told. The result was that the two men I took on were confused by my change of attitude. It would have worked alright possibly with my wife's cooperation, but she was terrified of my presence in the same house and did nothing to help the poor men, who were trying to fit in to an unusual situation. However, I soon got a suitable staff routine going and settled down to the next year of living at home.

[09:19]

All the time I had been confined in hospital, I had made casual friends with a few other patients, but really most of them had been very ill and usually could not talk. There was one girl, Daphne Green, who had gone home some months before me, whose condition was very similar to my own. She had been able to buy a van in which to travel and very kindly her family came to take me out in it, not only when I got home, but also once or twice during my last month in hospital. They lived a long way away and I am sure it was a great effort for them to come and take me out into the countryside for a picnic. I remember we went to the annual agriculture show on one trip. This was really a great occasion which wetted my appetite for further mobility.

There were two other people on respirators, who had been at home for some time. I hadn't met either of them although I did later on. One of these was Doris Page, who devoted her life to starting a little magazine for people like us. In those days it was a very modest little broadsheet, but later on it was to grow into a fine, glossy publication called 'The Responaut'. I thought it was a dreadful

word, but there had never been a better one suggested to describe the likes of me, paralysed and dependent on some form of iron lung or breathing aid. Doris did a lot to encourage me to get out of hospital by correspondence and later on she was the instigator of a new small charity set-up for the very purpose of helping severely handicapped people to get over the initial difficulties, financial and otherwise of leaving hospitals. The other responaut I was to meet was Robin Cavendish. Before I ever went home, he and wife his Diana took a lot of trouble in getting to know my wife and helping her to accept the situation. It certainly wasn't their fault if my wife did not respond quite adequately to the help they gave her. They tried to show her how a household could remain a happy one, despite the presence of somebody very disabled. Robin's main theme in disabled living was to increase his sphere of mobility for himself and, incidentally, for the benefit of the other handful of people in similar situations. The first time that I met Robin Cavendish, he was pushed into the room in hospital in a procession. His wife Diana pushing his chair, which at that time was one of the standard aeroplane chairs, and behind her carne a respirator being pushed by the man who helped them. Chair and respirator were connected with a long black rubber hose. This was his first attempt at mobility. When I got home, he brought me another aeroplane chair to experiment with. He was developing with the aid of a great friend of his, Dr Teddy Hall, a very sophisticated type of complete chair with all the necessary equipment built in to it. Luckily for us, both he and Dr Hall had some financial resources which enabled him to aim at this goal for himself and later on for the benefit of all of us on respirators.

[28:44]

Meanwhile I had a good look at the chair he had left with me. I sent it up to our village Blacksmith, who fitted it on to four wheels for me and made various other alterations in the blacksmith shop. It was a crude affair and looked rather like Boadicea's chariot. I acquired a little battery-operated respirator and a battery and a charger and arranged them all on a platform at the back of the chair. I was able to sit in it, plugged in to the power supply and I was also able to be independent of mains electricity for two or three hours. This chair lasted me a year or more while Robin's very much better equipment was in the stage of being developed. I had no equipment at home for lifting me and so I relied on my very strong and wonderful helper, whose name was Bernhard, to lift me in and out of the chair. We went for little walks and I was also able to sit outside the back door of our house, just to get a change of view and a change of posture.

In the middle of 1963 the inevitable happened and Bernhard developed a hernia. I was able to spend a week or two at the local cottage hospital, just to give my wife and family a little rest, but the hernia required Bernhard to go into hospital himself to get patched up. While I was at the Watlington Cottage Hospital, I met one or two people, in particular Irene and this was to be another turning point in my life.

[36:40]

Back at home Reg Maling had loaned me a tape recorder and I started trying to write stories. I tried fiction, showed them to Peter Fleming who sadly shook his head and said I could never make a living like that. He did help me to get articles published in *The Times*. This was not lucrative, but the articles followed the letter I had written, pointing out the financial anachronisms which had crept into the welfare state system. Friends helped me to have my taped stories typed out. By about November of 1963, it was clear that the family strain of this unusual existence was just too much for all of us and it was also clear that I would have to use some sort of lifting tackle to avoid a repetition of Bernhard's hernia. I made a final decision about that time. I decided to leave home. It is not very usual for somebody who is utterly helpless to do such a thing, but it seemed to be the best course and really the only action I could take. I told my wife that it would be for the best in the long run and although she was very hysterical at that time, I think that she finally came to accept the situation.

[43:25]

My new friend Irene, borrowed a Red Cross ambulance with which she was already involved, helping disabled people to get out of their homes from time to time. In my makeshift chair we went back to the hospital where I stayed for two or three weeks while Irene and I made arrangements to get transferred to the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre for a bit of rehabilitation and in particular learning to use a hoist.

One morning in December she pushed me in my chair to the other place and a new world opened in front of me. The Nuffield was a very different kettle of fish to the acute ward I had been in. It was human and everybody was so kind and understanding. Dr Margaret Agerholm was in charge of polio patients and her one mission in life was to get people like me back into society. Within a few weeks she had me getting in and out of bed using hydraulic power instead of a troop of nurses. She

lost no time in making me work out plans to set up home on my own. The administration at such a colossal undertaking took a few months, but we hardly wasted a day in the planning of it. Urged on by Irene's encouragement I started house hunting. So hopeful were we all that my father then stepped in. First of all he offered to buy me a vehicle suitable to carry my chair. It was not to be a van equipped with the sophisticated hydraulics which Robin and other paralysed friends already had, but at least it would have ramps up which my chair could be pushed.

[52:50]

At my end Irene and I met the local Bedford dealer and we worked out the specification for the cheapest type of 15 hundredweight vans which was available. When I arrived at the Nuffield, I met a boy, Peter Woods, who was at least 15 years younger than myself. I was amazed at the spirits he had developed during his disabled years. To me it was a tonic. He had missed much of his education, but he was very bright and completely in control of his situation. He too had not been able to arrange to live at home and Dr Margaret Agerholm was working on both of us to similar ends. Young Peter sat there like a giant queen bee with all the nurses and hospital staff running round him cheerfully doing what he wanted. He too was in the process of organizing a wheelchair with respiratory equipment built in. While we were thinking about house hunting, Irene and I, and some other friends who were helping us entirely on a voluntary basis, decided that we should try to spend a week somewhere in a private home to see how things worked out.

[end of track 4]

[Track 5]

Early in 64 [1964] my new van turned up outside. At the same time, Robin Cavendish's first standard built-in wheelchair was completed. He suggested that I borrowed it for a week to take away on this trial holiday complete with new van to see what happened. A friend of my mother's lent us a flat overlooking Poole harbour and the new hospital staff were delighted to let me go away on this trial run. Irene and her friend Ann Brown bundled me into the new chair and into the new van and off we went. In fact, we broke down the moment we got to the seaside, not quite knowing what had gone wrong with my respirator. We were lucky in getting an electricity company service van, equipped with a radio telephone to come and rescue us. He found that it was only a fuse which he mended temporarily, while we phoned Dr Hall's workshop for some spare parts which arrived the next day.

I have possibly oversimplified all the little problems which went into this first expedition, but there were so many of them that they cannot all be recorded. On reaching Poole, I was able to chat to my father about the possibility of buying a modest house. It was arranged that the money from my trust fund would pay for three quarters of it and he would make up the difference if I could not get a second mortgage. We worked out that we could spend 4 and a half thousand on a suitable bungalow somewhere not too far from the Nuffield Hospital in case we got into difficulties, The week ended and we had proven the van and the wheelchair and given them a good testing. I went back to the Nuffield to carry on my future arrangements. Irene wrote my letters for me and I had the use of a mobile telephone arrangement.

[09:31]

One of the most useful things which the Nuffield did for me was train me into a more or less routine habit for using a bed pan. Thus it was nearly five years between the time that I caught polio until the time I was house trained. It took the Nuffield just three weeks to accomplish this feat - a most important aspect of living if one was to be out of bed most of the day. By coincidence a bungalow came up for sale quite close to Irene's house in Watlington. We went to look at it and snapped it up. The idea was that I would have one helper living in the bungalow with me, while Irene and her other staunch friends took it in turns to fill in the extra time. I would also have to pay for a certain amount of night nursing help.

Those few months seemed to be a string of one miracle after another. The cabbage which I had become was at last going to seed and there seemed a chance of returning to life. I discovered that my wife had been gently transferring money from our bank account to a private one of her own without telling me, so we met and arranged fairly amicably to divide what was left. I ended up with my own bank account containing £300, which in fact had very kindly been left to me by my old friend and employer, the Baroness Burton. So we took stock of the situation. Various efforts had been made on my behalf to get a divorce, but I could not bring myself to force this issue because my change of circumstances really wasn't my wife's fault and could never have been predicted in advance. Therefore, we stayed married but separated and my new bungalow was only ten minutes in the car from our home in Nettlebed, so there was no reason why the children could not hop onto a bus at any time to come and see me if they wanted to.

[20:05]

So precarious was my own existence depending on the reliability of my mechanical lungs day and night that I felt quite strongly that my wife should maintain the closest possible relationship with the boys. By this time they were both at boarding school at Christ's Hospital. How this worked out is a long saga which could fill another book. So there we were in the Nuffield with a bungalow contracted to buy and a vehicle and my old chair. Robin Cavendish's new prototype chair had gone back to the workshop for some modifications which we had found necessary while testing it. I had this £300, but of course no furniture. I kept in touch with the outgoing owner of the bungalow and found out when he was going to move. We arranged to move in with Irene driving me home a few days after the bungalow was empty. I did buy a little basic furniture, but another miracle took over and all our friends in Watlington turned out their attics to produce unwanted bits and pieces, unwanted to them but vital to me. I had to have a piece of wall knocked down in the bungalow, simply to get in and this was done in a matter of hours. The garden was a jungle, but when I arrived on the appointed day, there was one of my new neighbours very very kindly tidying it up for me, although I had never met them. The redoubtable Reg Maling installed a telephone with a special switch connected to my puff-blow-possum equipment so that in a real emergency I could phone through to Irene's house for help. There was a comeback on this arrangement because I blew the emergency code by mistake only to find that Irene's long-suffering husband Colin tearing down the road to my assistance. This did not seem very reasonable because I did not need the assistance and if I had, he would not have known what to do once he got to my bedside.

I advertised for a helper before moving and got a very sweet unmarried mother with a lovely child. Isabel was a nurse and very scatter-brained and very very nice and she stayed with me for some months, but I found that she was really too kind for somebody like me who had gone through a long sticky patch and I was reacting, or rather overreacting to my new freedom. I had so much help willingly offered by so many people that it went to my head. I looked on myself as a fairly well balanced person, but this miraculous change in my life was like an overdose of champagne and I could not reciprocate and dole out the help I was given in a proper and sensible manner. Those years on my back in bed had taken their toll and if I did slowly come to my senses, it was only through the very great understanding of those friends. By force of circumstance, there was a predominance of female company in my life at that time. In fact of course, this had been the case ever since I got polio. I needed more male friends but this was not easy as it was the women who could usually spare a few hours out of their ordinary home life.

[36:47]

The general opinion of those who helped me was that I was back in society and that they could help me to sit back comfortably and enjoy life. I should consider myself free, lucky and very happy, but I couldn't quite accept this. To live comfortably was not an end in itself - I felt that I must try and make the best use of my new fortunes. I might do this by trying to become self-supporting or by helping other disabled people, or a bit of both. I was determined to try not to be a parasite on society more than was obviously necessary.

I called my new little house, 'The Fairground', after Rudyard Kipling's poem called 'Sussex'. It was a sunny little house on a small corner plot by the council houses and it was always a happy bungalow - a happy home, in spite of my occasional outbursts when there seemed to be too women about. Jill made all the curtains out of cotton which I had chosen. Irene took me down to see my parents where we stayed a night or two sometimes. I had some difficulty in trying to sleep without my own bed but eventually we got over this problem with a simple board device, so I just had to take my own mattress and put it on whatever bed was available. My hydraulic hoist to lift me out of the bed and chair came to pieces and travelled in the van quite easily.

[44:55]

By this time I was joining in normal activities, such as going for a drink in the pub, going to the cinema and the theatre and into restaurants. I don't know what the casual observer thought of me in my chair with its respirator going 'tick-tick-tick', but I always tried to make nothing of it - somehow I felt that if the public saw me looking fairly natural it would help the people like me to be accepted into society. I have started smoking my pipe again after seeing Peter Woods at the Nuffield enjoying his smoke. I actually got a small job testing tobacco and blends for Gallaher's, the tobacco company, and this was quite fun while it lasted. Irene used to organise weekly shopping expeditions to Sainsbury's, who were very helpful to me and I chose the week's household necessities with her help.

Some months after moving into the bungalow I wrote another article for *The Times* trying to describe how the machinery and gadgets which we now had helped to let me live at home with this sort of freedom, partly by increasing my mobility and also by helping to reduce costs by making it easier for fewer people to look after me. I was still using my typewriter with a mouth stick and I was able to type out the manuscript of a small book which was produced by my old friend, who was now Viscount, Esher, and a famous architect. This little volume described what effect and what little effect the town planning laws over the years had had on the country. All these Planning Acts were well meaning but have done little to preserve the visual aspect of our district and, indeed, of most areas in the Home Counties.

[54:24]

Then, at last, Reg Maling produced my new, sophisticated typing control and in theory I was to be able to type fast enough, blowing down my little tube, to actually earn a living. In practice, it was rather different. I did have a small, insurance agency which needed minimal typing, but actually the first two weeks of practising with my new typewriter was very disheartening - it took me those weeks to type out one word! But then, suddenly, I got better at it, and within a few months I was typing letters. I fixed up the corner of the living room for an office and there I sat wondering how to earn my living. I tried all sorts of writing and it so happened that from 1965, for the next ten years, I never missed a single week without selling some article. They were mostly technical and mostly centred on farming matters. They were never enough to pay my way, but as I progressed I was gradually able to write to my favourite Charities and tell them that I could do with less help from them. One by one I managed to dispense with their charitable aid.

[End of track 5]

[Track 6]

By 1965 quite a lot of things had happened. My best friends, such as Irene, found it more difficult to fit me and helping me into their own private lives. Dear old Bernhard had come back to me from his job working as a kitchen porter. Although he was a man, we did not have much in common to talk about, but while I was still very idle he was ideal for looking after my daily needs. Various other people started coming onto the scene and I took on Margaret, who also was an unmarried mother with a sweet, two year old little girl. I always found it fairly easy to have one main helper: the difficulties always arose when I tried to have a second one or various part-time help which had to be dove-tailed in. The constant pressure of needing somebody every minute of every day was probably the greatest difficulty I ever had to cope with.

In the summer of 1965, I embarked on my first real fortnights holiday. Jill and the Brown family and one or two others came with me down to Cornwall where I had borrowed a land agents house. He had been a friend of mine when I worked for Strutt & Parker and was now managing the Mount Edgumbe Estate. He was away when we borrowed the house, so I didn't see him but we did have a grand holiday touring all my old Cornish haunts where we used to spend holidays caravanning and sailing. His house was in a lovely spot overlooking Plymouth Sound and that holiday really proved that it could be done. It made it easier for future trips to know what to expect in places which one didn't know. There were always hazards like doorways too narrow for my wheel chair and electric plug of old fashioned patterns which one must be prepared to adapt simply and quickly.

[10:08]

The other main enterprise which started in 1965 was the Disablement Income Group or DIG for short. 'This organisation had recently been started in Surrey by Megan du Boisson. I volunteered to help in our local district with publicity and starting a local branch. DIG very quickly moved to a pressure group for disabled people and became respected in Government circles. I only played a very small part in its activities, but nowadays it has grown into a much larger organisation with properly conducted branches throughout the country. DIG really became the main fighting force for all the stupid financial anachronisms which in the past were being dealt with by individuals. Most of us got what we needed one way or another, but DIG helped to regularise the financial pattern. We made a number of trips to Westminster on protest rallies and presenting petitions to the Prime Minister, and so forth.

I can't remember how many times I've been pushed backwards and forwards between Trafalgar Square and the House of Commons but I was so pleased one day when John and Myra came to see me. Myra was my wife's kid sister and they had a dairy farm in Sussex. With a great deal of tact, owing to my somewhat unconventional marital status, John and Myra were able to invite me down to stay at the farm. I did this several times with different people taking me and always loved the farm atmosphere to which I had been used. On the whole, my wife cooperated and did not cause many scenes while I was staying with her family.

[20:16]

Talking about unconventional marital arrangements, I have not spent a night with my wife since 1959 and I didn't feel that fidelity was any more an important issue. My sex life, if not normal, was at least very satisfying and I hope that I didn't leave any permanent awful scars on any of the girls with whom I became unusually intimate.

In 1966, I had another great stroke of good luck - my maiden aunt whom I had not met for many years left me some money in her will. At first this sudden gift took me by surprise. There was over £4,000 worth of stock bringing in an annual income of £3 per week. The moment I got the gift one of the charities had to stop sending me £5 a week owing to their rule about capital owned by their beneficiaries which seemed very reasonable, but it left me with an immediate £2 per week less income, at a time when every penny counted. I scratched my head and wondered what to do about it. First of all, I had my van, fitted with a hydraulic lifting device to save the girls pushing me up those long ramps and I gave my ramps to Peter Woods for his old van. I decided to build on a self-contained bed-sitting room so that I could employ a second resident helper. The money that was left after this I used to purchase a small investment in land which gave an income just enough to put me back where I had started before the legacy arrived. The investment consisted of a row of lock-up garages some miles away and also the ground rent from a block of flats, which I understand will become mine in 95 years time or thereabouts. I don't know whether, if given second chance, I would have used the money in the same way but I think probably on balance, it was a sensible course to take. I suppose I could have paid off my mortgage with the money but this would have left me still with an inadequate income to pay the weekly bills.

[32:53]

The hydraulic tail-lift made all the difference to my helpers, although the self-contained annexe never quite hit the mark. For a start my eldest boy, Rupert, left school and after failing to hold one job, came to live in my annexe. He didn't seem to be able to stick at anything long enough to make it worthwhile and the crunch came when I was raided one night, by the Drug Squad who found enough evidence to put Rupert on probation. I couldn't handle this sort of situation and sent him off back to Mum.

During the seven years I was at Watlington, I went back to the Nuffield from time to time in total, I spent thirteen weeks back in hospital over that period. At first, so that the helpers could have holidays and later on, when I couldn't keep an adequate staff. Those weeks in hospital were very good for me in helping me to appreciate my home life at times when I got too swollen headed, Those weeks were also very useful in other ways. In one of them, I got a regular contract for weekly articles: in other weeks, I met auxiliary nurses who for one reason or another had nowhere to go at weekends and welcomed the chance to come and stay with me. Some were English and some were foreign, but it was all a great help, particularly the knowledge that the Nuffield were able and willing to have me for odd weeks was the greatest possible security I could hope for living my independent life at home. It was during one of these hospital weeks that I casually met Anne Villeneuve. Little did I realise that a year or two later she would enter my life like a bombshell.

[42:36]

As time passed, I wrote more and more stories - mostly technical which were published all over the world. I tried to help some of the disabled organisations by advertising various gadgets at home and abroad. It is very difficult to assess how valuable this work was, but I think if you throw enough mud some must stick somewhere. My man, Bernard, suddenly disappeared after a year or so, when he had had quite enough of me and of my women. He was not a ladies' man. I never heard from him again, but perhaps that was just as well for his sake. Margaret and her little girl stayed two or three years and there were so many others for short periods that I haven't got time to record them all. Irene's sister-in-law, Celia, stayed with me from time to time and took me down to Sussex for a holiday. I also went to an old Army friend who had a fruit farm in Essex. I stayed there two or three times and, in fact, his son and heir is my godson. Then came Polly and Angela, two sisters

who both looked after me in turn. Polly's little girl, also my goddaughter, and I was able to go to her christening in London.

[48:52]

The remarkable thing about these isolated facts and details, during those seven years, is that my physical condition was completely unchanged from the three long years I had lain in the hospital bed. To the world at large, the important thing is that able-bodied men and women were slowly beginning to accept people like me for what they were worth, rather than as hopeless cripples. Another remarkable aspect is that most of the ironmongery which helped us so much was neither sponsored nor developed by the Health Service - it was a combination of lots of little individual private effort, which put together, kept us moving.

The days passed and the divorce laws were changed in connection with incompatibility. I was wondering whether to take advantage of them so that the legal position could now match the actual facts about my marriage, when one day my wife rang me up and said she wanted to remarry and would I give her a divorce. 'Yes' I said. My long suffering lawyer who worked for me for little reward - in fact, no reward - came on to the scene and put the dissolution of my marriage into the pipeline. It didn't really make any difference to me one way or another, at that time, but it has been a help in latter years.

[56:18]

Because this is a simple, factual report and record, I have made no mention of humour. It must be obvious that by now none of these events could have taken place at all without a great deal of humour from everybody concerned. If you didn't laugh, you had to cry and we never cried. Life was a mixture between living from day to day and planning ahead for the future months and always it was the little details and the funny coincidences which kept us laughing away accepting this curious existence. I held several parties in "The Fairground" - simple affairs of wine and cheese which seemed to go down pretty well and were part of my disguise for normality.

[01:00:46]

At last, one day in 1969, the bombshell arrived. Annie some how turned up at my house to look after me for a weekend and this was really the end of that particular part of my life. From that day onwards, it was no longer Geoffrey, the independent cripple, but it was to be Annie and Geoffrey and their exploits, inseparable from one another. When a loner suddenly teams up and hits it off with somebody else, an enormous burden is lifted from the shoulders. None of my future activities can be considered as from one pair of eyes but always through the double vision of both of us.

[Dictated by: Geoffrey Webb - 1975]