KEN CAMPBELL INTERVIEWED BY CATHY COURTNEY

F4805 Side A

[Interview with Ken Campbell, January the 17th 1995 at his London studio.]

.....me where and when you were born?

I was born in November 1939. Where is a slight mystery to me. You will find that any stories from my family change violently all the time. I believe I was born in Edgware, Middlesex.

They change depending on who you talk to, or they change depending on what mood you're in?

Both, but most exclusively who I was talking to, because it's usually my mother, and she is now dead.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....an adenoidal but never mind.

You are referring to yourself rather than your mother.

Well I certainly wasn't referring to you. To me.

And, why might you not have been born in Edgware, where else might you have been born?

Well, because my mother did...on my mother's side there were story-tellers, and they enjoyed telling stories and they enjoyed their language, despite their lack of education, and the enjoyment I think came well in front of anything we call in your middle classes fact. So my mother moved it around for her own purposes. She told me that I was conceived in Epping Forest, which if you work it out must have been achieved on a very desperate February morning or February day, and I think I was, I think I was born in Edgware, Middlesex,

because we were...when were discussing such things it was discussing the Blitz, the moving around, my father going away, my mother moving from one burning house to another, and where she was at different times is not at all clear to me. I think I was born, I was actually born in Edgware.

Do you think you were born in a hospital?

I think I was born in a hospital, in Edgware.

And did you know your mother's parents? How far back can you go?

I knew my mother's father, who was a huge, in personality a huge and roguish man. I didn't know her mother very much, because she left him when my mother was about 12, because he mistreated her, the story goes, and set up with another woman - no she set up with another man called Brookman; interestingly not a common name but a name you will find on, I think you will find on either St. George's in the East, the Hawksmoor Church, or, the one in Spitalfields, I can't remember. There were a lot of, Brookman sounds like a German translation, a name that's moved from the German, and there are a lot of Germans, a big German community in the East End; they rapidly changed their names at the First World War, but they were in baking and bricklaying and things like that, or brick-making. And I think on my grandfather's side there was some German blood, also Flemish weavers, Huguenots. But the mother I can remember very very very vaguely, the grandmother, but interestingly enough they were apart for forty or fifty years and they died within about ten days of each other; when one died the other one hurt and the other one passed on.

What was your mother's maiden name?

York. I suspect that was an acquired name, because if they were Huguenots they may well have gone to York first to pick the name up, but in this area and this street my grandfather was born in, or the one just there.

Can we just say for the tape which street we're in?

It's in Gibraltar Walk, London E2 7LH. There are other Yorks around here, again not a common name, so they might be part of the same tribe.

And do you know anything about your maternal grandfather or grandmother's growing up, do you know what their life had been?

Well, part of the...my family being East End had a very kind of Dickensian imagination, I mean they actually read a lot of Dickens; my grandfather, my mother's father read a great deal. As she put it, he would read himself sober every morning after a night's drinking, that's in his eighties, he would actually, he lay in bed in the suburbs reading Dickens and Trollope, and then go off to the library, i.e. the library in the pub, the following morning. So, what was the question? I've forgotten it.

Whether you know anything about his background and upbringing and...

Yes. So they tended to spin stories, and they had this...there are certain models in 19th century story-telling or novels that keep coming up. One is `lost and found' of course, the other is the poor child born of rich parents. Then there's the bastard son and all of that. Now, my grandfather on my mother's side was supposed to have been, first of all he was a rogue, secondly he was.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] .....someone in Waring & Gillow, but this is the story, this is the story. And so there was money, he once had money, you know, with a capital M, which could have been anything, you know, it could have been £400, but he once had money and drank it away. If you see all these capital letters, you know, at the top of a Dickens period chapter, it was all spelt out in those ways. It's interesting if you listen to music-hall songs and, in many ways the working class of course are more conservative than anybody and they do hang on to their folk roots if you like, or they hang on to the models that are passed down to them, and you can hear this coming through in the stories that my mother used to tell. So, maybe life's sorted itself out that way, I don't know. Before him came, his father was supposed to be somebody called `the Butcher of Aldgate' with a huge red beard, this is where it gets into fantasy, a huge red beard, and he had three daughters, one of whom was my great-aunt, and grandmother, and they all had flaming red hair, wouldn't they just? And coal heavers were known to sweep the streets, the pavements, the coal away from their dresses so that they could pass, and he is supposed to have put up, put the three girls up on a bar in one of the darkest pubs in the docks where people were, sailors would go in, `indulge themselves' my mother would say with her rolling eye, and they would come out of the top into the river with their throats cut, you know, after their money. [LAUGHS] So my mother, these three daughters were put on the counter and it's rumoured that my father would say, `Nobody fucking swears while my daughters are in the pub'. And it's rumoured [INAUDIBLE] even peed himself rather than move while my father... You know, it was all cowboy stuff.

While your grandfather...

While my grandfather was in the pub, right. And he, now Dad[??]... It was either he or somebody else, went to America and was deported from New York in about 1902, which I think you've got to be going some to be deported from America for misbehaviour, came back to England and mysteriously, again it falls into these kind of novella stories, went to the country, you know, capital C, went to the country to look at the fine air, met a vicar's daughter, and seduced her and brought her back to England, right? So it's that kind of, those kind of stories. No way of checking up any of this, none at all, fortunately.

And as far back as the stories go they are Londoners?

Yes, but they, my mother said that they were called Yorkshire Yellowbellies, which is a strange term but it's supposed to mean that they had slightly Latin skin, as indeed I have were I to show you my belly, it's kind of dark. But I don't know what that means, Yorkshire Yellowbellies, and with the name York, who knows. They're supposed to go back to Huguenot weavers, but a lot of people in the East End claimed that, but in fact perhaps that's true too, because a great many people, there were a great many Huguenot weavers here.

And, what was he like as a grandfather as far as you were concerned?

I think he was wonderful. He smelt, he smelt of old man, and he smelt of tobacco, and he cackled and wheezed, and he had a stick, and he had a twinkly eye. Ruth, my wife, does not like the sound of him at all, she thinks I'm going to grow up into him, or grow down into him, or grow sideways into him, but he had, at 84 he had a 48-inch chest and he was called over at 82 to the doctor because he wasn't feeling well and the doctor saw my mother and said, `Well, I'm afraid Mr York will have to from now on, if he wishes to survive six months, live on steamed fish, milk liquids, and not touch alcohol.' And my mother said, `You're completely wasting your time, I will never be able to persuade him of this.' And he lived on for another two, three, four years after that. I remember him because he used to twinkle a great deal. He used to prod the dog, Billie, with his stick, and he used to walk along between one place, from our house to the house he was living, which was a few doors up, in the suburbs in Sidcup with my uncle, and there would be a train of kids walking behind him, and Billie the dog running backwards and forwards sort of shepherding the whole team. He used to leave great holes in privet hedges all round Sidcup because he would go off in the morning, ostensibly to the library, and I think he went to the library and then he would go to the pub, and then he would sit out his relaxment through the afternoon in various holes he had established in the privet hedges on the walls[??], and people were furious with him but they wouldn't face him out, which I quite admired him for.

And when did you spend time with him?

Oh really in my very early teens in Sidcup when he moved out of the East End to join us in Sidcup where we were bombed out of the East End in the war, and my mother, we were blown up in two separate houses which I'm sure we'll talk about later on. And at some point he found life non-viable in the East End and moved out to my uncle who was living a few doors from me.

This is your mother's sister - I mean brother?

Yes. Again supposed to be a bastard, but we don't talk about it.

What was he like as a figure [INAUDIBLE]?

Well he was...he was the man in the family who fought in the desert with Montgomery and all of that and drove a lorry, and because he had been abroad, been away, he was regarded as the man with brains and life experience, so he was set loose on me somewhat to argue with me, because I was an exceptionally disputatious small boy, and I would argue about anything; as somebody once said I would argue about how to cut your toe-nails but I forget who said that. And I found myself facing out Uncle Bert, because he had a fairly swift mind, I would say that I could win but we would argue to a standstill, and I suppose my trouble with him was that he...it wasn't just kind of male competition or preposterone or protesterone or whatever the substance is that produces these effects; it was that what he was there for as far as I could see was to argue me round to becoming what the family wanted me to become, and I was not in that business, and so this produced...this was a symptom of a very very difficult time where I had very ambivalent feelings about my family; I would look as though I was ashamed of them sometimes...and this was a desperate... This is one of the awful things about being working class which doesn't really get accounted for. But at the same time you knew that if you got in line you were mentally doomed in some ways, and this became a really terrible struggle and a schism between me and my mother. But her brother was really kind of, turned into the person who was supposed to get me in line. So, you know, Ruth for instance, my wife, really thinks he's a rather nice man, but my memory of him was, you know, it's like...it's like finding that you've got a great big cuddly pet to play with and you realise it's a tiger but no one else actually realises it's a tiger.

And how did he get on with your grandfather?

I don't know. Bert, my uncle, is a very equable man, and I think he got on with him quite... Well he married a kind of very ditsy woman called Aunt Mim, who talks like this, you know, [HIGH PITCHED]. And I remember her coming up to somebody and saying, `Have you been saved? Are you under the flag?' Because she was in the Salvation Army, you know, she was... But a sweet woman, but, you know, operating within a narrow torch-beam.

So how did she get on with your grandfather?

I've no idea. I would think she would put up with anything. If my uncle said so she would put up with it. They were a very equable couple.

What was her house like?

Her house? Dreadful. Fairly scruffy, producing two bizarre sons, my cousins, one who was hopelessly spoilt. You know, it's like two chicks in a nest, you can just see it happening, one gets all big and has things thrust down its big gaping throat and the other one is neglected and turns into a bizarre little thing if it doesn't die at all, and that's how the two turned out. But, I mean I just remember things that my mother pointed out. I mean to her the great shame of my Aunt Mim's place was that she made toast on the gas ring, just by putting the bread on the gas ring, you know, this was regarded as absolutely shameful.

Can you remember the house in terms of its decoration and furnishing?

This is...are you talking about my uncle's house or my...?

Yes, your Aunt Mim's house.

Well, everything moved...I think what's got to be remembered, it's just after the war, people were, or at least our people were extremely poor. My family was constantly hit by the dockers, my father was a docker, docker strikes, you remember the bloody dockers that the `Express' fulminated against, who were a good anarchic band who knew how to look after each other because nobody else would, and I could talk about that later, the structure of the way...the way people as far as I can understand it worked in the docks, something that people don't understand, never really got to. So life was very hard. My mother had to work at least one job, sometimes two; my father worked when he could, and when he couldn't work he would do other things, I found out later, I didn't know that. So the decor of the house...

We're in Aunt Mim's house, yes?

We're in Aunt Mim's house. But I'm trying to say that both of us, both families were extremely hard up. I think the decor of the house for a period in the...for the Fifties, perhaps the parts of the Sixties, was not a matter of choice; you used for instance what I call builders' brown, that mysterious colour that appeared all over the suburbs just after, during and just after the war, where I think they mixed every little bit of colour, you mix everything together and you don't quite get black, you get this kind of dark Plasteciney, purpley brown, and I call it builders' brown because I think that's what they did, and they made up a general colour. So everything got painted builders' brown, both outside and sometimes in. When they got a little bit of money in the Sixties they started to put up wallpaper by choice, but before that the wallpapers were very very Victorian, and I would say that, forget the money thing, I would say actually the great leap was from entirely Victorian interiors, straight into the Fifties and, you've never had it so good kind of, kind watered-down, what was that dreadful Cliff Richard thing, expresso bongo or café bongo, or cafe expresso, kind of stuff you know.

And would it have been a house with lots of sort of knick-knacks and objects, or not?

Not in those two houses, no, they didn't have much, but there would be treasured things. There would be a biscuit tin from Queen Victoria's Jubilee, there would be a clock. In the people's houses before, the grandparents' houses, I can remember one in the East End that I used to be taken to, there would be an actual, one of those glass, tall glass domes with dank things going on inside, you know; you hoped you would see something move, you know, and you would be rather frightened if you did. But damp and mossy and dark colours, feathered hats, polished wood. The polishing of things was a desperate business.

So although Aunt Mim made her toast on the gas ring she would have been quite house-proud?

She was ish, but she was kind of criticised by the rest of the family a bit for not being so. There's a big thing in the East End about being house-proud I notice which is, this is a supposition of mine, but in the East End a lot of people, a lot of women went to prostitution in the, well, almost traditionally but certainly during the Depression in the Thirties, and I noticed that the women used to polish the outside of their houses and their grates and their steps, and the ironworks and the foot scrapers, you know, outside the house, with absolute terrifying vim, as, my mother's word was `vim', and the grates inside the house. And I think what it was a lot of the time, people were trying to, the women had to register that they were proper, and proper really meant something quite different in the East End because it was the line between

being on the game, or in deep destitution or on the game, or holding your head above water, and that was I think a far more desperate thing than elsewhere.

So it was a psychological thing as well as a...?

Oh yes absolutely, absolutely. Respectable I suppose is the word, but really, you know, that word meant something very much stronger in the East End than it...

And did you ever go to your maternal grandmother's house when she had set up with this other man?

My maternal grandmother's house, no, no. She married a bloke called Brookman who was supposed to be a bit dodgy; I can't remember why, I think he worked...oh I think he was a talent scout for one of the football teams. [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE]

.....whether you had ever been to your maternal grandmother's house, and you were telling me a bit [INAUDIBLE].

Oh right. Are we on? The maternal grandmother, whose name I can't remember, settled down with this guy Brookman who was, as I remember, a talent scout for one of the local London teams, was also regarded as a little bit iffy. He wore, he was one of these guys..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....one of these guys who wore a bowler hat and dressed rather formally, like a site foreman, you know, in Victorian times, with a touch of the Max Miller around him. And I had rather objected when I was 14 to the way he always had my sister on his knee, who was about 8 at the time, and I didn't like it, I already didn't like it. So there was that undercurrent in the family, no one said anything as they say but there was a lot of slamming of doors and stuff. So the odd time we saw him he was not comfortable in the house.

And did your grandmother make any impact on you?

The maternal grandmother? No, not really, only by hearsay that she was mistreated by this very strange man, my grandfather. Abandoned a family of four children, and it's my mother's contention that my mother had to bring the family up from the age of 12, so there was bad feeling about the grandmother.

How much do you know about your mother's upbringing then, what's the earliest point of her life you...?

I think the earliest thing I remember is funny little stories about my grandfather that she told me, but how old she was then I don't know. The fact that she was very close to my uncle Teddie, who incidentally could draw like a dream, had seemed to be a natural draughtsman, who converted to Judaism because he married a Levi[ph], but there was a lot of that kind of crossing over in the East End. Very interesting man with a..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....well he just had a fowl mouth and a fowl turn of mind, but you know, it's the way he expressed those sorts of things that we're all concerned about anyway.

You mean sexual things?

Yes, yes. Well he had this kind of lascivious linguistic indulgence in matters sexual which often, as with a lot of men at least but I suspect with women also, was not so much about the humour of the situation but more of the indulgence of the thought, of the impulse, which I think is crass; I mean I think it's OK if it's funny, you know, but you know, he just had to get certain things out as it were, you know. But he was an interesting man. I think, my mother was very close to him, and she used to tell me, you know, he bullied her, but that's the way people are. He made, she said she used to make...he used to make her walk under a large cart horse in the Blackwall Tunnel, you know, just to terrify her, which must have been for a girl of 8 or 9 a very terrifying thing, particularly considering the gender of the cart horse. But on the other hand, you know, she said that there was a man who sold hot potatoes on King's Cross Station who importuned her and Uncle Teddie, you know, at 13 went down to King's Cross Station and threw the man's hot potatoes all over the platform, and hit him. That protective. I think the most...the significant thing I remember was that my mother at 14 or 12 won a prize for writing in, it was something to do with Toynbee Hall, so she got to know about the Toynbees very early. She was in the Communist Party at 16, she was a trade union organiser in very difficult times in the East End sweat-shops, and she maintained never got the sack because although they knew she was a trade union organiser she was a very hard worker, which I can believe. But, and this was the terrible thing that I found I had to fight and may still be fighting, she went for an interview to become a secretary in a factory, in a business of some kind, but saw her friends mocking her through the window, so she turned it down and went back to being a factory girl, and this is the big thing, you know, this business of how you get up the steps into the museum, which is what a lot of people don't know. As soon as you charge for it you discourage people from, who really need those museums, from coming up into the steps. So that business of her idea of herself was already established by external circumstances, and I felt her trying to do that to me, and she failed, and never quite forgave me.

You mean bring you back down the steps?

Yes. Never quite forgave me, and certainly didn't let my sister escape. Got her married to an oaf.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....see them?

Yes, well that's how I know he could draw. Well they seemed to be little sketches. I mean he would see a horse go past in a street, because in those days there were lots of horses, and I remember him drawing a horse, a terrific drawing, you know. But I don't think he was taught.

This is pencil and paper?

Yes, pencil on a piece of paper, yes.

Right. And, your mother was growing up in the East End?

Yes.

Right. And do you know why she was in King's Cross for example? I mean was there a sort of...

No, I think that was her...I mean King's Cross would be miles away, that would be going up west, you know, as the phrase, `up west', you know. The more I've been in the East End, having returned to it at 50, the more I realise how incredibly circumscribed people were. I mean you know, if you go from one block to another just like in New York it's a long way; people lived in real tribal territories, very very small ones.

And do you know who was part of their tribal territory when they were young? Did you form any idea of the neighbourhood and the relationships?

Lots of Jews. They were very close to the Jewish community; my mother was what's called a shabbatgoet[ph], and shabbatgoim[ph], the plural, are people who light the candles and do things for a Jewish family on Sabbath, or shabbat, or shabbas, to avoid Orthodox Jews breaking the prescriptions. She worked for, first of all she was in the rag trade and was a weaver, and I find - we'll probably, hopefully come to this, but I find it extremely interesting

that a lot of my work is about weaving in and out, sometimes with the brains of a weaver bird rather than any other kind of brains, but, you could put this down to the Celtic blood on the other side but I think in many ways it might be an appreciation or something coming through from my mother, this business of weaving and put things together in a certain way. But she worked for a particular Jewish family who sounded wonderful. They were very warm and generous to her, they were a book-making family, so they ran a book. As Orthodox Jews they still took other people's money in shady circumstance but they also dealt in stolen goods, so my mother at the age of 10 can remember going from one pub to another with a huge suitcase of dodgy things to raise a few pence.

Did she go to school at all?

Oh yes she went to school, and she, I think she probably did...

Do you know where?

I don't know where. I think she probably did well and that's why she won a prize for writing, I could imagine her doing that. I tried to get her to write in her old age, and I really rather pressed her because she had an enormous number of stories about the East End and about her own life, and I couldn't get her to do it, and the significant thing was this - have you got a problem with the tape? The significant thing was this, that she, I noticed - she used to smoke rather a lot unfortunately which didn't do her well in later years - she, I noticed at the end of a working day in which she will have got a family out to work and to school before going off to do her own work, come back, cooked for a family and got a family to bed, at the end of the day she would open a packet of cigarettes and she always opened the packet of cigarettes from the bottom, thus pulling out all the bits of foil and so on. And what I thought about that was, that it was the one thing that she could afford to do wrong in the day, right? Thus is life sometimes described, but it was...do you understand what I'm saying? She could actually relieve herself of the burden of responsibility by taking the bottom of the cigarettes out, taking the bottom of the cigarette pack out first, right? There was a point to this and I can't remember quite why I got it...

Did you ever refer to it?

Do I ever refer to it? [BREAK IN RECORDING] Oh sorry, yes I was talking about...no, I'm going to complete. When I tried to get her to write about her life and times when she retired, I once found the book that she was trying to write in green Biro, for some reason to me green Biro is the worst, but she started to write on the last page of the book and she was going to

write from the back to the front, and I thought, well it's the cigarette pack, turned upside down, right?

And you never talked to her about either?

No. I think there are some things...I think that's an interference.

End of F4805 Side A

F4805 Side B

The piece of writing she won a prize for, did you ever know what it was about?

No, no.

And do you know any instances...

Won a prize could have meant she, you know, it could have been anything.

Did you know any incidents about her schooling, did she ever talk about it?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No, I can't remember. I think she didn't talk much about school. I actually think she may well have closed, drawn a discreet curtain across it, because she knows she would probably let herself down, or she was let down by her circumstance. When I got to know her in her later years, I started to perceive her not by anything she did, as - and I'm not saying this because we're in feminist days, I mean I think she was of a generation rather like my mother-in-law, who were feminists long before feminists were around. I mean my mother-in-law ran a rather more grander history in many ways, ran special messages for Rosa Luxemburg, started gynaecological advice for women in the working class in the North of England as a Jew from Germany, really did some very tough stuff as a woman, and fought the fight of being a woman outside the feminist, so-called feminist period. And in many ways my mother was doing the same thing but in a completely different way. What were we talking about, what was the question?

I was just asking if you knew anything about her schooling.

Oh right. So I started, I think she drew a veil in her own mind across her schooling because she may have seen herself let down, and in the later years I started to see her as an enraged person in a woman's body, and there's nothing sadder in many ways, and this isn't a female person, this is a person, this is an ungendered person. People as without gender, locked up inside of a woman's body, and I think sometimes part of her dynamism was a form of, rather like the centre of the earth or the sun was fuelled by some nuclear thing that had started to burn in her early days and got crusted over but was still burning.

Did you get any picture of her personality as a child?

I think she was probably very gay, and very zappy. I mean she was a great one for...well, the urban working class are always, like urban blacks, they're always the leaders of style and fashion. First of all they are because they're street-wise, secondly they were quite often the first people to see fashion, high fashion, before anybody else. In parenthesis, and so we had better remember where we are because obviously I get easily distracted by myself, Ruth and I were walking down the street in the East End a couple of years ago and met this nice old Jewish guy we fell into conversation with, and he used to...he was in the rag trade and the schmutter trade, he used to be flown to Paris by his boss to the great opening nights of fashion, and he had such an exact eye, his boss used to say, `Look at this, and when we fly back, make it'. And that's what the guy could do, he had that terrific skill, right? So, I know my mother very much thought about fashion, had an eye for fashion all her life, possibly because she was in the middle of the trade and at the end of it, and possibly because she was urban working class. She loved to sing, she was part of that working class thing of always singing, singing when you're working.

What?

Well, musical songs, working class songs that we all know and have got totally bored with sometimes. Strange songs like `Jenny Wren' which I found out was an old Elizabethan song; where the hell that came from through the culture I don't know. A musicologist friend of mine said that whereas people think that music is around for thousands of years or hundreds of years, most music doesn't last for more than two hundred even in folk cultures. She sang a version of a song which I know to be a Derbyshire folk song. [SINGING] `He comes down our alley and whistles me out. When I go to him he knocks me about. But still I love 'im, I can't deny it. I'll go with 'im...'. You know, things like that. Which is a conversion of a nice pastoral, you know, but made urban. My grandfather used to sing a song in a kind of defiance. [SINGING] `Turelai urelai urelai ay, turelai urelai urelai ay.[ph] We kill all the coppers that come down our way, singing...' you know, [INAUDIBLE] monument I left her out in the pouring rain and all of that. So there were very indigenous songs. She used to sometimes sing street cries. [SINGING] `Won't you buy my pretty violets? Sixteen branches for a penny.' No, `My pretty lavender', sorry, things like that. They're obviously heard things, and they touched her ear. She once said that she and Uncle Ted were, on a summer's night they heard some music and they danced a Charleston or something in a court, because they could hear this music in the air, but she just came out with this phrase, `We danced to...we danced to a radio we couldn't see,' which was a nice little trope somewhere, you know. She had those ways, she had that thing with the language. And it's odd because my father was the Celt and you would have thought that side had the language, but he was almost dumb, you know, he hardly spoke; my mother had this. I mean she would say things

like, she would look at my sister who was just becoming pubescent and she said, `Look at her, she's getting the arse...she's getting an arse on her like the side of a winkle-barge,' which I thought... [LAUGHS]

Great for your sister.

I could come out with a lot more but I wouldn't want to embarrass the tapes.

Go on.

Well, my father would look for a pair of kippers for his tea on Saturday, which of course was a device to whip up a thirst to go the pub, and my mother once said, looking at him she said, `Look at 'im, his arse is knitting buttons to get down to the pub'. [LAUGHING] Which I think is this wonderful busy feeling.

And how did she get on with her father?

I've got a feeling they were very close, but I think that...and again going back to the dark, you know, early Dickensian mind she would say, `But he never laid hand on me or his sisters you know'. But she was very close, I think she was very close to him because she was, if she was right, and I think she was, she actually brought the family up.

So she didn't resent him for having harmed her mother and driven her mother out?

No idea how that went in her mind. But there was a whole thing in there, you know, which Ruth finds intolerable, the business of a man, you know, he's got to have his pint of beer and be respected as a man, be given space, but at the same time severely attacked by the likes of my mother. She was a great harrier of men, you know, I mean she said of the Campbells, you know, a different tribe altogether. She said, `The Campbells are strong men who are ruined for the want of strong women,' which wasn't bad, wasn't bad at all, and it proved so in that family I think.

So who...she had two other sisters, did she?

She had two other sisters, one older and one younger, and two brothers, so there were five of them.

So tell me about the others apart from her and Ted.

There was Ted, there was Bert, the youngest, who my grandfather ended up living with who I've already talked about. There was Aunt Flo, there still is Aunt Flo. Aunt Flo is a life force. They were all short, very short, the women at least, and as my mother said when I was very short, very worried about it, she said, `Kenny, you're not short, you're concentrated'. Flo is very very short, still alive, drinks like a fish, has led a rather louche life compared to the rest of the family, remarried, married literally a mad hatter in Dagenham, lived the Dagenham life, which is another story altogether, had a slightly retrograde son who was my kind of brother for a long time, a slightly wicked young man.

What's his name?

David, cousin David we call him. The people are often given titles in the family. If you're called Billy Boy it usually means, well your name's probably Billy, or William, but it means you are the youngest son in a family, and Billy Boys usually come to no good, most Billy Boys kind of, you know, come to no good at all. I remember going to a family, some kind of clan meeting where I was introduced to this old crow who was obviously the head of the whole family, and gripped by the wrist and she sort of looked into my eyes and then looked away and nodded, as if to say, `He can live,' you know. But I was introduced as, `This is Bertie's second child by Lizzie on the first side...' and you know, all of that, so you actually, your name was not important, you were specified, OK? That's the way it was.

Tell me a bit more about Flo's life in Dagenham.

Flo married a guy of Welsh blood, now what was his name? Dick, who dressed like a Teddy boy, he was a kind of, his life was slightly over the top. He drank and gambled and jumped about and I think he put himself about a bit with the women out in Dagenham. Most of the people who got bombed out, a lot of the people who got bombed in the East End went east, you know, like a flock of crows out towards Dagenham and Barking and so on. We went south-east.

Did they go to the new housing that were...?

Yes they went to the new estates in Dagenham and so on. We went to Sidcup because my father was a very attentive father to his mother and very much a family man, and he had two nieces, three nieces, who I may talk about later, who are very strange in my mind, in my imagination, but they were orphaned into Barnardo's, and he used to go down to Sidcup where there was a big Barnardo's home very regularly to see them, and he saw Sidcup which

in those days was hardly Sidcup at all, it was Lamaby[ph] and it was on the edge of or part of rural Kent, and he thought this was rather nice and so we moved out there instead of going east to Dagenham. Flo married Dick, they spent most of their time as a couple in the pub, which my mother never did, my mother wasn't a pub...well she liked a drink, she liked her Guinness, but would not lead that particular life. They split up, they had David, they didn't have any other children. David set fire to a row of shops I think when he was 10 just to see what it looked like I think. He was a mildly wicked young man and is still operating out at Forest Gate, and by his own description he says, `I'm a bit slippery Ken, a little bit slippery'. He came out with a nice one once, he said, after he had had enough of me doing what I was doing, because by then I had gained - this is in my thirties - gained a reputation in the family as being somewhat eccentric, he said, `In life, kid,' he says, `there's them, and there's us,' (which is a very working class way to talk), `There's them, there's us, and there's the funny ones. You,' he said, `are one of the funny ones.' [LAUGHS] I thought fairly accurate.

And what does he, at least on the surface, what does he do to earn a living?

Well he's been in a...he's an electrician, he's a plumber. I got him to do some work downstairs, he's profoundly naff. A smart dresser, had trouble with the women, got a woman (an enormous woman, I might remember her name) pregnant at 16 or something. She tried to seduce me, I was sort of 14 or something, in the parlour, which I thought was a bit naff, rather disappointed she didn't make it but there you go. He's been with, he's had a few partners since, and he's had two children I think, one of whom the son hasn't done very much; the daughter has got to university and has become a chief librarian or something like that somewhere. And he said, he said to me to my astonishment a couple of years ago he said, `Oh...' I forget his son's name; I ought to because he's a nephew of mine I suppose but I've just never seen him, except once or twice. `Yeah,' he said, `X,' he said, `he's having a 'orrible life, he can't work out what he wants to do and he's got, you know, he's heartbroken with women.' He says, `Now,' he says, `Lorraine,' he says, `now, look at 'er,' he says, `she's gone off, she's gone to university, she's got this job, making loads of money, it's unfair innit? You would have thought, it's unfair innit? I mean, those brains belonged in my son's head, you see what I mean? It's unfair, I don't understand it.' And I looked at him gobsmacked.

What do you say?

What do I say? I go quiet, I just go absolutely quiet, and I take it in as they say. I mean I am actually gobsmacked, but I don't protest, which is perhaps what I should.

Because you want to be gentle with him?

Because I want to be gentle with him, and I don't think that it would get anywhere, you know.

So there's another sister to talk about on your mother's side.

Aunt Li, who is, I think has died recently, who would have been quite a few years older than my mother, I'm not quite sure why. And she married another kind of strange eccentric guy, another louche number who gambled a great deal and drank a great deal. I think he had been in the RAF and I got the feeling, just the feeling, that he had been rather disturbed by the Second World War, but I'm not sure, it's just an impression. They moved out to Kent, in Tunbridge. They had a daughter who was obviously a cousin of mine who I think was a fairly ditsy number and she married a printer. Li was, when my mother died we had a small occasion, you know, the discreet sandwiches and pots of tea, when Ruth said in her innocence my mother had been bought by Ruth a picture book of the docks of the East End during the heyday of the place as docks, said, `Well maybe Li would like to have this'. So I said to Li, we were sitting there and talking and I said, `Well, Ruth and I just wondered if, you know, we bought this book for Mum, you know, I wondered if you would like to have this book.' And she looked at it and looked away and said, `I thought I was getting the coffee table.' [LAUGHS] I broke out[??], I thought it was wonderful. I said, `You have both Li, really, it doesn't matter.' [LAUGHING]

[INAUDIBLE].

But the whole thing of funerals, and sometimes at weddings where the whole thing gets a bit confused, there's a story about that too, where, you know, it's all to do with property rights, you know, people who, a chest of drawers have been promised in 1948, `And don't forget what was said at Eddie's funeral,' and all the rest of it, you know, that goes on. It's a very formal bit of business. The story about the weddings and the funeral was, we had a far-flung sort of family out in Hounslow, Essex, who I thought were profoundly naff. I don't think they were as it were of our blood, I think they were kind of mildly inherited second cousin, you know, friends of families. This was one of the families that I knew of that was totally dominated by the women, these terrifying women who kind of ran the whole household, and there was one rather diminished man looking like a male sucker fish you know, floating in the waters after having expended his seed, you know, he's just drifting off belly up. And thus he appeared in life, he had some little clerk's job somewhere. And at one of our occasions there was piles of, lots of piles of pickle-filled sandwiches, ham, cheese, tongue, and beef, cold beef, bottles of Guinness and light ales and things. And we were all sat around the room as they were at these occasions with tables...the tables had gone, there was just chairs all the way

round the four sides of the room. This was to allow people to look at each other, drink and talk, and eat, and possibly people to dance and so on. And at one point this uncle, so-called uncle, disappeared and had gone into the other room and reached into the stove in the fireplace and blacked himself up with soot and came through the door having drunk a few, and did the chocolate-coloured coon thing, right, which even in those days I thought was a bit kind of round the corner. And we watched him for about five minutes, and then someone pointed out quite gently that this was a funeral, and he had forgotten and he had got so drunk he actually thought he was at a bloody wedding, you know. He died within six months, I think of shame, but...

And what was his funeral like?

I don't think I remember it.

And is Li the shortening of something? What's her name?

I don't know.

Might she be Lilian or something?

I don't know what it's a shortening of. It's the diminutive of something and I don't know what it is.

Right.

Lily, or, could be Lily but I don't think so.

What was the relationship between the sisters as far as you could see?

I think combatitive, very combatitive, and my mother said that when she announced she was going to get married, I think she was 28 or 29 by that time, which was very late, people said, `What for?' Because she was naturally seen as the, as you can quite often see, you know, it's like the politics of the beehive, you know, people have their genitalia nipped and tucked for the appropriate role in life, and she was being regarded I think already as the person who would not get married and look after the rest, the ageing parts of the family, and, you know... And I suspect there was a certain, I think she had to control, she had to control Flo in some of her excesses, which, I think Flo was the baby of the family, well she, you know, the baby girl of the family, and I think Li was the fairly distant...but I don't know, I mean I wouldn't know.

And how did your mother's father earn a living?

How did what?

Your maternal grandfather earn a living.

My paternal grandfather. He was variously a builder, he was in the cabinet trade, he was a cabinet-maker. I think he had several skills, including drinking, and he had a mythic friend, but found out that this person existed because I spoke to my uncle, but there were many stories told about Paddy O'Riley who was a keen fiddle-player, and my grandfather thought it great fun - and, oh I must tell you that I wouldn't mind it myself, to be able to roll from one pub to another with your own personal fiddler, right, don't you think?

I can imagine you.

It's not bad, it's not bad, to walk in and have your own guy set up a few reels and slow airs for your more lachrymose pints. And he told many stories about him and Pat. Now the funny thing was, about, some time last year they found that there was a plague pit or plague grave under a big church near here at Spitalfields, the big...

The Hawksmoor Church.

The Hawksmoor Church, yes, Christchurch. And one of my grandfather's stories which he told every Christmas, he told stories every Christmas and they were the same stories, and like all story-tellers it was in the telling and the nuances and the twists on last year, and he would also let the younger men tell stories, upstage them, he would ask questions and correct them, and points of order, and would be reduced to breaking wind and asking for, you know, some more rum, you know. He would do anything. He was just giving them their apprenticeship, you know, about 2 in the morning we would all say, `Come on Grandad,' you know, and off he'd go. But one of his stories involved breaking into...breaking into by accident? I can't remember. Breaking into by accident or design, it was supposed to be breaking into something but they broke into the wrong thing, into some crypts under, I think it was this church, and finding all these dead bodies in very very bad condition. It may well he found that...if it were true, it's just a chance he may have found those things before everybody else did.

And he was hoping to find rings or something was he?

No no, it wasn't like that, no he was not...he was extremely moral, he wasn't like that.

So he was breaking into it [INAUDIBLE]?

Well no he was doing it for a building job of some kind.

Oh I see, right.

He was supposed to be doing it, not breaking in, breaking and entering, but he was supposed to be breaking in as a building job. No, he was, I suspect he was a very...he was an internationalist; he was absolutely ferocious, ferociously anti-racist. My mother said if any of us said anything about Jews or anybody, you know, retribution physical would come down very hard. I suspect he was some kind of internationalist. He may, she may have, my mother may well have inherited her socialism or communism from him.

Do you actually know if he had strong political beliefs?

No, only that he was extremely anti-racist, very very, I mean you know, virulently, so, it probably, that usually goes, at that, in those times it would have gone with an internationalist and socialist set of opinions I think.

And if he was a cabinet-maker, do you have anything at all that he made? Did you see anything he made?

No, no, no. I tell you, I have two things upstairs. There's an extraordinary pair of, I'll bring them down in a minute if you want to see them, an extraordinary pair of...can you wait? [BREAK IN RECORDING] OK, upstairs there are two extraordinary figurines. They're the one things I really want, they're the two things I really wanted from my mother's house. They are wooden statuettes about two-and-a-half feet tall, very slim, faintly art nouveau-ish, and they are of a man and a woman, very obviously, and they are supposed to be Adam and Eve, and under the foot of each of them you will see the name `B. Lamb', and according to my mother, B. Lamb was a friend of Uncle Bert's who in the recession was a cabinet-maker or carpenter, who had very very hard times and was very desperate, and Uncle Ted commissioned him to carve these two things just to find an excuse to give him some money to help him out. And for those reasons and because they were always in the family fireplace they are the two totems I wanted from the house.

Instead of the coffee table.

Oh yes.

And, do you know which the pubs were that your grandfather went to?

No. I've no idea at all. I found a pub at the bottom of, on Cable Street and Watney Street that I know my father went to, the old house at home, he used to spend time there, but...

And when your mother was little, was there a great sort of social world of cousins and things, was it quite tightly knit, or not, do you know?

I think it was clannish, yes, I think it was much more clannish than... And I think that the Blitz blew, you know, sort of finished all of that, although there were...there were clannish meetings afterwards, after the war, during funerals and weddings and so on.

Yes. And how old was she when she went to work?

Oh I don't know, I think very young, 15, you know, 14.

And how much do you know about that?

Well she worked in sweat-shops; she learnt obviously how to operate machines at some point. She's done a number of things. When I can first remember her she was cleaning, she was being a cleaner in Sidcup when we, you know, just after...at the end of the war and just after the war, which I resented deeply that she should be cleaning; I remember being 5 or 6 years old and furious that my mother had to clean. And she would come back with stories of having to clean up people's used condoms and things like that, you know, which pissed me off. And at that age I got into some very heavy number, very early, I don't know what it was, it was before I could notice social differences which really hit me when I went to grammar school, the English being who they are and me being who I was. I remember actually being under a gooseberry bush, so I must have been 5 at the most, and I remember the green arching[ph] and the smell of it and all the rest of it. In our garden I could hear my father talking to the rather nice eccentric Swiss man who lived next door, he used to sleep in a hammock out in the open, but I didn't, you know, he just looked to me exotic, and he also had wonderful apple trees which I used to scrump. And I remember my father saying, `OK, guv,' and I remember, I could feel this terrific knot in my stomach thinking, don't call him guv, and that was at 5 years old, I mean there was already a lot of rage about that. And I latterly

understood that my father's use of the word `guv' like `nigger' was not at all the way you and I, or the modern usage, but there was some...I mean, so I wasn't picking up deference from him, it was an intellectual idea. It was an event of the mind rather than of observation, and that's a very very strong image in me, I must have been this high. Terrific rage.

And did he see your rage, or did you keep it quiet?

No, I don't think he understood any of that, although we had our own troubles between ourselves, you know, obviously.

But do you know.....

End of F4805 Side B

F4806 Side A

Is this all germane to what you want?

Mm.

It is? Right.

Do you know anything more about the sweat trade?

Well it was quite often stricken by what is now known as Jewish lightning, which is bits of rolled-up film set fire to appropriately, so it was...and I mean I'm not joking, a lot of places went up in flames when things got competitive or people went broke. It was a desperate business, like all of these trades are run by the sweat-shops round here by Pakistanis, it's the same thing, they're being driven down in price all the time and they're therefore driving the people down in price. And they're quite often using people who are off the boat or illegally here, and it's a double-sided coin, they're exploiting their own but they're also helping their own out to survive in a new land. So there was a lot of that, a lot of Jews in the, my mother worked with Jews, my mother worked with, there was a West Indian woman she worked with. There was wholesale sexual pilferage. My mother implied that it was regarded as the factory managers' and owners' right to take what women they wanted if they want to keep their job, but she never did, kind of stuff, you know, so it was like that.

Was it just women employed?

Mostly women because they were cheap, you know, could be casual. I think there were men around.

And do you know how supportive of one another they were, or otherwise?

I think they had their friendships, but I think that a lot of the employment was that quick, you know, you're in and out, you know, it was either because it was seasonal or because you were fired because of the way the market went, you know, which I suppose comes to the same thing, but you know, the vagaries of the market wouldn't put people together for a long time. But my mother was early as I said a Communist, and someone who organised the unions, so she would perhaps make longer associations. She never really talked too much about that.

Do you know how her politics grew up, do you know at all?

Well they were the, you know, I mean, she was a Communist at 16, as was my youngest uncle, Bert, I know that, probably Teddie was. She said she grew out of it, but as in England, you know, as with England it's always mixed up with other things, what people call the class system and I call it a caste system here. I mean I find it of interest that the strongest relationship we had in the Empire was with India, and some of the deepest prejudices in the English soul were about the Indians, but I think it's because they recognised something in each other, that they had a caste system rather than a class system. I mean the European socialists could never really understand why revolution never happened in England; we had the oldest industrial working class and the oldest expression of that relationship in capitalism. I think it's because we had it so long that it actually became almost genetic. It wasn't simply defined by money, right? And that's the big mistake. Money isn't class in this country, it's a very big part of it but there's an awful lot of other crap going on, right? So, my mother, although her politics were of the Left, and she would come out with kind of terrifying things like, `There's only two religions in this world, Catholicism and Judaism,' you know, and she looked at me once and said, `You are a Liberal' [LAUGHS] nonetheless knew every gynaecological twist and turn in the history of the royal family, you know, back to God knows when, so she was an obsessive royalist. Well she wouldn't call herself a royalist but she was totally obsessed with the royal family. Now how can you get any...you know, that's another thing that's going on, how can you...I mean if you actually believe you are somebody's subject, you're in a different world to people who don't. I was a republican when I was 12, talking about Ireland, I'm a bloody English republican, and would be punched in the stomach and slapped in cinemas because, you know, they played the National Anthem and I would walk out, right, at the age of 12. I latterly think that's probably a crude thing to do; I think there's a real problem for people who came back from the war, there's a confusion in the English mind between nationalism... between the royal family and patriotism, and patriotism is quite a different thing to nationalism or whatever, you know. I think it's possible to be an American patriot in the way that it's quite impossible to be an English patriot, right? Because you're a republican, and you are respecting the people being a republican. In England you are respecting through the flag; in America you are respecting the people through the flag, you're respecting that person who theoretically owns you, which I am not going to put up with as an idea. I don't think, you talk about what's useful to the royal family or whether this bloke is a doctor or whatever, I mean I think the sheer idea that you are a subject to somebody. I understand that the definition of murder in England, the base definition, is the denial of the Queen of one of her subjects, which I think is an insult of the deepest kind to the dead and the living. However, however, however, however. But for my mother to be so obsessed with the royal family made me look on her politics after about 16 with some cynicism.

When was your mother born?

1910, my father 1909.

So the First World War would have had quite an impact.

She's never spoken of it.

But having lived it, in terms of patriotism and what she grew up with around her [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, yes right, right right, yes, yes sure. Oh right, but I'm saying, you know, being a patriot...never mind, I've made the point.

And, do you know what her politics consisted of? Did she go to a lot of meetings, was it quite a social thing?

She didn't...she was never publicly political in my memory. She voted every time she was given the opportunity to vote. She noticed with amusement the people who lived next to us, the Lancefields in Sidcup, one was Conservative, one was Labour, and they both went down and voted Conservative and Labour, and I pointed out to her, this is what you should do, this is democracy, and that's what's going to make it work. It's more important that people go to vote than it is which way they vote in many ways, there's another dimension to it. But she said she was a union organiser. She was certainly a union woman all of her life, until she went to the Ministry of Defence in her very later years to become a clerk and then she got kind of a bit, you know, she was a bit kind of seduced by all those toffs, you know. And she had to sign the Official Secrets Act, which I thought was laughable for the usual reasons. It's interesting that, I mean my sister has signed the Official Secrets Act because I think she's a DHSS sniffer but I'm not quite sure what she does. My wife has signed the Official Secrets Act because she taught for the Open University in one of the local, in Wandsworth Prison. And my mother has. Secretive society, right? Now my mother actually knows an official secret that she told me, and if you would like to give me five pounds you can then get me put away for betraying official secrets, right? You fancy doing that? You don't, you're shaking your head, right. Shall I tell you the official secret? The official secret is this. She worked for the Ministry of Defence, and there was a shindig, and official shindig, and she was trotting along from her office along a corridor, and noticed a gentleman, a rather old gentleman coming out of the toilet in some disarray. He was blind pissed quite obviously and his trousers were half up and not quite put together. And he said, `Where am I?' And she

showed him the way, and they found some young Minister's private secretary or something. And this turned out to be, what's his name? Christ! Here am I trying to betray official secrets and I can't remember his bloody name.

This must be very Freudian.

No it's not. I'll remember, I'll remember, I'll remember it. He's a toff with glasses, Lord something-or-other, and he was first of all in the Balkans before.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] One of his aides said, `Remember the Official Secrets Act, you're not supposed to tell anybody, right?' This is the Official Secrets Act. So there it is, I'm trying to betray the country for five pounds, you know, willing to do life and, I just can't get anybody to buy it, you know.

Terrible, terrible.

I've rung the Soviet Embassy, you know, and I just can't make a living out of it. What were we talking about? Oh yes, so when she moved there she started to talk about the DFO, and `The FC said to me that the DFO, you know, wants the HFC should do so-and-so.' I mean all of these little acronyms and, you know, for people's titles, she started to talk in this rather strange language, and I think started to feel the toff-hood of all of these people settling on her shoulders.

And what did you think about that?

About what?

About that shift in her.

I think it was an interesting little circle in her life which is that she came round to doing what she should have perhaps been doing when she first started out, and what a pity it wasn't sixty years earlier or fifty years earlier so she may have made a life out of her brains, and she had brains.

And how long did she work in the rag trade?

Well certainly until the war, and after the war when we moved out she worked at BICC in Sidcup, in Swanley. She wasn't in the rag trade then, it was some kind of electronics thing she was doing, early electronics work, but you know, machine belt stuff, you know.

And when she was younger did she have a friend, male or female, who was her...?

She was very close to, she hinted at someone at the factory who wanted her to run away with him, she used to tell me little things like that. But she had a friend who was supposed to be an aunt of mine, Aunt Em, who was actually probably a lesbian but we don't know. In those days it wasn't talked of. In a way I think properly, you know, I think there was a way in which the diffuse experiences of sexuality were better left alone because you could then, you had more choice, you weren't so easily defined. I find one of the upsetting things about today is that there's a colossal emphasis on sexuality, you certainly see it in America, and yet there's so much prescription on the side issues, you know. Abuse, was there abuse? If there was abuse then you must have been destroyed by this experience, whereas I think there was a time when people were finding their way, even the dirty old uncles. I remember an Australian friend of mine who's very hard left-wing, one day she said, `Oh yes,' she said, `I remember Uncle so-and-so, he used to stroke my tit. I quite enjoyed it.' You know, so I mean in other words she came through it. I think the option to come through it and to make what you can of it is being robbed of us by us being told what should have happened to us; not to deny the offence, but I think it's for the victim to decide when there was an offence, and we are not being allowed to do that, and yet at the same time being told to think about sex 24 hours a day. So, Aunt Em may well have been. She was very horsy, and she was the one who tried to control my, she was supposed to be the one who was trying to control my life.

What is hawksey?

Horsy, horsy.

Oh horsy.

Big and horsy, and, you know...

You mean in appearance?

In appearance, yes. And she was part of a family which I think was related to one of these great aunts of my grandfather on my mother's side, but I don't think she...she wasn't of our blood as it were, I mean I can't remember quite what, but the family was run by old Aunt...I can't remember her name, but she used to make an apple pie for me every time I turned up, who thought I was wonderful, and I thought she was wonderful. But the fam...this was another one of those households full of women of different kinds, and there was one bloke in

the middle of it called Joe who I'm afraid was, as the Americans say, was, you know, ten cents on the dollar, you know, a [INAUDIBLE] of sixpence for a shilling as they say over here. A few pork pies short of a picnic or whatever you like to say. And he was kind of dumb because they say a tea chest fell on his head in the docks, but I think it was these women, he decided talking wasn't a thing worth doing. It was a house of deep racial prejudice, and I found this upsetting. Aunt Em...

Against him?

Well anybody really. Aunt Em worked on the buses and was, you know, there was lots of talk about blacks and niggers and this that and the other, and even at that age I found it a bit much to bear. Quite by contrast to the rest of, you know, to my personal family. A kind of nemesis visited this family, because they had two daughters, Aunt Marry and Joe had two daughters who were honest souls but a bit unprepossessing in their way, and they sat there like good girls, never went out ever because Joe and Marry and Em wouldn't have it, and one day one of them ran away, disappeared. And she married a Pakistani accountant. Now Joe had been in the Indian Army and his deep prejudice were Indians because he saw people shitting by the railway tracks and things like that; he would, you know, they would mutter [INAUDIBLE] saw things which, you know, statues, rude statues, you know. So this almost destroyed the family, and about a year later the other one did the same thing, married the brother. [LAUGHS] And I was rolling around, kicking my legs with a certain fiendish joy. And it was to this particular family one Christmas, me and my dodgy cousin David went, we were about 14, by this time I had passed the scholarship and gone to a grammar school, a grammar school with public school pretensions, and David had beaten me up several times on the strength of this, though he used to beat me up anyway because that's what boys do to each other, but he had beaten me up on the grounds that I had passed into a grammar school and I should therefore be beaten up just as social justice. And we both went at Christmas, Boxing Day, to this place in Albany Park, this dreadful kind of house full of these terrible people, for our, you know, quite blatantly to pick up our presents, to see what we could get. And we came back out to the front gate after an hour of this, and David was roaring with laughter, I remember him roaring with laughter, and he said, `Look how much I've got,' he said, `£3...' you know, £4.10, you know, in old money, which was lot of money. He said, `Look what you've got. A shilling and "Gulliver's Travels".' He was rolling, because they thought I was, because I had brains, money wasn't the right thing for me; what I should have is a good book and a shilling, a sort of improving thing, and I was incredibly pissed off about it. That's a price that's got to be paid.

And did you say Aunt Em was meant to have an effect on you, she was one of the people who [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh no, she was supposed to have run my life. She actually, through, she was related to somebody who worked in Fleet Street, which in those days as we all know was profoundly corrupt, and it was a way, if you got into the print, you got into the print to get to Fleet Street; if you got to Fleet Street you were rolling in money. And that was the idea, and they...I had not an idea what I wanted to do when I was at school because of the grammar school, because I had a profoundly miserable time there, but, not having an idea I succumbed to the idea, the notion that I should be an apprentice printer, compositor, typesetter, which I started to do in Bethnal - in Stepney Green. The notion was, not that I would become a supreme craftsman and gain satisfaction through that notion, that route, but that I should go on to get to Fleet Street and earn a load of money with Spanish practices.

Meaning?

Meaning, you know, the dodgy practices, they're called Spanish practices, in other words manipulating time, space and energy in such a way, through the union in such a way that you earned loads of money. I latterly found that this is very typical of all of the service industries that are reliant on the acquisition of a great deal of money in a very short amount of time, like TV and film-making, and exhibition design and building, where things have got to be constructed and put together very quickly. The unions got on to the idea that they should have a big part of the pie and they saw the business as corrupt so acted just as corruptly. A certain amount of social justice, but, you know.

So she wasn't in any way set on you like the uncle who was meant to argue with you, she was purely [INAUDIBLE]?

No, she didn't have it in her, she didn't have it in her armoury to do anything like that.

And, I'm not quite sure how we got on the route. The question was, your mother's close friends.

Yes, well that was the closest friend. Oh there was another friend in Lewisham, Aunt Glad, who wasn't a true aunt, who had a daughter, a rather doe-eyed daughter, one of those I was supposed to marry, which was not a good idea, and she fixed up with a little fascist and they went out to Australia, I've heard no more of them since. Aunt Glad was, I don't know how, I think they, I think they knew each other in the sweat-shops in the East End actually, I think

that was an abiding friendship. Quite an attractive woman, don't remember the bloke very much.

Do you remember what they talked about?

What they talked about?

Mm, your mother and Glad.

No, I think that I was generally kind of shoved out, you know, and, out of the room and they got on with talking about what they were talking about, but it was...it was family business, the equivalent to pop music of time. Mostly family's business and work business and...

And just to get it straight, what was your mother's full name?

Elizabeth Ellen York.

And she was known as Liz?

Bet, to most. Eliza by her father I think. Betty now and again, but mostly Bet.

And can you just describe her a little, what she actually looked like?

Very short, 4 foot 10 maybe, 4 foot 11, 4 foot 10. Very very energetic. Rather shovel-faced; I've got a similar kind of face. My father's side is quite different. You can see it in a lot of Van Gogh paintings, potato eaters, it does, it suggests... If you go to Flanders or Belgium you see the face all over the place. A longish nose that's parallel to the face until the end and there's a kind of bob on the end, you know, real potato eater stuff. I think very attractive, not incredibly good-looking but other people thought otherwise. Very petite at one point, my father thought, he told me.

And where did your parents actually meet?

I don't know, I don't know the occasion, or where.

Do you know roughly what age they were?

Well it would be in the East End, and they got married, he was 28, 29, she was a year younger. I think they had met for a year or two before they got married, I'm not sure.

And what was your father's full name?

George William Campbell.

And how far back do you know about his family?

Well there's a picture downstairs in the basement of my, what I've worked out to be, I've actually got it on the computer, I've worked it out, it's grandfather two or three removed, who won the Doggett's Coat and Badge for rowing on the Thames, it's kind of working class Henley. I went to... He won that in 1850 exactly. He must have won that, according to the Royal Society of Watermen who I contacted last year, when he was 23, between 21 and 23, very likely 23, when they finished...they rowed at the end of their apprenticeship; they were apprenticed to be on the docks, I have the certificate downstairs framed. He's standing outside the Mansion House with a full white beard in 1880, but he, the Watermen, the Society of Watermen say that after having won it they became part of the Queen's Guard as it were, they rode her on the Thames, so they would do that well into their fifties or sixties if they kept their strength up, so that must have been an occasion when he was standing outside, in his funny, you know, hose and cloak and all the rest of it in 1880. So if he won it at 1850 he must have come out of Scotland, or the family must have come out of Scotland for him to do the apprenticeship on the Thames, so they must have come out in 1840 at the very latest, which is early, because when I remember my grandfather on my father's side I remember he had a pair of claymores above the, crossed claymore swords above the fireplace, and did one New Year a befuddled little kind of Scots dance, you know, but, it may be the Scot... I'm not sure, I've no idea how long the Scottishness was a conscious thing in the family, although lots of other things about the way people spoke and thought, they were Scots Irish, were there to be in evidence in the family long after they had lost their accents and so on.

Do you know which bit of Scotland?

The story is Hamilton, Fife, but that's lowland Scotland, and the Campbells of course come from Argyllshire so I don't know. I've been tempted to look it all up, or get it pursued, but it will cost money.

But in terms of stories handed down, you don't really know much about the Scottish time?

No.

And do you know why they came south?

I don't, except that insofar as most people went to America either out of political idealism or economic total desperation, and most people who came to England, who came to London, came for the same reasons. I mean there's a...a lot of people round here talk as though, you know, because of the Pakistanis and the Jews and so on, they talk as though the English white cockney has been here with, you know, helmets with horns on, since Saxon times. Of course none of them have; most of them, most of them, ninety per cent of them I think are probably from immigrant populations, from the United Kingdom or from other countries, Germans, Jews, Irish, Scots and so on, and most of those who came here came because they were desperate somehow.

And, did you know your father's parents?

Yes, just remember them, just remember them. Very very tough woman, Annie Honora McCarthy[ph], her father was called John Jesus Azalea McCarthy[ph], Catholics of course, and my father's people were Protestants, so we had Scots...we had Scots Protestants and Catholic Irish in the same family with the usual troubles. There is the rumour, but I can never, I could never unlock it, of a great-grandfather who got hung for a kind of `West Side Story' thing. He came round and called out a Catholic girl, and the father came out, there was a knife fight, and he got topped. But no one will talk about this so I don't know if...my mother said it once and I don't know if it's true. Annie Honora McCarthy[ph] sat underneath a portrait of Robert Emmet and would sing the eponymous song, you know, `Bold Robert Emmet', and drinking porter from jugs that she had over the brilliantly polished fireplace.

Where did they live?

This was in...well I remember in Bewley Street just off Cable Street but I think they lived somewhere else before they retired there. Cold water flat with big stone sinks and all the rest of it.

What do you remember her wearing?

Black, they all seemed to wear black And when she drank enough porter she would go out and assault the nearest policeman, but they all knew she was coming, and as my mother said, `But you see there was a terrible bitterness after 1916 Kenny,' by way of explanation. So

there was the Scots and the Irish. My paternal grandmother, Annie, was very very hard on my mother, it was like an induction into the family. She made my mother polish everything twice, you know, and would set her to work as the young upstart wife who was trying to take over her son and so on.

Did they go and live with his parents there?

I think they did at some point, yes. And if they didn't, they would be, as they say, in and out of each other's houses, so my mother would have to go and pay court and attention to this harpy.

And do you know how the harpy had been brought up?

I would imagine by the way they lived, very tough. If she was a good Catholic who made my mother work that hard, there is no doubt that that work habit was in the family early.

Were there any visual signs of Catholicism in that house?

I have downstairs a blackened crucifix with a black ribbon on it which I cannot put it in my mind to throw away, that my mother handed to me like some terrible thing, like a skull, you know.

And do you remember that being in the grandparents' house?

I don't know where it comes from, I suspect it was from the grandparents' house.

And what about the grandfather on that side?

I have a picture of him downstairs too when they were all out hopping, you know, hop picking in Kent, and there's the most extraordinary picture of these `Keystone Cop' characters, roguish characters. But insofar as you can see in the picture of the man who won the Doggett's badge, the same long skinny legs and Christ-like feet, and the same huge barrel chest, and small hands, you can see it in the picture there. They are very strong men but for some reason have got very small bones, so, that was one of the things that destroyed my father.

And what were they both like to you?

I don't remember. I remember the grandfather was said by my mother to be very fond of me and very affectionate, you know, no problem there.

And what do you know of your father's growing up then? Did he grow up entirely in the East End?

He grew up entirely in the East End, was apprenticed to his father, as it was then, as a docker. Left school very early.

Do you know where he went to school?

No. If he went...if he left school as early as I think he was, and if he was as late a developer as I was, he must have done himself a lot of damage very early to be doing dockers' work, and when he died the autopsy revealed that his back, to quote the surgeon, `was like cake,' so, all of that compression. He once told me that, the situation in the docks was that most men, you know, like boxers, are at their, in some way at their prime in their early twenties, but there's a combination of strength and experience which makes you the most productive worker in your late twenties, early thirties. Thereafter there's a very rapid decline. The way the docks was organised, very anarchic, very anarchistic, was that they looked after each other; that is to say, you were taught the trade by older men. You were more skilled than anybody really allowed for dockers; I saw my father, he was able to do some quite wonderful things with his strength and balance. It was a certain kind of skill. You were slowly put into the gangs of four to eight men who were going to be at their most productive. You were graded, in other words you earned your best money between your, in your late twenties and early thirties, and that was the combination of skill and experience, and you were slowly moved into gangs, you know, to, you know, you would earn less money but you... People, you were looked after, and this from the outside looked inefficient; from the inside was one way, you know, as people say of the Jews, you know, they look after each other, and the answer to that is, who else is going to? The dockers looked after themselves.

What age were they likely to go on working until?

Oh, depend entirely on what happened to your strength I think. My father worked very very late, and then latterly I think, he went into a very severe decline which was probably cancer, I mean I found out, I found out that he had cancer in his early sixties and he died in his mid sixties. But at one point he was, to look after him he was put into the docks' canteen to keep it clean, and I'm afraid my father wasn't really like that, and he would start to shout at people for spilling their tea and... [LAUGHS]

End of F4806 Side A

F4806 Side B

.....sort of `On the Waterfront' films where you were picked, and part-time?

Yes, yes.

And you were [INAUDIBLE].

You went as they say on the stones, you stood on the stones and were picked. You asked earlier about the dock, the pubs that he drank in; well if he drank in pubs it was very likely that he was drinking in the pubs to get work. My mother said the iniquity in the system was that the men weren't paid. The gang leader was paid, and the gang leader wasn't paid directly either, he got the money from the pub owner, so the pub owner had your money in his hand.

And you went there to [INAUDIBLE].

So you went there to drink and to spend it and to get it, so you spent it. And he took a slice, and then he gave it to the gang leader who took a slice, and then you got what the gang leader gave you. And every day you went on the stones to be picked. Now the interesting thing was, when I was a student I worked in, to gain money to get me through design school I worked in Mansion House loading furs, it was a seasonal thing and I just had to stand there, and I just knew what I had to do. Once I caught the guy's eye and was given a day's work, I worked my nuts off, and the other guys were standing around being students, you know, smoking fags and talking about women, and I just worked, and every time I went on the stones a bloke picked me, right? And before that I went hitchhiking - oh, just, no about the same time I went hitchhiking with a friend, I went, I hitchhiked to Europe as a student to Austria to work in a refugee camp, which was a turning point, it was a remarkable experience, and I didn't know it was coming, but I went to the docks to see if I could find my dodgy uncle who we've not yet talked about, Uncle John the bad boy of the family.

Your father's brother?

Yes. One of his brothers. And he was a thief from the age of 14, a severe thief, you know, very much known to King David Lane nick in Wapping, and, they had a long and fruitful relationship you might say. But I went with my pea-jacket on, which I had worn in Soho at the time as a student, you know the sort of pea-jackets, they were fashionable at one point before duffle-coats, and it has buttons on with an anchor and, you know, anchor on. I remember standing in this pub in Soho and ordering a pint of beer feeling the cat's whiskers,

and the old hack next to me raised his glass and said, `I see the sardine fleet's in'. [LAUGHS] But I stood on the, I went into the docks, you could walk in if you were careful and I walked in, I walked up to some guy and said, `I'm looking for somebody'. He said, `What quay are you working on?' and I was terribly pleased as a student that I looked as though I might be actually a practising docker. And I said, `I'm looking for Johnnie Campbell.' And he went, `[EXPIRING AIR SOUND]', which is a reaction I found all over. I found him in the end working in the lock-up, which is the bonded area, sweeping up, which is where all the most valuable things are, with these guys with uniforms patrolling around. And I think they put him in there so they could keep an eye on him. [LAUGHS]

Which docks did your grandfather and father work on? I mean was it [INAUDIBLE]?

What was called the Royal Group of Docks, but they tended to move from one dock to another, but it was the Royal Group, the Royal something, I can't remember.

But your father's entry into it would have been through his father, handed on?

Oh yes, absolutely, and his father obviously through his father, it was obviously handed down. It was the family business. My father wanted me to become a docker and was terribly upset that I didn't. My mother fought him physically, you know, to not have me go in the docks. She saw it as, quite rightly as a dreadful way to earn a living.

And did you pick up there had been any shift in that world between your grandfather and your father's time?

No, none at all, except that of course the docks were beginning to go into a decline as the Empire went into decline, as container ships... I can remember at 55...at five years old, being in the docks. I used to go up, I didn't tell you, that all through the latter half of the war and just after the war my mother was working, my father was working, so they didn't know what to do with me in the holidays, when I wasn't at school, so I would be taken up to the East End from Sidcup. I can remember brilliantly frosty mornings, you know, the moon still up and frosts everywhere, and my father would walk me two miles to the appropriate bus, and he would be carrying, on some occasions at least, a hundredweight sack of coal for his mother, he would take coal up to his mother in the East End, and with pride, because he was a very stroppy bastard, he would sit on buses with the sack of coal and defy conductors to say anything about it, you know, and holding his little son's hand, you know, he would take me all the way up the East End and... It was there that I would sit in their cold water flat in Bewley Street and they would give me the ultimate cockney Jewish soul food, breakfast,

which was a schmaltz herring bagel, you know. At 5 I would have this extremely strong food and a big mug of tea, and sit in this strange place, on a dark blue leather sofa I can remember, still in good condition. It was a lovely deep blue, I still love that blue leather colour, I love boots that colour. And I would be given a huge encyclopaedia with, I can remember it, of steel engraving pictures of gentlemen of the Raj, of the Empire, shooting rhino and threatening tigers and natives, you know, with their eyes all bugging out, you know, and holding funny-shaped swords, to show what rats they are, you know, how to fight like Englishmen. And, you know, I would be looking at all this text but wouldn't read it, and this was an improving thing, or playing with Plasticine.

What religion was your father brought up by the way?

Well they were Protestants. Well, sorry, of course, the father's line was Protestant, and the McCarthys were Catholic, so I don't think religion was a big thing in their family except that I do remember just about a wake or two where the McCarthys actually waked their, you know, there were, I think there were white curtains and there was candles, and an awful lot of drinking and shouting and hollering, and fist fights and stuff; I mean they were a great one for that.

You remember hearing about it, or being there?

Being there.

And do you remember the body?

I think the body was standing up in a coffin, but you see, you know, you know recovered memory syndrome and all that, you know, I mean I actually think a lot of this is implanted through stories, you know, so I don't know.

And, going back to the docks for a bit. I mean, did you get told stories about the '26 strike?

I got that through my mother, and she said, you know, that Churchill was deeply hated in the dockers community because he put that thing down and put up machine-guns. I don't know if this is in the history books but he put up machine-guns at the vital points of the docks, and had the Army, and they were going to shoot the dockers if they had to. And Victoria Park they had a big meeting during that, and the police came in, locked the gates, and just, they had mounted police going round beating the dockers up through just about the whole day. But the dockers weren't easily beaten up, so there was a battle.

And what about for both your grandfather and your father, in terms of unemployment, were they mainly working?

There were big periods when they got used to the idea of unemployment. I didn't know, but my mother said that my father when he was unemployed for long periods in the Fifties, during the great dock strike, did things like being a tiler and painting and decorating and things like that, I didn't know he did that, but, you know...

And what about his politics?

Didn't have any. As far as I knew, I think he always voted Labour because that's what you did. He thought the blacks would take over the world, but he said that was - oh I think he said that like poor people do, they were a projection of his lowly feeling about himself. He was a very kind man, I think he was a gentleman. I mean the two or three women that I actually took home in my jumping about days found both of them remarkably gentlemanly people, and I think they had a lot of grace, you know. So he was very kind, very courtly.

And how violent was the dockers' world?

Very very violent. I mean it's not the thing to be romanced, even, you know, as a double bluff. It was appalling. There was violence in the family, men beat their wives, wives beat their husbands, wives fought with other wives, men with fought with other men in the street, men got drunk, women got drunk. There was violence between brothers. Things were settled by hand. I mean this is an amusing story, that the last funeral I went to of that side of the family was, before my father died, was my father's eldest brother, Billy - no, it was Joe - yes Joe, Joe, who had settled in south-east London, and I turned up at this place, and we first of all met cousin David..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....he had a broken hip because he had got it broken by the local police. He's what's described euphemistically as a company director, right? He's..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....filled with a chandelier that he knew the price of, that he get you one. The last time I heard of him..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....sister's wedding, when he knew all the police were looking for him, and was seen by others to be hanging from a parapet of a bridge just to see his sister pass by and to dodge the police. When I buried my father I found him sharing the hearse with..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....pearl grey two-tone shoes like an Italian ponce. A deeply dangerous man.

Sounds like the Mafia.

He's a dangerous man. And, the day didn't go well because, when we got to the...when we got to the graveyard, a very big place, we found ourselves with a Liberal vicar; I could tell he was a Liberal vicar because he had mustard flares poking out, mustard-coloured flares poking out from under his hassock, and he ponced a ride on the running-board of our hearse, which we thought was deeply offensive. And in the chapel there were all these Campbells, and there were 22 male Campbells who by this time had been drinking very heavily, and they had what they called, what are called dockers' cuffs, which is, they get a very good suit with a shirt, the suits made to measure but the shirt comes over the first knuckle. I worked out why, that they've got such thick necks they have to get a shirt that's too big for them. I used to think it was to show off the jewellery here, but it wasn't, I think it was just, they would buy the hand-made suit, never buy hand-made shirts. At the, before we went to the church, we were first there, me and my father, and Marry the widow said, `Oh Georgie, you were like a brother to 'im.' And we neither of us pointed out he was Joe's brother. And she said, `When the Campbells turn up, make sure they don't drink won't you? Because you know what they're like when they drink.' And my father said, `Yes Marry, I'll do my best.' She said, `What will you have?' And opened a sideboard that was full of nothing but whisky, obviously knocked off, and one bottle of orange squash. So at 10 in the morning she poured us something like a third of a pint of whisky to drink. I mean it was preposterous. And so by the time we got there everybody was in something of a state, and the vicar got up on his little stand and started this peculiar thing, straight out of the editorial column of `The Guardian', you know, saying, `Now what do we all mean by death? Some say...' and there's these guys going, `What is he talking about?' I mean, what they wanted was the kiss of the lash, they wanted to be told that they were sinners, there would be redemption if they behaved themselves, which they weren't going to. And I put this, I think this actually was the cause of the deep trouble that happened when we got back to this house, where my father who had something of a lip was going around and was very frail but was going around putting the verbal knife into people, and a lot of these people hadn't seen each other for 20 years so they were eyeing each other up like some terrible kind of Renaissance court, those eyes sidling from one to another. A huge guy called Scotch Siddy had turned up who had been on the run for twenty years, he wasn't Scotch, he had just been to Scotland and stayed there, he was called Scotch Siddy. I came home early, fortunately, because I had to get to London to do some work, and I heard that all 22 male Campbells decanted to the pavement and did each other in for about an hour, and if I had have stayed there I think I would have had to bear the brunt of the ire that my father's tongue had engendered, because he was very ill. So it was like that. So that is a romance, but it's...

Supposing you had been, I mean how would you have dealt with it? How do you feel yourself [INAUDIBLE]?

No, well I don't think I...I think I would have walked away. But I have to say, my father never ever hit me; he was incredibly powerful, he was built like, you know, people imagine Welsh miners are built, very narrow waists, very broad shoulders. He was built like Popeye, you know. You know, eat and drink colossal amounts every day but not put on an ounce of fat while he was working. And I used to wind him up very badly, it's one of the things I have a conscience about, I could out-think him every time, out-verbalise him, pull terrible strokes on him, and once went outside after a round, found him beating the side of the house with his fist, there was blood everywhere, he was just working it off; he knew if he hit me he would really do some damage.

And, when you were talking before when I asked you about the violence in general, you were saying who was violent to him, what was the general attitude to children in those terms?

Children got hit and brutalised. My grandfather on my mother's side, who was far more literate and educated, beat his kids constantly. My father never beat me, which I think is remarkable, absolutely, because he was a violent man. I mean, him and his brothers were known in the East End, my mother said, as starkas[??], which is obviously German-Yiddish for strong men, like stark means strong in... But starkas[??]] meant that they weren't of the criminal fraternity but if anybody fancied a fight, very Scots-Irish you know, they would go out on the street and fight anybody. They did it as a form of pride and also as a form of entertainment.

And presumably your father would have been beaten by his father?

Probably, yes, yes, probably. [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....you know, may not have been.

And your father presumably didn't hurt your mother?

They fought.

Physically?

Yes. And I used to be on my mother's side all the time about that, and then one day, listened to it going on, it's pure D.H. Lawrence stuff, I mean I once listened to it going on on the stairs, and suddenly heard that my mother was actually bating him to do it, you know, it was her way of getting him to dominate her, because she could actually run rings round him

mentally so she needed him to physically dominate. That's my, that was my conclusion at that time.

And did your mother hit you?

Oh ferociously all the time, yes. Get thorough, thorough hidings.

In an uncontrolled way, anywhere [INAUDIBLE] you would be hit, or what?

I can't remember. I can't remember deciding whether this was being controlled or not. I mean it was...it was deliberate, it was with deliberation.

But would you have been hit round the head, or would you have been hit somewhere else?

All over, yes. I'm not traumatised by that, I mean I just remember it.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....the names and relative age gaps of your father's brothers and sisters in relation to him?

No I can't really.

Do you know how many there were?

There were three boys on my father's side, and a woman, a sister who was younger than my father called Kathleen who died when she was about 12 or 14 I think probably, well I think it must be in the Twenties or something. And in fact my father, his favourite song was, `I'll take you home, Kathleen,' and after a couple of drinks he would tilt his little Irish chin up and, Scots-Irish chin up and keen with this song, rather nicely I thought. [BREAK IN RECORDING] But on my mother's side I don't know what the age differences were.

No no, I meant just within your father's family.

Between the family? I honestly don't. I think they were quite close.

No no no, but who came first in terms of the whole lot?

Oh I see. Joey came first and then George, then Johnnie - well, then, either Kathleen or Johnnie I'm not sure which, but Kathleen did..... [BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....die from, do you know?

Don't know. Don't know.

And was that something that was a sort of ghastly unspoken-about thing, or...?

No, I think my father knew about Kathleen and sang about her. I mean they just didn't, he didn't talk about because he didn't talk about anything very much. But in those families, Aunt Esther was the one I was trying to think of earlier who had all of these, who was in the family of awful women, she had, she was one of the great-aunts, she had I think twelve children and only four survived, and my mother says that a doctor who looked at her in the Sixties when she was still alive, and she refused, it was a male doctor, she refused to have a male doctor looking at her, you know, at her privates, because she had some pain, found that she had a hernia I think or a rupture, and she, when questioned she must have had four of her children with that rupture. I mean, very very hard lives, you know, she would get up in the morning and take in, she would go cleaning, take in laundry in the morning, do another job in the afternoon, you know, it was like that. Ferociously hard lives, and to lose eight of twelve children was, you know, it was kind of rough but not unexpected.

And how bitter do you think they were about the harshness of their lives?

I don't think they were. I think they were made hard, or they were made bitter, some of them were bitter people, but they weren't bitter about their circumstances, seeing it as an injustice and therefore raising political steam. They were hard like a horse can be hard.

And what was the determining factor between those that became thieves and those that were straight?

No idea, no idea.

And, do you know what...?

Because in one family it was so; I mean in my father's family all three brothers had the same parents but Johnnie...the story about Johnnie the youngest was that in the Twenties he, when times were very hard, someone set fire to a van load of food, my mother said, or groceries,

out of bitterness I would think, and Johnnie was somewhere between 10 and 14 and was standing around like any kid would stand around a fire. This is the story. And the police came along and nicked him, and he disappeared from his mother's view for three days, she didn't know where he was, she was beside herself, and what had happened was, he was taken down the cells, knocked about a bit, put up in front of the bench, found guilty, and given the cat, cat-o'-nine-tails, or the birch, but my mother says the cat, all within the space of three days. And the first thing she knew of him was to find him brought back on a door, face down on a door with his back all in lacerations. And apparently, according to my mother, from then on he's just, he just never went straight, he just started to thieve.

And do you know what your father felt about it?

My father was... Well, I've got to go, I've got actually to go to when my father was dying. He was hallucinating, I went to see him a lot in the hospital and he was hallucinating badly through the drugs or pain or whatever, and I had this rather unnerving experience of seeing him, and I would never know what he was seeing when he was looking at me. At one point he thought I was his mother; another point I was, he thought I was variously his two brothers, and it was a very hard thing to cope with, and at one point he thought I was Johnnie the bent one, and he came up to me and he said, in his pyjamas he said, `Don't look round, there's a tec (which are detectives), a tec's just come in. I can't help you this time, I can't help you this time. You've done it this time,' you know. So I had to take a half-hour of this, you know, which is very very hard work when you are trying to see your father to the grave as it were. But I know that he was protective of him, but was...he thought he was a disgrace, and...it's very kind of puritanical Scots. I mean he was a very odd mixture of working class hedonist and puritan, my father. He had terrifying honour codes, you know, which, you know, if you passed over them, you know, then you were just out. I think Johnnie the wicked one owed him, he borrowed £4 or £6 from him in 1946, didn't pay it back. My father didn't speak to him for fifteen years just on the strength of that, you know. Because money was very tight he regarded...I'm afraid I'm like that too, I think, I've got terrible tolerances about people behaving and misbehaving as you can probably guess.

By tolerance you mean intolerance I presume.

Intolerance. Well, narrow tolerances, an engineering term.

Right. And, what did he teach you in terms of morals and ethics then, what were the codes you grew up with?

His favourite phrase, rather clumsy, was, never be frightened of turning a corner, which meant that you should not fear anything. If you walk round a corner of a building you shouldn't fear anybody who is coming because you are straight, for whatever reasons. He would have liked me to have been a far more physical person, someone who could duff anybody up at the slightest slight, and I am not that way, although I got a bit violent when I was young and didn't like the feel of it at all. I didn't like the feeling of losing control which I found terrifying. And I think it was this whole honour thing about, you did, you know, you did the right thing, you know, it was just a number of very simple things that you find in the Old Testament, totally Old Testament, I mean no subtlety to it, you know, you do not mess women around, you do not tell lies; you don't tell lies out of...I mean, to him the business of telling lies was a matter of personal honour, it wasn't anything to do with the cause and effect or any kind of generalised picture of the way society ought to... I mean he just felt that people shouldn't tell lies for their own sake and for those people near them, and things like that, you know, four or five things.

And do you think your mother had the same code, or...?

Well, I mean like a lot of women married to hard-edged men, you know, they know how to blunt the axe and also blunt their effects. There was always a struggle between my mother and father which you could see in a lot of marriages where the woman works very hard at subverting the man to, I mean there's always a struggle about who is controlling the family I think, and you can see that quite often. My mother was very often trying to disestablish my father, but at the same time keeping him propped up as a kind of, a rather wonky figurehead, you know. Very good, it's a slave's game, slaves do that, they know how to do that, great subverters from below, and women do it when they're slaves, mental or otherwise. And you know, you keep the man, you keep the figurehead up but you keep it rocky, right? Keep it rocky. So if he tried to put his foot down my mother would take the piss out of him, which I would pick up very quickly and I could use that.

And do you know anything...?

I actually got rather fed up, I actually got...probably my father's influence, probably, I got disgusted with it between about 16 and 18, I thought it was just a shit-head way to behave in a family. But I think my mother in many ways understood the world a bit more than he did perhaps, you know, like a lot of women, or a lot of slaves.

And, if you don't know how they met, do you know anything about their courtship?

Well my father said that he took one look at her and knew he was going to marry her and all of that, but this is not quite the straight answer, but he once did a very odd thing. Because he never used to talk to me it was a very peculiar thing once when he, I forget where it was but he suddenly launched into a little talk, he was quite old, and he said, he just told me a story. It was very concise, because he had very little language, but it was like the script of a three-part movie. And his choice was interesting. He told me about a woman who he met, who he courted, who always wore a feather hat and careful black gloves, and served tea in a little house in what was one of these little Victorian parlours to him, and wouldn't let him shag her essentially, what he was telling me, but she clearly wanted to get married. And he didn't want to get married because of the lack of sex, he just didn't want to get married because of the parlour. And on the other hand he was at the same time seeing somebody who couldn't get enough of it, as he put it, you know, he was obviously shagging her in every alleyway and situation he could find, and he got fed up with that, so he found that boring after a while. And it was odd that he told me these two little stories, and I could never work out, again, you asked right at the beginning of the thing, `What did you say?' I mean I didn't say anything, I was just listening to him, trying to work out what the mechanism, why did he tell me this? And where did it come from? It was beautifully edited, and it was two sides of something. So he had a brain that could work out which side of the penny was one side of the penny and what was a matching side.

Do you think it was a confessional thing, or do you think he hoped he was giving you some advice?

It was long past advice time, I was married, you know, two kids, you know. Some kind of confession.

End of F4806 Side B

F4807 Side A

But OK, he's seen your mother and he knows he's going to marry her.

Right.

Does she want to marry him, does he take her out?

Don't know.

Does he beat her up? What does he do?

Don't know.

Do you know when they married?

When? They say two years before they had me, so '37, '36.

Would they have had a church wedding? What would it have been, do you know?

Don't know.

Do you know if both families approved, disapproved, didn't care?

Don't know that either, but I do know that her siblings kind of, as I said earlier they objected to the notion that she should marry, as though she ought to be the person who stays on looking after the oldies, so there was a kind of, we're living our lives but what the hell do you think you're doing trying to lead a life that's similar to ours?

And do you know anything about the period before you were born, when they were in London?

No. I know that they were...at one point my father thought of emigrating to Australia, but wouldn't leave his mother, which is obviously very often a...it was a...you know, it's something you say when you don't actually want to leave. But I think there's something about the toughness of both of them that, I actually think they would have been...they would have done better in a wilderness, and they are very, they were very good in extreme times, and they could have done with that challenge I think. It might have liberated them a bit too. My guess

is that when they were happy together they were very happy, but they had a very up and down life emotionally together. Even now I look at some families and of a necessity these days I tend to see working class - sorry, middle class families, bourgeois families, where I simply cannot understand the emotional exchange that's going on, there doesn't seem to be anything going on except a lot of bubbling and brewing up, and in our family if a row had to be had it got had, and there would be emotional blood all over the walls and then people would pick themselves up. And in many ways Ruth finds that exhausting with me, that if there's a terrible row or if I go down and get into a depression or whatever, like my youngest daughter who leads a similar rich emotional life, I can seem to get up the next morning and say, right, you know, as though not much has gone on, where those around me have actually, you know, are still picking the pieces up. And it's regrettable but it's a certain mechanism which is good for survival.

And what's the first house you actually remember then?

I remember it very very clearly. It was a big... When we first moved out of London we moved to Sidcup and we stayed in a house that we had rented, either wholly or in part and I think it was wholly, but it's quite a large house compared to the house we ended up, because we bought it, it was a two up and two down suburban house, end of the road, so a largeish garden. But the house we lived on on Half-Way Street was quite close to the doctor's house, Dr Abramson, who was Jewish, a big bald head, had real sculpture in his surgery, had real books which I had never seen before on shelves, had the most beautiful daughter I had ever seen.

How old are you at this point?

Oh, I could have been 6 years old, I don't know, but I was absolutely besotted with the daughter, who was dark, Jewish and the daughter of a doctor, and look what I married.

How old was this daughter, about your age or...?

About my age, a couple of years older, she was already soignee, I mean she swung about, you know. I think I... Anyway, so we were in those houses which were quite large semi-detached or detached houses, semi-detached, and we rented it just to get out of the Blitz.

But you've no memory of being in the Blitz? Presumably you were too young.

Very very faint, but powerful memories of the scream of bombs and flames, seeing the reflection of flames on the wall. The stories my mother told were just absolutely awful, we'll talk about that later. She...sorry, this house, you asked about the house. I can remember being in a big room which was my own, my own bedroom, which was a big room, not the kind of house you get in the East End and the house we ended up in, because it was rented. A large room with my toys, and a little crane with, it was supposed to pick up sand and dump and everything. Now these...and Meccano and things like that. I had a real problem with toys, I couldn't understand them, I didn't know why they were there. They looked like what they were to me, I couldn't fantasize with them. I would be asked to go round to play with Jimmy, you know, and go to his house and have tea and cakes and then we would go to his room and he would get out his little Dinky toys, or his lead soldiers and go pew-pew-pew-pew at each other. And I would look at him and I would think, what the hell does he think he's doing? I swear to God I never got into the fantasy of toys and I don't know what - you know, maybe it was something wrong with me but I already didn't understand what that was about at all.

So at that age, left to yourself what would you have been doing?

Well I remember winding... Oh well I was trying to be a kid. I mean I remember winding this thing up and it picked up sand and ditched it and things happened, and I thought, well that's very nice; what am I supposed to do with it? But I could at the same time hear under the eaves of this...I've actually written about this in a poem a long time ago, I remember under the eaves which I regard as the kind of brows of the house, you know, there's all this ivy growing like eyebrows, I could hear this wonderful rich sound, and it was the sound, I mean it was just so loud even in my memory now, it was the sound of sparrows chattering to each other, and it's a very very domestic sound, it goes right back into your blood. Like the squeezing of privet buds, which releases a smell which releases all sorts of memories, you know, a very very sensuous experience in a small boy. So I can remember that house. I can remember the kitchen which had a big open table, and I would really like to have a kitchen like that before I die instead of this nonsense of these built-in cabinets that you have to kind of bend down for; if you've got a big gut like me it gets to be more and more of a nuisance. Huge kitchen table that you could walk round and chop things up on, at which I remember my mother being pregnant with my daughter, so I was 8 years old.

Pregnant with who?

Sorry, my daughter, my sister. So I am 8 years old, and a cat that my mother didn't like, she never liked cats but one came to the house, jumped on her back and she screamed, I can see

her screaming and dropping the knife she had in her hand, screamed, and the cat fled. And when my daughter was born she didn't see any cats for about a year and a half and the first cat she saw she went absolutely crackers with fear.

Daughter, or sister?

My sister, sorry. I keep saying my daughter, sister.

Were you the two children or were there more?

Yes, yes. So we were really like two, we were actually like two only children in a way, because we were eight years apart. They didn't have a second child because the war depressed them and they felt that the world wasn't worth living in, and, you know, by this time all sorts of news about the Buchenwald and so on had come out. But I remember that particular little, almost like a Goya mise en scène, dark tones, and, you know. I think I enjoyed that house.

How long were you in that house? When did you leave?

I don't think long, two or three years or something, three or four. I don't know, I mean, if I was 8, let's think about it, if I was 8 then we must have been three years out of the war, so three, four, might have been four or five years, I don't know.

And, at that stage was your mother at home most of the time?

Most of the time she was working. She worked most of her life. She took time off to have kids, she took time off to have the kids, but she took time off, you know.

But, you mean to give birth to them?

Yes, and bring them up a bit.

So for the first couple of years she might have been around?

I don't know, don't know.

So who looked after you?

Well, as I said my father would take me up to my grandparents when I wasn't at school. I would have a kind of baby-sitter, the dreadful... [LAUGHS] A terrible kind of, if only Evelyn Waugh wrote about the working classes, you know, instead of the Llanabba silver band, if he just sort of stopped there and actually wrote about the...he would write about the Dutches, the Dutch family who were up the road at Brooke Head Road[??] in Sidcup, who were...they were like a kind of hill-billy tribe, they were huge grotesques, you know, overweight with lots of moustaches and that was the women, you know. Old joke, but you know, the...you know, all of them were grotesque in one way or another, and I was looked after by them. But again by this time I had passed the scholarship to the grammar school and regarded as smart so I was bullied ferociously by all the boys for being clever, so they would come up to me and hold me in tortuous positions and say, `What does "woz" mean?' Which actually wasn't a bad, hard question to answer it at 11, 10½, and not having a sufficient answer I'd get a thorough beating for it, you know. No, just a dreadful family. They looked after me for a bit. And there was somebody called Joan, Joany Day, who is still alive in her fifties who lives in Dagenham who has lived an absolutely tragic Dickensian life. She's had, Sid, her husband died recently of generally being worn out. They were a family, a Catholic family who seemed to have had nothing but bad luck all the time. Mongoloid child who is completely out of control and has been put in institutions who beat the father up when the father had a broken leg, you know. He was sitting there on a coach in Dagenham waiting for his son to beat him up. It's a catastrophic life they've led.

But, sorry...

And she looked after me, she was some kind of, again I think a factory-met friend of my mother actually, and she became a kind of a second aunt to me and looked after me a lot. And during the very very distressing times during the war and after when we had got to move at some point due to the medical conditions I gained through the war which were chronic eczema and asthma and various other things, I think through being blown up, she told me some of the things my mother didn't tell me, like my mother was...my mother kind of rejected me because of my condition at infancy, and she would be the person who dressed my wounds and bandages and so on, put me to bed, and she told me a couple of years ago, which came as a slight shock, that... One of the treatments for eczema in those days was to bandage you up with cold tar ointment and then strap you down to stop you scratching in the night, and I would say to Joany Day - my mother wouldn't come to put me to bed because she found it too distressing, in tears, and my mother...which I think gave me a very bad self image, I felt that I was kind of, not just rejected by all this, I mean I think I kind of proposed my ire politically on the rest of the world the fact that I was having trouble with the way my mother regarded me. She said that I would say, I would be 3 or 4 years old, and say, `I can't go to sleep yet

Aunty Joan, because you've got to bind me up, you've got to strap me down.' So it was a very odd idea that I was looking to be strapped down at an early age. Because latterly when I was in a skin hospital at 16 when my education was falling apart, they said, `Well strap him down'. I said, `I wouldn't do that if I were you.' And they said, `Why not?' And I said, `Well do it.' And they did it, and I just went like that and broke the bandages and bent the frame, you know, so the rage had got exterior by that time. Right.

And do you remember feeling ill as a child, I mean was that part of growing up?

I remember feeling full of beans, a terrific amount of energy, thought the world was an absolutely beautiful place, but was a walking scab, and a lot of the time couldn't play games because to open your arms after a night's crusting up would bleed and, you know, and all of that. Half your hair was fallen out. I was seriously ill with serious eczema, and at one point when my education was so bad at the grammar school I really was in a terrible mental state, I went in to the hospital called Goldie Levi[ph] because of the huge efflorescence of the skin complaint, which was just about the time when I started to realise that there was kind of a causal connection between your mental state and your physical state, not at all indicated by any of the doctors I was seeing, I mean I just started to see this. And it was the first step into a kind of mental freedom I think. I often think that to understand what's going on itself is the opening of a door. And at the same time as people see the relationship between my father and mother was something other than they told me, or she told me. So, you know...

And what about books, did you have books?

No books in the house, no. Well there were a few sort of Dickensian things come through my grandfather. My mother read a bit but you know, she read to go to sleep, it would take about ten minutes for her to nod off. I remember being, I was an absolutely compulsive reader. I got to the library at Lamorbey I think almost at 5, 5½, got my own ticket out and started to read, funnily enough, `The Wind in the Willows' and things like that, and I was an absolutely ferocious reader, and the older I got and the more pubescent I got the more I became a colossal reader, I mean I would read a very large number of books each week. Stole a couple to see what it felt like, buried them in the park.

From a bookshop?

Yes - no from the library. Buried them in the park with great guilt, wouldn't go near that part of the park for years afterwards, you know, just dreadful stuff, but that was just playing with fire.

So are they still there?

I've no idea. But then latterly I went back to the library when I was an apprentice to re-establish my education which by then had to be self-education, and I started off new, and I remember exactly walking into this new library thinking, where do I start? And by...I had a feeling for history. I mean you don't want to hear schoolboy things, but I used to do things like, we would have a history lesson, I was entirely disruptive, utterly disruptive; I got every punishment that was available every week, you know, and a beating with a cricket bat once a term by the headmaster, just as a kind of bonus. But if we had a history lesson going and we had been talking about interminable fish days[??], the Tudor kings and so on, I remember I put me hand up and the master would look at me with some kind of fear and say, `What is it Campbell?' I said, `I've got a question.' `What's that?' `About the map.' I said, `What's happening there?' and I just pointed to the middle of Asia, you know. `What's happening there?' And of course there was no answer but a clout. But the day in my apprenticeship...

Hold on, did you actually want to know the answer or you were just trying to stymie him?

Yes I did actually. I actually...no I actually wanted to cause trouble but the problem was, amidst the trouble I was very serious, and that was problematic for me because the rejection that was inevitably coming was another stunner... I'll tell you another story now, but just finish this thing about history. The first thing that happened, I walked into the library and for some reason I went to history, I just got down essays by Toynbee...essays about history, and it completely blew my mind, because it actually started to answer the questions about what was happening in Central Asia, you know. And rapidly, I mean it was just, it was like, it was like learning to swim, you know, you just went forward and you went back and I followed avenues. If I saw something referred to in a book I would go, you know, very very piecemeal and very disorganised but... And I remember a very strong feeling, like the image of the, you know, me under the gooseberry bush, don't call him guv. Very strong, I think, single thing. Feeling, having a very bad self image, late pubescence, very short, covered in scabs, all of that. It sounds like [INAUDIBLE], this was absolutely the time that made me and it's difficult for me to talk about to other people because it's boring, I mean people have heard all this kind of thing, you know. But I remember thinking, if I believe what people are telling me, I'm doomed, about myself, I am doomed, and I have to find out myself what I am. I had a feeling about writing, I had already started to write poetry, which is, if you don't need any more[??], this was actually at junior school so I was doing this at 10½. I had left junior school at 10, I left too early I think, probably by a year, because I was top of everything in junior school. I could organise being top at anything by just turning it on. Funnily enough my best subject

was mathematics, I could do that and now I can't. I wrote poetry and the teachers believed I had pinched it from somewhere, you know.

Do you remember any of it?

Well it was clearly Scott's 'wha hae where Wallace fled' but it was... `Ye mighty oak that in the past that's weathered storm and fiery glass,' and then it went on from there, you know. Not bad for 10, you know. And I did about eight verses of this, and then it, you know, like a lot of poetry it kind of starts to trip up, but not bad at 10, and people didn't believe that I did it. I had already got into language, and I remember at 16, 16½ thinking, well, I have a feeling about writing poetry and it may be that I am educated and maybe I'm using the vocabulary wrong but I've simply got to use the words as best I can. So you become your own, you re-invent yourself at great risk and a great price. Gershon Scholem said about the golem, making golems is dangerous, and he said, `But of course, all that's a creation, dangerous to the Creator,' and if you're re-inventing yourself or finding out who you are without any reference, you are naturally going to grow into a very odd shape. But this bizarre act of will I can remember, I can remember standing in the street and thinking, if I believe what these people are telling me, I am fucked.

Were they all telling you the same thing?

Yes, I was a guttersnipe and... I mean I was trouble, deep trouble at school.

But this is school or this is family as well?

Well I was getting it through two different ways. I mean at home I was being told I was aspiring to the wrong things, you know, I wasn't becoming a good obedient working class boy, you know. A big boy in the kitchen like, you know, a lot of blacks these days, big boy on the street but you know, anybody can make them feel like a piece of cheese any time they want to. And in the school I wasn't marrying up to what they thought I ought to be doing.

And do you think, when you went to that library later on and started with Toynbee, was that because of your mother's connection or was it random?

No, I think that was purely serendipitous, I don't think it was anything to do with it.

Right. And going back to childhood, I mean the image of being under the gooseberry bush, are there others like that, are there other very strong...?

Probably but they'll come up as I think of them, do you know what I mean.

Right. How did you react when your sister was born?

Very disturbed, and I remember absolutely clearly with some amusement, and actually found it amusing at the time, they said, `Your mother's coming back from hospital with your sister, you've got a sister'. And that night I dreamt I was having to hide under the dining table, and there was this huge eight-foot carrot-haired girl sitting in a chair with tall hair like a kind of, you know, a Regency play, you know, it would go in to a point, who I was totally terrified of. And I think, that was OK, I think that was me speaking to myself with absolute clarity.

What was your sister's name?

Diane, and still is.

And were you involved with her babyhood at all or did you just walk away?

Not really. I think she's...I think I bullied her a bit when I was young, which I would regret except that people do. I think we are very close mentally, emotionally, but we were very distanced, because I went off and did a load of very strange things. There was a point when she was about 16, 17, where she wanted, I had left home and she wanted to follow me to London and I couldn't accept that, I couldn't handle it, and people have blamed me for, you know, letting my sister stay - I keep nearly saying daughter - my sister stay there and letting my mother slam the stable door on her, you know. My mother was furious that I had got out of home, she couldn't keep that influence on me, and she made damn sure that Diane didn't go, made her get a proper clerical job, not go to further education, marry an oaf, you know, and so on...

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

And was your father involved in her babyhood and your babyhood, or not?

I think he was very much, very close to her, I was close to my mother. You know, the usual stuff. He was very close to her. I don't think he was...no I think he took us out quite a bit, you know, I think he was a caring father within his own...

Where did he take you?

Well, to a park, you know, or to the fair or something like that, you know.

And did either parent tell you stories?

Mother told me stories all the time. You're hearing half of them on here.

But I mean as in, instead of reading you stories, those kind of fiction stories as opposed to stories about the family.

No, they didn't get into written fiction, because they, my father couldn't read, he could just about, just about get over the first page of the `Daily Mirror', and my mother read but she didn't read me stories. She would recite some, you know, `The Owl and the Pussy Cat'.

And were there any picture books in the house?

Probably, I don't remember them.

Atlases?

I don't think so, although I'm atlas crazy, I mean I've got an atlas mind, and I'm surprised my daughters don't have a geography eye, you know, I love maps.

Were there any pictures on the walls?

You've just asked me that, and hardly, no, not really.

And did you have comics?

I wasn't a comic person, not much. I did it for a bit, you know, I `did' comics, like drugs, when I was kind of 9 or 10, but I was peeling away from when, you know, when the guys got the `Eagle', when the `Eagle' first came out, and I was already peeling away from comics. I didn't...I was just very short on all that child stuff, and that doesn't make...I'm not making myself out to be a highly developed kid; I think, you know, it may well be there was something very missing but I just went straight into books and stayed there more or less.

And what about the radio, was the radio a part of your growing up?

Listened to the radio. That was a very strong thing with me and my mother; my father was away, not in the Army because they used the dockers to move around the country being dockers, they were very valuable to them like that. I can remember very very intimate times with my other sitting round a coal fire or a fire, you know, an enclosed stove with some candles on because, you know, the black-out or the power cuts or lack of money, and listening to the radio. I mean I just loved the radio. As they say, the pictures [INAUDIBLE] good radio.

Do you remember what you listened to?

Plays, readings from Dickens that kept coming up, you know. They tried to censor the radio, they didn't want me listening to Radio, what was it then, Radio 2 or, `Dick Barton, Special Agent' and all that, they didn't want me to listen to that.

The Home Service.

Pardon?

The Home Service wasn't it?

Yes. No, there was the Light...the Light Programme it was called, the Light Programme, Tommy Trinder and all that. I could listen to that during Sundays, you know, during the day, but at night I think they wanted to get me to bed. My mother was very strong on me doing homework and so on but she didn't understand that you needed a room that was quiet and so on. But I was long gone beyond doing proper work, you know. And that I can remember starting at, going to, when I passed the scholarship the headmaster of the junior school, which was a good school, I remember it, it had some good old-fashioned liberal arts and crafts people in it and people with good heads, interviewed me because I passed the scholarship, and it was with my mother, and he said, `What do you want to be?' And at that time I wanted to be a doctor, but my mother thought I had said I want to be a docker, so I got a clump round the head and she started to scream and shout and we thought, `What's wrong with her?' you know. And after some argument, he said, `After all,' he thought to wind the discussion up, he said airily, `After all, what goes up must come down,' and I remember this knotting in my stomach thinking, here we go again, and I said, `Not necessarily'. He said with a terrible...he said, `What do you mean?' I said, `It seems to me that things that go up are not only the same thing, the thing that's gone up, but they are actually going up so the thing plus going up...' I mean I can't remember the language that I was using but I was actually using the argument, which I found out's a very early form of Greek philosophy, I forget what it's called. The

argument is that the thing is not just the abstract thing, it's the abstract thing and the qualities that pertain at that particular time, which is I think a bridge between a North American Indian saying, `Goose on the water, goose in the sea, goose in the air, goose doing this, goose doing that,' but not having a word for goose, the abstract notion of goose, it's a very abstract notion. It plus what it's doing. But there was a form of Greek philosophy that was that model that you said, well, that's a green apple, or an apple going up or an apple being eaten, there was no just simple apple. So I said, `What goes up is a thing going up; when it's coming down it's a different thing to when it's going up.' And my mother was shaking me and saying, `There you go again causing trouble.' The knot in my stomach and the, here we go again, you know. So already I was used to this thing about being disputatious. Are we OK for time because there's another story about that too, which is, at that time, at the what I think is probably the infant school, so somewhere between, whatever it is, 7, a team of strange people came round who must have been early educationalists, psychologists, whatever, and they gave us some picture books, poem[??] picture books with lots of line drawings on and asked you to comment on the line drawings displayed. And I remember one of them being cowboy country, desert, chaparal, bushes, Kit Carson type character, [INAUDIBLE] skin hat, fringes, you know, fringed leathers, rifle. And he's firing at an Indian who is running at him with a tomahawk some fifteen, twenty feet away, but, either side of him are two Indians jumping out of bushes about to attack him. And the person said, `What do you think of this picture? Can you see anything wrong?' And I looked at it and I thought, yes, I used to say what I thought, and I remember thinking, oh I see, what I'm supposed to say is that we're supposed to, you know, that he should be dealing with these two blokes who are close to him. And I thought, no hang on a minute, maybe he's doing the smart thing here. He's got a long rifle, he's not going to be able to get a shot off. He's getting a shot off against these two guys, and then deal with them with the rifle as a club and maybe his knife, you know. Or, and/or, maybe these two guys have just jumped up and he started to aim for... And I remember thinking, no you don't say that, and I started to give him the first answer, a similar one with some people in deck-chairs and rainfall and, you know, we've got summer what's wrong with this? It's raining and [INAUDIBLE] be there, and...yes but hang on, maybe it's only just started raining because there's no pools anywhere. So, you get the picture. So by that time I had decided there's a way of arguing as the world requires, there's a way of thinking which is not necessarily shared.

And just to finish now, when you said you wanted to be a doctor when you were asked that question, was that because of the doctor down the road with the beautiful daughter?

I don't know. I think it was a mixture of idealism, might be to do with the doctor down the road with the beautiful daughter, might be a projection of my very bad skin condition.

And, when you said the doctor down the road had sculptures, what were they?

Little hand-held, little hand things, you know, along the window ledge where all the nice books were. One was an elephant. Little ivory carved things or wood carved things, you know.

So they were pretty near to being...

I remember looking, and thinking how very much like his sort of dome was, he had this kind of big fleshy head, you know, like Sidney Greenstreet.

But they were probably more like ornaments than African sculptures or something?

Yes, well, a small sculpture's a sculpture isn't it. No, it was a serious piece of sculpture.

But did it say Art to you with a capital A?

No, it said, classy behaviour.

And did you have none of those things?

None whatsoever, except for the two statuettes upstairs.

Right.

End of F4807 Side A

F4807 Side B

May the 3rd today isn't it, 1995.

It's Wednesday today.

Yes but it still has a date, May the 3rd.

Oh right, sorry, yes. I thought you said Thursday.

Are you going to argue with everything I say?

I'll try.

I thought as much.

But I do have to relax sometimes.

OK. Just tell.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]

When we were talking before about your childhood, I got a clear picture of the first house you really remember, the rented house, and we talked about...

Mm. But did I talk about the sparrows in the eaves? Right.

And we talked about the fact that when your mother was working you used to go up to London and be in your grandparents' house.

Right.

But I wondered how much of your early childhood you spent out of doors.

I'm going to ask you why you ask that.

Because I want to know what your landscape was and whether it was [INAUDIBLE].

Well the thing was that I actually, it's interesting because we haven't spoken for some weeks or months. One of the things that I thought I perhaps hadn't gotten into this talk so far, and it

seems the question is absolutely pertinent in time and place, is that I rapidly became someone who was utterly involved in nature, although my parents were from London, and if I go from that house, that first house that I remembered to the next house where I spent the rest of my life until I left home at 19, two streets away, it's the house that my parents first rented and then bought, I can remember sitting on a three-wheel bike, so I must, unless I was a delayed adolescent, somewhere between 3 and 5, 3, 5, 6, and experiencing what used to be called some kind of nature vision, quite, what now is called a hallucinogenic experience but for then, those days, in more innocent days it was just regarded as a super vision of the world, I can remember sitting on this bike and looking at a thorn tree, the poem is in `Father's Hook', the tree divided itself up into perfect bilateral symmetries as you see in primitive paintings, and in my eyes birds flew out of it like arrows and directions to the compass, like beautiful music, and I was completely besotted with it. This kind of experience carried on through my early years, and disappeared into my dream times, as the Aborigines would say in Australia, it went underground into my dreams, but there was from that moment a very very strong parallel universe to me which was called nature, and it became, from that point it became extraordinarily important to me.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

And when you had that experience with the thorn bush, did it live with you a long time?

It's lived with me a long time in the sense it's a poem in `Father's Hook' and I can still recount it to you.

But as a child, did it really light you up for ten weeks, or what [INAUDIBLE]?

I don't remember. All I can say is that it was strong enough to remember now and I can almost have a, I can reconstruct it in my memory, and that was typical of those experiences that happened a lot to me through that period and through into my early adolescence.

And did you just take it as being natural, or were you...?

I did accept that what was natural was again split. Again if you look through the books there's always dualities through the books but rapidly I became to feel separated from the rest of society as artists are supposed to do, and as perhaps working-class people who are having trouble after the war in the suburbs had materially and physically, and materially and psychologically they had problems about settling in, they were regarded as trash and so on, all

of that. Not copying the plea, but already there was that split in my contact with the outside world, and I think it started there.

And were there other similar visions then that you can remember about this time?

Similar...?

Visions.

Oh, they just went, they became quite natural to me. I mean I can remember one or two, standing in a small coppice that was actually not about a hundreds yards from where that three-wheel bike thing took place, and just looking at the sunlight come through the trees, and just thinking it was wonderful, you know, just went into a strange state. And quite often there was a kind of super colour effect, which again reproduced itself in dreams later on.

And would you usually be alone when this happened?

Yes, yes, always.

And were you alone a lot?

Oh yes, yes.

And so was this a landscape of streets, or was there a wood nearby?

It was a burgeoning suburb, Sidcup and Lamorbey was the, I think the old Kentish village that it was centred around. It was very verdant, it was very, lots of trees. I hated it in later life but when I went back to it after leaving home I looked at it and thought, well, lines of cherry trees on broad grassy verges; a river ran down the middle of the two streets I lived in, a very small one with hedges and so on. For a 5, 6-year-old you could disappear into these places, you could disappear into small coppices, maybe like woods. And as soon as I got a bike big enough I was rapidly off into the Kentish countryside, which turned out to be all of the wonderful Kent that used to be around Shoreham and so on, is it Cotman and people like that.

Shoreham's on the coast, yes, or not?

No Shoreham in the Kentish, in the Weald of Kent.

Oh I'm thinking of Sussex aren't I, yes. So can you just describe that, because the tape has no idea where this landscape is. People who don't know England need to know.

Well to me of course it's a lost country, but you can see it best in old black and white movies of usually about the Battle of Britain where the officer and his moll in a nice frock will go for a day in the country and get out of their little open two-seater and look across the Weald of Kent and you will see all of the...and he will say, `Felicity, it's worth fighting for'. `Oh John, carry on.' But they will look across the Weald of Kent and they will see all of these wonderful long grasses rippling as the wind runs through it, you know, and the oasthouses and all of that, and orchards of trees in blossom which don't exist any more. So it was a place that I could get lost in very easily. I would get on a bike, I would ride to Sidcup proper to the station, over to Foot's Cray, down into the Cray valley to Farningham, and I knew Farningham because my parents used to take me there to, not to Farningham, what was the name of the place? It was a small village which latterly got infested with tourists with a river in the middle, and it was the centre of the hop-picking country, so my parents had taken me there because they used to go hop-picking. So I used to go there on my own, and then I went on, and I later, when I was an apprentice, I developed a system where I would either go cycling or latterly would go, get on a bus and go into this area with a map, and not look at the map till Sunday afternoon, knowing that you couldn't get lost in Kent. So I would lose myself, and at 3 o'clock on Sunday afternoon I would find out where I was, which was a nice way to see the country. And I had slept in barns and ditches, and, you know, usually had `The Faber Book of English Verse' in my pocket.

Did the fact that nobody knew where you were, was that part of it?

Could be, but, yes, and I wanted to get out of the house. I used to go sketching as well, carried a sketch-book.

So you were doing landscape sketches?

Landscape sketches, reading poetry, the whole, you know, the whole thing.

Can you remember which poetry?

I said, `The Faber Book of English Verse'.

But what do you remember from it?

I can't remember what I was reading then. I think a lot of Dylan Thomas, cracking my way through T.S. Eliot, you know, stuff like that, who I now think is a miserable old sod, bad influence.

And apart from the oasthouses, was the land a working countryside?

It was a working countryside, typically I've got it in my mind late summer, early autumn, hop vines in the hedgerows, the smell of a good pint coming up as you walked up to a pub with the eye, keeping your eye open for a barn that you might go back to, hoping the weather would stay good and wouldn't get too cold.

What about skylines?

Don't recall too much of that.

Night?

Night was interesting. Usually stuck between two bales of hay, quite often with the chest heaving because I was an asthmatic. Might be rather cold. Dogs might be barking but I hoped they'd shut up for obvious reasons, because they might have heard me. I remember waking up in a wood, and this was on the Surrey borders, this was near, it's teddy-bear country, it's where Rupert Bear used to be, Robertsbridge, somewhere around there, under, in pines, on pine needles, which I thought was very comfortable. And then I was woken up at half-past 3, 4 o'clock because I was under a rookery, so I had this wonderful, you know, music that got me entirely invited. But that was different country, rather more open.

Animals?

No, don't recall.

Birds, specific ones?

Bird song, yes. My hearing was good then.

And, did you encounter people, I mean was part of it striking up a conversation in a pub, or not?

Yes, I...yes, later, this is, you know, from 16 onwards as an apprentice, yes I would tend to meet people and talk to them. I noticed there was this ring around London in which, within, you know, the centre of which nobody talked to each other, but the more you got outside London, the more un-urban people were, the more they are likely to spend time on a country lane and talk to you, you know, I quite enjoy that.

Any encounters that were significant?

No.

And, when you were in London as a child with grandparents, were you playing in the street much, was there an outside environment there?

I wasn't in London as a child. Oh when I was with the grandparents. No, I was locked up in this flat and stayed there. They decided to keep an eye on me, and their eye was kept on me while I sat on this large sofa and read an encyclopaedia and ate pickled herring.

And, I don't think we described the main house you lived in. We described the one you rented, but can you just describe the house?

The house that we ended up, we settled in, was an end of a terrace, it was a two-bedroomed, small two-bedroomed house with a box room, two bedrooms and a box room, two rooms at the bottom, the parlour or living-room and the best room in which people were buried, got married, or courted in, but it was the best room, never used, it's a complete waste of cubic space really. Oh the piano was there, when I had a piano. My mother insisted I should have a piano, my father bought a piano, grumbling, and he looked at me for a year waiting for me to somehow turn into a pianist, you know, and that never happened, so the thing was carted outside and a rather wonderful thing happened to the piano, my father chopped it up and put the big iron frame in the garden and grew sweet peas up it, up the strings, and then made this wonderful seat with the curved bit for the keys would be where his knees went, and he made two boxes for his tea and tobacco, and sat out every morning in the remains of that thing that might have turned me into a pianist.

So the grid of those strings must have been rather wonderful.

Yes, but he put them quite a way up the garden.

And when you say he looked at you waiting for you to turn into a pianist, did he offer you a piano lesson?

Oh no, that's not...no no he didn't understand the relationship between knowledge and its acquisition and, you know, the raw material, I mean that was the thing. I mean, I had won a scholarship and went to a local grammar school, you had homework to do, and my parents, poor dears, didn't realise that homework meant a quiet room, turn the radio off and so on, you have to sit there and somehow generate this homework. And my mother would clip my ear and say, `Have you done your homework?' and I would kind of lie and say, `Yes,' you know. But the idea that you had a quiet place in the house wasn't on. So that's why after getting married and having children I was very insistent that the girls always had, my daughters always had a room each to disappear into, under whatever duress and whatever might be going on in the family, and indeed Ruth and I should have a room to go into, you know. Very strong on privacy and space.

Did you know that you needed piano lessons?

No, I was, you know, I just felt like a piece of cheese really, I just felt like, you know, I had failed in some way.

Did your mother play at all?

No.

Right. And, did you have one of these bedrooms or the box room, or what did you have?

I had one of the bedrooms, yes.

Can you remember what it was like?

I can only remember it when I had grown up a bit, and was 16 or 17. I wanted to decorate it myself, which my parents conceded to because by this time I was teaching myself to paint, I had, you know, bought some oil paints and hardboard and stuff and got on with it, and I was beginning to be a bit peculiar and I was playing alto-saxophone and the clarinet, and decorated my room myself and proceeded to do charcoal murals all over the walls, which upset my parents, particularly my father who had wanted to, always saw it in terms, the house in terms of resale value. And then announced that I want to get rid of my bed and wanted to put up a hammock, which drove them completely round the bend.

And did you do it?

No, because my father wouldn't allow it because it meant driving heavy things into the wall to take it, but really they were getting a bit worried about me, and I'd read a lot of books by this time. And also I remember now I had a kind of a chest with a metal top on, and I remember the metal enamel top with chips in it, because by this time I also had a microscope, and had got some kind of lessons from a very interesting co-Scoutmaster in his sixties who showed me how to hide in trees, you know, and all sorts of things, and he showed me how to use a microscope and put things under a microscope, so I was getting quite into this. And I had this rather alchemic view of what the microscope was for, and at one point I thought that you could actually, if you weren't careful you would see God, you see. And I remember getting the mirror wrong, and I thought I could see into my eye and therefore would see into my brain, and wouldn't look into it for quite a while after that. But of course I did a kind of reverse and then got hold of a herring's head and dissected it and got the gill arches to move, and so I remember the blood all over the enamel and so on. And then I had boiled crickets down in spirits of salt to see if I could find the ultimate piece of cricket at the bottom. I mean pure alchemic behaviour, disgusting to you by the look on your face but there it was. A boy with curiosities, you know. I felt quite sick all the time I was doing this but I felt kind of driven to get to the nub of the thing, right? So, I remember that. I think I had a wardrobe. I don't remember much of the room apart from that.

What were these charcoal murals?

Oh usually of me and dragons and people being hung. I mean I was the usual kind of gory young boy, you know.

It doesn't sound usual at all. Can you explain it in any more detail?

No, not really.

You say it had you in it.

Yes, I would do self-portraits and...

As yourself, or in sort of...?

No, as myself.

Were you being hung yourself?

No.

No, you were always...

Other people were.

People you knew?

No.

Were there any women in them?

I don't recall. I think I did do women sometimes, yes.

And, tell me again what your first schooling was.

First schooling was...first schooling. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] The first schooling I can remember, I think I went to an infants', I went to an infant school. Yes I remember the infant school, and at 7 I went to a junior school, all very local, the infant school was very close to where I lived, a quarter of a mile, the junior school was half a mile, Burnt Oak School, and then to grammar school at 10½, I won the... I was put up a year because I was very bright at junior school, where I started to write poetry but the teacher didn't believe I had written it, but when I went to the grammar school things went to the bad, but at the junior school my best subjects were, curiously, mathematics and English, but mathematics I could do just like that.

English as in writing stories at that stage?

Yes, yes. But I remember that junior school with affection. It was a well-designed and airy Victorian school house. It had terrific pictures around the side, John Nash, Breughel, you know, enlightened. A wonderful woman called Miss Horseforth who I think was probably my best teacher ever, who took an interest in me. And I remember her saying, `Look at this word that Kenneth has used, "sombre",' which I thought, you know, and I've still got this big word in my, in front of me, sombre is brown, and it's varnished, you know, it's like that. And playing was good at that school and so on. The infant school was OK.

Hold on, what was playing, what was good?

Well, they played cricket and did races, and they had a very, I think it was run by a very enlightened person because they had a big garden that was trellised off that was part nature reserve, part, I just think about it, it was actually laid out very well. It was part nature reserve, part English country garden, cottage garden, and part vegetable plot, so obviously there were three, they were trying to show the kids three things. It had a little pond in it that I remember because an awful boy called Graham Block, who followed me to the grammar school, or we both went to the grammar school, who was a real nature boy, I mean he was just, he was just red in tooth and claw, he had bits of string around the pond on the end of which were the cadavers of various small furry animals that he had killed or purloined, and he used to be always pulling them out to see how far they had rotted down. A man of curiosity, I mean don't look upset, I mean it's the way it goes. But I enjoyed that place.

And when I asked you about playing, you sounded as though it was really the sports, the structured things. What about play [INAUDIBLE]?

Well no I wasn't...I wasn't too much of a sportsperson.

But what about just playground time?

Playground time, yes, I tended to get into fights a bit.

Do you remember what you were defending?

Oh my honour of course, but...no I don't remember too much, no. Oh it was...no, hang on, no I remember now that the junior school had a split playground, there were boys on one side, girls on the other, so there was a lot of action around the gap, you know, where...all of that, you know, of hanging about.

What did you think about girls at that stage?

Violently in love with some woman called, I forget her name now, but Christ! I was only 8, who I had managed to kiss in the, where you hung all your satchels and things up, you know, and then did a runner. But, I found them as I do, as I ever have, terrifying and profoundly interesting, you know. Equal and opposite reactions all over the place.

And did you know about sex by this stage?

Can't remember.

Do you remember finding out about it?

No, but what I can remember, and I told my daughters this, I remember, because it's something to do with generations. I remember looking at some family photographs, sepia tinted, I think they were family photographs, and these chaps in stiff suits and these women in black buttoned-up satins that went in and out, heaved and all the rest of it, and I suddenly looked at it and suddenly realised that they were as besexed as we were, and it was a great flip in my imagination to realise that the older generation, the other generations were so deranged, and I think I was not very old when I saw that.

And do you remember either parent ever saying anything to you?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Yes I do, but I think that I will respect my parents' privacy in this, because they told me about themselves, my mother did, and I am going to respect her privacy. I'll tell you what my father did, apart from tell me not to make so much noise masturbating, he came up and just said, `Keep it quiet' or something like that.

Is this the bed springs or were you doing something more interesting?

Yes, well I was just deranged at... No... [LAUGHING] [INAUDIBLE] listeners. He, quite a lot older he was a man of very few words, very very limited vocabulary, hardly ever spoke, just told me two stories about his courting days, which were polar.

Oh, you've mentioned this before.

Yes. And I found that very interesting that he had saved that up, but that was much later, much later. The infant school was interesting because, two things come to mind. One was that I had a very clear impression of why a person is built, so I must have been somewhere between, somewhere between 5 and 7, 5 and 10? 5 and 7. 3 and 5, infant school, infant school. I don't know the years that you... And I have this image after having some kind of lesson of a person being in outline, absolutely full of blood with bones floating around like `give a dog a bone', you know, that was the first image. And the second was, we were visited by some people from outside who were obviously proto-psychologists or educational theorists who showed me, or showed us all, a series of pictures, and I remember the first or one of the

pictures was of a man sitting in a deck-chair with a striped...have I told you this? I've told you this story, right, OK. So that's...it's been such a long time since we've done this.

Yes. And, by the way going back to your charcoal drawings and the figures on them, did you repeatedly draw the same images through your life or not?

No, no, no.

They were all different? Right. So that this sort of outline figure that you saw...

I was a compulsive drawer and a compulsive reader at that time.

Right, but it wasn't repetitive in terms of image?

No. Well, I don't know, it might have been, I can't remember.

Right. And were you part of gangs at school, were you part of groups?

I veered between being very isolate and moving in on a gang and quite often taking control of it, and misbehaving.

In what way?

Well, like bully people, that's what you took control of a gang for at that age. I became senior sixer at the Cubs before I got thrown out.

You were in the Cubs?

Oh yes. I became senior sixer, and then I joined the Scouts, was thrown out of the Scouts quite quickly for misbehaviour.

What did you do?

I can't remember, I just arsed around.

Was there any homosexuality in the school?

Which school?

Any of them.

In the grammar school, loads. It was a public, an ex-public school, or a grammar school with public school pretensions, and there was quite a lot of developed homo... I mean I would make the distinction between sexual fooling around between boys or between girls, which is experimental crushes and so on, and developed homosexuality, in other words people who are clearly going to be that way for a long time, rightly or wrongly, you know, I mean it's...it wasn't a debate in those days. There was a lot of, the second, in the grammar school that I was at. I wasn't involved in that anyway.

Did you ever have a crush on anybody?

I had crushes on girls, I had crushes on a couple of boys.

And what were they like, the people you had crushes on?

Usually what I wasn't.

Which was what?

Well big, athletic. I mean I was very very short until I was 17. I don't know if they were crushes, they were friendships; I mean crushes sounds like a sexual attraction, and I don't think they were. I might be fooling myself but I don't think they were.

Did you have any desire to...

I think they were hero-worship things really; I mean I think it's best to say they were hero...more accurate to say they were hero-worship things.

And did you have any desire to comfort them? Was it a protective thing in any way?

No, not that I recall. I mean I might have done but I don't recall that as an emotion.

And did you have other heroes? I mean were there sportsmen who were heroes or film stars or anybody like that?

Don't recall them. I think I'm a fairly hero-less person. I mean I still have the same thing. If people say, `Who influenced you in your book art' or whatever, I really am at a loss. I can start to say Goya and Schubert, I mean, but it's hardly, it hardly matches up.

And were there any historical figures who were very important to you as you were growing up?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Should have been shouldn't there. Don't recall.

End of F4807 Side B

F4808 Side A

And when you were at the junior school and you knew you had the prospect of going to the grammar school, did it matter to you very much that you should succeed? Were you sort of working for it?

Well, I think that by this time, I mean one of the things, I don't know if it's come out in the earlier interview or...part of the business of running in a parallel[??] world wasn't just to be, about the business of being working class and so on, it was also, I had a couple of physical disabilities; I was very short, very very asthmatic, and I was absolutely covered in eczema and you know, half my hair was falling out and so on, and this caused a real, real problem for me, and it did not improve, and half-way through going to grammar school, going to grammar school about a year or six months before O'level time I actually went into hospital with chronic, absolutely chronic eczema, it couldn't be handled. So I...what was the question again?

When you were at junior school whether it mattered to you to get into the grammar.

Oh right, so, I was already feeling, and already there was terrific tension in me about feeling separate physically and mentally from whatever I was around. I was already beginning to feel a terrible thing about the differences between where my interests were and what I was and my family background, which produced huge reservoirs of guilt. I mean somebody once wrote in one of the reviews in the Sunday paper about I think Tony Harrison, the ever-present Leeds poet, that, he said, `I really don't...as for so-and-so poem, I really don't understand what happens to a working-class guy and the guilt when he starts to write poetry.' Well, what that person didn't understand is that to become a poet or to become a certain thing, unless you do some fairly efficient truncating and editing of your talent you very often have to say goodbye to the place you came from, and this is really very difficult in yourself. At this age I didn't know this, I just felt the tensions. And you become a snob of a certain kind, you become an unattractive person to those people around you, and you become an unattractive person to yourself, very very rapidly. Now when it became possible that I was going to pass the scholarship and go to the grammar school I had extremely mixed emotions, and the business of succeeding didn't come into it, the question of succeeding; the question was, who was I and where was I going to. My mother was overjoyed that I had passed the scholarship but didn't understand what was necessary to become some kind of scholar, and I felt that I was leaving from whence I had come, and in fact I was. And I was also feeling bad because at that time the passing or the failing of a scholarship was a grim reaper, it was a scythe that cut right through every group of boys at that time. Tony Bateman, a good friend of mine, looked at me

when he heard and more or less said goodbye. He just looked at me and in his eyes was, `I'll be seeing you,' you know, `or not'. You lost your friends or you gained friends. It was a fairly traumatic thing to happen. So, I don't remember asking myself, will I succeed at grammar school? I mean there was no Nye Bevan's father leaning over and saying, `Get on with it boyo, read great books and become Prime Minister one day,' you know, that kind of thing, there was none of that.

But really before you knew, you know, you presumably did an exam.

Yes, I don't remember doing the exam but I expect it...

Were you under pressure to, before you took the exam was it...

I don't remember that at all, I don't remember any of that at all. I don't remember how it happened. I presume we sat, we sat the, you know, whatever it is, the 11-plus in that nice school, and I don't remember... To its credit I didn't feel any of that pressure, I can't remember any of that pressure.

And what did your father feel, do you know?

No idea. Probably pride, but not expressed.

And did it mean you had to have a uniform?

Yes. Oh that was...I mean...we received a list and my poor mother nearly burst, well she burst into tears, because the cost was colossal. I mean we were supposed to have a normal grey uniform with purple piping, and then we had, you had both short trousers and long trousers of course, and day shoes and house shoes and plimsolls, and then we had another uniform which was purple blazer and the cap, and then we were supposed to have cricket whites, and, you know, a string of things, shorts and so on, which, and football boots, and cricket pads and things. Well when you add it up it's a colossal amount of money, and of course there was one supplier in Sidcup who would grace you with all of this attention and [INAUDIBLE]. And I couldn't actually tell my mother all that we were supposed to have, so that was the first thing that went wrong at school - not the first thing, it was one of the things that went wrong. I got the cricket whites, my mother had bought me cricket whites, and I hated and despised and loathed cricket and still do, because cricket is different in the north of England than the south, it's a different game, it's a different mental set. But I was picked up for not having the grey uniform, and I said, `My mother can't afford it,' and I think it was one of these oaf prefects

who informed me that, `You had better get it Campbell or you'll get more trouble than you've got already'. So I went home and I dyed my cricket whites grey, turned up two days later with the grey, clearly dyed cricket whites, inefficient grey, you know. Got hauled up in front of the headmaster. So, yes, we were faced with a great deal of that.

So what happened with the headmaster at that point?

Oh well by that time I was already in trouble with the headmaster, and we had two kinds of detention; we had Saturday morning detention which, you were hauled up in front of the headmaster at the grand pow-pow, what is it, the assembly on Friday mornings. Everybody who was not part of the general congregation would come in after the congregation had sung their hymns and read and said the Lord's Prayer in one of four languages, which was one of the better things about the school, English, French and Latin, German, and the headmaster would then say, `Non-late boys, sit down'. Took me a couple of years to realise they were Jews and Catholics, they were non-late boys.

[BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE]

You were just talking about your headmaster and the grey trousers.

Oh yes, well, I'm digressing into what happened at assembly on Friday mornings. And then after dismissing the non-late boys, which were the non-believers in...Anglicans and...we were then judged - that's too loud for you is it? [BREAK IN RECORDING]

Would you like to have had a Jewish service before you came in as a late boy?

Me personally?

Well, and the others with you presumably.

I don't think we cared a jot about religion, so, and we didn't really know why we had non-late boys.

What had you been doing while the other people were having assembly?

Oh, well, the people, the non-late boys were sat down and the remainder were the people who were in trouble, and we were then tried by the headmaster in front of the whole congregation and awarded punishments. So by this time I had achieved a track record of every Saturday

morning detention you could have, and the two evening detentions which you could get every week, so I had a kind of a familiarity with the headmaster. And he later took to giving me a beating with a cricket bat once a term as a kind of bonus, he was trying to discourage me. A very brutal man.

Did he ask you why you were wearing these trousers?

Oh I don't remember how it went with these trousers, I mean that's... What I'm trying to say...

No I know that, but I still want the end of the story.

I don't remember about all this stuff because I was consistently and persistently in as much trouble as you could get.

But in other words, at no stage did anybody say, `This boy needs some extra money'?

[LAUGHS] No. No no. Christ! no. I mean this 19, you know, 52 or something, I mean this was a different world. Lucky to be at grammar school, and you ought to make sure you get it. And I wouldn't plead poverty to those people. I mean you know, I said my mother can't afford it, and from then on got stroppy.

And you never mentioned it to your mother again?

Don't remember. She had enough problems.

And so, presumably when you first went to the grammar school you went with sort of quite a lot of hope; you didn't go intending to be difficult?

No.

So what actually began to go wrong?

I keep coming back to it, but unfortunately you know me well enough to know that it's an actual fact, it was the class thing, it was a severe assault on my pride, and I didn't...I wasn't in the business of taking it lying down, but I also think I can cot[ph] that plea but I also think it wouldn't be honest to say it was altogether to do with that; I think it was also to do with number. I think that I was buoyed up this in the junior school by small classes, a lot of attention from teachers, and insofar as I was beginning to feel the difficulties of being

interesting in reading books and all of those things, another kind of life, I found it manageable at the junior school, and I found it utterly unmanageable at the grammar school, mostly by number; I mean I was suddenly in a school of 600, which was to me, I was lost.

It was a day school I presume.

Yes.

Was it all boys?

Yes. It had been a public school at some point in the past. I think I, you know, in a way for good or bad reasons I collapsed under the onslaught of what I... And I, you know, I was suddenly going to school with people who had been to prep school and had Latin and Greek when they were 5, and so on. I mean, other people could cope with that, they turned into Richard Hoggart's scholarship boys, you know, and as he said, you know, there was a certain amount of damage done to them but they managed to knuckle under that and get on with it. I didn't.

And how quickly did it go wrong?

Within weeks, I mean it was just almost immediate.

And it must have been desperately disappointing to you.

Yes, I was profoundly unhappy, I mean it was just awful, and it carried on until I was 18, 19.

Did you actually cry?

Yes.

Privately?

Privately. Got very aggressive at school. I could turn on playfulness, wit, I could be creatively difficult, I could be creatively entertaining, but underneath, underneath, a lot of the time I was, well most of the time I was extremely unhappy, a dreadful time. I felt myself slipping, not getting a grip of what was going on, not really being able to cope with my physical difficulties, and not being able to cope with the disparity between my home background and what I wanted to be, and my very failure in that place that I knew could have

made me what I would want to be, and that's just... And I empathise with people from other minorities or majorities in fact, because that word `minority' I think is misused, I empathise with other people in majorities who have those similar feelings. They step forward into what they think is sunlight and get burned, and they can't go back.

Did you confide in anybody?

No. I mean there wasn't anybody who I could have.

And what about the other boy, say, who had come from your school?

He actually kept away from me, because they were either doing better than you or it was a private grief, and, you know, it's a very very difficult thing to communicate.

And with the physical problems, were you teased? I mean how did they behave to you?

Don't remember being teased, just, it was a question of personal shame I think.

And, what do you remember of the other boys, do you remember any of the individuals?

I had different friendships with different boys. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Actually, I'm actually stumped to think of any particular pattern, you know, I just got on with people, and I got on with them.

And do you think your unhappiness there could have been avoided? I mean what would have made it not happen?

I think there was a...there was a Miss Jackson who taught Latin. I'll tell you the rapidity with which I got into trouble really. I think I was placed in the, there was A, B and C streams and I was placed in, I think in the B stream, not the A stream but at the top of the B stream, and within two terms I was at the bottom of the B stream, and within a year and a half I was in the C stream, and within two years I was at the bottom of the C stream, so it was fairly rapid. Now I mention that because in the B stream there was somebody who taught Latin, I started to do Latin, called Miss Jackson, and she had a certain empathy for the position I was in and tried to talk to me I think, you know, I think she could probably see what the problem was. But they were, well they tough times, they were just times when this kind of thing wasn't considered an important thing in a pupil's life. How one might have rectified it I...you would

have to start from, you know, from scratch, you would have to do different things at home, and do different things at school.

But presumably if the school had been more sympathetic you would have been helped enormously.

It would have been helpful, yes.

When this teacher tried to talk to you, did you respond to her, or not?

I think I was fairly dumbfounded to be quite honest with you.

And what about holiday times and weekends, what would you have been doing?

Well, my parents were really quite poor, even by the standards of those days. My mother had cardboard in her shoes to...and so on. My father was fairly consistently on strike being a docker, the bloody dockers according to the `Daily Express', and times were hard. My mother worked all the time, I worked, I worked all the time, I mean I did paper rounds, butcher's rounds, milk rounds and so on. I usually made my own money, and at one point my parents were that broke they borrowed money from me. So we didn't have holidays; we had one holiday I think on the Isle of Sheppey sometime in the late Fifties, or early Fifties.

Did that make an impression on you?

[LAUGHS] I thought it was hilarious. I mean it was...well, we took a chalet on the Isle of Sheppey, and my father really didn't understand about relaxing too much, or, you know, having a kind of a proper holiday; to him holiday was having a few drinks, or several drinks, getting on with his mates and working. So his first thing was to put us out on the beaches very early in the morning to pick cockles by the bucket, which he would then boil on the gas stove. I remember hearing them squeak and bubble. And even earlier in the morning he would drive us out into the fields to collect horse-mushrooms which he would fry up with loads of bacon. You know, to him this was what you did on, you know, this is a good idea, and it wasn't a bad idea, I mean it was good. And then we went, I remember us going down to a sort of a pub in the middle of fields, and there was a kind of a wooden bandstand and there was music on, records, and I was watching what was then adolescents and people in their twenties jitterbugging, which I thought was a whizz, you know. But it was all a very strange world, it's a way people would enjoy themselves in the cracks[??].

What were they wearing?

Don't remember.

Were you interested in fashion?

No, not at all, not till it became important.

Which was when do you think?

About 16, 17.

And so, in a normal summer holiday you would have done a milk round and a paper round, but would you have had a...?

Yes, and hung out, you know, gone to the park, read books as a matter of fact, gone cycling, did a lot of that. I kept very fit, did a lot of walking. I mean these rather bourgeois pursuits were the things that I picked up, you know. By this time I was friendly with an engineer's apprentice at Woolwich Arsenal as it was then, and he would come over and we would go out to the park and cycle and hang out, look for girls and so on. I must have told you the novel story.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

What is your novel story?

Alan Holmes[ph], this friend of mine who latterly became a tenor-saxophone player, backing Little Richard and so on, turned up on my front door on a lambent summer evening, poised on his racing bike with his sport bag stylistically hung, and his hair all styled up, and he said, `Where are you going this evening?' And I said, `Well, I'm going to the library.' And him thinking we would go over the park to look for girls said, `The library? Have you got a trade exam or something?' That being the reason to go to the library. I said, `No,' I said, `I'm going to get a novel.' He said, `A novel. A novel. That's about a load of people in a house with French windows, isn't it?' Which is not a bad definition of a novel I think. And at the time I was wrestling with Henry James. So I blushed and let it pass.

Very interesting. By the way, while we're at it, what do you think of Tony Harrison?

Not much. Too loose, the language is far too loose for me.

And during your time at this school, did you do well in anything?

The grammar school? Well art, but I think a lot of people retreat to art, it doesn't make them artists necessarily. But I did draw a lot. Such successes as I had were very spotty. I was curiously good at oral French, passed that, although my French exercise book had scarcely three lines in it. My, obviously - not obviously, but English was good, but precis was my skill in...I mean I looked forward to precis, just couldn't wait to do a precis of something, just loved it, could understand what it was all about, went for it. I had a natural feeling for the natural sciences and geography, which I find very interesting. Ruth thinks I would have made a geologist, but I just found that a very interesting subject because it combined many, many different disciplines, and it was kind of physical sociology too if you want to treat it like that. Gymnastics, boxing, later when I started to put on weight, or enough weight to hold the gloves up, and at the same time, just as I was leaving and beginning to get a bit more physical, rugby, I loved rugby, and was...I had an unfortunate incident otherwise I might have been in one of the teams.

What is this unfortunate incident?

I'm glad you asked. Well, I was obviously up for selection for scrum half because I was that kind of size, and the opposing pack were rolling all over our pack, I mean there was no chance of me to subdue...do you know the position of a scrum half in relationship to the pack? Oh he's the man who feeds the ball in and gets the ball out and passes it down the line to the guys to shine on the wing. But he has to be very nippy and doesn't have to be too heavy. And so the opposing pack was rolling over our pack all the time, and so I wasn't going to have a chance to shine, and obviously my task was to get to the opposing scrum half as quickly as possible to neutralise them as they say. And so, I had conceived of this plan to run up to the pack, being a gymnast [INAUDIBLE] round the pack, I would jump over the pack with a forward roll and in mid flight catch the opposing scrum half, which is what I did, and hurt him, and I made his nose bleed. And unfortunately the referee's whistle hadn't gone yet, I just got it into my mind, I just did it before any action took place, but it looked like a mad act and I was sent off the field and that was the end of my rugby.

So it was over-excitement one could say?

Over-excitement, yes.

And that, you were really penalised for that?

Well, I mean, they regarded you as a man who couldn't control himself, quite right too.

And do you feel that's gone on all your life, that you've done something quite forgivable and been labelled?

Forgivable and been labelled? No I think it was unforgivable to be honest.

So you don't forgive yourself?

Well I don't blame myself, but I can understand why it was the wrong thing to do, it was just too impetuous. I mean if I saw somebody do it in front of me I would say, `You've just done the wrong thing,' you know.

But when I asked you the things you did well at, it was quite a long list.

Well I said such things as I did well at were spotty. I mean didn't do...I didn't shine or get medals for them, I mean I didn't get A'levels for them. I mean, if I looked at the activities I was in at school, they were the things that I either did a bit better than the abysmal performance I had at the rest of them, or I enjoyed, or both.

And tell me a bit more about the art education there.

The what?

The art education.

The art education, run by a man called Symmons[ph], and along with music it was regarded as really the fag end of the school because they didn't really understand why you should have art or music. Remember the music was taught by a little round roly-poly Jewish man whose name I forget. Symmons[ph] was in league with the metalwork master who was a brute and hit you with a steal ruler, in whose class when he disappeared we made gunpowder, we drilled out a steal rod and made a gun; we fired it from a vice and buried the ball-bearing in the blackboard. One boy turned it down to avoid doing that and fired it through his foot. It was hayhem, it was then St. Trinian's, I mean we had a ball there, but it was very physical, and when this guy came in he would beat people up, I mean it was very rough. He got on

with Symmons[ph]; Symmons[ph] was fairly brutal too but he did encourage you to draw, and I drew consistently.

Can you remember what?

No.

And were you actually taught, or you were just allowed to follow your nose?

No I think you were pretty much allowed to get on with it, but he did have things to say.

And did you accept what he said?

No, it was...I didn't consider art as a thing to do then, I mean I think it was a haven from everything else that was going wrong, but, I turned to it when I left school and started to teach myself to paint as an apprentice. Symmons[ph] was, well, I shouldn't use his name really because, he was one of these people who didn't actually encourage you to do anything. I mean he, there was a chance of me going to Sidcup Arts School, I'm rather glad I didn't, I think I needed a life before I actually came into the arts actually, I think I would have gone completely out of control otherwise. But he wasn't...he wasn't that much of a tutor, you know.

And was there any art history?

Oh no.

Were you aware of it at all?

No.

So when you went to the library you never were taking out art books or looking at art books?

No, no.

And did you ever...?

Sorry.

Did you ever go and look at any paintings or drawings?

Oh yes, I mean, I can't remember when I did this but the first, well the first paintings that burn themselves into my mind were the ones of the junior school, and it's very very...it was very much of its time but it was both modern and ancient, and it was a well chosen bunch of paintings. I remember looking at them a lot.

Can you remember which actual paintings they were?

There was a cornfield by... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] There were two...what a clever[??] selection. One was the picture of a cornfield by Brueghel, the harvest, and then there was another cornfield by one of the modern English painters, two brothers and I can't remember their names. I mentioned his name earlier on the tape.

Nash?

Nash, yes. Either Paul or John Nash, and it was a wonderful, it was very much my imagination of, you know, a painting about a specific subject, or moral focus. It was a cornfield coming down from the background, sloping down to your feet, and you knew, I knew, that I was standing on the edge of a copse at about 7 o'clock on a summer's night waiting for shadows to fall, [INAUDIBLE] do it, and I thought that was wonderful. By this time I was walking in the country, so it was a piece of, it was a call of the real world, and it impressed me very much. And the Brueghel of course was a subject of human behaviour and ideals or the lack of, or whatever, it's a discursive picture; this Nash picture was the way the world is when no one's looking, which is what I found interesting.

Did you ever have as part of your, probably English, exams, to write about an image, did you ever have to do that?

Can't remember that. May well have done but I can't remember it. But the other painting that burnt itself into my mind was, at some point I got up to London to the National Gallery and the Piero della Francesca, the `Nativity' which I think is a great object.

Can you enlarge on that?

Well it's a great object in the sense that half of it isn't there, it's like a very beautiful ruin; half of what's great is the architecture, but the symmetry is gone, and what's remained is an artifact, and in the passage of time those two things cross and I think that makes something very powerful. But there is a beautiful design to the picture, and there are those four angels,

or is it three angels, with their mouths at different attitudes, and I often wonder what they are singing. I think that they were singing either three notes or four notes that we are there to know but we can't pick out, or a phrase wrapped in Latin. But it's too deliberate, their mouths are all at slightly different apertures. I think something's being sung. Reminds me of a little piece in the middle of Mozart's K421 where the thing dances, if you know that piece. [HUMS TUNE] And I often think of those three angels singing that, something like it.

End of F4808 Side A

F4808 Side B

Have you any idea how old you would have been when you saw that?

No. I think it might have been quite young, because I had by this time got the travelling habit, I actually roamed a lot. My mother didn't quite know how much quite often, but I would have gone, I could have gone to London at 12, 13, 14.

For people who wouldn't know where Sidcup is particularly, how long would it take?

South-east London.

But how long would it take to get up to London? It's a train journey isn't it.

Well, then it would be about thirty minutes on the train, forty minutes on the train.

And what was your feeling about the city? Because I suppose you had seen it always in a sense from childhood.

Yes. It wasn't...I didn't have any sense of it as a city; it was in pieces, like London is in pieces, but I didn't have a unified image of it I don't think.

And apart from the National Gallery, what were your bits of London?

Well it was the East End, because I would go there every weekend with my father. I don't remember where else I might have roamed. I really have got a rather patchy memory on this, so, there's no other bits coming up apart from the National Gallery.

And would you have gone to the National Gallery once, or you would have gone again and again?

Oh I would go, you know, go again and again I think.

And did you have any of your contemporaries who would have gone to the National Gallery?

No.

Did you tell anyone you had been to the National Gallery?

Don't recall.

And while you were at this school did you go to the homes of any of the other kids?

One or two. They tended to be posh, they tended to be large Edwardian houses or villas. Lovely houses with lots of rooms in, pianos and everything, you know.

And elegant mothers serving tea?

Oh elegant mothers, yes.

And how did you cope with it?

Got on with the mothers. But by and large, you know, I was torn. I mean I liked it and I mean...I mean they had books on the shelves. There were no books in my house. I remember hitchhiking for the first time when I worked in a refugee camp in Austria, sort of 22, and found myself staying at one of the officials at the embassy's place, because somebody of I had met the camp who knew this person, and I stayed in one of their rooms and found not only books on the shelves but when you opened the books they cracked, they hadn't been opened, which to me was both a miracle and an amazing thing, at that time somewhat enraging.

So, what age did you leave school?

16½.

And did you come out with any...?

No, hang on. It was 17½, something like that.

And what qualifications did you have?

I had six O'levels.

And what were they?

English language, English literature, English economic history, general science, geography and art.

Well that's not bad is it?

French O'level.

Oh that's not bad.

I was suppose not to get an A'level at all - O'level at all, according to the more waspish teachers. But I did this in two years, I got four out of eight the first year and two out of four. They had by this time regarded me as somewhat immature and they were right, but I was actually a year in advance because I was born in November, and because I was bright at junior school they put me in a year perhaps in advance, and perhaps that was kind of a technical mistake; I would have been better off being a year below I think.

And was there a wish on your part to stay longer at school?

No.

Was there any pressure from anybody to stay longer?

No.

And were you ever nearly expelled then, I mean how close did you get?

Yes, well, it didn't get that bad. I just, I was quite clever about how far I pushed it.

Did you ever do any acting or anything like that?

No, but a long time ago I was trying to organise through some students' work for Joan Littlewood to design tickets and posters and stuff, and she got me up in the gods and we were watching what was going on down on the stage, and I tried to talk about these posters, she refused to talk about it. She said, `You want to act, don't you? You want to be on the stage.' And I looked and thought, you're a powerful and quite sinister woman, and I said, `No, I don't.'

And you didn't?

No.

And did you learn any music at school?

No, but these were the times when a lot of people in the suburbs, this is pre rock'n'rock, mostly working-class boys were for some reason going out and spending all their money on saxophones; guitars were considered extremely out, but saxophones, trumpets, trombones, we were playing jazz in our front rooms to the distraction of the neighbours and the despair of the parents.

A sort of [INAUDIBLE]

Some of them went on to be professional, you know, friends of mine. So we were trying to teach ourselves music, boot-strapping operation again. I was terrible, absolutely dreadful.

What would you have been wearing by this stage?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Carefully, not quite winkle-pickers, you know, it's quite controlled. We would go down the Embassy Welling[ph] where there would be Ted Heath and Lita Rosa[ph] and all of that, and so there would be cautious boys like us, then there would be heavy Teds, then there would be the Gypsies off the sites round the Cray valley who worked on the fairgrounds and so on, and they were rough boys. I mean once the crowd parted and a guy with long drapes rushed towards me, his eyes bugging with terror, behind him was a Gypsy with a chopper in his hand, you know, definitely trying to cut him up, you know.

And what did you do?

Well I parted, I went with the company and parted, and allowed him to...allowed him to pass, you know. [LAUGHING]

And, so what year did you leave school?

It was '56, something like that, '56. So I was, no, 16½. I spent, I had two bites at the O'levels so, yes, I became an apprentice in 1956, so...

And how aware were you of the sort of build-up of things like CND?

I got to that quite quickly when I was...when did I get to that? When I left home, got to London, I was then 20 I think, and became a student at the London College of Printing, had the good fortune to be taught by H.C. Beck who is now being recognised, the man who designed the London Underground map. And I did day release as an apprentice to have English and, have my English corrected along with the other apprentices and learn trade theory, which was a good, a very good thing to do, stood me in good stead later on, and he helped me to get to the London College of Printing as a student.

Right, I've pushed us on too far then. So, when you left school, did anybody such as teachers or your parents talk to you about what the next stage would be?

Well, everybody had a go, but it was fairly desultory. I can't remember having any heart-to-heart talks with anybody, or nifty analyses of what I am or what I was capable of. One suggestion was that I should go to Sidcup Art School.

Who suggested that?

I don't know, I can't remember. I don't think it was Symmons[ph] the art teacher. I think this would have been a mistake, because I was too, having taught a lot now in art schools for about thirty years I think I certainly shouldn't have gone to art school at that stage. I would have been encouraged in all my worst aspects. Curiously I had too little confidence to go to art school; I think you actually need to be solid and achieving funnily enough. And somebody suggested that I should become a reporter on the local, which was smart because precis was my strong suit. Now I had two reasons for saying no. I had a reason for saying no to both of them, and I don't know how honest they are. I didn't go to the `Kentish Messenger' or whatever because I was covered in eczema and I thought, well how the hell could I be a reporter looking like this? But I also think I lacked social confidence. And I didn't like the idea of going to art school because I felt the pressure of my parents and, you know, it's another three years, how could you earn a living and so on. Now I in fact did go to design school latterly, but I made that my own business; by the time I had got to do that I did it in a way that didn't take any money out of my parents' pocket and I did it on a grant. I mean I didn't know you could get grants, you know, and I thought if people went to further education it's because they had money. I found out by accident you could get grants, and I did it by a county grant and working all hours to pool the money together. So by and large I didn't take money off my parents. But if I had gone to art school from, or to university from...I mean I didn't even think of going to university, that just, my academic record wouldn't allow it and I wouldn't have done it anyway because I thought, at that time sociologically I think it wasn't

something that I would have thought I would do. So they were the two, those were the two things that were suggested, art school and...

What did you think, what did you want?

I didn't have a clue, and that's why I succumbed to... I mean at the time I used to tell the story, and it's true, that what I did was to go to Sidcup Station and watch people getting on and off the train, and watch them, with bowler hats and suits and briefcases and thought, I don't want to be like that, and they don't look very happy. So I decided whatever that was, I wasn't going to do that, but still didn't have a positive idea what it should be, and therefore conceded to my parents who through family connections had somebody in Fleet Street who would see me all right in the print. So if I passed the apprenticeship I would then become a printer, and therefore part of that totally corrupt trade union thing of being on the print in Fleet Street and earn absolutely piles of money.

This is through Aunt Em, is it?

Yes, that's it, that's my Aunt Em.

Do you did do that, did you?

Well I did do three years of the apprenticeship, but within a week I knew it was a total mistake but I couldn't get out of the apprenticeship.

So what happened, where did you go and what was it like?

Well I went to George Reynolds, high-class printers in Stepney Green.

Do you remember being interviewed?

The building is still there. No I don't remember being interviewed. It was run by two covey silvery dudes, Jewish, one who was - this is on tape, won't mention names. One was a homosexual and the other was the brother. They were both very intelligent, cultured men, really nice people both of them actually. One had I think a bit of an on-going pick of the apprentice boys, but not me, and he was an urbane, both of them were very urbane people. I just hated the business of working in a workshop with the people I had to work with.

Can you describe what it was like, the environment?

Well, it was grey, it was grey because it was dusty, it was grey because it had lead dust everywhere, lead dust is poisonous. My job, one of my jobs in the morning was to bring, in the evening was to bring a bucket that people washed their hands in, which was covered in lead, the bucket, and was to bring a pint of milk to each man because the union had got the ruling that every man should drink a pint of milk to wash the lead out of his system. It was a dirty job, you picked up lead all day. I developed shoulders because I was picking up trays of lead type and running them for the men. It was built on a fairly tight caste system, it was a peculiar thing because it was, it had all of the old English caste vices. I prefer the word caste to class, because it's an interesting thing that the Europeans never really understood class in England, they thought it was to do with money; it's got nothing to do with money, it's to do with other things. In fact the people we got on most in the Empire were the Indians who understood caste from way back, they knew it and we knew it. So it was a peculiar mixture of that in the workshop, and also, but also ranking by worth, so there was a man who I was actually apprenticed to, because they saw that I was intelligent, who was the best printer in the place who had his own set-up of material things, wouldn't use other people's things to keep his bit pure. Had his own wage packet that nobody knew how much he earned, but he was just incredible to watch.

Why?

He moved slowly, and he produced things five times faster than anybody else; never rushed. He sat and thought, he would look at something for hours working out what he was going to do, while everybody else was rushing. He was a supreme technician, he was a craftsman.

But can you actually describe what people were doing?

Well, what you would do is, you would be, if you were doing the job yourself and not assisting you would have a layout, a plan, a visualisation of what you had to do depending on whether it was graphic or it was, if it was typographic.

This is a newspaper page, or what?

No, it was mixed, it was all sorts of things, advertisements, books, we did a lot of stuff for favours I think. I remember the rather beautiful Perpetua italic that one was always setting, designed by Eric Gill.

Did you know that at the time?

I learnt it quite quickly.

From the people there, or...?

Yes. And from trade school. That education was solid, I mean that trade school actually, I look back on it... Do you know Cathy, I actually gave lectures to students for fifteen to twenty years after that about print technology which not one member of any of the art and design schools were capable of doing, and I could do it with adaptations, with you know, revised knowledge. It was essentially what I got at day release and night school in the early Sixties, and the students found it extremely useful. So it was a very good, it was good... Actually I got that from, I also did night school, I did, as well as the day release thing; at that time I was into self improvement so I did...

But, sorry, I interrupted you, you were describing actually what people were doing.

Ok, so you would have a visualisation or a plan depending on the nature of the thing you were going to do, and you would look at it and work out how it's going to be built literally, because you were making it out of lead type. You would set the type, you would arrange the type, you would pass leads and spaces through the type and furniture as it's called, sort of building blocks; you would build the whole thing up. If you look at something that's on a piece of, that's printed on a piece of paper, you have images and they are bits of type or whatever, and there's lots of white space. The white space is full of something, right, and what you were doing, you were not only building the image up but you were disposing it and putting in all of the furniture and constraining and building things that would actually dispose it that way and keep it that way for the press. It's quite a technical thing to do, skilled, it was a very skilled thing to do, requiring a certain amount of agility of mind, and some fairly simple arithmetic.

Who had come up with the plan that you were...?

Designers. Either in advertising agencies or publishing houses or newspapers or whatever.

So you were in a way translating those plans?

We were translating them, but I got to understand later in my apprenticeship, and certainly as a design student, and this got to be a political thing with me, was that once upon a time printers would do that. This kind of industrialisation and post-industrialisation thing had happened where people had got separated from the means of production - you remember all

these phrases don't you from pre-triumphalist[??] times - and had lost control of that production, and they had lost control of the most fruitful things that they could do. You still had places in Europe, Germany, Switzerland, and to a degree France, where printers had much more control over what they produced in the sense that they kind of designed it in the house, but by that time very few printers were designing and were taking control of things. To the credit of the people I worked for they very often asked me to design letter-headings and things because they could see I was a kind of a bright kid and had an artistic bent and so on.

But how did you begin to learn? I mean, tell me the stages you actually went through, both...well, at the moment, actually literally in the workshop.

You actually sat next to people and watched them do it, but the first thing that happened in the workshop was that, literally the first thing that happened to me was that no one spoke to me for three days, which at 16½ and you think you're bent on a career is an upsetting thing to happen. And the reason for this was that there was a union dispute as to whether they should have had another apprentice or not. There was a very strict ratio of apprentice to journeymen, and I, my presence was in dispute, so they were instructed not to talk to me until this was resolved. Now I didn't know that, so I just felt like I was a piece of crap really, I mean it was just a very bizarre way to start. The next thing that happened was, they did start to talk to me, which was kind of encouraging, and I was asked to, as I would start someone today if I were teaching it, I asked somebody to find out what's called the lay of the case, which is a case with lots of subdivisions in, to do with...rather like a typewriter, it's to do with the mechanics of where your hands go rather than the order of the alphabet, but it's where all the letters and punctuation, points and figures and spaces and so on are laid out. And I had to go through this case to find this out and clean it up, and it was very small type, thus testing my eyesight, making me understand that I was going to have to look at things that were that big or that small or smaller. And I spent two days doing this and on the second day putting the tray back at the end of the day I dropped the tray and it all fell all over the floor. And as I was just looking at it, somebody passed me and said, `Been a long day, hasn't it?' So I found myself facing this male-on-male, mano-a-mano wit which is savage and accurate and very creative. And I found myself rapidly getting into the thing about, if you work with somebody you get to know them in ways that you don't get to know them if you don't work with them, and it was a wild polar thing of physical understanding of things, the physical understanding of things, which many times doesn't need words, you read people out and you read things out. We're in a society that over-values words, I think, in many respects, it cuts off all sorts of other knowledge, and I'm not speaking as kind of a natural philosopher, I think we just miss it. And at the same time I was working with these people who remind me of Mrs Malaprop in a way,

that because they handled hundreds of thousands of words all of the time they thought they knew them. They were rather like actors who, since they play Lear think they're king, and they're quite often preposterous people playing Lear but they may do it very well. So a compositor may well set type very well, but he may well use words very very badly and sometimes hilariously, but sometimes he may use them well as well. So you get a very wild mix of verbalising in the shop, and it's also mixed up with insults, curses, and mental tortures.

Is there a particular code that they talk in, is there a language?

No. No.

And how many people were there in this workshop?

There was about ten, twelve.

Right. And who did you actually sit by, this terribly clever man?

Well you don't... Yes I had a stand where I stood, it was quite close to Stan, this man who was the best in the shop. He got disgusted with me because I was very scruffy, I didn't keep a clean place at all. I mean I now keep a very clean shop, I've got a shop like a dentist, I mean it's really, people look at it and when it used to be downstairs...but I mean I was actually very disorganised, a hopeless mess.

Was it light?

It should have been, but there was an awful lot of grey and dust. Very Dickensian.

And had it been built as a print workshop?

No.

What was it originally?

I think it was just a small factory, a factory building.

So can you tell me a little bit more about the other men there?

Stan, very bright, very funny, very very skilled. After I had known him for some time I said, `If you hadn't been a printer, what would have liked to have been Stan?' Because I actually did, not hero-worship him but I saw what he could do, I mean he was impressive. It's like if you're, whatever you are, a writer or a motor mechanic or something, you see the good work and you, you know, your jaw drops and you think, Christ! you know, that person is the business. And he sort of sat and looked at me, he said, `Well,' he said, `I would have liked to have kept a small shop.' I thought, right, right, there we go.

How old was he?

Was he? I should think he was probably late forties, fifty, fifties.

And did you know about his private life, did you know about his family?

No, not at all, no, no, no.

And what about some of the others then?

Oh there was a bloke called Fred who I don't remember too much of, who was a...they were all very Dickensian now when you look back, he was a kind of weedling, snivelling person with a kind of a bit of a stoop. He'd been in the Army, as he kept telling you, and, `Never saw such goings on in Vienna and the way those ruskies[??], the fings they did round the camp-fires, it was just unbelievable, you know,' saliva dribbling down... I didn't really rate him too much. There was Tub Wilson, who was a lovely man. He was the reader. Tall, boney, bald head, Viking, beaky nose, thin lips, very physical, looked like a kind of an aged athlete, or a Roman wrestler. One of those men who drove motorbikes, motorcycle combinations all his life, because the missis could sit in it, and they could go for holidays, and they could go over to Scotland, which working-class men didn't do except people who had motorcycle combinations. And in those days motorcycles were cheap, they're not like they are now, the price of a small saloon. Independent, probably I would have thought a non-comformist Christian of some kind, but never thought of it in those terms in those days but looking back I would say he was probably a non-conformist. Probably read. He read, when I say he was the reader, he was the man who read all of the copy that got set. I mean you must know that nobody should read their own copy if you hand set it, you must always have someone because you don't spot your own mistakes and so on, and I would have thought that's actually a written copy sometimes. I liked him. He had to be tough because everybody thought that they had done the right thing and the apprentices liked to goad him, and he could be easily goaded. He had a Home Counties accent, he had a Hertfordshire accent, and he was in his

sixties, which was nice. There was Fred the foreman, Fred Horsecroft, who had thick bottly glasses, and shifted from one foot to another, went dee-dee, dee-dee, all day. He had a bumptious brother who turned up in the shop later who was kind of good-looking but had a monstrous quiff like that, what's the guy, Portillo, you know, kind of, bring me the head of Michael Portillo; well he had the same kind of quiff, and preposterous male attitudinising, and used to do something which was very Forties and Fifties, which was whistle like Bing Crosby, because he obviously fancied himself as Bing. I mean I just can't stand Bing Crosby because of these years that I had to put up with people who like Bing Crosby. And there's a kind of, a quite aggressive speculative whistling that the working classes have got, particularly if they're stone deaf, and I think they know it, would just go, [WHISTLING], and you will never find out what the tune is, you know, and that can drive you crazy. There were two, usually two or three apprentices, and what was called journeymen, which was, I used the word `journeymen' earlier in the wrong sense. A journeyman was, after being an apprentice you journeyed from one place to another to gain experience, and then after that you became, I don't know, a master or a proper printer. There was one rather foul journeyman there, there was his friend, whose name I won't mention, was a very good-looking homosexual who had a kind of relationship with one of the guys, and...

What was the attitude to that?

Horror. I mean the rest of the blokes just hated it, but they were protective...

Did they ever talk about it?

No they just expressed...they could, you know, you could see that they didn't think much of it. They were just disgusted, you know. But I mean not saying that they were right to be, but it...this person flaunted it a bit. [BREAK IN RECORDING] One person who was actually important was a wonderful creature called William O'Herlihy[ph].

<u>End of F4808 Side B</u>

F4809 Side B

You were just telling me about another person in the workshop.

Well another person whose name was in fact Liam O'Herlihy[ph], who was Irish, you wouldn't guess, and he was short, stocky, with a shock of violently red hair and that kind of tipped-up nose that you sometimes get in the Irish, you know, a slightly fawnish look. And he looked not unlike that actor, John...here we go again, can't remember his name, become famous recently on the news[??].

John Hurt?

Hurt, yes, John Hurt. But rather more...well he was more youthful, I got to know John Hurt through actor friends years later. But this Liam O'Herlahy[ph] was one of these people who moved through print and had obviously had some life experiences and he told me of this poet that he knew who was from Gloucestershire and so on, and it turned out to be the `Cider With Rosie' man, what's his name?

Laurie Lee.

Laurie Lee. I don't know where he met him, it must have been in one of the pubs in, you know, on the Laurie Lee circuit, you know. And it was Liam O'Herlahy[ph] I got on well with; I listened to him because he was a story-teller, and for once I shut up and I was listening to how he would tell stories, because, you know... And he could tell a story, he told us all about Ireland, and he let me know that you could become a design student, and he let me know that you could get grants, and that further education was supported by grants, and I didn't know that, I was then 18½.

How old was he?

How old was he? Oh I would have thought he was in his late twenties or early thirties, I would guess.

And did you know what his home life was? I mean did you know anything about any of them?

No, not at all. No, he was a bachelor, he was a tearaway.

And what was your opinion of Laurie Lee?

At that time? I had read, is it `Praise but not...' [INAUDIBLE]'.

`As I Walked Out One Morning', whatever it's called?

No, there's a wonderful poem, I think it's his best, it's about an early morning vision. Yes I'd read Laurie Lee by this time.

With pleasure, or not?

Oh yes. Good nature poems.

Did you meet him at this stage?

No.

Other characters?

People came and went. There was a bloke, and I forget his name, who was what's called the stone hand, who was essentially a retired printer who cleared up after everybody, who broke forms down and did things. I knew people in the machine shop, the various machine minders, one who had a kind of a military bearing, had a totally scatological mind, amusing but hard to bear. Old Sarah, who was a cleaner. Alfie Van Prague.

Hang on, what about old Sarah?

Well, she was just a very old woman in her seventies who was I think given a job because she was in the Jewish community and, you know, she would clean up and wash cups and so on. Alfie Van Prague did a similar thing, who played trumpet and had his own little band and literally had a visiting card that said he had played before all the crown heads of Europe, you know, Bar Mitzvahs, weddings and so on, you know, who was a very sweet man and offered to get...because I had played out a saxophone badly, he would get me a job in a band, you know, and just very up-front, take you as you... And as a lot of good Jews are, as Ruth points out, you know, they take you as they find you, you know; what they say, what you say they take on face evidence until it's proven otherwise, which I found refreshing. That's why I tend to get on with Scots and Jews, in England. There were other people dotted about. Big Wally in the bindery, big, crude, totally male chauvinist, but looked after his lady binders, you

know, like a clutch of, he was the cock on the dung heap who looked after the hens, knew all of them and their menstrual cycles and would be polite to them at the appropriate time of the month and so on, or so he said. Big, protective, terrifyingly strong man.

So the bindery was more or less the only place women were employed, really?

More or less the only place that women were employed, yes.

And how many women would have been there?

Five, six.

Do you remember any of them?

Yes, a very fruity woman in her late twenties who at that time I lusted for hopelessly, was married with a huge husband. An awfully ugly girl who lusted for me, hopelessly. There were lively times at Christmas, you know, people got drunk and...

Where, where did they...?

Well they got drunk in the pub next door.

Is that where everybody went all the time, or just at Christmas?

Oh well, at Christmas they did. The management went to the pub all the time and were pretty well pissed most of the time.

The management was just these two was it?

Well no there were two under-managers actually who actually made the thing run. The two brothers were the managing directors but the two, there were two other people in management who were desperately running around and trying to tell you what to do. There was always class, but it was always a problem, you know. There was kind of disrespect and respect.

Can you remember...?

Oh...sorry.

Can you remember about the under-managers, what they were like?

Yes, one had a slightly, what used to be called a slightly faggy kind of way of talking, public school but you know, slightly, a little bit like that. [TALKS IN EFFEMINATE WAY] And bustled about a lot. Biggish guy, blond; lacked, probably, had almost no authority whatever, personal authority, but had authority in his position, so he had a hard time telling people what to do. Both of them didn't seem to know what was going on most of the time. The other one was pretty well pissed most of the time but was more human, but he forgot everything, you know, it's...that's our view, our view of it. They were trying to...they were always fighting the unions and the union was always fighting them. There was another bloke called Stan, tall, lean, he looked like kind of a knife-thrower in a Samurai picture who looked very glum for a while and I said, `What's up Stan?' and he said, `Oh well, my younger sister got raped'. And then I said, `Oh,', you know, I was full of kind of morality, I said, `are you going to tell the police?' He said, `No, we know who it is. We're going to catch up with him.' Didn't ask after that. There was a union thing there which was that, there was a big strike, a big printers' strike, and I was obliged to work because I was an apprentice, and I worked for about six weeks and got quite tired. I liked working you see, and I remember the, I was told to slow down when I first became, first there, and I got rather pissed off with it, so I wasn't anti-union but I, there was this thing of being taught how to skive, how to do things at a certain speed, and I'm afraid at that age I really found that anathema and I found it horrible, and I found I was kind of breaking my little fingers off as I did it, and I was right, you know, I mean it was just a rotten thing to teach a young person. So when this strike hit, I mean I was left-wing at the time and still am, but when the strike hit I had to work for a long time on my own or with the other apprentices, not with the other men. And one morning I didn't get up, and phoned in and said, `I'm not coming in today.' He said, `Why not?' Fred Horsecroft[??], the... I said, `I think I've worked very hard over the last six weeks and I deserve a couple of days off.' He put the phone down and got a letter reminding me of the terms of my apprenticeship.

What were the terms of your apprenticeship?

Well, that I was to do as I was bloody well told, you know, and if not I could go to...well the terms of the apprenticeship was either serve your master for five, six years, in fact it was seven but you know, I missed the National Service by a month so that would have been mixed up with it, and the only way out of the apprenticeship was through the Civil Service or the armed forces, right? Which is another story about how I got out of it, because I only did three years.

But when you went into it, did you go into it with hope or did you go into it with resignation, or what?

No, no, resignation. Very much with resignation.

And, I'm sorry, I'm probably being thick. I still haven't got really a sense of the building. I mean, were all these departments you've talked about on one floor? What was it like?

No, there were three buildings. There was the out-building which the printers, our compositors' shop was in; there was a small courtyard just nondescript concrete; and another cheaply-built factory, small factory building, where the machine shop and the bindery was; and at the other end of, at the end of that, one end of that, abutted to a very elegant Regency building which you can now still see on Stepney Green. Stepney Green's got some wonderful buildings on, like much of the East End, and the Regency building was the offices of the firm.

So it was all quite big.

Yes, it wasn't that big.

How many people in total do you think?

I don't know, fifty maybe.

Right. So in fact they were producing a bound book at the end, were they?

No they were producing all sorts of print work.

But completed?

Yes.

Right. And how did they drum up work, do you know?

No idea, except, I was thinking the other day, things got tough for them at one point. After they went into lithography, this was a lead press printing shop, relief printing shop, but at one point when things were tough a well-known purveyor of soft pornography, I forget his name but he was nationally well-known, got the firm to print some soft pornography, and the work force was very unhappy about this, thought it was a great diminution of their standing in life.

I mean I remember a lot of printers regard themselves as gentlemen, and at one point they are allowed to wear swords and wore wigs, you know.

What did they actually wear in these days?

Ordinary clothes, and to work in, the apprentices wore aprons.

Colour?

White, but going grey. And, you know, there was lots of stuff about where the pocket was, and you hung your straps around like an Italian waiter round your hips, you know, for the best effect, and the workmen themselves wore overalls, you know, coats.

Colour?

Tan and blue.

And what would be underneath them, suits, or...?

Well, casual clothes, you know, suits, casual clothes [INAUDIBLE].

And were they fairly scruffy, or not?

No they were usually fairly neat the compositors, yes. They regarded themselves as, you know, first of all they were craftsmen and secondly they were literate craftsmen so they regarded themselves as fairly up.

Respectable.

Yes, respectable, yes.

And, when they were working on these various things, did you ever all discuss the content of anything you were setting, or not?

I tried to, but they didn't really go for it. I just want to finish the story about the strike. The interesting thing was, when I was reminded of the terms of my apprenticeship and I came back to the print shop, the Reynolds brothers, who were the bosses, and I can't remember the managers, the two under-managers but the Reynolds brothers were kind of grinning all over

the place and said, `Hello.' I mean they were the ones who wrote the letter saying, `We remind you of the terms of your apprenticeship,' they were worldly men, understood where I was gone, you know. But you know, none of the men in the print shop would talk to me for a long time, because I had done something quite outrageous, I had broken a code just to come clean about the relationship of work, you know.

In other words you did what you were supposed to do.

No, in other words I did what I wanted to do, and worked during the strike which they expected me to do, but then said I'm not going to do any...I'm going to do it a slightly different way, I think I deserve a rest. They didn't understand what I thought I was up to, so I had some difficulty with them.

And if you had gone on, I mean after you had done your apprenticeship you then have to join the union, do you?

I was in the union anyway, but as an apprentice I wasn't bound by the union rules.

Right. Did you have to join the union, did you have a choice?

Yes I would have had to have joined the union.

And that union was what?

Can't remember. Oh, the...oh no no, what was it? I can't remember the name of it now.

And how did it actually sort of come...apart from when there was a strike when there's an obvious way in which it's coming into effect, how did it affect everyday working life otherwise?

What effect on everyday?

The union.

Well they controlled the relationship of the number of workers to apprentices, which I think is absolutely correct. They constantly argued about wages, or salaries or whatever, they called it wages. There were times when you worked overtime. I mean printing, rather like TV now, was, it was one of the most pressure activities, exhibition design, where there are longueurs

and then sudden ferocious activity and fierce deadlines, like journalism or whatever, and that causes great pressure at the front, and rather like with the newspapers, people bought them out, you know, they paid heavily to get things done at great speed. Quite rightly, they should do, but it became a really tough and condensed battle, and some of the practices weren't that good. So overtime was constantly bargained for. We did a thing a couple of times called a rounder, which meant that you literally worked all night, you worked all day and then you worked all night, and you got paid increasingly more and more money for it, and I did that a couple of times, but nobody at the end of five hours of overtime was good for anything, I mean, you know, it was attrition, it was like the First World War, you know. Yes you might advance a yard in terms of work done, but you know, you would spend 10,000 lives doing it in work hours, you know, it was like that, those values.

What hours did you work normally?

I'd have to get up...oh 8 o'clock till 5.

In the workshop?

Yes. So I had to be at work by 8 o'clock.

And you were living in Sidcup?

Yes. So I would be up at 6 and I would get on a train with all these people smoking Old Holborn and coughing their lungs up, and, I was a commuter for those three years and I thought, if I get out of this I'm never going to be a commuter again.

Where did trains come into from Sidcup?

Well I would get the Suburban Line from Sidcup to New Cross, which would be on the way to London Bridge and Waterloo, get off at New Cross and get the East London Line up to Whitechapel, which is why we're living here because Ruth works at New Cross, so I remembered that East London Line, so it's another return.

And, can you remember the development? I mean between the very early work you were given to learn as you've been describing it, how did you gradually attain that skill?

The fact is you attain that skill quite quickly. You were really taught after three years, but the extra years in all apprenticeships, since apprenticeships have been designed, they're

Mediaeval and before, were there for two reasons. One is to give something back to the employer, so the employer got good work out of you, which I think is fair; your wages started off very small, I think my first wage was 35 shillings a week, you know, old shillings, and slowly went up, and from 35 shillings you had to buy your tools, which I think, I've still got those tools.

What are those tools?

Well, type-stick, you know, and type ruler and tweezers and things, various, not many things.

Where did you buy them from?

You bought them from a trade house. I forgot, what were we talking about?

How you gradually acquired that skill.

Yes, well, the employer had sort of extra time off you, which I think was fair, but although you had learnt probably most of what you had to learn by mid-way through or two-thirds of the way through your apprenticeship, you needed more time for simple practice, you know, to consolidate the skill.

When you say you had learnt most of what you had to learn, I mean what did you have to learn, how did you learn?

Well, you had to learn to read copy, I had to learn how to set type, I had to learn how to read instructions on what they wanted, the type setting, how wide it should be, how deep it should be, how it should be disposed around a page or a particular area, how to mix it with different illustrations, with different blocks it would give illustrations, how to align the blocks if there were four colour blocks, so that they would all print on top of each other and give the desired four-colour result. If necessary I should have enough typographic understanding to interpret that letter, that layout, particularly when it didn't work, because they didn't do it right, or if given the opportunity I would be able to do it myself.

And did you take to these disciplines quite well?

Yes.

It came naturally to you?

Yes, yes, very quickly.

And did you have some degree...?

I was a scruffy, I mean I was badly organised, but...

You mean in the terms of what was around your work, but the...

[INAUDIBLE] I keep a crappy [INAUDIBLE]...yes, I keep a bad kitchen, you know.

But the work itself would be...?

The work, I think I was quite good at it, yes.

And did you have any disasters? I mean did you learn through mistakes?

Yes.

And what kind of things would those be?

Well, the blocks would all fall out, you know, if you didn't lock it up properly in the frame, and it's about an inch deep, roughly an inch deep of lead type, some of them are extremely small, by the tens of thousands, and you would lock it up or constrain it within a metal frame. If you lifted that up and you had locked it up wrong it would all fall out, and that would be a pain in the trousers, wouldn't it. So you had to do that. There's a certain amount of exactitude about what you were doing in calculation, and physical understanding of what was going on.

Which you liked?

Which I liked, yes. And still do.

Did you positively like the type, or did you hate it sometimes?

I liked the type except that when I had set the lot of it, sometimes at night I would see it coming up in ranks, you know, I would just see it, you know. There's a particularly sensuous quality about lead type; I mean it's very, we now know, chemically dangerous because it's got lead in it and so on, it's a mixture of lead anthony[??] and tin, but new type has got this

wonderful silky feel to it that's very very sensuous, and it has a dull sheen, you know, it's like a slightly cloudy mirror, and it has an oil in it which is there from the typesetting, and so it's very very wonderful to the touch, but cold, you know, would take up your body heat rapidly because it's a metal, and it's heavy, so, you know, ponderous stuff, rather nice to play with, and I got off on it somewhat, and I've still got type around which I can show you, probably seen it. I rather liked the physicality of it and the design of it and the ingenuity, it was profoundly ingenious stuff.

And did you at that point ever want to just design pages for the sake of it, or...?

No. I became a designer to get out of being an apprentice, and I rapidly got into, because I had been on the end of it, setting it, I rapidly got in as a - this is jumping ahead somewhat - as a student, into criticising the copy and the content of things. It would be crap, most of the time, and I didn't see why I should set it.

But ordinarily, when you were interpreting these plans, how much room was there for you to be creative in any way?

Well, I think you've got to be careful with the word creative, but I would say, how much room was there for me to alter what was being... I said earlier that, particularly if a guy got it wrong I would have to kind of get it right, or reinterpret it, but there is a different kind of creativity, as most scientists and engineers will tell you, which is that the result may be fixed but how you produce that result is a very creative thing, so you were thinking about, you would be thinking about the methodology and how you were going to go about this thing.

So did you have a great...?

So I enjoyed that. There's a lot of...sorry, there's a lot of, to achieve a fairly simple thing there were a number of ways of doing it, and I liked having the choice.

And did you invent some of them?

Yes.

Can you remember any?

No. [BREAK IN RECORDING] In many ways the roots of what I do on the bed of the letterpress machine now are rooted in just what I said. I learnt, very fortunately for me,

because it was against my education, and it was quite against my background, because my father was a physical man but wasn't a skilled man in the way that I am talking about. Dockers were skilled in ways that people don't understand, but in terms of manipulating material and thinking out logical ways of doing things like an engineer, which is what a printer does, was very fortunate to do this, I now realise, because I didn't fall in love but I got to like the business of physical manipulation and making logical choices. I'm lousy with a car, but that kind of thing I enjoy, so to gain a certain result that will turn up on a piece of paper, hidden underneath that in a scorpionic way there are a number of things in the strata of getting it done that aren't seen, that you can choose, and they will affect the result. And that's what I do in the books that I do, which is why I'm sitting here. It goes that far back I've just realised. It's a strong physical thing.

Reminds me slightly of you talking about the fact that you liked Latin.

Right. Did I say I liked Latin? Right.

At some stage in your career.

Yes, yes.

And the sense of working within a discipline.

Right. That also came up, you know, I was rapidly introduced to the Arts and Crafts Movement through day release school, I think that, I got all that...before I turned up as a design student you see I was already skilled as a typesetter and as a printer, and understood how printers put together this physical thing, and I had also already, through my own personal readings in libraries and the night school where I went to, and through the day release as an apprentice, was introduced to notions about the Arts and Crafts. In many ways I was culturally ahead of a lot of the people who I was students with when I turned up at the LCP.

But going back to being in the workshops, over those three years when you were being apprenticed, did you have a great sense of adding to your skills all the time?

No I can't remember that. I think I was very fed up. I knew I was getting good at what I was supposed to be getting good at, but I mean I was impatient to get out, and my first opportunity was being offered a place at the London College of Printing in something like October but told that I would have to wait till the following September, which I was very angry about, and then when I got to the LCP I would see Samantha and Rodney come in, you know, any time

through the year because their parents knew members of staff and I didn't hesitate in letting people know that I was rather peeved about that.

[May the 24th 1995.]

Did you celebrate over the VE Day weekend at all?

Not much. No I didn't at all, right.

Did you feel in sympathy with it?

I did, I can't stop... I think people have a right to celebrate that kind of thing. I remember celebrating at the time but I think there's been, so much has happened since I would prefer that people, I think the two-minute silence was adequate.

What do you remember of the original one?

I can remember a photograph of me looking at the camera, sitting at a long table with lots of other boys and girls and of the celebration.

A school thing or a family thing?

No it was a street thing. But I don't remember the occasion.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

When we were talking last time we talked in quite a lot of detail about the printers where you were apprenticed at Stepney Green, but I wasn't quite clear about the night classes and the day release you went on. Can you clarify that?

I can...well, there isn't much to it except that what comes to me over this period of time was that we were then in a culture which we're not in any more, which was vaguely left-wing, vaguely non-conformist, with ideas of self-improvement, being something coming out of the Dickensian era, coming out of the better sides of the trades unions and so on, and the idea of improving yourself was not an uncommon one. It was one of the things that made all of those boys pick up guitars and drum kits in the suburbs, working-class boys, the pre-Mick Jagger gang, and I was one of them. We were playing jazz, we listened to jazz; we couldn't face classical music for...perhaps partly because it was too sophisticated music, but I rather suspect

it was why lots of people ate curries, not only because they learnt, their fathers learnt to do it in the Indian Army, but because it was a classless thing to do. So going into a restaurant had its threats for certain people, and listening to classical music was to tip your hat at something other than just good European music. So playing jazz was an un-fraught thing.

Just being very pernickety for a minute, when you're talking about people eating curries, are you using that as an exact memory of that time? Because I thought people, that all happened about twenty years later.

Yes, that happened later, that happened later.

Right, OK. No I'm sorry, I wasn't sure how literally you meant.

So, you know, long-winded answer. But the business of improving yourself was all part of that thing, and while an apprentice I did day release, as an apprentice that was formally laid on, but also did evening classes in music, which I was hopeless at, incredibly boring English history, because I was trying to get, thinking of doing A'levels, and I just drifted off from that, just fell asleep against a wall radiator in November-December, and did print technology classes. It was something you did.

So what were you doing, and where were you doing whatever you did on day release? What did that add to your thing?

Day release was at Stamford Street, south-east, just south of London Bridge; it was part of the old London College of Printing, the trades part, and it did introduce me to H.C. Beck, who was teaching typography to day release apprentices. H.C. Beck was the man who designed the London Underground map, very brilliant man, not a designer trained, he was an engineer, and because he was an engineer and old even then he was fed to the day release boys like a Christian to the lions, because the design people didn't think that he knew anything about design, he wasn't even then fashionable. So it was a good thing. It was a gate for me, that day release thing.

Do you remember what he actually taught you, do you remember any details about him?

He made me understand, one of the things he said is, `What you do in the margins is as important as what you do in the square.' Now I don't think they were his exact words but I remember them absolutely. The hidden instructions and the way you think metaphorically in the margin is as important as what's in the square. He was the first person in education who

called me Ken; he was white-haired in his sixties, but I found that extraordinary. He encouraged me but didn't persuade me, didn't push me forward. I said, `Do you think I ought to become a designer?' He said, `I can't give you that advice,' but I'm fairly sure he supported my application.

Have you any idea what he might feel about your books if he could see them now?

I think he would give them a great deal of attention, yes.

Can you convey at all what he was like as a person insofar as you picked up on it?

He was a big, shambling, big-boned man. His rather elegant suit hung off him loosely. I would think he was big-boned but slightly shrivelled. He had an excessively jutting jaw, both at the chin and at the turn of the jaw, beetling eyebrows, sunken eyes, high cheek bones. A big Anglo-Slavic Germanic person, but a slightly haunted Celtic eye, and white hair flowing.

Long then?

Long, yes, for those days. I would guess he was a non-conformist of some kind in religion.

Do you think he felt ill-treated, do you think he felt he should have been better treated?

No, he showed a certain amount of wire because he was...he used to work for London Transport in the typography or design division, and I happen to know, I had a flat-mate who was a design student who came from there, and I know that when the London Transport map was redesigned and somebody else's name was put on it, H.C. Beck protested but probably in a rather gentlemanly way, and one day they noticed that he wasn't leaving exactly at 5 o'clock.....

End of F4809 Side A

F4809 Side B

One evening it was noted that he wasn't leaving exactly at 5 to 5 or 5 o'clock, he seemed to be fiddling about, and when they came in the next morning his desk was beautifully cleared and in absolutely perfect lettering, hand-lettering on a piece of pasteboard it said, `Herewith my resignation. H.C. Beck.' That's the story, and that shows a bit of class. So, if he felt, as the Jews say, broygus[ph] about things he nonetheless, he did the right gesture and with style and walked away whistling, and I wouldn't have thought that the people who had found him not worthy to teach proper design students were big enough to cause him too much loss of sleep.

Do you know if there were other pieces of work he had done that he was proud of?

No. When I was in contact with him he said, and this was 1958/9, that he was trying to invent quadrophonics...

What does that mean?

Well, it means that, stereophonic sound means the sound comes from left and right.

Oh, in music.

He was trying to put together something quadrophonic so that it would come from the four points of the compass. So he was an engineer, he was a thinking designer.

And did he talk to you at all about doing the Underground map?

No. I talked about myself, as always. No no, I'm being flip. No I don't ever recall doing that.

And did you have any idea...?

A good teacher doesn't talk about his work to people.

No, I thought he might actually have shown you the way it evolved in fact, as a teaching exercise.

No.

And did you have any idea what his life in private was like, what he enjoyed, what he...?

No.

No? OK. And, so you obviously enjoyed being taught by him.

Yes, it was a bit hectic because the rest of the class were throwing huge lumps of lead at him, or breaking wind noisily as young men do, or breaking up the furniture, or being boisterous, so it's hard to get teaching in, but we got it done somehow.

And who else taught you?

On those day release things at Stamford Street? There was a small worried little kind of, a small man who taught English, I can't remember his name, who found it interesting enough to argue with me, because I was a ferocious arguer and would set up an argument just for, you know, it was like opening the window really, and he was interested in me, but I'm afraid...Garland, I think his name was Garland, I'm not sure, I might be wrong there.

And you were being taught English so you would be able to deal with copy with understanding, or what?

Yes, but the proposition forged through many rows with the unions, between the unions, the employers and I think the Government was that apprentices should do one day a week where they do generally improving things. We had history, we had English, we had technical instruction and so on. A good idea, not the kind of thing that would happen nowadays.

And were you the only person who got anything from it do you think?

I've no idea, can't remember.

You didn't make any particular friends there or anything?

No.

Right. And was it a sort of boring dark building, or what was it like?

It was a boring dark building in my memory, but in fact I go past it even now, it's probably a rather elegant Queen Anne building inside that's been turned into something else. Yes I did make one or two friends; I didn't make friends but I associated with, I met one or two people

there. Just trying to think. No it wasn't at day release, it was when I got to the London College of Printing.

So you literally would go there one day a week?

Yes.

Right. And...

Regarded as a day off for most of the apprentices there, get drunk at lunchtime and, you know, trash the joint.

And did you go there for the whole three years?

Yes.

And so where did you go in the evenings?

As an apprentice?

Well, to do these evening classes. That was [INAUDIBLE].

The evening classes, the evening classes, a local institute, the kind of thing that in our wisdom we've gotten rid of, those either technical colleges or institutes of further education that used to lay on a network of evening classes for the whole community, that we don't do any more. It would be daft old ladies for the fifteenth year trying to get their first grade in musical education; there would be, you know, basket weaving; there would be serious studies and so on. I think it's a dreadful loss. I mean even the suburbs had this as a network.

So it was local to Sidcup?

Yes, local to Sidcup; I don't think it was in Sidcup, I think it was in Lewisham or somewhere like that.

And do you think you would have fallen asleep over the history if you hadn't been working all day, or was it...?

I think there was a lot of that, but you know, I've always been in total, I've been at the end of a day's work as an apprentice, it was quite often running around with huge trays of lead and you developed, you ate like a horse and you developed muscles, and at the end of a day you wanted to either have several pints of beer and/or eat something and fall asleep rather rapidly. And I mean I've been always in admiration of people like miners who could go down the mine, come up and then read Dostoyevsky and write essays and still manage to do something with themselves, it's just a colossal, a colossal effort required.

But it sounds as though you were doing a lot of evening classes.

No, I didn't do many, no. The music, English. I tried to re-establish, I tried to get back into proper education and tried to do A'levels, but I wasn't equipped to do it.

And the thinking behind that was, a) the pleasure of doing it, and b) an escape from this printing apprentice?

It was almost certainly an escape, there was no pleasure in it, which was a shame.

But would you do these different classes on one evening, or would you do them one at a time, year by year?

Oh no you do them, just different evenings.

Right. But, sorry, were you taking, i.e. were you doing evening classes several days a week, or...?

No, I don't know, I think that I might have been doing two evenings a week at most, and then as my English fell apart I might dry and do something else, you know, I'm not sure, something like that.

And again, anybody who taught you there of any significance?

No, only I remember the music master, me and Al Holmes, our interest was in jazz, we went to the music class, and the first evening we were...the class was supposed to, say, start at 6, and at 1 minute past 6 this creature came in, he didn't quite have a velveteen cloak but he had a white mane of hair, and he looked a bit like Edmund Wilson, but he came in, entrance from the left, didn't look at anybody in the class - this was the first night, right? - went straight across to the piano and went, choom! middle C. `What a marvellous sound. Good evening

ladies and gentlemen.' [LAUGHS] And I thought, oh my God! what a prawn! [LAUGHING] `And [INAUDIBLE] I ask you your names and your instrument.' And it was Edith Thripp, piano, piarno, and Edith and so-and-so, piarno and piano, maybe cello and so on. And then it was, `Al Holmes, tenor saxophone, alto and clarinet.' Oh, `Tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, clarinet and flute.' Very good musician in fact, self taught. And, `Ken Campbell, alto saxophone,' you know. And he visibly withered, poor man.

And the point was music theory, was it?

It was music theory and I think Al stood the course and I didn't, couldn't get a grasp of it. I was a bad learner.

I know you said that you had found out from somebody else that there were such things as grants, but how did the idea actually come into being that you would go to the London College of Printing?

I think I mentioned Liam O'Herlahy[ph] saying that there were such things as grants, and then I found out that there were people studying design for three years in another place, not at Stamford Street, in Back Hill, it's where the London College of Printing was then, and I put two and two together and thought you could therefore do that, and was still desperately unhappy about being an apprentice, and got the idea that way I suppose.

So what was the actual course you then went on to do?

Typographic design, that is graphic design with a typographic emphasis, so-called special level, but it was the NDD in those days and latterly it became the Dip. A.D. and then it became Degree over a period of time, which by and large hasn't been a particularly good thing.

And was it easy to make the transition from the apprenticeship to the course, or was that a fight?

It was an absolutely dreadful fight for me. First of all, to be apprenticed was that you were legally bound, you could not break an apprenticeship of seven years, six with, if you did National Service, which I missed by one month I'm rather glad to say, unless you joined the armed forces, the police or the Colonial Civil Service. So I thought that, I didn't see myself in the armed services and I don't think the armed services saw me in there either; I certainly wasn't going to join the police. So I was, my hand was trembling over the forms for the New

Zealand Civil Service, which... [LAUGHING] I was that desperate. But shrank back from the brink. But then, at one point found myself in a farcical situation. Everybody was really, wanted to do...I mean there was no villains in this. The London College of Printing were happy to give me a place, provided I could get my parents' permission, the breaking of my contract with the employers, and a grant; I could get a grant if, and you can imagine, it was sick, no one would sign anything. So I committed a crime and signed my father's name to get the ball rolling.

Had you actually established that he wouldn't, or did you think it wasn't even worth asking?

That was their position, but I knew it was my mother's position more than anything else. So, it had to be done.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

OK, you were just telling me about forging your father's signature.

Yes.

But it wasn't quite clear to me. Had you actually discussed it with your mother and father?

Yes I had.

And they wouldn't cooperate?

And they wanted the best for me, as indeed my employers did, this pair of Jewish brothers who ran the...they were very nice and understanding, and I think they knew that I was something different to the average apprentice. And the London College of Printing were happy to give me a place, but by the time we got things fixed I had to wait another year, which made me furious.

Because you had missed the entry date?

Yes. But then when I got to the London College of Printing I saw sons and daughters of lecturers and their friends coming in any time of the year, so...

And just before we leave it, if you had been apprenticed for seven years, would you have still gone on learning during that seven years, or had you effectively learnt what [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh yes, I had effectively learnt much of what... I mean what you then get is more skilled, because by virtue of practice you do pick up more things, but you've learnt the basic knowledge of the thing. And I got an out-county award which gave me £150 a year to live on, and to pay the in-county fee for the course I sold my saxophone, which was...which was a gain to music generally, I think.

Painful to do.

No, I knew I was no good.

But, sorry, you would have left after two years and you had to stay on the third or you...?

Yes.

Right, OK. So what year did you start at the London College of Printing?

I think it was '59, '60, '59.

Right. And you had at this stage left home?

I left home when I went, when I became a student, because I thought, I wasn't doing what my parents wanted me to do, and I was in any case a financial burden to them because I wasn't earning very much, I was earning 50 shillings a week, and I thought that if I was doing something that they didn't really understand, although they were willing to go along with it, it seemed to be unfair on them so I left home. But the other, the other truth was, I was just dying to get my hands on girls, and I figured that that was rather more likely in London than it was in Sidcup.

So where did you go to live?

Me and Dick Turpin, believe it or not, I was sharing with Dick Turpin, somebody called Dick Turpin, found a boarding house, an Indian boarding house in Camden Town run by a Mr, wasn't Patel, it's one of the, it was one of the rather royal names, Indian names, I can't remember. A man who is a lawyer, looked like kind of T.S. Eliot but darker, and his wife was a classical Indian dancer, and he had this huge house in Camden Road which kept dividing like a fertilised cell. You would go in a flat and found it divided into three rooms instead of five, and then you would go into a room and then it would be, come home one day

and a partition there and it would be divided into two. And it was Indians, West Indians, knockabout students like us. It was a good place to live, I enjoyed the time there, but it wasn't for very long.

How did you find it, do you remember?

We were hanging...yes, I remember, we were hanging around in a rainy drizzly October night, we were hanging around a notice-board in Camden Town, because we had been looking at other places, just looking at the notices for places to stay, and this very well-dressed Indian gentleman glided, glid up to us and said, `Are you looking for rooms?' And we thought, oh-oh, you know. And he said, `Come with me,' and he was...it was fine.

And who was Dick Turpin?

Dick Turpin used to work in the London College of...sorry, in the British Transport design office, and decided to better himself. A tall, skinny guy.

So how did you meet him?

He was in the class. We both...

Day release?

No, design student. We had started the course by this time.

Oh, right, sorry. And so what was life like living in that place?

Well, it was multi-racial. There was always a curry on somewhere. There was a West Indian girl, or lady, lived up above us, and there was always, her name was actually something like Sapphire, you know, and there was a West Indian guy on a bike on summer evenings who was circling all the time with a big broad-rimmed hat, looking up ardently at Sapphire's window, and then one evening there was another one doing the same thing, and then about three days later they realised they were up to the same thing, and a terrible fight ensued. She was thrown out by the landlord because she was bringing trouble to his house, so she broke all the windows and, you know, ground stuff into the carpet and stuff like that, but... It was a house without spleen; it was a very nice place to stay actually. It was our first experience out of home.

Did you and Dick have private rooms together, or was it a sort of communal house? How did it work?

We shared a room, we shared a room, which had its difficulties.

And where did you eat in the house?

Well, off of...well, as a matter of fact off of a large drawing board that was on the top of a tea chest, and the drawing board had on it piles of the most elegant gold and red decorated crockery, mostly plates, dinner plates. The reason for that was that we needed to learn money, and we always worked in the holidays, except for the summer holidays, and we got a job, we got one job working at Grosvenor House washing up at nights, so what we would do is, one of us would wash up at nights one week, and eat all night, and as a matter of fact drink all night, and take home a chicken salad, bean dry but reasonably nutritious, clutched between two plates for the other person. So the other person would be the honest student but impoverished, and eat the food the other one brought home for him, and then the next week we'd turn around. So we got this great pile of plates, and kind of switched eating habits and weight loss I would have guessed.

So that sort of makeshift table was in your room, you didn't eat communally with all the others?

No, no.

And, I mean did you all share a bathroom? How did it work?

Can't remember.

But there was a sense of the other people? I mean there was...

There was no sense of that being either a problem...I can't remember how it was done, I mean, you know, we must have had a toilet and I don't think it was in the room, you know, it must...

But I mean, you weren't making friendships with them that were really very meaningful?

No, we didn't... I mean everybody went about their business if they had any, but we, you know, there was no sense of difficulty in the house.

But nor anything terribly broadening?

No.

And did your parents ever come there?

No.

And what did you do about things like washing?

Can't remember.

You didn't take it home to your mum every Friday?

Now and again yes. Not every Friday, no, when I...I crept home two or three times, not very often, crept home when money was really hard.

And, did you manage to get your hands on any girls?

Yes.

Did you fall in love with anybody?

Yes.

Who?

Well at the time you can remember, can't you? [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well there was the usual kind of social activities as a student. I fell...there was a, I think the first big event was, one of the lecturers there asked me to help him design a mural in the country for the Dow Chemical Company, not helping design it, help him do it, he was going to design it. And the company had a company secretary with a big white Jaguar, and mink to match, the whole Mayfair bit, and I went for that like a rat up a drainpipe. And we had a very very passioned affair, and she was older than me and she thought we were going to get married and seems to be completely deranged behaviour, I didn't know where that was coming from.

Was that your first sexual experience?

More or less, yes.

And how did it end?

Badly.

And how long did it last?

A year, maybe.

And what did you feel about it?

Well, I was going through the gamut of emotions and from A to B, B½, you know. I mean I...how did I feel about it? At some points I felt very good about it, at some points I felt very bad about it, you know. Sometimes I felt in control and sometimes I didn't at all. I mean, I remember an evening where we were taken to...I mean she was...it was a life's lesson, I mean she had some very old-fashioned and some very modern habits. I mean the old-fashioned ones were driving and we would get out somewhere and there would be this colossal white Jag and I would get out and think, what the hell's she sitting in there for? She was waiting for me to open the door, you know. So that would be the start of all sorts of crap for the evening, you know. And I was excessively left-wing and she was excessively right-wing. And we would go, I remember her taking me to some very smart pub in Mayfair just near the American Embassy, and we were all standing there, and this is, you know, this is Rodney and this is so-and-so, and this very elegant dude in his fifties, very good suit, [INAUDIBLE] the suit, lent over and said to this woman, you know, `What are you having my dear?' you know. And I immediately realised that I should have...you know, and so on. So it was, you know, at all points it was an obstacle course.

And where did she live?

Hard to say. She moved around a lot. She proposed that she lived on some kind of very big, there was a family estate in, on the Kent-Surrey borders, and we drove past it but we never went in it. She, I think she moved...I also think she moved - I am not going to name this person, so, I think she also knew some of the criminal fraternity, Jack Spot and people like that. There was a kind of...well you remember all those kind of Sidney Taffler movies, you know, heard of Sidney Taffler? Oh right.

What are they?

Well, they're kind of B pictures, black and white pictures, English film industry trying to produce gangster movies based in Mayfair, and there was always a nightclub and women in white mink, and Sidney Taffler was an actor with a camel-hair coat and a cross-over tie belt and all of that.

So in other words you didn't go back to her house?

No.

Did you take her back to yours?

Oh yes.

What did she make of all that?

Well, actually I didn't take her back to where Dick was, I mean, by this time I was getting into my stride and I had got another place, in Mildmay Park, I'd got a kind of like basement flat. And I think the second night I was there this big white Jag drew up, and the next morning the landlady went absolutely apeshit as I came out to go, as a student, to go to college, the window-sill went up and she started to scream at me in this working-class way, to let the rest of the neighbours know, you know, that a big white Jag had... As far as she was concerned I had been visited by a tart, you know. And of course I had been dished by the son of the house, who thought, `Well I can't have that so I'll make sure no one else can,' kind of thing. So I was out in a matter of, I just thought, bugger this and just packed up and walked out.

It was a very alarming beginning really?

To what?

Your sexual life.

No. It was an alarming event in my social life.

Where was this neighbourhood, where you moved to [INAUDIBLE]?

Mildmay Park, it's just off Islington, between Islington and Hackney.

So having left there, where did you go?

I can't remember. I just legged it to somewhere or other.

But was there somewhere you went to live in the end that was fairly stable, I mean lasting?

I had a flat in Sutherland Avenue, which was a bloody good flat, shared it with a deranged jazz freak who would play Count Basie in the morning for breakfast, you know, with me with a hangover I couldn't...you know, it's hard to bear but the flat was good.

Whereabouts was that?

Sutherland Avenue in Maida Vale, a big elegant apartment block. And I enjoyed that flat; the guy was a bit of a pain but... I lived with the girlfriend who I thought I might stick with for some time. I don't know if I was doing...no I wasn't doing that as a student, that was later. In fact that guy I just described, that was later too. I can't remember where else I lived. One moved around.

But did you associate this period of your life with a bit of London at all? I mean what was your...?

Mostly with Clerkenwell and the lovely smell of tobacco, raw tobacco coming out of the tobacco factory that was by Leather Lane street market.

Because that's where the college was?

That's where the college was then in Back Hill.

So what as the building like that the college was in?

It was an old, it was an industrial building, not particularly old, that had been converted into studios and so on.

Right. Can you tell me in a fair amount of detail about what you learnt at the London College of Printing and who you were taught by?

Well, Harry Beck as an apprentice.

And you stayed in touch with him?

The course was three years long, and like all three-year courses had a very specific emotional pulse to it. The first year you were desperate to learn all sorts of things. The teaching was by and large indifferent and amateur, but it was based on the Anglo-Greek system of tutoring, in other words, those people who could get near the staff would get taught something, or learn something by discussion, and those who didn't, didn't. There was very little formal teaching except for technical things. And that's how the art schools carried on for a very long time until they got overtaken by Thatcher's children who turned it into something else, and those art schools that got done in had it coming to them, as far as I was concerned, because they were rank amateurs and half the time were indulgent, slip-shod and sometimes downright [INAUDIBLE], but what's taken its place is just as bad or a good deal worse, for a number of reasons. So in the second year, having realised that you haven't learnt much, or thinking you haven't learnt much in the first year, you, in a three-year course, tend to either go off the rails or go into depression, and then in the third year you realise you've got to do something so you get your crap together and pull yourself together and try to do something. And that emotional wave is pretty general to most three-year courses in English art and design, and I think probably to an awful lot of other three-year courses. It was not the beaux arts system as you find in America and Europe, based on kind of regular formal studies for better or worse; it was amateur and loose, and at its best it's very good, and it's produced some terrific people. But it's not democratic, there's no bottom line contract, which I think should be there, so if you're not pretty, male or female, or talented, or charming, all three of them being quite different things, you can get to the edge of the nest and be tipped over, and I don't like that, and I think you need a good combination of what goes on in America and what goes on in England. Having said that, the London College of Printing at that time, being a designer or wanting to be a graphic designer in those times was rather like, you know, don't put your daughter on the stage Mrs Worthington, it was one step up from going into the theatre. It wasn't regarded as a proper business at all. And so the people who taught it were a very weird bunch. A lot of them were ex-communists from Europe, a lot of people had escaped the Nazis, a lot of people were just miss-fits, and you met some very interesting people. I think the person who taught me anything at all was a man called Rolf Brandt, who was the brother of Bill Brandt, the photographer, a very sophisticated German with real good formal training, and he really tried very hard, and in six weeks he taught me an immense amount of, how to control visual spaces and so on. Are you having trouble with that?

<u>End of F4809 Side B</u>

F4810 Side A

So inevitably I want to know more about what he actually taught you, and how he taught it to you.

He... If you know something about the Bauhaus and all of those very severe exercises by Itten and people like that, he taught me that; how to look at the spaces as well as the solids, negative and positive, how to formally divide up space. He didn't teach you how to do it, he put it in front of you to do and he made you address the problem. And I can't remember too much of what he, how he did that, but I remember that it was one of those visual gates that opened.

And what...

You don't...you see you don't need many teachers I don't think; I think you need certain people who open a gate or two, and thereafter you generate it yourself.

But was that opening of the gate a sort of gradual process, or was it...?

No, it happened in six weeks.

And, I mean, looking back at it you can put it into that perspective and talk about the Bauhaus, but was that how you saw it at the time, did he tell you about the Bauhaus?

Yes. He was one of those teachers who makes you question very much some of the knockabout people who teach art history or related studies and so on. A good teacher of art and design has got all that in his or her head anyway and it should come with the work, and I think when it comes with the work it comes at the right time, and it comes in context, and it comes from the right person.

And...

So, sorry, I mean, having contextual studies or art history people is rather like having laws, it's...I can get on with laws if you accept them as an initial failure, they're a register of failure. If we have a law that says, I must not be rude to Cathy Courtney, then we admit there has been a failure of some kind, right? And it should be mitigated against, but only if you recognise it as a failure should a law exist, and as soon as that ceases to be necessary the law should be rescinded. Therefore with art history it's a recognition of the fact that the tutors

who are teaching art and design aren't teaching everything they should be, but unfortunately people who are laying on art history or related studies have naturally made an industry of it for their own failed purposes. And now of course they now claim the text as art, as the art.

What...

A case of the priests taking over the godhead somewhat.

What did the Bauhaus mean to you, can you remember though?

Oh I was fired up about it, I liked it all, because it was...I think I would now say I was seduced by the style, it's far more stylish and style-driven than people would say, and it[??] said, all of that cleanliness and pure form was as much style as anything else. But I think it's part of the modern art thing that it was a reinvestigation of pure form, or would be seen as that in the future. But it smacked of industrialisation and therefore of democracy. There was a great trap in that of course that a lot of that industrialisation was extremely Nazi and authoritarian, and some of the people who were the great Bauhaus people were really authoritarian to a degree and shouldn't have been tolerated. There was something about the modern movement which suggested that, it threw all the rules away and ignored the fact that the rules were there rather like in politics to allow people who can't think of the rules all the time to find ways of behaving, but a good anarchist knows that if you're going to re-invent the world every time you do something it takes an awful lot of hard work, and therefore re-inventing the world every time you do something, which is what modern art and modern architecture demanded, was a very elitist thing in a funny way, because not everybody had it in them to do that, that was the trick of it, that was the contradiction.

And would you have thought in those terms at the time?

I was beginning to think in those terms by the time I ended.

Did you know about things like what Lubetkin was building in Finsbury, the health centre and stuff like that?

Well funnily enough I...yes I did, and the reason I knew that was, I don't know why it happened, I got very...I more or less ignored graphic design as a thing to study, because there was structurally nothing to study because however way you twisted it, the question of style, unless you get into the technology and what you do with information. I was very interested in what you did with information because it led me into language, how to break it down, how to

re-invent it, and I already knew a lot about the technology. I mean I came there armed with an awful lot of stuff having been an apprentice. What I had got into was a very polar thing of doing Kurt Schwitters type things, doing political things, which I put in the same category because they were very Kurt Schwitterish things.

Had you seen his work, did you know it?

No, I just started to look at books and found him. Recently I found a Kurt Schwitters show in Paris which was absolutely fabulous, I hope it travels, it's a wonderful exhibition and you can see them in real, I mean they are fabulous things, and some of them are very small. And for some reason I got very very excited by architecture, but I've just realised why that was, which was that I had a girlfriend...I must get my dates right here. Latterly I met somebody who was an influence on me on matters architectural but that was about three years down the line, but why I got on to architecture I don't know. But I just used to go around looking at buildings.

So did you go and look at the health centre?

The what?

The Lubetkin health centre in Finsbury.

Yes, but I just...but I mean I just used to go round looking at buildings, that was my thing, I liked doing that.

So can you remember how you reacted to it, that particular one?

No.

Can you remember any of the buildings that you did react to?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No.

And did you read about it at all, or not?

I think I read a lot about it.

Right, OK. And this particular teacher who taught you about the Bauhaus, did he have any other importance to you, was there anything else that came from him that mattered?

I think what he taught me, it was an extension of what Harry Beck taught me, was that, I mean I wasn't going to get a visual result from the very formal things that he was getting me to do unless I behaved cleanly, and although, I mean I'm a naturally filthy person when working, I have conquered that over the years, and I mean some people are just made to do it, and I now, you know, people look at my work and say, `How did you do that?' and so on. Well it was a kind of, it's actually ploughing through filth that you get to that, and at that stage I couldn't touch anything without making extreme filth. And there was...it was obvious that this was, anything that didn't work called attention to the surface of the page, and it's the difference between collage and montage, that montage is smooth enough to supply an illusion through which you look, and collage brings your attention to the surface all of the time. So, if I was cutting up some piece of card or coloured paper or doing something, it had to be done very very beautifully. I don't think he told me that, I think it just, it was implicit. And it was part of that thing, I think there was that thing where you started to find out that everything that was worth doing was worth doing well, you know, there was a kind of heavy morality thing, and I was reading Ruskin a lot, and the Arts and Crafts Movement for its political, apparent political and, political drives, and its emphasis on craftsmanship I was sympathetic to, although I realised that it had its problems, because in fact William Morris ended up doing flaky things for flaky people with lots of money, so I kind of walked away from that after a bit. I came out actually thinking that what you have...the last thing I wanted to do was to be a nifty designer for art galleries, which was more or less what I was only good for, for my kind of design, because I hated advertising, and the kind of advertising work that we were given. I mean me and a friend made up a mock project which was a desire for something called `Fuck Dust, the mecca[??] lacquer that adds muster to your cluster'.

What did it look like?

It was a spray can. Well, it's a spray can, it was styled on... But we offered it up just to wind the guy up. So my idea was that you shouldn't be an elitist designer of gallery posters and catalogues, which of course is exactly what I wanted to do really, and that you should be able to go out to industry and design beautiful totally elitist bits of hard-line Bauhaus typography. I was doomed, you know, absolutely doomed.

So when you first started at the London College of Printing, did you feel quite astonished that you were given that freedom, that you had managed to get there? Because, it so easily might not have happened, mightn't it?

I can't remember feeling I had got all this freedom. I remember putting on weight very rapidly because I was used to eating four meals a day, and still staying at 10½ stone light-middleweight as it were, you know, because of the work I was doing, and I had to cut out food. And I remember wanting to do a day's work but I rapidly found the bohemian life not at all a bad thing.

What was the bohemian life, what were you doing?

Well, I mean you cover...you take...you know, it would be a close-run thing as who would be by 11, you or the staff. It would be a close-run thing as to who would be round to the pub, you or the staff. And it would be a close-run thing as to who got nearest the girls, you or the staff. And there would be parties, there would be political demonstrations, there would be going into Soho mostly. Well I had a tour, Friday evenings would be, the George IV near the LSE for the sharp wits, you know, like dice around the table bit, these guys were doing social psychology. And there would be several drunken taxi rides to various places and people would fall down shouting or, whatever would happen happened. And then there would be the Murphys at Cambridge Circus, upstairs, where the Irish drank. And then, Soho would open up like a night flower to you.

And which bit of the petal would you opt for?

Which what, sorry?

Which bit of the petal would you opt for?

[LAUGHS] Any[??] I could get hold of really, I mean it was just... No, that's a lousy and a cheap... The cat crawls in there sometimes and pees. I mean I was not a particularly efficient raver; there were people who...

But just, this is an area of great ambiguity we're getting into. Are we saying you're paying for sex?

No.

Well I think we ought to make it clear, because actually it sounds rather as though we are.

I don't know why you thought that, that I was saying that. No, not at all.

So what did you do in Soho?

Well you go drinking at the French[??], you know, the then Highlander. There was a coffee bar called the Partisan where Long John Baldry would be playing on the guitar and poncing cigarettes, acoustic guitar. There'd be various people. Mostly, it was a heavily political coffee bar, we would all be organising the next demonstration and so on.

What were you demonstrating about at that point?

Actually I put a lot of time into a thing called...I was loosely associated with an anarchist thing called Solidarity, and the South African thing which I saw as a particularly English crime, empire crime, and so put a lot into going on the street and distributing pamphlets around.

And who were your friends?

Well by the time one had been at college, about after two years I had gotten into a network of people who came out of the college, through an extraordinary man called Bob Springer who was known at the age of 14½ to argue Hugh Gaitskell to a standstill at Hampstead Town Hall as a wild young Trot or Leftie into people in Soho who are either anarchists or, you know, supposed left-wingers depending on the solidity of their convictions.

So given the sort of times we've talked about when you were growing up where you felt very much an outsider and pretty unhappy and in the wrong place, you must have suddenly felt all sorts of things were possible.

Well, that kind of person was still with me then and of course still is with me now, but I mean, those years that you described as being fairly unhappy, I was unhappy in a good deal of the time but there are other consolations. I mean I was very happy on my own sometimes when I was fantasizing, dreaming, drawing, reading, you know. I don't think I mentioned that in Sidcup we had a doctor called Dr Solomon - Abramson[ph], who was Jewish, looked like a kind of Oriental Sidney Greenstreet, big, bald, fleshly person, who had a surgery with books, beautifully turned wooden sculptures on...and I thought this place was wonderful. They had a daughter who was incredibly beautiful. Have I mentioned her?

Is this the house you went to stay in at one point?

No, no. Where he had a surgery. It was close to the house that we first stayed in.

I think we did talk about them but I don't...tell me why you're bringing them up now.

Because that was part of my imaginative life, and it's no...I don't know if it's an accident, I ended up marrying a Jewish doctor's daughter.

But I mean, we talked...

But I was there...there were consolations going into the country, you know, I mean I found the world a very beautiful and interesting place, but not happy with people.

But still you must have been...

And that carried on as a student, to a degree.

But it must have been better than you could have dared hope it was at this point really.

I don't remember feeling that. I do remember hitchhiking and being picked up by, in, I think it was somewhere in Surrey, after going out for a weekend walking, and I was picked up by a bloke in an open MG with, you know, he was like kind of Donald Huston but younger, you know, you don't perhaps remember him, cravat, you know, open green, racing green car and all of that, driving gloves. And he listened to me moan about life. `It's beautiful,' he said, `I don't know what the hell you're moaning about, you seem to be having a good life.' He's quite right, you know, but, it's not [INAUDIBLE]] chance to see it.

And when you went to the London College of Printing did you actually have to unlearn any of the things you had learnt as an apprentice?

That's a very good question, and it would be a very good thing if I had an answer to it. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No, I think I actually did, as they say, the right thing. I realised very early that I was technically ahead in terms of what, how the industry produces its actual material product, by a year or two, and in fact most of the people there weren't going to know what I knew by the time I left. So what I did, I threw myself into being visually very bohemian, doing strange things, strange to me.

Can you actually describe some of those things?

Well, I would do kind of pre-punk things with semi-collages, you know, finger smears, blowing up, using photographic images in the way that weren't being used. There were some of us doing, you know, Pop art and all of that, I mean we were actually doing the kind of Pop art before it...you know, it's like guys still...I mean things were going on all over the place, but we were doing Pop art things in our class before Pop art was coming, pouring out of the Royal College and so on. This friend of mine, Bob [INAUDIBLE], did a poster with, he just did a very exact visualisation of a snooker table with things going on on it, and nobody did anything like that in those days, I mean we'd do that kind of thing.

Can you remember anything of yours in detail?

Funnily enough I can't. Oh I did the college magazine `Typos', I was...I had worked on `Private Eye', I expect I've told you that. No? The college got rang up and they put me onto `Private Eye', they thought I was perhaps satirical, which was `Private Eye's' word for OK. Is he or she satirical? And they got me in the second year to do the college magazine, which was a sort of 48- 60-page thing, various articles, some interesting things in it, and I designed it, put it together.

What did it look like?

It was a bit peculiar. I designed it in a very odd way, I did it as an off-square, slightly tall and square, and I had this idea that you opened a double square, a square into...open a square thing up, it would be rather longer than it should be, so increased the depth of it mildly. I was into those kind of subtleties in those days. So, the square was slightly at, a very slightly tall square; if it was in 10½ inches wide, it would be 11 inches deep, say, and it just gave it a bit of extra rigour in the spine, and it had interesting effects. And I would offset things according to whether it was a left- or right-hand page. I was into some very very subtle stuff which the formalists actually didn't figure, they thought I was too dodgy. But I liked playing, doing funny things with formal things, which you can see sometimes in the books.

So did you feel anybody was really picking up on what you were doing at that point?

No, no.

That must have been very disappointing.

No, I was kind of used to it by that time. I mean, you know, it certainly didn't happen when I was being a proper designer. And I think that whole form of interest, at which I think I am

quite good, I would have served, at that time I thought serving the text was the thing to do, and in fact if I had to design anything by Cathy Courtney or anybody else I would immediately flip into that mode, serving the text is the thing to do. And I did a number of subtle things, and I've sometimes seen them recently and I don't think you can see the difference. But, you know, as somebody said, `Who sees, God sees,' you know, I mean there are reasons. But I mean, I have to tell you, I'll just finished this, on Monday finish this thing, why we are here on Wednesday evenings was because I anticipated doing the 60,000 pulls of the press, you know, till God knows when; I finished it on Monday, and I worked it out it was 66, minimum 66,000 turns of the press, and I thought, well, I've finished that, I drank some very good whisky Monday night and thought, well - on my own, Ruth was in Oxford - I thought, why aren't you out raving? Well, can't be bothered. And when I picked the phone up and told a couple of people over the phone, long expensive calls to America or wherever, I realised that it's rather like as though I had been shot down in an aircraft in Siberia and decided to walk home, even though that one might have done it another way, like, got on a train, and found myself after a very long time in the suburbs of the city, which turned out to be Birmingham, explaining to people that I had walked home from Siberia from a crashed plane, and I chose it, and they would say, `What is this guy talking about? Why is be boring us with this?' One. Two, I'm bored with it, and the satisfaction is entirely internal. So these things that I was doing that are very formal are inner mysteries for me, they are hermetic, they are part of the job, they are within the confines of the work as you set it down, and what other people feel about it or see in it is rather more secondary than perhaps it should be. But it does lead you into those funny hermetic things about craftsmanship and doing the thing that only another craftsman can see, which I think is part of the mysteries, and I think it's part of the mysterious connection between art and craftsmanship that's unfortunately not recognised.

And can you point to when you started to feel the way you feel now, when you got to the end of a work?

I think I always felt like that and it was just a matter of growing up and flexing my muscles. And I think the real turning point was - I must have said this to you before - was when my father died. I mean I celebrated him, and I did him a book, and it was a grieving for him, the poetry was about him, but he metaphorically was no longer saying, `You've got to do a proper job'. Right? But meanwhile I was picking up, I was doing all those other things. So I was armed but not...I hadn't been shown the enemy yet.

But do you think at the London College point, if people weren't picking up on what you were doing, were you picking up on what anyone else was doing, or wasn't anyone else doing anything that was comparable?

I think the only interesting people were two or three other design students, and we would spark off at each other, but we were doing quite different things which I think is quite healthy. And we were combined, we were united in a certain amount of political behaviour. I mean, Sharpeville happened when I was there, and by this time I had acquired the keys...I mean, doing photography in this course was rather like playing with computers or CD-ROM now, and it was very difficult to get to, so I got some keys made in Leather Lane, distributed them to two or three close friends, and we would go in lunchtime to do photography, our own photography, and I developed things on a...develop a soaked rag wrapped round a broom on a big piece of paper on the floor for instance, do very big things. And when Sharpeville happened I took the front page of the `Express', that infamous photograph, blew it up that big, did off six copies, and just went around and put them on every notice-board in the department. And was hauled up once again before the head of department, good man, good guy, who said, `This is politics'. I said, `No it's not, it's murder, and it's on the front of the "Daily Express". What's wrong with that?' So I was up to those kind of things.

And how did he react?

The wise guy took them down, but, he marked my card. And then latterly I formed a commune where, pre-Hornsey days of course, Hornsey happened in '68 but they're just style freaks up there. We got to form a commune inspired by me and Bob, we decided to eject all the staff and we would allow them to teach us one week in a month, and the rest of the time we were all going to have group therapy sessions, crits[??] and produce our own work technically, all based on technology and so. It lasted two weeks before the crap went down[??]. But the head of department was a wise man who let us get on with it, it was interesting.

Can you just explain, because we know for a fact that this is going to be heard by some Americans and there will also be some English who don't know. Can you just say precisely what happened at Hornsey, because you've made a reference which will mean...

No, well Hornsey was part of the '68 counter-culture, or Californian pleasure culture I tend to regard it as, where freedom was regarded as something that came off of a record sleeve in many ways. I'm being cynical. But they decided to have sit-ins and political protests in the way that everything was going on in those days. I mean a lot of people were doing that then. People forget that the Irish question is still referred to as 25 years of violence, an interesting...an interesting mistake, because what they are really talking about is the march on Berntollock[ph] Bridge in 1968 in Northern Ireland when the Irish Catholics were starting to

ask for that very thing that the Southern blacks were asking for, ordinary right[ph] people were asking for. And the interesting thing about that is that it's not 25 years, it's nearly 30 now, it's coming on for 30, but why do we keep saying 25 years? Because we actually want it to have only started in '68, that's the English, and in fact it started in 1926, 1916, 1940, and back to Elizabeth and so on. So we are ignoring our history by talking about 25 years. These gates come down; 1968, the world seemed to have been invented, re-invented in 1968. I mean I new people, if I was being political in 1958/59 I knew people who were silvery dudes who had been conscientious objectors, the Spanish Civil War, been doing things in the Twenties and Thirties, and it's as though these people along this [INAUDIBLE] never occurred, you know. So I'm kind of, I was a young bright thing in 1968 myself, but I have a very, a rather longer view and I distrust the '68 thing because I think it was when politics really did turn into a fashion. And it was a watershed when people found politics a long, hard haul and found it a distasteful one, and at that point it all broke up into single-issue politics, so whether you're a feminist or if you're black or you're trying to get a zebra crossing outside your school or whatever, you haven't got an umbrella[??] view of human destiny, you've only got a view of your own section, and that to me is a colossal disaster, a monstrous disaster.

Just to be pedantic, we're talking about Hornsey College of Art, yes?

Yes we are, yes. And I'm saying that I have got a sour view of it because it was the start of politics of style.

And did you actually know the people at Hornsey?

I knew one or two people who were there but I didn't know that at the time. I sent twenty quid which I could ill afford because I did have sympathy with the students sitting-in.

And did you, while you were at the London College of Printing did you know people at art schools at all, or not?

We would meet them through raves but we didn't know people in other places. I was supposed to have gone on to the Royal College of Art, but I didn't do that. I think latterly, partly out of lack of confidence but also at the time I didn't think that the work produced by the Royal College, as now, as ever, was either relevant or very much better than anything that was being done in other colleges.

And do you know how you were regarded by art students? Did you come up against them in that sense?

I think we played a funny game of being designers but also artists. I mean we moved...I mean sometimes we were as it were, it's now a London joke isn't it, either you were living in Hampstead of Kilburn, depending on what party you were trying to break up.

But you didn't have a bad time at their hands when you did come across them?

No. We gave as good as we got.

End of F4810 Side A

F4810 Side B

Will you tell me a bit more about the photography you did at this stage at the London College of Printing?

No, it wasn't serious photography for...well yes it was actually, I've just remembered. I took photography seriously but in a very formal way; I was doing kind of Kertész close detail, grainy photographs. They weren't humanity-driven very much.

Did you have your own camera?

Yes.

Where did that come from, where did that come in [INAUDIBLE]?

I saved up money and bought it, and I had a, to me at the time and for a very long time afterwards, 2¼-square was a divine formula, format rather, sorry.

And you got that camera while you were at the London College?

I can't remember whether I got it there or when I was a designer. It was either when I was there or just after.

Right. And what else during this period at the London College of Printing were you taught formally?

Some typographic information, but it was really project-based like so much visual education. `Here's a project, run with it; move it over there, I'll see you next Wednesday,' kind of thing.

And what equipment were you using?

Oh it was studio-based. If I got to any printing equipment it was because I could sweet talk my way into the print department because I knew what I was doing.

I mean otherwise, what were you using, if you couldn't?

Well photography, there was some silk-screen work got done. There wasn't a great deal of access to technology as design students.

So what were you doing, drawing?

Yes, doing what's called lay-outs, drawings, designs, they could be as abstract or technology-based as you felt you need to.

And with the photographs, were you placing them alongside words?

Yes, yes, sometimes.

And did you get anywhere near to designing a book?

No.

Would it have occurred to you?

No.

And were there moments in your own work where you felt windows opening up? I mean you talked about windows opening with the Bauhaus thing, but was there your development that felt the same at all?

No I can't remember. I don't think...I mean I now remembered that I threw all my work away at the end of the second year, you know, to make the third year bop.

Do you remember what you threw away, can you remember any details?

No.

And were you still writing at this time?

I was writing, yes.

What?

Poetry, as ever.

And when you've talked about the poetry you wrote earlier on, you said it wasn't good.

It wasn't good then either.

Was it different?

It was getting on.

In what way?

I was growing up.

And how was the poetry changing?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I think it was less imitative and less mannered. At the time everybody went around, I mean poets were a miserable bunch of bastards. I remember a slightly drunken American poet on Radio 3, if I haven't said this already, some time ago saying on a, you know, what's that Saturday evening programme, `The Critics' Choice' or, I call it `The Fraud Squad' myself, but...

Was it called `Critics' Forum'?

`Critics' Forum'. I call it `The Fraud Squad' but it was...there was a precursor of that. And he said, `Oh what's the matter with you English poets? You're so god-damn miserable. Why don't you get in the room and lock the door and all get drunk and enjoy yourself?' But, I mean everybody tended to have this kind of tragic thing. If you read poetry and you read T.S. Eliot, who I think was actually a very bad influence on the zeitgeist, I think he was a brilliant poet in some ways but he was a very bad influence on people, and I don't like his attitudes at all, it was a way that you, you know, you went around feeling miserable and trying to make sure you sounded miserable, you know. So it's a matter of finding your true response.

And were you going to the Royal Court plays?

Funnily enough, yes, because it was supposed to be left-wing, and I thought I ought to go to plays, to the theatre. The theartar. And I remember seeing Lotte Lenya do her number, `An Evening With Lotte Lenya', and looked at all these bald heads and evening suits and mink and cigars and thought, well there's a thing, there's a thing.

So did you go again to anything?

Did I what?

Go again.

I went to the, I saw `The Caretaker' I think. But I think I was... Alan Bennett just did a thing in `The London Review' for Peter Cooke and said he was always elegant and already earned lots of money and looked good and so on, and I remember him at `Private Eye', you know. But the good thing that Bennett said was that he always went around with a load of newspapers and he actually lived out of the newspapers. He always got his funny voices and strange people out of the newspapers. And I think there was that thing where, I wish Bennett had run with the bull with that a little bit; I mean I think that, there was a thing in those days which has carried on, a kind of a populist anti-elite culture thing where you tended to look at the race track and the newspapers and what the people produced, and comment on it or do things with it rather than the higher consequences of art, and I...that's a kind of regrettable thing, but I think I was up to it too. And it meant that whereas I think for generations some people have gone to the theatre and therefore supported the theatre, they would go once a week or once a month or when they went down to Harrods in the autumn, you know, that's kept the theatre going, rather like keeping good restaurants going in France, everybody goes to them, you know, not just like in England, adulterers, businessmen and so on, and toffs. The tone is different. So theatre got supported by people, but I found that if I went to the theatre and could only expect to enjoy one thing out of three it rather discouraged me from going. But I think other people went for other reasons.

Didn't you go to the Weskers?

No I don't think I did. I might have seen one...I might have seen one in the theatre. I remember `The Kitchen' thing on the film, which I thought was very good.

But didn't you go to `Chicken Soup with Barley'? I thought you did.

I might have done, I can't remember.

The one about the blackshirts and the riots.

No. That's someone else you know. Someone else you're interviewing.

And were you part of that? No you weren't.

No.

Was any of your family a part of that?

Part of what?

The confrontations Oswald Moseley.

Oh my parents, my mother was definitely. My mother was a Communist at 17, 16, and she was in there, you know. My uncle, Bert, was a Communist and he was I think at the Battle of Cable Street. They talk of that with pride.

Right. But it didn't make you go and see the plays?

No.

Did you go to the Osbornes?

Not as a play, no, I saw Osborne on the movies, which seemed to me as good as anything.

And when you were at the London College of Printing...

I mean, sorry, I know what you...you see I see the tenor of the questioning, but, I was actually kind of quite tricky as a person in those days. I found myself reading the `New Statesman' because I wanted to read short, well-written articles, and sometimes about film and literature and reviews as well as politics, but I thought that this was wrong because I was already left-wing enough, so I used to take the `Spectator' as a corrective. I mean I used to do...that's the truth, that's what I did, and in fact enjoyed reading Taper[ph] who was Bernard Levin getting into his stride in the early days, and I looked forward to reading the `Spectator' every week, at the end of the week.

And, were you...

So, I wouldn't go to the theatre to look at Wesker and people like that to persuade myself that I was OK.

No I thought, I remembered us having a conversation about `Chicken Soup with Barley' years ago.

No.

Obviously wrong. But, at the London College of Printing were you formally taken to look at anything in museums, or anything in art galleries?

Yes we were as a matter of fact, but not, you know, let's all go and look at the so-and-so thing. We went...the great thing about the London College of Printing at that time, even the typography students did at least a day and two evenings, or two days and two evenings, drawing every week, and it wasn't a block like it is now, you know, let's get that over with and so on; you did it every week, and I think that was a very good thing to do. So we would be in, unless it was absolutely terribly cold we would be out of the college...we would be, in the evenings we would be in the studio drawing nudes, or figure, and in the days we would be out either in the street or going to museums to draw, and even now I can go to the V & A, which is why initially I was so pleased to have my work collected by the V & A, I can go the V & A and spot a statue at 150 yards that I drew in 1961, you know, I mean it goes in that deep if you're drawing.

Tell me some of the ones you drew.

Well I can't remember, it was a couple...a Buddhist statue, a rather decadent statue of a young girl, you know, kind of French things, you know, but I raved it up a bit. I remember drawing in the Science Museum objects and pieces of machinery.

Can you remember what?

I remember a drawing of a cam, I remember a thing like a Stephenson's rocket. No I can't remember that many.

And what do you think that taught you, what did you gain by doing it?

Taught you to draw, and it taught you to work out how things were put together. It's an odd thing about the English that they think that if you teach people to draw or give people art too young it will ruin them as artists in the future, and I think it betrays not only yet another piece of English hypocrisy but it also, it betrays a fear of art, visual art. You never propose that teaching a child mathematics or arithmetic at three is going to ruin them as putative

mathematicians; you never propose that teaching them language is going to ruin them as putative novelists. In fact you don't expect them to be novelists or mathematicians, you think that they should have it, but when you start to show them drawing at 3, 4 or 5, you say, well that will ruin them as painters. What the hell are you talking about? Of course you won't. We gave the girls, I gave the girls drawing lessons from 4 onwards, and it shows. I mean, a 19th century lady, it would be an accomplishment to make a likeness; most botanists had to learn how to draw before the thing rotted when it was found; and most engineers have to draw to get pipes through a ship.

But when we talked before you had hardly seen any sculpture.

Oh, sorry. [BACKGROUND NOISE] Please, what's going on?

When we talked before you had hardly ever seen any sculpture. You had talked about these wooden sculptures at the doctor's.

Right.

And we've had you looking at some of the paintings in the National Gallery. But sculptures have never been mentioned [INAUDIBLE].

Right.

Can you remember what sculptures first made an impression on you?

Are you talking about the V & A?

Anywhere.

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I don't think I had an eye for sculpture for a very long time.

Were you aware of public sculpture, I mean...?

I don't recall it.

So possibly what you were drawing in the V & A was the first time you might have thought about [INAUDIBLE]?

Yes, got into drawing three-dimensional objects, except of course in drawing classes, in the actual studio drawing classes.

Right. And, were you looking at any paintings at this time?

I was looking at paintings all the time, but we had an attitude that all art galleries were, you know, temples of the bourgeoisie, you know, and so we had had a very ambiguous relationship with galleries. Yes we would go in and look at it, and yes we would curse it out.

Can you remember what had hit you?

Well I remember the first paintings I looked at, I'm sure we've got this on tape, was at junior school, there were...

Yes, but I mean [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, but the...I rapidly locked into Piero della Francesca. El Greco, who I then, rather like Dylan Thomas, walked away from, I mean Dylan Thomas didn't walk away from El Greco, I walked away from Dylan Thomas. But going back to the Prado a couple of years ago I got back to him, for different reasons.

But were you going to commercial galleries at all?

I don't think so, no.

And would you have been going to the Tate at all?

Oh yes, all the time. Modern, you know, for modern British art and so on.

What about the Americans?

Not much. Not aware of them at that time.

So what was your reaction to the contemporary British art?

I saw it as I think it is. It's an extension of English language and poetry, really. I mean, the problem of being a visual artist in England is immense, because you've got this colossal Saturn taking up half the sky which is called the English language, and it's...it's what our

culture is built on for good or bad, and I think it's generally good but of course there's a huge amount of experience that is not explained by language, and is very often not experienced by people who are very good with language. So I can tell you that you can get to know somebody extraordinarily well just by working next to them, and many of the things are not worth talking about, but they're worth knowing, and many of the things that, that is between you and that person, and the things that you actually do, you learn by showing people, you don't learn by talking about it, it takes too much time.

But when you're talking about...

And I think in the visual arts, I think most visual artists have to cope with the English language in England.

Who are you talking about at this stage?

Who am I talking about what?

At this stage in your life, when you are seeing those paintings.

Well, Stanley Spencer and, you know, they're story books, they're things to be read out. No bad thing, but I find that with my work in America and on the Continent you will get a much more immediate visual reaction, and a visual understanding about what's going on, and therefore very often a visual dynamic. They'll understand what's going on in the books, whereas people in England just, I feel fairly sure very often don't. They appreciate it for some reasons, they can see that it looks good and they will appreciate the poetry when it occurs, but I don't think the structure of the books always gets through to them.

And would you at this stage have been looking at Paul Nash at all, or just...?

Oh yes, sorry, yes, the Nash brothers, Nash, yes, very very strong, very strong.

So you would have liked that?

Yes, absolutely.

What would you have liked about it?

It described that kind of dry southern England feel to it, post-Forties. It had a kind of a bare thing to it. And of course Nash had his own quirky poetry, he would warp things and twist them, and that appealed to me.

And what about somebody like Edward Burra?

I found him mannered and I didn't know the world that he painted, I felt it was a bit constructed.

And what about the French paintings that you saw in the Tate?

Well we were taught to love the Impressionists, weren't we, and I do. I found Cézanne the most moving of all the painters. Matisse called him the father of us all. I mean I had taught myself to paint however I can paint with a piece of hardboard and some things on the ground at my mother's house and just started to paint. So I could appreciate him starting from scratch. I mean I think some of his paintings are absolutely terrible paintings, but he certainly stuck there, and I think he learnt, he taught everybody to look at every square inch of the picture for good or bad as being as important as any other square inch of the picture. An Oriental view that, not a European one.

And what about the Picassos and Braques that were in the Tate?

I liked some Picassos. I liked Braque over Picasso, he seemed to be Haydn over Mozart. I, over the years, got less and less enchanted with Picasso. I can see him as a colossal trickster, huge energy. Somebody said that drawing is the young man's skill and colour is the old man's skill. Picasso has never been a colourist, and it's as though he never grew up, which I don't think he did. Braque, within the confines of what Braque did I think was better than Picasso, cooler, and Matisse of course I think is a real poet.

Can you say a bit more about Matisse?

No. Not an expert on Matisse, I just think he's a better painter. There's more poetry in what he does.

I'm not asking you to be an expert, I'm asking you about your response to him.

Well I think his paint is adventurous, and although it seems to be, and he said, he paints for the bourgeoisie, and that's held against him by left-wing critics, I think it means more than

they understand, and it means less in real terms than they think in that, he kind of said it as a joke but he also was understanding who wanted his paintings, but he was also, I think he actually...I think he's...I'm thrashing here but I think he's a risk-taker more than Picasso ever was, I think he's a real risk-taker with paint. He will think with paint, he won't draw and then fill in, and he won't go for grotesquery. I mean once you see a man with a bull's head, an erect penis, it's an alarming thing one Friday night but you know, it's... [LAUGHS] I would imagine. But I mean it's not...you know, it goes on as a metaphor too much. Matisse actually thinks visually with his paint, and achieves a kind of poetry in spaces, and constructions, and in the long run gets more emotion out of his things. He's not just a describer of the beautiful bourgeois interior, he's not just about sunny Sunday afternoons.

And what about something like Giacometti, do you remember all those [INAUDIBLE]?

I actually thought Giacometti was an absolute waste of time. I used to look at reproductions of his work and think, it's all like that Dubuffet, that kind of modern Expressionist warped, stylistic, almost calligraphic Klein things, you know, the exaggerated and oft-repeated gesture. But then, a few years ago while carrying the suitcases to Zurich where she does regular research, I went to the Kunsthalle, or Kunsthaus, and saw Giacomettis actually standing there, and they are just fabulous, they are fabulous, which taught me something about me and also something about art in reproduction. I'm generally against 35mm art, you know, things...I mean I think it's serious, you know, I mean you can't describe what happens in my books adequately in reproduction, and I remember looking at these Schwitters who I used to be a fan of as a student in reproduction and seeing them for real last year in the Bow[??] book, I had never really known Schwitters' work at all. They really are different in real, real life, absolutely different, fabulously different.

And of course, I mean the generation before hadn't even had reproductions, had they, they had absolutely nothing.

Right, right.

I mean then there was a huge shift.

Right.

But what about people like Ben Nicholson?

I loved him, and still do, and he stands up...

[INAUDIBLE]?

I loved him then, and I still do. He's not someone I've walked away from. I saw him most recently at Yale when I was over there, because of the show I'm going to have and so on, and they have managed through this benign geezer Duncan what's-his name to...

Robinson.

Robinson, to get out of the 19th century into the 20th, and they've bought some 20th century work. Some of it's, you know, it's got that rather dusty look that 20th century work looks after twenty or thirty years. But there was immediately, my eyes wacked into...they've got about three or four really terrific Ben Nicholsons, lovely stuff, always liked him.

And you don't particularly remember having any reaction to the Hepworths and the Henry Moores at that point?

I got a feeling I ought to like Henry Moore because he was a Yorkshireman and because of the Blitz, you know, and all of those drawings and big sensual figures and so on, and I liked to see myself as a person who liked big sensual figures and, because I was, you know, because of one's age and so on, but I've never really got into him, although...yes, I now remember that I did, because I did a whole load of drawings as a student, and the drawings are popping up in front of me. I started as a sort of joke of eating lamb chops and bits of meat, and eating it right down and gnawing every bit off and then boiling it and cleaning it and then putting it on a plate and drawing it. And they turned out like very large Henry Moore drawings, you know. Used to draw little figures beside them, you know, to suggest that they were fifteen feet high. Weren't far off, you know. Enjoyed doing that.

And Hepworth?

Yes I liked her, yes.

Gabo?

Yes, yes.

And were there Rothkos there at that time?

No they weren't, and Rothko I got to late, and I just, bowled over by him, absolutely, but, his late stuff. He's a bit like who wrote `Lunar Caustic' and `Under the Volcano', Lowry, do you remember that, `Here us oh Lord in Heaven, thy dwelling place', was at the beginning of one of his books, I think `Lunar Caustic', or even at the beginning of `Under the Volcano'.

I've read that twice and I don't remember it.

Mates Fisher[ph] song.

[INAUDIBLE].

It's at the front of one of his books.

Probably that one.

Yes. And I think Lowry, I think, I was absolutely torn to pieces by the writing of `Under the Volcano' and read other of his works, with the exception of `Lunar Caustic', I don't think he gets anywhere near...he's one of those people who had to kill himself to get the good work out, one good piece, and I think that's true of Rothko. I've seen a lot of Rothkos in other places, and he was just an average knockabout painter as far as I was concerned and not very good at it, and something, maybe it was the booze and maybe it was the destruction, or maybe he just came good, you know, maybe the destruction's got nothing to do with it, but, it took an awful lot of crap work to produce good stuff, but when it was good it...all good work stands out of its time, and I would be very surprised if abstract having passed on and whatever kind of art is going down, if there's any left in a hundred years' time, people will look at a Rothko and still get a big thing out of it.

And what about the Surrealists, what about Magritte for example?

Always thought they were a load of crap.

All of them?

From day one.

Ernst?

I quite like Ernst, but I kind of lost respect for him since taking up the `New York Review of Books', because, in the `New York Review of Books' they used to reproduce drawings by a French engraver called Grandville, who did very anthropomorphic things, unsentimental things with animals, turning them into human beings, and objects and technical instruments, scientific equipment and bits of engineering. And I think Ernst took an awful lot from Grandville, without question, and that's really what I liked him for. There's a little bit of magic around Ernst, but he was... I never believe the Surrealist proposition. I don't even believe in the subconscious. It's got too much of a metaphor around it. There's this sewer lid, and you lift up the sewer lid and there's all these things boiling away underneath, you know, it's the old bourgeois thing of being terrified of the consequences of how they got their money, and their fear of the proletariat, might jump up and bite them in the bum. It's what Dickens wrote about a great deal, and it's what `A Passage to India' is all about. It's not really about India, it's all about being terrified of the stews of Manchester.

So are you saying we have no subconscious?

I haven't seen one.

What have you got? You've just got a conscious?

I'll tell you what I think we've got, I think we've got...I think we've got a creature where the brain doesn't stop where it's drawn, it carries on a good deal down the spine, but all of those nerves that go to the ends of your body are actually feeding into it, and so you've got to start regarding it as a whole organism. I'm not being a kind of a nature freak here, I just don't think we look at half the truth. If you pay attention to it you'll find yourself doing things most of the day which suggests that you are thinking in a way that you didn't know, that you are not aware of, that you are not conscious of, and that...consciousness is the wrong word for it, there's some funny thing called attention, which is like a little, it's like a little torch beam being shone in to a room that's dark with lots of furniture in it, and what you are doing at the moment is the furniture that's nearest the door, and what's happened in the past is the furniture that's up over against the walls. But the attention is where you think you are, the attention is just going like that, the rest of it's going on anyway. It exists even after the thing's moved on, right?

<u>End of F4810 Side B</u>

F4811 Side A

So apart from the Tate and the National Gallery...

I just want to say something more about the consciousness which I think is that it's, it's not that I am particularly, I don't think I know what being conscious or unconscious or having a model for the way the brain works at all, it's just that I think that the notion of the consciousness fits too well with some of the worst aspects of the way we are in the West, that there's the sewer, there's right, there's wrong, and the notion of the conscious and the unconscious allows people to play with that model and bully other people and terrify people. I remember standing in front of a huge Spanish painting in the Prado and looking at this huge and beautifully painted picture of Christ bleeding on the cross, and I thought, stuff this, and I looked around at the people looking at it and I thought, this is trying to frighten people and I don't like it, and I think that they're...it's not just the Catholic Church or other people who have been beaten people over the head with ideas, or the Communists or whatever, all sorts of people have, and where you've got an idea which cannot be proven except by the words of the person who's holding up the thing in front of you with a cloth over it, I think the people should look very carefully at the bloke and walk away before he does any damage. And I think the model of the unconscious and the conscious and these dark forces stinks to high heaven.

Would you have been reading Freud and Jung at this point, or not?

No.

Never?

Read...well I've read some Jung latterly, and I find him interesting because he's a risk-taker.

But as a young man you wouldn't have been reading Freud?

No. No I read a lot of Eastern religion and strange works.

What would have triggered that in you?

I think I have a kind of a religious streak unexpressed.

When did you discover that then?

About 14.

Do you remember what makes you say 14?

Yes I think it comes out of the slightly, you know, those rather visionary experiences, nature visions, they were very compelling. I once had a wonderful dream of Toledo, like El Greco, with all of these gravestones with teeth coming up in great lines, and I was travelling over it. Wonderful, super colour, you know, video colour, videochrome was given to those kind of things. Sometimes they would happen in front of the eyes and so on.

Where did you find out about Eastern religion in the beginning, do you remember?

The library. I mean, I told you how I went to the library at 17 and started and was fortunate to find Toynbee's, a book of Toynbee essays on history, and I just went off from there.

And so you never talked to anybody about what you were reading particularly?

No. Oh, by the time I got to be a student I ran into one of the guys I spent a lot of time with, called Bob Harrison, from Cornwall, and he was kind of pointing me...we were both incipient pointy-headed[ph] intellectuals, and we, by that time I was reading Thomas Mann from cover to cover, to cover to cover, to cover to cover, and I kind of hit him with Thomas Mann and he said I couldn't quite take talking to talk to [INAUDIBLE] because he had done that. [INAUDIBLE] This bloke came at me with a blazer and a... [LAUGHS] I turned up at college with a blazer and tie, you know, because I wasn't going to be taken as any knockabout art... I had a sort of funny way of wearing, it was a different uniform. So I camped about in a blazer and tie for a while I was a student, and he found this a bit odd.

So you discarded your almost winkle-pickers?

Oh yes, oh yes. I mean I used to go on marches dressed up very respectably, because I noticed that the police used to beat up people who were very [INAUDIBLE] they could get away with it, so, I had some hairy times getting away with murder dressed up like a bank clerk. The way to go.

What kind of murder?

Oh, bating the police. Starting up a little demonstration.

And, were you looking at things like comics at all?

No, that whole pre-Pop thing of, that infantile thing, you know, `Captain Marvel' thing, I mean I didn't do it when I was a kid and I despised, actively despised, young men who by that time were beginning to get buffy about `Captain Marvel' comics, who were collecting their old `Eagle' comics and, you know, I thought that was crap and I still think it's crap. I mean it's, I think it's...it's not excusable.

And what about films, were you going to films?

Went to a lot of films, yes.

Any you remember particularly?

No, I mean we did all the heavy things. We would go and listen to rock[??], we'd go to [INAUDIBLE] concerts, and go to the Everyman, Hampstead, you know, and look at all of the Indian, the Ray films, the Indian movies and all the films, the films of the time that were reckoned to be important. Last year [INAUDIBLE]. But I mean, I loved `The Seven Samurai', and I was there and the woman in front of me with flaming red hair was huge and loads of beads, when the actor was in the stream fishing for trout, I don't know if you remember that, to prove that he could join the band, she said, `My God! look at those thighs.' [LAUGHS] I thought, this is wonderful. And I was there, I went to see `Jules et Jim', which everybody was totally besotted with because they, you know, they had wanted to live this Charlie Girl life, you know, what all women wanted, just loved the idea of two men, you know, and all the men thought it was great, you know, to prove they were sensitive, and smoked pipes [INAUDIBLE] and so on. And I went along and I just howled with laughter, I thought and still think it's an incredibly funny film, and I just pissed everybody off because I was rolling in the aisles, I thought it was a very very funny, camp movie. And even now I find it very hard not to look at it and think that really it was supposed to be very funny, a very funny film. [LAUGHING]

And what about Jacques Tati?

Loved him, all of that great. I loved all of that physical thing, that, what's the French theatre that indulged in all of that? The...

Comédie...

Comédie Francaise. I loved all that, you know, the physical wit. I mean everything depends on, you know, things happening and gestures as well as what's being said, loved it.

But it's also a lot of it a send-up of the bourgeoisie, which presumably you would have enjoyed.

Oh yes, well that's...yes, yes.

And what about people like Buster Keaton?

Yes, liked him much more than Charlie Chaplin, and I think most people do.

And the American films?

Well I thought John Garfield was wonderful, I mean, you know, well it's just a very very terrific, brooding pre-Brando, love Brando. It's hard, I mean it's hard thirty years on not to talk about the films you like now. I mean it's very hard for me to remember what I was looking at then, really hard.

And did you go to any kind of comedy clubs or anything like that?

No, there wasn't any comedy clubs.

And not the Establishment Club?

Well I used to get free lunch at the Establishment Club when I was working on `Private Eye' but that was a regrettable summer, you know, I mean, I thought they were a bunch of upper-class shitheads and they thought I was a nasty little working-class worm, and we were both right of course, you know.

What were you actually doing with them?

I was supposed to be helping with the lay-out of `Private Eye' the magazine. I wanted to do revolutionary kind of collages, and that wasn't their bag, and I was trying to persuade them to, you know, lay out typewriter[??], which is essentially what it was then in a way that would work, which they latterly adopted, they weren't [INAUDIBLE]. But I remember an occasion where the chaps came in, I think it was Peter Cooke or I think it was John Wells and a couple

of other people, and Christopher Booker was much in evidence then, and they had a picture of, they had a copy of `Queen' magazine I think, and it was one of these fashion plates done in grainy black and white to prove it's a sort of post-Spanish, World War photography to prove voracity, like stencil lettering, you know, grainy, taken quickly in bad light, bodies floating in the... You know, it's all of that. But they've applied it to fashion laughably to prove it... I mean it seems to me, half of the 20th century is actually people trying to prove that they're bona, you know, the wearing of Vietnamese... I've been to dinner parties where people are wearing Vietnamese fatigues, this is the women, you know, with jewels on their hands, you know. So, there was this picture, grainy, and it was a woman, an elegant model in a long white silk sheath dress, she looked like a million dollars and I could have jumped on her just by looking at the picture, and she is hand in hand, and she's on Wigan Pier, the sort of Wigan Pier, you know, a kind of a pier in a muddy river, hand in hand with a very fat bloated working-class girl with a shitty coat on and everything, you know, and obviously a poxy dive, you know. And he said, `Now what's wrong with this?' They used to drop into their voices that became famous, but half the time they were doing it. `What's wrong with this? It's very difficult, I...' Willie Rushden, `It's too grainy. Don't like the composition. I know what it is, the bloody model's got such a horrible dress on.' So I was sitting over in the corner, blew up and said, `No it's not,' I said. `Even after thirty years, twenty years of the Welfare State you can still have shithead women standing there like that, patronising this, this girl, and this girl falling for it and the camera person thinking it is a great idea.' And [INAUDIBLE] look, who the bloody hell's he? I don't think I was necessarily right, but there was that kind of disparity between me and them.

How long were you actually involved?

It was just a summer really.

And, I mean do you think there was anything in the magazine that was you, at that point?

That was me? Oh I liked...I mean I liked the magazine, I was pissed off not to be able to get on with them, you know.

No, I mean was there any contribution you made that was [INAUDIBLE]?

No, not really, I mean I used to paste things up and it was just a mechanical job.

And do you remember any more about them?

I think I got one of my...I think I got a collage of some kind of a march in, but...

You didn't try to write for them at all?

No.

And do you remember any more about them?

I'll tell you one interesting thing. It's just a wry, I don't think it's of any consequence, but Ingrams is it, the editor, married somebody called Mary Morgan I remember, you know, they were obviously in love and had their arms round each other. I got to talk to her in the pub, and she said, `What do you do?' And I said, `Well I'm a designer, and I study typography and so on,' and then I started to formulate...

Fulminate?

Fulminate, fumigate, fulminate and go on about, you know, I thought I ought to be very, you know, angry because it's `Private Eye' and I just said a few daft things about bourgeois art. And then she said, `Well, yes, but you know, there are beautiful books and beautiful typography and things by Eric Gill.' It was interesting because I remember this little kind of chill thing where I kind of denied Christ and said, `No no, it's all crap, it's all crap,' you know, and I remember a little thing in the back of me thinking, come on, there are beautiful books. So I didn't know I was going to do books then.

You didn't?

No of course not.

Had you looked at Gill's work at this stage?

Oh I was a fan, I mean I loved his... In fact when I applied for a grant to go to the LCP, we're going back a few years now, I had to go before a board, the Kent Educational Authority or whatever it is, and I sat in front of a panel and they were asking, they wanted to make sure I was a serious young man, I was breaking my apprenticeship, and you know, so... And art [INAUDIBLE] talked like that in those days, in a strangled voice, and he said, `And, what do we think of Eric Gill's typeface?' And I said, `Which one?' Putting all at risk. But, I mean the bloke didn't know, but I knew then as an apprentice that, I mean I could trot off half a dozen typefaces, all very good ones, that Eric Gill had designed. So, I was a fan of Gill, a fan

of his typography, became very much an un-fan of his decoration and his bas-reliefs, I think they're creepy, soapy, high Anglican, sexually deranged art, you know.

What about things like the reliefs on the Portman Place building, did you go and look at them?

Hardly looked at them.

And did you go to St. Bride's library, you know, the print library?

I won't go near that place because I've spoken on the phone to the bloke who I regard as somewhat difficult.

That's something we have in common.

[LAUGHS] Well I think he's one of those people you get now and again who proposes that he knows a great deal but he, if he does, he hangs onto it in a rather nasty way, and as a teacher I wanted to get some students there and he kept being very picky about my conversation and yes I was not being very accurate, but he was trying to keep me away from the place. He was one of these people who, it's not enough to say they're anal retentive, they are actually shits who hang on, and they regard... I'll give you an example. I was in hospital, one of several times I was in hospital, and, I forget what I was having done, I think it was something to do with my nose - no it wasn't. Can't remember. And there was a man, I think I was an apprentice and there was a man next to me who actually had half-rimmed glasses and his wife bought him a nice little thing that sat on the bed that he could read books from, and he wrote letters with a real fountain pen, and had it all going for him, you know, great. And I got into conversation with him, and I said to him, he said, `What do you do?' I said, `Well I'm an apprentice printer.' `Oh very nice, yes.' And after a bit I said, `I would really be very grateful if you could tell me some books to read,' you know. `Oh I couldn't possibly do that.' I thought, fucking thanks. I know where you're coming from, but I think that you not only don't want the responsibility, but I got this feeling of knowledge as being something almost like property to be hung on to, and not necessarily shared.

[INAUDIBLE] But you didn't as a student try and go to St. Bride's?

Anyway, so St. Bride's. I got a bit...pardon? No, I didn't go, I haven't been in St. Bride's, no.

And was there anywhere else, not necessarily in London, where you were encouraged to go in that way?

I don't recall it.

And just before we finish this time, going back briefly to the `Private Eye' area, were there other periodicals you were reading at all?

Well the `Spectator'. I used to, I was...I used to read all the Sunday papers, the `Spectator', a lot of books, and I don't remember any other periodicals.

There was nothing you were reading visually of any importance?

Well there were design magazines, but I would go to the library in the college to read those, I wouldn't buy them.

Do you remember which, what they were?

Well, `Design Magazine' for a start. `Gebralph's Graphique[ph]', I mean we were into the Swiss-German magazines. We obviously wouldn't read them, we would just look at them. Sometimes the translated articles, the articles were dense, obtuse, and irrelevant.

And what about things like furniture design, I mean would you go to somewhere like Heal's to see what was going on, or not?

We wouldn't do it in that pilgrimage way, I mean, but we would, we had our eyes, we were on the street and looking. I mean, I suppose the thing to say is that, whereas culturally we weren't keyed up to the idea of going to look at art, or listen to music, or what, all in the rather deliberately formal way, organised way that this part of the culture...and a very good thing it is, we were nonetheless on it on the street, I mean we didn't stop looking or listening because we weren't doing that, you know, we were at it all the time. And I can see this sometimes in my girls, I mean, they were quite rightly resistant to us to having, going for healthy walks, you know, pink cheeked, non-conformist Christian walks up in Yorkshire by us, but they do it, and when we floated Mozart or jazz towards them in early days they resisted it, but they do it now, you know. And I, when I talk to them now, which is a much easier thing to do because they're older and we're not kind of locked in to arm wrestling, I know they're working on the street all the time in that way and I think it's great.

Did you watch television?

No, because television really wasn't around when I was young. There was one or two people who had them that kind of looked like goldfish bowls with wooden edging, or plastic or Formica edging, and by the time they had got to be ubiquitous I was then a student and living away from home, and certainly no one could afford it, and we weren't in a TV age. I can remember now actually, I can remember my father...so yes we did have some TV while I was at home, my father would always curse the adverts, you know, and all of that. We would watch `Bonanza' and my father would call it `Bronzo'. And I also remember him, we had a big set that was always dysfunctional... [TELEPHONE] ...and always a dysfunctional camera, and he would bend over it, curse it, adjust everything, put everything even further out, and finally get a huge, it was like a cartoon Tom & Jerry, it was a huge screwdriver that long, and open the back and poke about. Never blew his arm off, which he deserved. Yes there was TV at home and I would watch it at home and it was, you know, it was real TV life.

But at this stage we're talking about there was nothing in your head that was thinking in terms of TV graphics?

No, no no no no no.

Right. And just a last question tonight. I mean were you aware of Snowdon's photographs and those, you know, the way he was used in `Vogue' and things like that? Was he a figure at all at this time?

No, he wasn't. No.

Was there anybody who was coming up as a journalist [INAUDIBLE]?

Well Bill Brandt, we just loved Bill Brandt, you know. But I mean we were very arty graphic students, we weren't looking at what was going on in the adverts, we... I remember, I don't know if we've got this on another tape but I remember me finding in one of the big design magazines, there's a guy called Max, was a guy called Max Bill, a very formalist, rather beautiful designer, who a friend of mine, something of a gentleman toff designer, met, and said, `Oh it's quite extraordinary. He's a sort of big Swiss peasant who breaks wind and eats and drinks a lot'. And I said, I was supposed to be...[??] Anyway I found this advertisement designed by Max Bill, and absolutely beautiful, it's for the Krupp[??] Organisation. So I said to, you know, the poor lecturer who happened to be in the studio at the time, `Could we talk about this please? You're training us to be graphic designers and do that?' you know.

[INAUDIBLE]. I had this problem about what design got used for, and the skills that, you know, the skills that I enjoyed in it didn't sit easy with what is was there for.

So what did you think, any of you, and you particularly, what did you think you were going to do with it, or...?

Well, that was the thing, I didn't really know, but you know, we were desperate, I was desperate to stop being an apprentice, so, that's why I went into graphic design. I didn't go into graphic design because I liked drawing when I was at grammar school, I mean...

Why do you think the others were there, what did they want to get afterwards?

Oh it's a mixed, you know, it's a whole range of... Dick Turpin wanted to do it... I don't know, I mean it was one of those funny things like doing video ten years ago, you know, ten, fifteen years ago, it's a weird thing to do, you couldn't see any reason, there wasn't any reason for doing it, just attracted odd people, people who were either desperate or not very good, or... A lot of designers then and even now were doing it because they didn't have the nerve to go to art school, become artists. It's called applied art isn't it, at one point, and then communication design. And graphic design, then communication design.

[Interview 31st may 1995]

Would you agree with me when I say that the date today is May the 31st?

I'm not sure of the nature of your question, but I go along with it provisionally and providing I don't sign anything.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

When we talked last time, you said that in the second year of your time at the London College of Printing you destroyed all your previous work.

Mhm.

What did you therefore do in the third year?

Do some more work rather quickly.

But what was it like, can you remember?

Well, if you were a bit sharper on the hoof you will realise that throwing away the second year wouldn't have involved throwing away the magazine that I designed.

`Typos'.

Which was `Typos', which was their... I don't recall what I did extra in the third year except that it would have been hopefully sharper and more mature than the work I had done before, I mean, that's...they're pieties I've just uttered, but that's the only answer I can give. I can't remember.

Do you think you were working with photographs in the third year?

I was working with photographs, yes.

And typography?

Yes.

So it would have been more like poster designs or something, or...?

Yes. I think that, there's an impression that, there's an impression that scientists seek and you know, come up with knowledge, but quite often...in the seeking, but quite often what they do is actually know what they are going to prove but spend all their time finding ways to prove it. I think there's something called the inductive method or whatever. And I think in a lot of student work you get people more driven by style and what's around, what their tutors seem to require of them, than anybody confesses to. So I think if I was doing things with typography and photographic images, and as you said, posters and so on, it was because I was actually hunting for that rather didactic political style that came out of Russia and the anti-fascist graphic movements of the Thirties and Forties. I was unconsciously or otherwise trying to make the work look like I was OK, and I think a lot of people in our century are more, as much concerned with looking authentic as they are with being authentic, being themselves.

Can you remember what you thought about Russia at the time? I know that's not really the point of what you're saying.

Didn't think about Russia at the time that I recall, no.

So in terms of politics your focus was South Africa?

Well in terms of politics I was a free-range Leftie of some kind, and it was a warm and nutritious fluid in which to swim, because there were lots of people around like that. Criticism wasn't the mode of the day; although I was very critical of lots of things on the home front I was rather less critical of the movements of history, because first of all I had the shortened vision of young people, and secondly I didn't know enough history, and thirdly we weren't in the business of criticising things at a long distance, except the English in South Africa. I think that, I was beginning to hear of the great battles of Kursk and other things, and realised that the contribution of the Soviet Union in the Second World War was very much underestimated, and realising that that was as much to do with a nationalist point of view from England's point of view as anything else. But that didn't lead me on to find out the question, what Stalin had been doing and so on.

Did you read people like Hobsbaum as they wrote, or not?

No.

And, you mentioned that, was it Rolf Brandt, was an important teacher at the London College of Printing?

Yes. He was an important teacher in the sense that he taught me, which was a rarity.

Right. And you said that the headmaster had basically been a good bloke in the end.

The head of department, whose name I couldn't remember then and I am hoping to remember soon, but it still escapes me. He did a lot of, he became an OM or DCO or something, he got decorated for his work. Eccesley, Tom Eccesley, did lots of propaganda, pro war effort propaganda in the Second World War and did lots of stuff after. A rather eccentric Lancastrian gent, and talked like, `Ken, you've got to oonderstand that you can't go on talking to people like this,' you know.

Did he wear a little grey suit?

Mm?

Did he wear a little grey suit?

No, he wore...he dressed as a sort of, quietly stated artistic fop, long rangey and florid bow-ties, florid to the pink bow-ties. A nifty version of English tweedery, you know. Carefully stated English bohemianism, but one foot firmly in the Royal Academy if only it were allowed to get there.

And, was there any other teacher at the London College of Printing that mattered to you?

A very nice man called Ivan Dodd[ph] who had come up through the ranks, ex-compositor-cum-typographer. Funnily enough I've made contact with him in the last year again after all that time.

Why?

I met him at some wing-ding at the V & A, and talked to his very pleasant lady companion, and we got invited, we were invited over for supper and so on. I think he's a much more settled person, and I'm a much more settled person.

And did you, during this third year did you have any projects outside? I mean did they try and find you actual work?

No, well, I did...well, I worked at `Private Eye' a few weeks in the summer, I think that was in the third year - no, it must have been the second year actually. Don't remember much about my third year, it was a scramble to get some work done.

Were they making any attempt to set you up with work?

I didn't find the work that interesting. I mean I didn't find...me and one or two other people who were student comrades tried to make life interesting in the teeth of the evidence. I don't think any of us by the end of the course wanted to be graphic designers, we wanted to be other things that we didn't know of yet, and I think that's another student experience, you try to make what you've got work in some way. But the business of being a graphic designer by that time was not interesting.

Was there anybody to talk to about what you might do next? Was there any interest shown?

No, no, not in the college.

By the way, did you during this time have any contact with the people you had been apprenticed to, or did that completely stop?

No, that completely stopped.

Right. And you didn't...I mean we talked about you doing washing up jobs.

I wish I had gone back, but I'm sure they're dead by now, you know. I would feel that I could go back now with some medals, but, or at least be numbered amongst the regiments, but I mean I would have taken a long time before I would have felt easy enough to go back to explain what it was I was doing. You are after all a lot of the time as an escape slave you are in disguise, you know. Some very sophisticated, a very sophisticated photographer and his theatre designer wife live in south-east London in darkest Brixton where murders have been committed and so on, and he says, you know, `I am in disguise in the street; I have to pretend to be what's going on round here and become acceptable.' So the reverse is true, I think once you jump out of the paddock, you know, you have to adopt an appropriate gate to go along with all the other horses that go down the lane, which is about the most tortured, on the hoof analogy I can think of.

Last time you mentioned the Royal College. Did you actually get offered a place there?

No, I was encouraged by the staff to go to the Royal College, because I think they saw me as a, probably as a somewhat incomplete, uncompleted but interesting student. But I went to the Royal College and looked at the work that went on there and I really didn't see that it was any better than the work that we were doing.

Can you remember what you saw?

No, just the work wasn't very good.

And so somebody at least was thinking a bit about what you might do next?

Yes.

And did you just find that they had no ideas that were applicable, or what?

Yes, but I was fairly objectionable and bolshy, so I wouldn't have listened to them anyway.

And what was your relationship.....

End of F4811 Side A

F4811 Side B

What was your relationship with your parents at this stage? Because you had obviously moved out of home.

It had gotten better because I had left home, and it had gotten better because my mother had overcome her rage that I had left home. I mean it was to her a disaster that I left. I went to see them periodically but, episodically, and not enough, but quite often within an hour or two my mother would start to try and engineer the same kind of rows that we had had before, and power plays and so on, and one time I stood at the gate and she started as I stood at the gate, and I said, `I'm not opening this gate if you don't shut up,' and she carried on, and I just walked away, got back on the bus, train, and went home. I don't think it's too late for people to learn.

Did you ever see your father outside the house, did you ever meet up for a drink or anything?

No, I mean I had a drink or two with him at the pub, but that was from the house, I mean the pub was an extension of the house, as it were, you know.

So they didn't make really any attempt to join your life at all?

They wouldn't have been equipped to in any way.

And they were presumably not very involved in what you might do next?

No, they were short of ideas in the first instance, and had no ideas by the time I had finished doing what I was doing.

And what do you think you were like at this stage?

Which stage? Being a student?

As you were about to leave the London College of Printing.

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I think I was a very witty and sharp person, particularly in the language, because me and my mother had played language games all through the time we were together. I think I was charming when I wanted to be, but I was catastrophically uncharming when I chose to be, or was compelled to be. I had what's called a chip on your

shoulder, which is a phrase which is given by people who don't understand about chips or woodcutting. It's a patronising term if offered in a certain way, and most of the time it's offered in that way. I had something to complain about, but it's, you know, it was a destructive thing, so I was extremely destructive. If I wanted to be destructive, or if I was compelled to be destructive, I would be destructive. I suppose the best thing I can say really is what I said to Ruth, my wife, at the, just about when I turned 40, because Ruth, and as you can probably observe, our marriage is a kind of a twinned career as well as a marriage, and in that sense it's both interesting and difficult and so on. I said I realise that I am equally damaged and talented, and what I've got to do from the age of 40 onwards is do something about it, and it was one of those sort of keynote moments, you know, and I think...this answer is called vectoring isn't it, it's where the magnetic pointer swings on the compass so it goes too far one way, so I just talk about 40, I would go back to when I was 14 or 16 and stood in the road and said to myself, I can remember exactly, in fact I was having this conversation with Ruth the other night when we were talking about such matters, if I believe what people are telling me about me, I will die, I will die. I have to re-invent myself or become myself despite their opinion.

What were they telling you?

Now that...now that opinion of theirs may not have existed, but that was the under-siege mentality that I had; I had to re-define myself.

What did you think they were telling you then?

I'll answer that, because that's the second question, but I will just say, by answering your question which is, what did I think of myself when I was 22, I will say that at 16 I thought I had to fight for my life, my mental life, and at 40 I realised that I was damaged and had to do something with what I had, so, if you take those two and put them together, you might be able to work out the answer to what I was at 22. I can't quite remember. So what was the next question?

What did...when you were 14, what do you think they were saying?

Oh when I was...yes, what did I...what I thought they thought was that, I thought my...the people at the grammar school thought I was an utter guttersnipe. I achieved every possible detention that you could achieve over five years; I had failed dismally by my measurable intelligence to do the appropriate things with it. This caused me a lot of grief. Meanwhile at home I was regarded as a snob, which I was because I was partly ashamed of my background

but I was also torn apart because my background couldn't give me what I should have got from somewhere else, that somewhere else being the grammar school, that wasn't giving it to me or I was throwing it away as well. So, I was copping it hot and strong both from the school and from home, and it felt as though I was not well regarded.

So by 22 you would have been pretty aware of self destruction as well as protection[??]?

Oh yes, yes. I think that I've got a great talent for self damage, you know. No, I think it's a strong strain that I have to do things well[??].

Did you ever contemplate suicide?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Yes, but it was in a very Roman way, and it was later in life and it was something to do with the family and I'm not going to tell you what it is.

But you didn't at this sort of stage?

I think at that time I might have done in an adolescent way and not really... I think, oh yes, I think I had a kind of a talent for trying to, you know, like a kind of a Tory junior Minister, that thing of trying to hang yourself and fire and stuff like that, I had a whole thing of that, but that's a fairly straight adolescent male thing.

Did you play with fire as a child?

Oh yes, yes. I had a cousin who was rather more successful. My dodgy cousin in Dagenham, who by his own admittance is slippery, set fire to a row of shops when he was 10 or 11, just to see it burn.

Yes, I think you said that. But where did you play with fire?

Oh, at home you know, in the yard.

But I remember for instance in sheer innocence I lit a fire underneath our car.

[BURST OF LAUGHTER] Is that innocent? That's a very odd definition of innocence.

In a garage which adjoined the house.

So that the rain wouldn't get on the fire?

No, I just played with fire a lot, and it was one place to do it. But I mean you didn't do anything comparable to that?

It's fairly standard I understand, it's a fairly standard burgeoning sexual thing, and the hanging thing is trying to get close to the edge, you know, but...

And did you, did you ever have a scooter or something, you did, didn't you?

A what?

A motorcycle or a scooter.

No.

So you didn't take that kind of risk?

No, no I...I mean I am a peculiar risk-taker. I mean I've been in gambling joints in Nevada and watched someone put a...I've put a dollar in the machine and pulled it and nothing happened, and I put another dollar in the machine and pulled it and nothing happened, and the gambling friends I've had said, `Yes yes, on the third one,' so put another dollar in the machine and nothing happened, and I felt, well fuck this for a game of soldiers and walked away. I mean there are, I used to have friends, particularly actors, who were heavy gamblers, it was a thing for them, you know, it was a crime, it was a sin, it was a turn-on or whatever. It's never done that to me. I went rock climbing, mountaineering, and when I found the edge of fear, when I found fear, and I found it because I fell off, it seemed to me entirely natural and healthy, and I didn't want to kill it, which is another way of saying I'm a coward, if you like. But I mean I haven't got that relationship with risk and fear that some people have got.

When did you go rock climbing, what kind of age?

Oh I don't know, I think 25, 23, 24, something like that.

Right. And...

I had a friend who did it.

While we're talking about suicide, I mean do you think about death very much?

What, having thought about it, or think about committing suicide?

No, I mean, you've more or less answered the suicide thing, I think, haven't you? But I mean, do you now, does death come into your thoughts quite often, or not?

No, I think I've reached a very good accommodation with death.

What do you think it is?

Well, you know, stepping over a small wall with a bit of luck.

Do you think there's anything after it?

The wall is...there's a certain amount of bushes and mist and I can't see.

And it doesn't frighten you?

But, no.

But nevertheless you would rather it didn't happen for a while?

Sorry?

You would rather it didn't happen for a while?

In adolescence?

No now.

Now? I'm easy, I am easy in the sense that now and again since I was 40, since my father died, which I think was the big turnaround for me, now and again through the various emotional and psychotic storms that I may be party to, I have...I think it's the replacement for the odd visions that I had when I was young, but a very odd sense of balance where I for a moment think that I am absolutely OK, everything is equal, if you do every sum there will be, you know, a balancing out, and I say to whoever or whatever it is, you can have me now, and

nothing happens and I think, right, I'm being given a bit more time. But that's the closest I can get to it.

And what about the deaths of people who you are close to, does that worry you, the possibility of it?

No, I mean I've lost both my parents and I've been through that, as far as I am concerned. Last year I lost four good friend, male friends, one through Aids, he was a homosexual; he wasn't a close friend but he was a good friend and colleague shall we say. One who was one of the most interesting men I've known, in his sixties, died of a massive cancer, probably masked by alcohol for a long time, but he was a noble guy. One was...I mean he hid Bobby Seal[??] when this CIA, the FBI were killing Black Panthers, when they could catch them. I could tell you, I mean I could fill a tape up telling you his life story and I won't. Another one was Bob Springer, a friend of mine from student days who went on to do a kind of Bill Gates number who he actually knew at the same Buddhist temple or monastery in California, after a life of drugs and rock'n'roll he became an inventor and relatively rich. That's three. And one, a lovely man who, Patrick Shohenwold[ph] who won prizes for his documentary film making, he was a rake-hellian, wrecked, physically wrecked by his excesses, a gambler, a drinker, a Soho hound, one of the boys, which I never was, whose wife rang me up and said, `You'd like to hear that your dear old friend Patrick Shohenwold[ph] has died. I said, `Oh Bella, I am sorry.' She said, `No, he had a couple of drinks on Saturday night and Sunday morning we made love, and he rolled over, put his head on the pillow, and died.' I said, `What a very good way to pass on a Sunday morning.' [LAUGHS] So that was four. And in each one of them, I think of them now and again, I think it's what, I mean I've got a very Jewish attitude to this, it's, you live on through the memory of, the good memory of others, or through the memory of others, and you had better make sure that it was a good memory. So I think of each of those four in different ways and to different degrees and for different reasons. But the business of dying, I think that the death of my immediate, I think the death of either of my daughters would be catastrophic for me, because I...I am utterly involved in them. I don't know if I said it in an earlier part of the tape, but I wanted children like women are supposed to want children.

Oh, no you didn't.

Oh well, yes I wanted them, I mean I just desired to have children.

Do you remember when that began?

Just before I met Ruth and got married. People said, `Why did you get married?' I said, `To have children.' People thought that was an outrageous un-PC thing to say, and I said, `No, we, Ruth and I lived together and I thought, well I want children and I want children by Ruth, and I am going to get married.'

Did you have an actual picture in your mind of family life?

Do I have one?

No, at that point, something that you [INAUDIBLE].

No, I had a very funny picture. Kind of. I had a funny picture when I met Ruth, and it was a profoundly difficult arrangement in the very first go, I mean you know, I think she was having a liaison with Poet Logue[ph], `Chrstopher Logue[ph] writes for `Vogue', most distressing for Doris Lessing,' was the phrase at the time. But, I had one of my dreams, and one of my...Ruth was at the time I think, she doesn't mind me saying so, a lot larger than she is now, what the Jews called a Yiddishe Motsaball[ph], but lovely with it, you know, absolutely outrageously lovely with it. And I had this dream of the kind of ideal Canonbury kitchen, which was immediately laughable, by my lights it was laughable, and in the middle of this kitchen Ruth was standing in a big smock with these beautiful button eyes and a big satirical grin holding a saucepan and a frying pan, as if to say, `I am the wife,' but as a huge joke in a setting that neither of us would ever have. Which was an interesting dream because I probably saw that she was extremely satirical, as `Private Eye' people used to say, at that time, already. So I saw trouble coming, right? So that was the family, that's the only family image I had. But I never actually had any kind of pictures of what family life would be, would it be something off the front of `McCall's' or some American magazine, of the garden, the car and all the rest of it, they didn't...I just...I went forward, I mean I'm sure me and Ruth went, like most people do, you just went forward and started having children and it just happened, you know. The delights were constant and immediate, straight off.

I'm just interested that you did have that feeling, given that your own family life had been rather barren a lot of the time.

I think there were good things in my family life that I've probably not come out with, and I think that, somebody once said when I was trying to teach on a course, I was trying to give people the education I didn't have, so I think perhaps my attitude was to have the family I didn't have.

I suppose you had been intensely involved with your family and then as a student you didn't have that around.

Well I think I was intensely involved with my family, and I think that my father loved me dearly. I mean he is the unspoken person in this, he was...I can't...I can't begin to imagine what kind of vocabulary he had, but it was like a couple of hundred words or something, and most of them mispronounced, because they were so rarely used, he was a very very silent man, which was odd, considering how gabby I am. But as time has gone past I think he was both a very honourable, very noble and a very very loving man. The one or two women that I took home before Ruth were very taken with him, they thought he was a gent. And I also think he was very attractive to women from past evidence, not that he did anything about it.

But do you think he spoke more out of the home than in the home?

Almost certainly. Because my wife was - not my wife, my mother was, you know, 200 per cent talking all the time, I mean she was gabby to the enth degree.

OK, just to pick up again then, you finished at the London College of Printing in what year?

I think it was 1962.

And by that stage you had got a qualification then.

Yes, some knockabout qualification.

Right.

Equivalent of a degree now, but...

Right. So what did you actually do?

Well, let me think. Because the summers in that course were taken up, I was fully determined on the course to do things that I hadn't done before, and in the summers, whereas in the other holidays I had to work to get money, I saw this amazing eight week summer holiday, which of course I had had nothing to do with since I had been working in a factory, and I thought, I'm going to do something. So each year I travelled. I the first year worked in a refugee camp in Upper Austria, which was an extraordinary bit of business. The next year I think I sold papers on the beach at Nice, and the third year I probably did something...oh yes, I went to

the kibbutz scene in Israel, because I wanted to see how socialist organisation worked in communities, and then came back and got a job.

Can you tell me about all of them in a bit more detail?

When?

Now.

[LAUGHS] I'm not sure if I've got the order right, but the first thing that happened was going to Upper Austria.

Was this the first time you had been abroad?

Yes, that was the thing, that was the extraordinary thing, the first time I had ever been across the Channel, so... The first thing that happened was that I got up in my, the room I was sharing with Dick Turpin, on a very hot summer's day, and went out in this rather kind of moody French existential novel way without any socks on, just a pair of shoes, and I thought, [FRENCH ACCENT] this brings very strange disassociation between myself and what I see. I think I will take chances, you see. And went down Holborn and bought a stick of French bread, a half a pound of butter, and a jar of honey, which I thought was outrageous behaviour, and sat in Bedford Square and ate the lot, and thought, well, [CLAPS], there's a thing to do. And then picked the phone up and phoned the United Nations Association and said, `I want to work in your refugee camps in Austria,' which they said I could do. I made application and so on, and then I got Dick to do it as well. So, I found myself hitchhiking to Upper Austria, crossing the Channel for the first time, going through all those extraordinary things that happen to you, like sleeping in a part of Calais two nights running and getting absolutely drenching wet and catching a huge cold; like getting demoralised in the south of Paris deciding that I'm going to pay money to stay in a hotel, which I had never done before, even in England. So, I then went to a hotel, and by this time straw is sticking out of my clothes because I had slept in fields, and said, in the little bit of French that I had got from O'level, you know, `How much for a meal and a night?' And they said something like 22 francs, which sounds colossally cheap these days but, you know, this seemed to me a bundle of money at the time. And because my French wasn't good I said, `Did you say 22 francs?' And then they said, `21 francs', and they thought I was bargaining. Well I had never met this before and I kept saying, `What do you mean, are you saying 21 francs?' And so it came to 19 francs and then I asked them, `How much of 19 francs is for the meal?' And they got totally exasperated and said, I think, you know, 10 or 9 francs or something like that. This

was all on reflection; I realise this was what had happened, but I was just...I was totally flustered. And I was shown to a room, which was very nice, and I tried to find some clean clothes, and went down to this, what I now remember to be a wonderful restaurant, it was cut and frosted glass, it was brass work, it was that lovely blond wood of, you know, the turn of the century in France, you know, and lots of glass views out to gardens and so on. The only three tables taken were a very very crusty pair of French petit-bourgeois, he and she hating each other for at least sixty years and determined to take it out on the meal, and sent everything back, you know that kind of thing, you know, the salad, `This is not good here,' and... Me, and two tables of the German Wehrmacht who were on United Nations manoeuvres, which to me was, I couldn't cope, I could hardly cope with it, because I was sitting between two halves of the, you know, the Second World War. So, I was full of piss and vinegar because this meal was going to cost me eight or nine francs, so, you must guess the story, but the table was beautifully laid out and this extremely nifty little item of a waitress came up and, you know, my jaw dropped just looking at her. And she put down a basket of bread and a small carafe, I would guess half a litre or, half a litre of wine, and a plate. And I looked at that and thought, nine bloody francs? And she put down what's now called, you know, crudité, which is some sort of chopped vegetables. And so I thought, nine francs for that? That's not much good. So I ate that, ate every piece of bread in the basket, and drank the wine, and sat there looking cross. And she came back and paused and looked, and then she went away and came back with another basket of bread and another carafe, or half carafe of wine, and put down a passable omelette. And I think, oh, well, it's looking up but it still doesn't..still doesn't add up to, you know, nine francs. So of course I ate all the wine - ate all the bread, drank all the wine, and ate the omelette. And of course, on the fifth course... [LAUGHING] ...things got completely out of hand. I was utterly drunk, I was by this time stuffing the bread into my shirt, because I thought that I had to buy... You know, by this time I had totally realised that I had got a bargain, right? But I was drunk enough to actually, I kept hold of the idea that I was being done, so I started to load all of this bread into my shirt so that I could get off in the morning. And when I had finished, and by this time the waitress was going, `Oh, c'est formidable,' [MUMBLES WITH FRENCH ACCENT]. And I could hear her in the kitchen saying, `This Englishman is a maniac,' you know. So, when I got up the French petit-bourgeois were looking at me, the Germans were looking at me with some amazement, because they were kind of fifteen times bigger than me, you know, and I had done the business, and I got up, walked towards the door and fell over, and all these bits of bread came out of my shirt. [LAUGHING] So I was a vision of what England was going to turn into I think in Europe, and I scuttled off quite early the next morning and carried on.

Did you have any damage to the bedroom or anything?

I don't think so, no no no no. Various little adventurettes happened to me on the way, but, working in the... Oh, I think the, the image that, apart from the Tom Fool German policeman who, in some German village was obviously geed up by the German wives of that village to go and investigate me, because by this time I looked quite rough, and he, you know, `Komme.' And I said, `Nicht verstehen Deutsch.' `Was machen Sie?' So I made him walk over to me. But all the wives were watching, you know, and he said...I said, `Ich bin Englander, nicht verstehen Deutsch.' And so he wouldn't look at me, he said, `Pasaport.' So I have him the passport, and he looked at me, looked at me, you know, and looked at the page, looked at me, looked at the page. This is pure comédie francaise acting, you know. And then I saw, he was looking at pages that were utterly blank, you know, so he was doing it for, he was doing it to get the vote, you know. But before I got there the powerful image...oh there are two more images. One was getting to Saltzburg, or getting to Austria, and sleeping in a field and waking up in the morning and for the first time I saw mountains. And I was absolutely gobsmacked, because I had never seen mountains, and I could feel the geometry of the flat land from London all the way to this place, and then the mountains and then the cubic space described, right? I mean it was just... The other thing was stopping in Frankfurt.

Hang on, hang on, this is mountains in the summer, yes?

Yes. Yes. And, these great kind of armies of cloud going down gullies, you know, which I had never seen, real kind of Sturm und Drang stuff, fabulous. White peaky mountains and then there's, you know, great fields with peasants, real peasants, they had peasants then working with carts and stuff. But the other image was, outside Frankfurt at that time was, I think it was Frankfurt, in Frankfurt I really got tangled up with the Autobahn system and just couldn't get the hell out of it. You know, you're not allowed to walk on the Autobahns. We didn't have Autobahns at that time in England, so, I didn't know what the Stich was there. So I found myself walking along the Autobahns, and the police yelling at me, and people slowing down and keeping their wheels moving, you know, and saying, `What's the matter, you musn't walk on here,' and all the rest of it. `Well give me a lift pal,' you know, I mean, you know. `No no no, that's forbidden.' Oh well, fuck it. And I was driven off the Autobahns by the police, you know, and they had to put me in the car and drive me off, you know, so I was being a thorough nuisance and quite enjoying it. But then I got to a place called Frankfurt where they had a real spaghetti junction and I just had, I just lost a lot of hours there and slept in some awful part of it all. Next morning found myself at a place called Wolfgang, which was a U.S. Army base. And I had never seen Americans before you see, really, except for the ones who turned up in Soho asking for the American Embassy and we used to direct them to the Houses of Parliament, or vice versa. So I thought, I've got a letter from the United Nations, I'm going to work for the United Nations association in a

refugee camp, and I'm fed up with hitchhiking, so I walked into this base with straw sticking out, by this time brown as a berry, and said, `I represent the United Nations. Could I... [LAUGHING] I want to get a lift.' And for the first time in my life, I wasn't in England and found English speakers who took you at your face value, which I had found with Scots and Jews but not with English people. And they said, `What?' you know, like, `We've heard a few but, you know...' `OK,' and they picked the phone up and say, `Hey, Colonel so-and-so, we've got this limey on the gate, you know, who wants...' this that and the other. `Send him along, OK.' I thought, amazing, absolutely amazing. This is a generous nation. This is a nation with an open heart. So I spent half the day looking at these strange matters.....

End of F4811 Side B

F4812 Side A

Like, for the first time seeing blacks and whites, never seen that before, en masse, so in the base there were white people throwing a ball around, softball and stuff like that, because they were idle, and black people doing it, and they were doing it entirely separately, and I had just never seen it before. I wasn't being righteous about it, I thought, oh, so that's what it's about. To sitting around some dustbins and noticing something strange like the, all the men would walk around with their hats on their...their helmets on the back of their head, like they were doing the St. Louis blues march, you know, with straps hanging down, they were trying to make Marlon Brando... It was the American swagger that I had never seen before, and I, you know, was used to the kind of English spiff walk. And they seemed to be frightened of something, and it was clearly the women, you know, it's a colonial thing I think, I find it...what's interesting about Australia too, that the women are very strong, and I think there's an untold story that even feminists aren't on to, which is that to run life in the desert, you know, in the wilderness, the women had to have very particular qualities and be very very powerful, you know. And you don't hear it but my...I've come to see that in America and I've certainly seen it in Australia and France. It's an equation that isn't spoken, it's to do with the men being weak but it's not, it's to do with the women being strong. So you know, I saw this new inversion, you know, something I had not seen before, men who were frightened of women and the women who were frightened of something else, which is not men, but the kids, you know. Kids would say, `Hey Ma, quick, come on!' you know, and I thought... One of them came up [INAUDIBLE], `Who the hell are you?' And I just leaned forward and said, `Fuck off or I'll cut your throat.' `Hey Ma Ma Ma Ma...' [LAUGHS] But I got to see...I got to this office and there was this U.S. Army major who was surrounded by pouting German broads, I mean they were just...they were supposed to be secretarial staff but they were pouting German broads, you know, I mean, and I had been on the road a week, so you know, I could appreciate it. But, you know, `Hey, what's this guy doing? Hey, working in the refugee camps? Hey, that's a good guy. Get him a lift.' Christ! you know, I mean it's just...you know, this is a new world, and... The Stich was, the problem was, I could get a lift if I went from...they were saying, `Can we get him a plane to Linz or can we get a truck going right by this place?' And they had a truck... I said, `I'll settle for the truck,' you know. The problem was that I had to go back to Frankfurt to this major who would sign an insurance things. Oh I had a [INAUDIBLE], I said, `Well I've been hitchhiking and you guys didn't stop, and I can understand it's rules and regulations.' `Oh no,' he said, `they're not ungenerous guys, it's just that there's no insurance if anything happens, you know.' I said, `OK, right.' So, I was willing to agree with that. And he said, `No, you've got to go back to Frankfurt to get this indemnity.' And I said, `Well if somebody could give me a lift back to Frankfurt.' He said, `Oh no, well you can't have a...' And I thought, oh, OK, so I just walked out of the base

and carried on hitchhiking, which was my general attitude. But it was nice, I mean, it was a good experience, a good experience. So then I got to this refugee camp near Linz, which was close, quite close to where Hitler was born, and slept under the Golden Monastery near Linz, which is up on a hill, which is in fact referred to in the poem at the end of `Father's Garden', and saw, just woke up in a field and just saw these bucks coming out of the bushes, which if you read the poem at the end [INAUDIBLE]. And Dick Turpin, who was travelling to the same place, turned up twenty minutes later, or twenty minutes before, I can't remember, which was extraordinary because we had gone separate routes.

Why?

Gone separate routes? Because we basically didn't get on that well and we knew it, and we were sensible enough to travel separately.

Perhaps you were ready for marriage.

[LAUGHS] Right. And there was another story, because this was a place where people in the second or third generation from the Second World War were stateless, the poorer, the then poorer countries of Europe, Italy and Austria had these people, and they had nothing, they had no papers so they were stateless, and the deal was, the host country would give them a bit of land if the United Nations would give them some money to build a house, and we were going along there to give them our labour and time, no money but we had board. And it was great, I mean I could work like a docker, you know, so, digging trenches, I just got into it you know. But I would be working for a 90-year-old woman who would - I don't know, but she would be a woman in black, you know, so she could have been anything, 60-odd - she would...she knew what she was doing, she cooked these wonderful European, middle European meals for the work force, and then jump into the trench and carry on digging, I mean just, you know, that kind of, you know, we shall not die stuff, you know. And I learnt a lot there.

How long were you there?

Pardon?

How long were you there?

Well, six weeks, something like that.

What did you learn?

Well, I went to Mauthausen to the death camp; I looked into the ovens; I could smell around the huts, or I fancied the smell of huts of rotten potatoes and old urine. I went to...I talked to a 12- or 14-year-old girl in German and English, she had some geese or stuff, and I suddenly realised she was offering herself, you know, to get some money, which, you know, was not something I could cope with. I saw a generation of people who had been there who were born in the camps, you know, by this time, and heard stories of a bloke who made application to England or America to become an immigrant, was all the time learning classical Greek and mathematics, you know, educating themselves from books and [INAUDIBLE] the place. And it took years for his application to go through. He took a medical, and...oh no no, he applied to Sweden, get it the right way around, and it took about three years, and they turned him down because they only took people with tuberculosis or bad diseases. So of course he applied to America, or England, took another two years, and of course by this time he had tuberculosis so was turned down, so he hung himself, you know. But I was dealing with people like that at the time. So I went away for a cheap holiday, but came back wired up in several ways.

Do you remember how you first knew about the Holocaust?

Oh, my mother was telling me at her knee that she knew women in... You've got to know that the Holocaust was known about before they found the camps, you must know that.

But you were very young.

Yes, I was at my mother's knee, and she knew Polish women and people, and Polish Jews in the East End of London who already had the stories coming back. I mean my father-in-law knows that...I mean people were buying, sending money to Germany for their bodies, the bodies of their relatives from the camps, you know, at the turn of the war or just before the war, and they were getting a coffin back with four left arms, one torso, two heads and a foot, you know, that was put in as a direct and absolute insult to the people who paid money, right? So, you know, the Jewish communities around the world, and in England, knew about the Holocaust long before all of this stuff about opening the camps, and so did the various Western governments, because the information was getting through. As Ruth's father put it, you know, who is a medical man from Germany, he said they were...you know, we're not making a special plea, they were doing it to their own people before they were doing it to us. I mean in the Thirties they were gassing Untermenschen and, what are they called, degenerates, and people with mental problems and people with club feet in ovens and in vans

that were mobile vans, you know, in the Thirties, before the war started. So it was all available information. But how did I know? Because my mother was telling me stories that were coming out of the East End of London during the war and just after, so I was 6 or 7 or 8 I guess. It was very much a part of my consciousness as the Spanish Civil War was I think.

Right. I don't think we talked about the Spanish Civil War.

Oh right, I thought we did. The first time, the first time I physically hit it was when I worked in Israel and I was - well, not the first time, but the most...I remember a very physical image which was working in a refugee camp in, working in a kibbutz in Israel, and I had, you know, a young over-randy young man, had been on the road and all the rest of it and I found myself working next to a very healthy woman in shorts, and it's very hot and we're shovelling chicken shit together, you know, very funky smell, and dusty, and awful. And I started to fancy her somewhat, you know, in a speculative sort of way, compulsive sort of way, and I was sort of working and looked at her, and I just noticed up here were numbers, up her wrist, you know, they were numbers obviously from the camps. She was a survivor, you know. That holiday in the refugee camp made me realise there was still a lot of uncompleted history in Europe.

And how much did you let yourself be upset by it, or how much were you holding back?

What's this, how did you let yourself be upset by it? Who's got these kind of controls?

Well did you cry when you went to the camps?

No. I looked into the ovens, you know, and I looked into the ovens, like you look into the Devil's throat, you know, and you...there's not time to blink. In fact it's wise not to blink.

And what about that evening?

I can't remember it. Looked over the cliff where people joined hands and ran off the top of the cliff just to get out of it, you know, all of that.

And, I don't think we talked about the Spanish Civil War, so tell me what effect that had.

Oh I just...it was because I was running around Soho a Leftist. I mean I think it was all very much a part of the zeitgeist that you had some sense of the Spanish Civil War which was the last war where you appeared to, you could appear to fight for a very good cause that wasn't

nationalistic, that wasn't of your own, wasn't... I think what the attraction of the Spanish Civil War, it was an apparently, a chance to fight or do something where you really had no sexual interest, there was no personal interest in it, there wasn't...you weren't fighting for your pocket, for your race, for your nation, for your class. Well, sorry, you would be fighting for it, you would be fighting for the international proletariat, you know, I mean... I mean I think it was seen as a selfless act to go to that war, utterly selfless, it wasn't...

But this is looking at it in retrospect. I mean at the time it happened you were too small to count.

I wasn't alive at the time it happened.

I was going to say.

No, I'm just saying it was part of my personal feelings about history.

OK, but you didn't actually encounter a place or a person in the way that you are talking about the camps that made it personal?

No.

Right, OK.

No, I knew a few...I knew one or two people who fought in the Spanish Civil War but no, nothing pops up like that.

Right. And so, the people that you met in the refugee camp, did you stay in touch with any of them, did they stay a part of your life, or not?

I went to stay with one of the French guys I met there and his brother in the Cours de Vincennes in Paris, which was a mildly farcical stay, on the way back. I got to know an extremely intense Lutheran or Lutherian woman, and I think there was some kind of attraction, but I mean I just, what I think...it was a very intellectual attraction, I mean she was very very intense, shadows under the eyes, very thin, that I find very interesting, sallow, olive skin which you get in some Swiss Protestants, you know; a little vein throbbing at the temple, you know. But she was very intense, read books, you know, and I was into all that. Stayed with her family for a couple of days on the way home. They were interesting because they were real Swiss Protestant peasant family that have done quite well, so they had a very strong

family life, lots of terrifically good food, duvets as we now call them, you know, and things hung out the windows, you know. But when they all sat round the meal and you know, everybody belched and farted, you know, like bandits, everybody kind of broke wind at both ends, you know, and that was entirely normal there was, you know, no comment, no blushes, and I found this absolutely, you know, very hard to cope with, you know. Then I moved on to Paris and stayed with these pair of, what I realised were kind of rather uptight brothers, and had a slightly farcical Lucky Jim thing where...we pranded[ph] about in this kind of very large flat, and there was the...the father was a lawyer and the wife was, well the wife, housewife, and they had a very solid bourgeois family life, and it had its own rhythm. And the boys went out to museums to chase girls, which really meant they kept looking at girls and talking about, did she look at them, and so on. This whole thing didn't really...I didn't really understand what the hell was going on, I didn't see this as any kind of game. So I said one evening, `I think I'll...it's a warm and pleasant night, I think I'll go out for walkies,' you know. And they said, `Oh yes, well, perhaps Jean-Jacques will...' I said, `No no no, I think Jean-Jacques has been a really good host, and perhaps...' So I jumped into the nearest bar and spend three or four hours there, and came back a little bit tight, but very careful, and let myself in very carefully, and got undressed and went to bed. Within half an hour I wanted to go for a wee, and I went into the, I went to go to the toilet but I was being put up in this tiny box room in which there were various bits of bric-a-brac that you get in families, and one of them was a plaster image of Her Maj the, you know, Holy Marry, you know, the Virgin Marry, which I knocked over, and it smashed. And I thought, you know, it's like, you know, at the time a kind of anarcho-communist, and my relationship with the Catholic Church was extremely weird, you know, I wouldn't go to a Catholic church, I thought that was... And, oh my God! what do I do? So I went to the toilet and found some soap, and found that, you know, if I ran it under the taps and moulded it I could kind of mould the soap. So I went into a thing of moulding...I thought, I'm spending too much time here, so I would run the taps, pull the chain, go back to the room, and then mould the soap and try to put the statue together, and then within half an hour go back to the toilet to get some more soap, pull the chain, run the taps, you know. So these people must have thought I was absolutely insane. And I had put the complete statue back, which may still be standing on this thing because I did a very good job. They must have found a cake of soap that was clawed to death like... [LAUGHING] Sort of strange clues, you know, what the hell had he been doing? No, I didn't see...well I also remember a nice wise old, some kind of Jewish philosophy student there who was quite funny, very acerbic wit, but we didn't...we exchanged addresses but we didn't...

And what about Paris itself?

I don't remember too much of Paris of that trip. I think I was passing through really. The business of the refugee camp I think was quite strong enough.

And did you tell people about it when you came back?

Oh yes.

Right. And did anyone have any interest, or not?

Well yes, I mean, you know, I tend to get hold of people and hold them by the throat and not let them go until I've finished talking or until they've stopped looking interested enough, you know, when they stop looking interested enough I'll let them go, you know.

So that was the first summer holiday at the London College of Printing, yes?

I'm not sure, it was one of the summer holidays.

Right, but it was one of them.

I think it was actually the first year.

And, I forgot...oh Nice, being on the beach in Nice. I cannot imagine you on a beach in Nice.

Yes, that was a weird, that was a hilarious comedy of errors, because the guy who died in California last year, Bob Springer, turned out to be an adventure. That time he was a wild...he was an extraordinary man. At the age of 14, I've heard it verified by several others, he actually talked Hugh Gaitskell to a standstill in Hampstead Town Hall, he was very very bright, very fast [INAUDIBLE]. We went...he had all these connections, he reckoned, in the communist parties of various countries of Europe who would see us all right you see, which was best [INAUDIBLE] the effectiveness of this was when we stayed at a youth hostel somewhere in France, which I was totally against, I thought staying in a youth hostel was the most naff thing you could do; I mean you were not proving your macho worth, you know, you had to be able to hack it in all sorts of other ways. You didn't sell your body, you didn't stay in youth hostels, as far as I was concerned. We stayed in a youth hostel, and the man said, `Have you the youth hostel card?' And he put his hand into his jacket, which was in shreds, because he was a man in shreds, and he pulled out his Communist Party card and put it in front of this guy. Now he had told me that he had actually sewn his Communist Party card into the lining of his jacket in this kind of paranoid way, and it came out, and the bloke

said, `Monsieur, I do not think this is...' [LAUGHS] So..... [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE] That particularly holiday. Well it was a thing where, it was supposed to be the Dionysiac holiday, it was supposed to be the holiday where, with all the connections that we could scrape up we were going to have a good time in Europe. Now one of our co-students was someone called Carola Casson, who was daughter of the great man, and she gave us the address of some place she was going to be staying in on the coast, the Italian Riviera, and we were going to connect up with her, which again turned out to be a farce. Bob had these connections across Europe, we were going to go from one Communist cell to another, having a terrific time. It all ended, not quite in tears but it certainly didn't happen like that, and it ended up with me getting a job on the beach at Nice and selling papers to [INAUDIBLE]. [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE] Got to be a doctor because Ruth's parents [INAUDIBLE] two boys. And she said to one, `What do you think of the strudel I've cooked?' He said, `It's wonderful.' And she said to Heinz, `What do you think of the strudel?' He said, `It's not bad but you could have put in a bit more...'

OK.

So this particular holiday was a, you know, was a catastrophe, but I...

But why, you haven't really told me why.

Well, we parted company, I think we fell out mildly, and...

Is he still alive?

Poor Bob, we agreed to meet in, I think he was going to a connection that he thought was - oh yes, God! One of the connections was a riding school in Vienna, outside Vienna on the Hungarian border, and we turned up to this thing, and apparently there was a woman working there who was the lover or girlfriend of a guitar-playing friend of his, so we turned up at this place, it was a farcical time, we turned up at this great estate on the Hungarian border, and waited for everybody to come home, the servants said these people were coming. Oh no, first of all we had an address in Vienna which turned out to be a chemist, right? I said...we were very low on money, I said, `Bob, you had better get your shit together here, because I want to know what the truth is.' He said, `No, I don't understand.' It turned out this was some kind of postal address or something. We went out, we hitch-hiked, we took trains, we went right out to the Austro-Hungarian border. We came to this huge place with paddocks and, you know, a chateau and everything. Now you can't pretend you just happened to be passing by, you know, it's one of those situations. You clearly look as though you haven't got a penny to your

name, because you haven't. So, we found some servants in dirndls and stuff and they said that the Count will come back at 3, and at 3 o'clock these Daimlers turned up and all these people jumped out like something from `The Last Year in Marienbad' or something, you know, and there was all these kind of heavy-duty European toffs really, one way and another. And the first thing that happened, the count is drunk and really can't handle anything; the girl who is supposed to be the connection flees, you know, she said, you know, when Bob says, `I'm a friend of Al's,' she said, `Oh that shit,' and rushes out, right? The count's wife said, `So vot are you doing? Are you bums?' [LAUGHS] Oh by this time, sorry, we're eating a meal, and then they all turn up with the Fed, and this very good-looking and very intelligent cynic, this guy about 50, very well dressed, leans forward and said, `If I was you I would keep on eating, before you have to go'. [LAUGHING] So it was, a lot of feathers got unruffled one way and another, and so we entertained conversations where, you know, I leapt into a whole thing about royalty and said, `Some may say that royalty is good for this and that, but others...' [INAUDIBLE] makes me hang from the rafters of history.' So I was, you know, all of that went on. And in the end we got out of there, you know, with nothing, and at that point I decided that me and Bob ought to kind of skid off really. He had an unfortunate, he got...we had made an arrangement to meet at Genoa, which we looked at the map and it was a port on the Italian coast. I said, `Well, Carola Casson says, you know...and she will be there at some kind of...' what I can understand, it turned out to be some kind of ditsy school for summer time, the daughters and sons of summer time gentlefolk. And I said, `Well I'm going there, if you want to turn up there, I don't know what's going to be there, I don't know if Carola's going to be there, but otherwise I'll go up the coast and see what's going on. But before that I'll go to Genoa.' I can't remember why I said this, because there was something about [INAUDIBLE]. `Let's go to Genoa and let's meet at Genoa at the railway station under the clock between, over a period of three days, at midday for three days, OK? We should bracket it.' And he said, `Oh right.' And I thought, this is real military planning. And then I said, `Hang on, maybe there's more than one main station. Let's make it the most southerly, right?' He said, `Great.' And when I turned up, I found Genoa had about eight main railway stations and they all were in a direct east and west line. [LAUGHS] So it turned out later, we were in town at the same time but we missed it. Then I went up the coast, Carola Casson wasn't at this place, I hung around that place for a few hours and talked to these people and it turned out to be, you know, it was like Kensington by the sea, you know, so, it wasn't for me. Moved on up the coast, hit Nice when it was in the middle of the, some kind of a carnival time, this was great, and got a job washing up at the, on the beach at Nice for the [INAUDIBLE], the equivalent of W.H. Smith. I then found out that the papers I was selling were right-wing papers, you know, [INAUDIBLE], the `Il Tempo', `The Daily Telegraph', so that upset me a bit. Oh I got a basic fee of £2 for selling papers every morning, and commission on selling over a certain number, so I conspired to sell none whatsoever, because

I didn't want right-wing newspapers distributed, and avoided sales, which caused some confusion on the beach. I would run away from people who wanted to buy them. And had a kind of, a general tussle with the beefcake on the beach, the big boys who were supposed to be...well they were lifeguards but they were, you know, muscle for the 50-year-old American women, and they would...they had these kind of, you know how formal those Mediterranean beaches, exactly where you sit is very important. They had these walkways, you know, slatted wood, and the trash, the people who sold things, the Algerian nut-sellers and people like me, were supposed to clump about on the pebbles, and I wasn't having any of that. So I had this kind of physical run-in with these guys, who were much bigger than me but they didn't know about being low and small, your centre of gravity is lower and if you play some rugby you know what to do with them. And their real problem of course, they wanted to look good all the time, not lose their dignity. I didn't have any. So I just tucked my shoulder in, dropped low and lift them up from under the rib cage and they tend to go over. The last day I gave all the papers away, all the way up the beach, gave every single newspaper away with a little speech, hoping they would accept my gift, hoping they would ignore any political statement in the newspapers, kicked a little dog that had been giving me trouble all week in the jaw, stepped back, trod on the inner thigh of the woman who owned it, and fled. The one good, the two good things was that lunchtimes I used to go to this extraordinary cafe up in the Moroccan quarter of Nice, which was full of, it was run by a Yugoslav, and it had three blokes on a bench like a kind of a male Greek chorus in real crack-catcher[??] Turkish clothes, you know, and head gear, and a big amphora. And they drank wine out of this amphora all day, they were all over 70, and they would tell stories, burst into song. You get blokes coming in with food who throw the food on the table, on the counter, and the bloke would cook it for them, which I had never seen before. People would come in who were labourers, Moroccans and Yugoslavs who would come in, but there was a little sink in the corner, you know, one of those little, a modest little corner sink about a foot by a foot, they would strip down to the waist and absolute, you know, they would wash themselves, shave and all the rest of it. And I would have fabulous lunches of a big fried mackerel that looked like a Terry Scott painting, you know, a huge white plate, and olive oil, and this wine that actually raped your throat, and a bit of salad, and I thought this was the best show in town. I also got to know an Algerian nut-seller who was kicked about by the police quite a lot of the time, he was in his fifties, and we would conspire to have lunch now and again together down by the rocks where he put some wine in the water and some grapes, and I would bring some salami or something like that, and we would talk about Mozart and things like that

<u>End of F4812 Side A</u>

F4812 Side B

.....Nice itself, did that make any impact on you?

Well, it was where lots of people hung around with lots of money. There were parts of the town I didn't feel comfortable in, there were parts of the town I did. I slept in a tent out on one of the camp-sites. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I think the thing about, I think the thing about those kind of trips that I was always facing up to, what I regarded as the utterly loose and seductive sensuality of the Mediterranean climate and people, and at the same time being censorious, so I was finding that kind of battle in my head, you know, but also admiring the visuality of it.

Did you go to Cannes and places like that?

No, no.

I've always felt totally uncomfortable in those places.

Yes, I felt uncomfortable.

You obviously felt more of mix[??].

I went down to Villefranche, there was a funny little coda to that particular, because I didn't go all the way home. Yes I did go all the say home, I intended not to. I went to Villefranche because one of the things I heard about was that there was...Villefranche is a kind of a working port quite near to Nice but really pretty much full of private sailing boats and so on. I had this idea of going down there and trying to find a boat that I could work as crew on back home. I had never done it before but I heard you could bludge your way into these things.

Could you swim?

I'm an absolutely poxy swimmer. I'm best at the bottom of the...I'm terrific under water, I'm very comfortable under water; I cannot stand being at water level, partly to do with my polyps and sinuses and so on, but partly because, it's psychological I think, I'm much happier at the bottom of the pool, really, and never really resolved that. I went to Villefranche, and by this time had picked up with several kind of people in that free-floating population of travellers who had come unstuck one way or another. One guy I met who had fallen asleep with his jacket over the back of his deck-chair and had absolutely everything stolen from him. Down

at Villefranche with this guy, who was walking around with a pair of silk shorts, a somewhat incongruous chap and a very kind of high kind of, he had a kind of, what's the equivalent today? Kind of Larry Grayson kind of haircut. I don't think he was gay but he was strange, he was a very strange bloke. All he said he had left was a pair of shorts and a pair of plimsolls, and he seemed to be very unworried about this, which I found bizarre because I was very uptight and wanted to travel and made sure I knew where my sheath knife was and kept my socks clean and all of that; always kept the money across the Channel in my boot so that even if I got drunk and spent everything, I knew you could travel across Europe eating out of the fields but you couldn't swim the Channel. So I was kind of rather over-organised in that respect. And this bloke was kind of breezing through life with absolutely nothing, I mean I couldn't work it out. Then we went to Villefranche...so I said I was going to Villefrance, he said, `Well, can I come?' I said, `Well, yes all right, but you know, I'm about business.' We went down to Villefranche and there was I remember a huge bull being carried up in a sling but started to come undone, you know, and I thought, oh my God! loads of bulls were going to be all over the...they managed to sort it out. Then we saw loads of bits of wood stacked and in between these bits of wood I saw the odd leg, so I remember pulling one of these legs and getting some Anglo-Saxon out of it, and it was a bunch of upper-class Sloane chaps who were also travelling, used to meet these kind of guys. I remember meeting one bloke on a bend of a road who, the most miserable man I ever met, and he turned out to be the son of some James Goldsmith type person who had said to him, `Basically you're a wanker,' that's him to his son. `Here's £200 to disappear in Europe for the summer.' I mean £200 in those days was just like £5,000 now. `Come back with some experiences.' And he was essentially trying to make the summer, wait for the summer to go. And I looked at him and I thought, well why don't you turn into an absolute upper-class shit and just sit in some club somewhere and not tell your dad, you know. But these guys were people who had been in some disaster where they had been waiting for some ship to turn up coming out of Corsica and the ship had sunk, so they were completely...all their dads were on it, you know. No one had died but they had just lost contact with that which was going to kind of give them a summer, so they were kind of on their beam ends as well. So, I walked along the quays talking to the skippers of the various boats and saying, `I am a young and urgent lad who wants to get back to England. I know nothing about ships except my great-grandfather won the Doggett's Badge,' which was true. And I said, `But I can work and I'll work for nothing to get home to England. If you need a pair of hands,' so on. `No, sorry, nice idea.' `No, sorry, nice idea.' Finally get this bloke, `Oh, that's interesting.' I said, `Why's that?' He said, `Well, my ship has developed trouble in one of the screws,' it's a twin motor thing, it was some kind of launch..... [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE] So the guy said, `Well, one of the engines has packed up, twin screw thing, so instead of going across from here through the Straits of Gibraltar up across the Bay of Biscay and all of that, I have decided to go through all of the canals of

France and make a quick dash across the Channel. I need a bit of help with that, how do you feel?' I said, `That sounds to me an absolutely wonderful way of ending up the summer.' He said, `Well great,' he said, `there's no problem, it's just that I only need one person.' So I said, `What's the problem?' He said, `What about your friend?' And I looked round and there was this guy was standing there kind of grinning. And I couldn't believe it, I mean he was there, you know. And the bloke said, `I'll toss you for it.' So, I was young and naive and tossed for it and lost. And then hitchhiked home. I learnt a lesson there. This guy stuck as they said, like shit to a blanket, I mean, I don't know...I really still don't, when you think about I don't know what this guy was about, whether he was a mass murderer, a very strange kind of gay guy, or...but someone, whatever he was, he was either lying, which meant that he travelled across Europe with a pair of silk shorts and a little bag and a t-shirt, nothing else as far as I could see, or he had lost it all and he was still willing to do that.

And he was obviously attractive to your man with the boat.

Maybe, maybe.

And, did anything happen on the way back?

Can't remember the trip back.

With this trip and the previous one we talked about, were you drawing all the time?

No.

Not at all?

I was... [LAUGHS] I used to travel with about four-hundredweight of books, improving books; I mean I would take all of Dostoyevsky and Sartre and Camus, and I would take a huge...the first year anyway I went away with, because I couldn't afford a sleeping bag or anything like that, so I got a, what do they call it, it's not a duvet. Those kind of padded blankets that English people put on the top of their beds.

Eiderdown.

Eiderdown, I got an eiderdown and put a zip into it, rather inefficiently, called that a sleeping bag. And the moment it got wet it weighed 56 pounds, the books got wet, and got mouldy, so I carried like some terrible kind of Mediaeval monk as a penitence, I carried culture and a wet

thing around Europe, you know, and caught a cold every two nights sleeping in it, and carried these sodden books, none of which I read a page of, you know. And I did it each year, I'd think, now what book shall I read this...you know.

And, since she has cropped up, tell me about Carola Casson at this stage.

Carola was part of our year, which was a very...I think I said earlier, last time, that the staff were a very weird bunch, they weren't, in those days there was no such thing as an ordinary graphic design tutor, they were all peculiar, they had all come to it from other directions. And the students in graphic design had come to it for different reasons. It got professional later, it's now a profession, but in those days it was, as I said last time, it's like the, you know, the...it was second worst to sending your daughter, putting your daughter on the stage Mrs Worthington, it was a bizarre thing to do. So you got upwardly-mobile prols like me, you got people who wanted to be artists but lost their bottle or weren't good enough or had been told they weren't good enough. So a lot of people did graphic design because they thought, they had been told, they weren't good enough to be fine artists. I'm not talking about the truth of any of that, I'm just saying that there was a lot of that. There were other people like me who were desperate to do anything, and it was their...it's what I call back-door education which we've lost sight of, we now call it kind of options and all that crap, but I mean I think that there was a, you know, there are divergent thinkers and convergent thinkers and the convergent thinkers tended to do well in their exams, the divergents didn't, I mean we've done all the studies on that, and those people needed another, a root, you know. So there were people like that. I think I was a mixture of that and an upwardly-mobile prol, there by circumstance and opportunity. And there were, now and again there were people who were doing it because their parents were very big in the print industry and wanted, they would put them either in print management or they put them into design. And now and again there were people, like the Casson family where everybody had done a bit of everything, but some people weren't as good as others, and somehow some people have opted to do that. Carola was a wispy thing with red hair, probably still is, who, I think I can say even on tape, I noticed first because she had a wonderful style which was to curl the hair under her armpits, which I thought looked absolutely beautiful and wonderful, I thought that was an excellent thing to do. We had never had any kind of romance or anything but we were quite close. I mean I thought she was funny and witty; I thought the personal life she was living, as far as I could understand it, was catastrophic, but that was to do with Kensington hyppydom, you know.

Why, what was that like?

Not to do with her family but to do with her private life, so I won't talk about that on this tape.

You mean to do with the times, or you mean just to do with her private life?

I think that her private life reflected the times of Kensington and Chelsea in those days. I have no, absolutely no comment about her family life, although I went to her family house once, fleetingly, but I thought that what I could see of what she was up to, I knew about through other people, and I never talked about it with her, you know.

But you mean it was unhappy?

I thought it was unhappy and unfortunate.

And what was...

And that she needed correcting, you know. I mean, sorry, that sounds like a kind of, but I mean she needed...she needed a better break in life.

And what was the family house like when you went there?

Oh, a kind of an elegant place with various kind of gingery red-haired daughters zooming about, and, I don't think I met the father or the mother. Or I think the mother was there, I'm not sure. But I mean it was just, come in, I think I might have had a glass of wine, and I think we were off to something, you know. But we weren't companions, me and Carola, I mean we were just...we were foils for each other in the dynamics of the studio.

What was her work like?

Very bad. Indifferent, as she wasn't serious, I mean she wasn't fighting for her life, she was raving in other places.

And was she part of your sort of Soho life as well, or not?

No, no.

Right. And were there other girls on the course? I mean nearly everybody you've mentioned has been a bloke, I think.

There was plenty of girls in the course, yes.

And were they sort of pretty well equal, was there any division?

Well I think there were divisions in the course which cut across...they cut the cake in several ways. I mean there was, who had money and who didn't was quite important. What class people were from, quite important, as ever, and that didn't necessarily correspond to who had money and who didn't. There was the gender thing; some of the girls or women and some of the men were more matey with each other than others, and more, you know, and some of the women were more sexual marks[??], you know, targets, than they were matey with other people. I mean the way society breaks down, I mean, there wasn't any... It was fairly democratic in that there were all sorts of people from all sorts of either bohemia or...I don't know. Maybe I'm describing the way it normally is with studentships, so, no I can make nothing of that.

But the fact that you say that she wasn't serious, did you think other of the women were?

I don't remember any one woman I could put my...oh yes I can, one woman that I could put my finger on who was serious. She was a serious designer. She is also probably the most beautiful woman of her generation that I remember, would hold salon in Bloomsbury and you could always lope up the stairs and find people loping down, or loping about, or just sitting there hoping.

And did she go on and have a career?

She went to have a career, I don't know if I ought to identify her on this tape, there's no reason why I shouldn't. She went on to have a career but suffered a physical misfortune, she got some kind of accident or spinal deformity which rendered her as a cripple. She married somebody I believe well. I had a mild thing with her. And, I met her many years later in a wheelchair in Hampstead and she said everything's fine, you know. So... She was one of these interesting women who I've tended to get involved with who, I mean she didn't like, she had the same problem about design but she was extremely intelligent and design was her entree into that intelligence, into the business of intelligence.

And when did you stop being in touch with somebody like Carola?

The moment we left college really.

And was that true generally with the students, or not?

Yes.

Right. And just to finish this time, tell me about the kibbutz.

Well there were two kibbutzim, plural. [ANIMAL NOISE] Shut up. I again in this rather, it sounds, I've said it several times but I've had this really rather deliberate way of doing things. I decided that I ought to...I talked to people about Israel and the way it's put together, I decided that I ought to a) go to a kibbutz in the north, in a well settled Galilee, and a fairly lush Galilee, and b) go to a kibbutz in the south which would be desert and less...more recently settled. And if I went to the north I would also probably go to a more Ashkenazi or European and right-wing kibbutz, and if I went to the south I would probably go to a more left-wing Sephardic kibbutz, and I ended up in the latter category in a kibbutz of Cuban Marxist Jews who came out just before Fidel Castro got in.

How did you know about the kibbutz anyway?

Well I just talked to people, I don't know, I mean, I can't remember that, I just talked to people.

Because it wasn't that common to go to them at that point, was it?

No, but I was an anarchist left-wing person who had a real feeling for, at the time for working with people and so on, you know, so, I regarded the... I mean, there's two words here, one is communist which we all know, and there's this bizarre right-wing term coming out of America, communarialism, as though they can't quite say communism without all their teeth falling out, you know. But there's an in-between word somewhere about community spirit, or you know, being a community-centred person, and I had that instinct and wanted to see more of it, and see how you could fit into it, if you could. So that's why, one of the reasons I went to Israel.

How did you get there?

Well I...what did I do? I remember taking a boat from Bari or Naples to Haifa. I think I hitched to...I hitchhiked to Belgrade and caught the Orient Express to Salonica, which was hilarious for a number of other reasons. Or did it go...did I go all the way to Athens? It was that kind of route. Can't remember the... I remember the... [LAUGHS] I remember the train,

I mean it was, that was diabolical, I mean it was... Oh, in Yugoslavia I was, that's right, I was walking through some mountain bits and passed through a village, and on the outskirts of the village were some Gypsies who looked at me with some, you know, interest, and I walked past them and I looked back and a quarter of a mile out of the encampment there were two guys with a gun, with guns, following me, and I thought, fuck this, I mean, there's...you know, I'm at the mercy of fate here, or what they want. They could just be seeing me through, or they could be about to sort me out; there's no way I can get out of this, I can't go down, up, and I can't run, so I had to wait. So I walked on and on, and finally they just hung back and they disappeared, and in sheer nerves, I was desperate for a piss, and went to the edge of the road and just, you know, just went down a bit, unbuttoned your flies, hung my dick out, and looked into the jaws of a wolf. [LAUGHING] [INAUDIBLE] three feet there was a huge dead...it might have been a dead Alsatian but to me it was a huge dead wolf with flies with its jaws open, and my penis kind of two feet or three feet away from it, and I thought, this is the end of...this is all the excitement I need today, right? Yugoslavia I found interesting at that time; it was full of good people, and I remember staying in villages, this is the old stuff, you know, this is old Europe, this is the old world, where you would be sat down in the local, I don't, they didn't call them Gasthofs but some tiny kind of shithead pub in a village, and you would buy a drink but that would be the first and only drink you would buy that evening. And I remember people putting a piece of bread and some sardines in front of me, and I looked at the sardines and thought, who wants that? And I suddenly realised that all the food, that's what they had. And they would ask you a series of questions which I could almost write like a manual, `What is your name?' Ken. `What is your father's name?' George. `What name is that?' Yorge. `Ah, Yorge.' `Does he have land?' No. `What does he do?' So. `Why are you here?' `Where did you come from?' `Where are you going to?' And what I was doing, I realised, I was telling them a story. Not as a story-teller, as a talented teller of stories, but I was giving them something which, when I had gone they would pick over and they would make into their own story. I was giving them the raw material, do you understand what I'm saying? And I had to kind of behave like a journalist...oh I didn't have to do anything, but I mean in a sense you were behaving like your English teacher wanted you to behave, given the bare bones. It wasn't...there was no point in going off into a number; what you had to do was to give them the raw material, and with a bit of luck they would like you, and when you went away they would make your story up to your favour, and if they thought you were an arsehole they would make another story up. And if they felt that the telling of the story would encourage people to stay in their village, they would tell one story, and if they told...you know, and so on. You know, you were giving them raw material. And I understood this exchange, it's a very important and very ancient exchange, and in that sense you learnt to accept hospitality, because it was a very equal exchange. On the other hand, people I met who said they had got from London to India for £40, now I knew to be liars, they

had sold themselves in some way. But there was a balance, there was a balance between the ancient laws of hospitality, which I think are great, I mean one of the things, they always give you, they give you water to refresh you, they give you something sweet to give you energy, be it chocolate or a candied fruit, they give you something to nourish you, and then they want a story. And I think it's a very good exchange. And I got to enjoy it, if the balance was right.

They were asking you in English?

Oh, sometimes, I mean sometimes they were... I mean that would turn into a story itself, I mean how they would go to a village and find a bloke who would speak a bit of German...said he could speak English but it turned out to be a bit of German and some kind of bizarre French from Mauritius or something, you know, I mean it was just, you know... So, it was not only my bluff was being called, you find people who were buried into the local woodwork who kind of would look at you with a wild eye and you know, I want to confess, I don't speak any English at all. So we would all get by somehow because we would all be protecting our various self interests, you know. I had some lovely nights like that, you know, honourable ones, you know, where there was a good exchange going on. I liked Yugoslavia then, I thought it was great, and, I mean this was all in a few nights[??]. And on the Express, the Orient Express, I mean there were people giving birth, there were people conceiving in the toilets, there were people giving birth in the alleyways, there were people singing songs, there were people coming home to Greece or Bulgaria, and whole families and, you know, they would be singing and keening their songs. I mean I've seen this so many times where people are coming home to Crete or Greece, people would sing themselves home, you know. They would induce their home, they would bring it forth, you know, by singing it in, you know. And there would be the boss-cat in the corridor who would be drinking and then every now and again he would put his head into the compartments, sing a few catches, you know, just to put his little cat's paw on the whole business. We would, I remember stopping somewhere on the, yes it was on the Yugoslav-Greek border, and someone came along, a guard came along and collected all our passports, and I started to say to him that under English law no one's allowed to take my passport, but kind of thought better of it. I looked out of the window and saw him walking up the track with an armful, he was clearly drunk, with an armful of passports and the passports were dropping out of his arms, you know. So, I don't know what kind of aggravation that put into the lives of the people whose passports got dropped. We got off at some station, some way station, for people to relieve themselves, people to get a drink, people to get something to eat, and everybody was behaving incredibly and exhilaratingly badly, I mean people were kind of just pigs and animals and so on. And as we were fighting our way back on, all expecting to try and get the same seat that we had before, I started to shout, `Oh fuck this, I've had enough of this,' and there was this completely wacked-out

hippy, American hippy, leaning against the door-jam, said, `Hey man, this is the Balkans'. [LAUGHS] I said, `Oh go away!' I don't need any of that. Anyway.....

End of F4812 Side B

F4813 Side A

Israel itself is a tape, you know, I mean it's, I could talk about that for a long time.

Tell me the beginning. How much did you know about Israel?

How did I know about it?

How much did you know about it?

I don't know, I mean that's hard to say. I knew, I had done a bit of research as they say, which means talking to people in pubs and so on. I got to Israel on this boat; the boat was interesting because it was divided up between sincere pilgrims going to Israel, or people returning on business, you know, but sincere pilgrims, and a particular class of mad communist Jew who were going to there to work in the kibbutzim because it was left-wing. I mean I wasn't one because I'm not Jewish, but I mean these were people from severely left-wing Jewish groups. And you would walk round the alleyways and the gangways of the ship and find very Orthodox Chasidim dovering[??], which is a Jewish term to mean praying but with a nodding thing, you know; Christians get on their knees, you know, Jews doven[ph]. Nodding like this. The equivalent of Catholic prayer beads I guess keeping the hand moving[??]. And they would be doing it all over the place, you would go round, they'd pray in toilets, anywhere, you know, find guys doveling[ph] away like that, praying, praying, inducing Israel, you know. Very devout, very devout. And on the deck there would be these communist Jews, young Jews from Hamstead or France or wherever, singing, da-da-da-da-da, black pudding, da-da-da-da-da-da-da, black pudding, you know, a kind of, you know, a complete take-off from their own home experience, which is very [INAUDIBLE] the Jewish experience, you know, there would be people on the steps of the kibbutz and there would be people taking the mickey out of people of the shul, and the synagogue, and there would be people just below the steps of the synagogue taking the mickey out of people in the synagogue, on the steps of the synagogue. But they're all around the synagogue, which is an important point. So, the boat was that, and it was me meeting up with some other souls who were travelling for much the same reason as me, those early travellers, most of them male. Now, just come into my head an extraordinary remembrance of an absolutely crazy woman that I remembered, it was quite unexpected, and it's to do with this tape, which cuts across the historical memory of, you know, the proper flow of what happened in Israel. But I was sleeping on the beach at Tel Aviv where a lot of people with sleeping bags slept, and in the morning I found myself looking at this extraordinary woman who was, I found out later, Moroccan Sephardic Jewish, very lithe, very brown skin, was playing with the crabs that you

found all over the sand, and throwing stones. And I got to talk to her, and we became companions for a couple of days; again it wasn't an affair or anything, it was just, she was weird and I was weird. And her reactions to things disturbed me. She got into arguments with people very very rapidly. Very good-looking, about 28, 26, 27. Very intelligent, spoke French and Jewish and some English. We went to a political meeting one evening, there were not many people in the square, and the speaker was a right-wing fascist and everybody said, `Ignore him, he'll get nowhere'. And I said, `Well it's interesting, because the applause that I can hear every time he says something doesn't match the number of people in the square.' And I looked round, and there were loudspeakers everywhere, [INAUDIBLE]. That man was Menachem Begin, and I thought, watch out for this guy. And in those days he was regarded as a joke. But she got into a terrific row with some people, and I had to cart her away. When I left Israel, I mean I...there were a couple of other things I haven't remembered about her, which struck me, but we, you know, we went our different ways. I went out, when I came out of Israel I decided that I had spent the summer in Israel working on the kibbutzim and Israel owed me a good couple of nights' sleep, I was a bit tired of sleeping in funny places, so I went up to Haifa to the Technion I think it was called, it's a kind of university on a hill, on Mount Haifa, and walked in rather like in Frankfurt and said, `I've been working on the kibbutzim, I want a place to sleep'. And they said, `Oh, OK.' And they put me up, in that Israeli-American way. And I found myself talking to some people, they said, `Where have you been?' I said, `Well I have been, you know, working on Devere[ph] Kibbutz Devere[ph], and Kibbutz Mitzuva[ph],' which I think we'll probably talk about on another tape, because it was a big time in my life this actually. But, `Where are you from?' They said, `Oh, Kibbutz so-and-so.' I said, `Ah...' No, sorry, it wasn't a kibbutz, it was one of the sub-sects of kibbutzim, it was a moshav. No they had a different relationship between the market[??] and, you know, they weren't totally communist or they were already into the market[??] or something like that. I said, `Oh, did you know...?' The name, it's like, it's a kind of a French Arabic name, Susannah-Ben something, I don't know. They said, `Christ! How do you know her?' And I said, `Well, so many weeks ago we were, you know, I met her on the beach at Tel Aviv.' They said she's in a mad house, she's locked up. I said, `Why?' She said, `Well,' the people said, `well, she apparently was a victim of the Algerian war, she had been, you know, she was Jewish but Algerian.' Well the Moroccan war, I can't remember, it was either Morocco or Algeria, she was part of the terrible happenings, and she came out of that place deranged, or things happened to her, I can't remember the story, but clearly she had been got at by the whole thing. And she had been on either a moshav or a kibbutz, and, what happened? There was an incident. She was eccentric, she was disturbed. It was something to do with, it was not to do with feeding animals, it's what she did on the sea front. She kept feeding the birds and animals with me while I was with her, it was an obsession. If we broke bread or if we had food she would beg, she would get food from other people, together with our leavings,

and she would then feed birds with it, which was a very un...it's a very English thing to do, but this was obsessive, it was compulsive. This was something to do with, something to do with, it's a similar thing to do with killing vermin in the kibbutz, you know, they had vermin, they had rats or they had something like that. It wasn't rats, I know it wasn't that but it was something like that. And she said at one of the meetings in a hadarofel[ph], which is Hebrew for eating place, you know, where they used to have the kind of councils, `If anybody does that, I will have no more killing, I will do something about it.' And they thought, Suzannah, you know, well she's off again, you know. And so they bated the rat, you know, they poisoned the rats, or they did what they were going to do, I can't remember what it was. And she was then found to be pouring petrol into a house where there were sleeping children of the woman who did this thing, I mean she was, you know...and they carted her off.

Did you try and contact her at all?

No I didn't. It was the day before leaving. We weren't that close. We had...I think it's one of the very peculiar relationships I'm capable of, which is to walk around with people for days without talking very much, even if the communication is there. I can get...I mean I think it's something to do with working in a factory or working physically, I can get to know people just by walking. I mean could walk 25 miles with somebody, and I'm sure other people can, and you get to know people very well. So, conversation isn't vital. But we didn't converse that much to...and frankly, from my experiences later with barmy people, she may well have not remembered me at all.

Is part of this walking you are talking about also to do with walking away from people, that it's a temporary closeness and then you...?

Sorry?

Is it, what you've just said about, you can get to know someone by walking with them.

Yes.

And is part of it also walking away from them, that's the end of it?

No.

Because the other time you've spoken like that, and you've said something similar, was to do with working beside people when you were an apprentice.

Yes.

And getting to know them, and then you walked away from them.

Yes, but that doesn't...that didn't stop me getting to know them, it just meant that I walked away from them, because, you know, I mean... No, I mean walking away from them was metaphoric, I'm talking about walking with them across, you know, from here to there, you know.

Yes, but when you began saying that you started saying about a particular kind of relationship you have with people, which is to do with exactly what you're saying.

Right.

But it's not necessarily a sustained one.

No, I think you can have a particular kind of a relationship with people where you don't have to speak that much but you can do an awful lot of things.

But it can be sustained?

Yes, absolutely. Yes it's just that with Suzannah, I call her now Suzannah, I mean it may well have been her name, I can't remember, but with that particular person it's not...there wasn't enough verbal contact to refer back to and say, hey, I'm your friend, that we met, you know, for four days and... Well I think it's too tenuous. I was on my way out of the country anyway.

[June the 7th 1995.]

You were going to tell me this time about working on the kibbutz in Israel, please.

I worked on two kibbutzim, in the plural. One was, I don't know if I said this last time, but one was in the north and one was in the south. One was established, well settled, and more right-wing, it's either mapai[ph] or maparm[ph] I can't remember which, and more Ashkenazy, which means, tends to mean eastern or middle European. And the one in the south was newer, much more Marxist, much more left-wing. In fact there were Marxist Cuban Jews, a wild bunch, some of whom said, if we had have only known that Castro was

going to come in we wouldn't have bothered to come to Israel, we would have hung about. But I did that quite deliberately in the way I described earlier about me reading the `Spectator' to compensate for my own left-wingery, actually did it as an act of calculation, to get some sense of the span of the experience of working in Jewish kibbutzim. And I was there, I think, I'm not entirely sure I'm like[??] this all the time, but I think I was there to get a feeling of the community experience as a leftie kind of artist. And as someone who comes from a background where the phrase `mucking in' is very strong, which means that you all pull together and so on, and from a background that's also working class, left-wing, at least on my mother's side, I still found it quite a shock. All things that you normally took for granted were up for question. If you were in the hadarofel[ph], which is the eating place, and watching a movie, someone put a, if somebody put a packet of cigarettes down, everybody helped themselves while they were watching the movie, and nobody got bitched for taking cigarettes. And I watched this happen, and I found that was very interesting. If you worked in the fields you worked at a pace which was sensible for you, which I knew about from my background, I knew that was a sensible thing. You got no points for working so hard as to collapse at 3 in the afternoon. And when a couple of rat-toothed English tearaways skived off into the palm trees to have a cigarette, they were found by the foreman, who said, `Well what are you doing here?' And they said, `Well we're having a cigarette.' He said, `Well, if you were having a rest, why did you walk two fields to come over here?' In other words he was perfectly happy if they sat down in the field and had a cigarette as a rest in full view of everybody, but these people had different, very very different perceptions of what you, you know, what you do in these situations. And I found that very exciting, I found it very good, and I miss it, and I've not found it anywhere else. I found the physical labour interesting. I found the, on one of the kibbutzim, I think it was the one in the south - no, it was the one in the north, a man who was at one time a professor of science I think in Australia, a Jew, who came to Israel and found that he ought to become an expert in the growing of bananas, which he proceeded to do. He did that for the movement, for the kibbutzim, and I thought that was wonderful, and he did that in his forties, you know, mid-forties, and he turned his life over and used his brains and the mechanics of his brains to get into a new thing. I found the relationship with the Arabs not at all easy. They employed, in the northern one they employed Arabs in the kibbutz which was a point of dispute in the movement as to whether you should do that, not...of course sometimes it was because of a kind of implicit racism or fear that Arabs could be a problem, but also it was part of the extreme puritanism in parts of the movement which said you don't ask people to do what you won't do yourself, and if the kibbutz movement's going to work then everybody should be doing something and making the thing work, you don't get in outside help. I think it was the fact that even after a hard day's work people would sit down in the hadarofel[ph] and talk about what it is they should be doing and what they shouldn't be doing, for hours, with intelligence, and I thought that was wonderful. You don't get it in

England. You might get it in other places. But that was exciting to me. I mean I didn't stop talking in Israel. I remember standing on Dizengoff Street with a back-pack on, and a big Chasid came up with the hat, the locks, and by locks I mean L-O-C-K-S and not L-O-X, and the big black coat. They just came up me, spoke to me in Hebrew, and then he spoke to me in English and he said, `What are you doing?' I said, `I am a traveller and I have come here to look at Israel.' And we stood on the corner of that street and spoke for four hours, and we talked about all sorts of things. I mean he never actually offered me a coffee, God forbid, and he never actually asked me to sit down, but I mean... [LAUGHS] And I was at the age when I rather liked that. It was a kind of, a very open university for me. In one of the kibbutzim I was actually asked, in the south, I was asked if I wanted to join, which was very remarkable because I'm not...they don't normally do that to travellers, they certainly don't do it to anybody who isn't Jewish. And I found that flattering, because there was a Swiss woman in a kibbutz who was an honest, hardworking woman of intelligence and she was trying to, had been trying to join for years and they just put her off all the time, they could see it was a problem. I liked the work, I liked the way they worked out their destinies, and I liked it as a model for behaving. They had their problems in those days, one of them was going to be that the American money that propped them up was going to catch up with them at some point, they were going to have to face reality, and I said so to them, which they could take, [INAUDIBLE] 20, 21. [PAUSE] I've broken my thread, what was I saying?

You were talking about the fact that they said you could stay, and I wondered if you were about to say why it was you didn't really, because you...

No I wasn't about to say that. I mean I wasn't going to stay because I was young, on the move, and I wasn't Jewish, and I mean I could see that you would have to pay a price to stay there. But I liked the way they addressed their problems, and talked about them all the time. That was it, it was the thing of them having a hard time with the fact that if they had intelligent youth the youth wanted to travel and go abroad and then wouldn't come back, and I said, well, I felt that they had to take that chance really, you know. It's a problem for us all I guess.

What did you think about the way the children were brought up?

Very, it was very varied. I mean it was a university in its own right. It had every kind of way of behaving in every spectrum that you could think up. There were people who would bring their own children up in their own houses; there were people who would bring their children up in communal places. And they would be doing it for quite right-wing reasons and

sometimes for very left-wing reasons, it varied. Each kibbutz was different. And I thought that was great too.

Was there anything you actually didn't like?

There was a certain righteousness sometimes on the kibbutz. On one kibbutz we were kind of castigated for not wearing shirts in the hadarofel[ph], which I think they were probably right about, you know, we would come off the fields and all sweaty and just walked straight in and started scoffing. That's because we were young gits. So we were pulled up for that, and I said immediately, `Well, yes, if you want us to really be part of it, why don't we have Hebrew lessons?' Which was a kind of a fly move on my part. And do you know, they actually organised Hebrew lessons, which faded out because in the afternoon we were just absolutely whacked out and fell asleep. There were problems I think with the history of the place. I got to know one guy on the northern kibbutz who said, `Well, what you hear isn't quite right.' The grand mufti of Jerusalem had actually sold land of the Arabs to whom he was supposed to be the father and protector to the Jewish agency, with the effect that some poor fellahin would come to, come up one morning to his land and find settlers on it, and they would say, `We have a piece of paper which says this has been our land forever. We have a piece of paper.' Now the fact is, under the Ottoman Empire most people didn't have a piece of paper for the land. So the grand mufti of Jerusalem was selling land that he didn't own, had no title to, so there was double villainy of course, the grand mufti of Jerusalem was a great admirer of Hitler. So there was all of these complications which some people were very happy to tell you, and some people were not willing to talk about it at all. Their attitude to the Arabs was mixed; sometimes it was romantic and sometimes it wasn't. I remember being shown in the desert, going out in the desert and seeing a cave, and I said, `What's in the cave?' And Digalia[ph] I think his name was, who I got on with very well, said, `You don't go in there.' There's a special kind of fly that bites you and you get a real disease. I think actually it was probably full of dead bodies, there was a good chance of that. I remember on another occasion some ten or fifteen years later being in Israel and fancying walking into the Jordan, quite liked the idea. I'd had a sip at Delfi[ph] so I thought I'd have a sip of the Jordan. Quite liked the experience of it. And I noticed these signs along the Galilee which said, `Do not go into the water, it's dangerous'. Right. Could be bombs, it could be old arms or whatever. Well I just went in to the Jordan as it came out of the Galilee, which I thought was a nice place to do it, just on the junction, and I took a drink of water and put a bit on my head and so on. Looked down and right by my hip, by my knee, was a hip bone sticking out of the sand. It wasn't a piece of mutton, it wasn't a lamb, it was a human hip bone. I thought, right, dead bodies round here.

So there had...?

Weird little experience to be kind of quietly baptising yourself and see a hip bone, right?

If there had been bodies in this cave, whose bodies do you think they would have been?

Oh they'd be perhaps shot Arabs, you know. But I'm guessing. But you know, there'd been a rough time in Israel in those times, I'm not saying who's right and wrong, it's a very very complicated thing.

And did you wish you were Jewish?

No. Sometimes people ask me if I am Jewish, and there's a very good answer to that. I help out in the store.

But did you, I mean did you feel more in sympathy with them than you did for instance when you were sharing the house with the Bengalis or whatever they were?

I'm bound to feel more sympathy with them because my background is Old Testament, and my mother was brought up in the East End of London amongst the Jewish community, and she was what's called a shabbatgoet[ph], somebody who lights the candles for the religious people on Fridays, you know, so...

So you were in quite a good position really in that it was familiar to you, and you were in sympathy with it, but you weren't bound by it in any way.

Yes right.

And were there very big differences between the two camps in the way they were run? I mean it sounds as though there should have been, but...

I can't remember that. I think the southern one, the Cuban one, was a little bit more raffish, but it was also younger so it hadn't been settled for so long, and it was never going to be as prosperous if it was just to do with the business of how much you could grow, unless the technology changed, so it was a scruffier place, it was, you know... It was a little bit more laid-back, a little bit more easy, you know, they weren't exactly sitting around playing guitars at night but they were a kind of slightly more louche gang.

And did you make quite deep friendships there, or not?

I made one or two friendships. I went out to, I used to go out in the evening, because the desert in the evenings and in the dawn is absolutely wonderful, it's flooded with colour; it bleaches out during the day and then it floods with colour at each end of the day. And we used to go walking in the dunes and seeing a gazelle or oryx, you know, [INAUDIBLE], and would go back and, I did this for a while and then people were incensed because apparently I was walking through these very tight defenses, you know, so, the kibbutz had to be defended quite well. And I got to know a guy, I think his name was Abu Suk[ph], who was a Bedouin who had his tents a few miles away, a couple of kilometres away from the kibbutz, and was a friend of this Digalia[ph] who drove us out there, and I had a meal in his tent and all of that kind of stuff. And, he had his own horse that he would race in the evening on the dunes, you know, a real Bedouin.

And did you stay in touch with anyone you met that at this point?

No.

And how long were you there do you think, this time?

It was a summer, a summer.

And do you think you were changed by it?

I don't know what change, or when you notice you've changed. I think that, sometimes things are combinations of changes, they are... An event like that actually allows you to pass through a gate that you had almost opened, you've been opening for some time, put it that way, so the combination of a change. Yes, I think there was.

Can you pin down what?

No.

And do you think it's influenced the way you've lived in the future?

I think it had a short-term effect which was that at the time, one of the reasons I went there I think, I had just finished at design school and I was utterly sick of the idea of working in advertising or working in those kind of trades, and when I went there I think it affirmed to me

the idea that you could behave in a reasonably idealistic way and still eat. And when I came back I tried to mix the business of making money as a designer with doing things as a designer and other things that would compensate.

Where did you physically come back to when you came back?

Can't remember.

But London?

I really...yes, yes. Oh I came back, that's right, I came back to a basement flat in Hampstead where my, where the girlfriend who I had before I left was, and she was still apparently glad to receive me, so I wafted in there for a while.

I don't think we talked about her. Do you want to talk about her?

She was a remarkably nice woman who was from Canada, from Montreal, who was partly English partly Cree Indian, partly Jewish I think. We had a very very intense sexual relationship, it was really good. We might have got married but I think there was a problem; she was the daughter of an intellectual family and was, like a lot of people, educated in a way slightly beyond her own abilities, which produces some rather peculiar effects in people, you can sometimes see it, people who are kind of, whose expectations aren't going to ever be matched by their abilities, although they've had the education to make those abilities fly, right? And guess what, you tend to meet those people in rather well-to-do places rather than other places.

Was she a fellow student?

No, no she was a, I met her in the left-wing days in Soho.

End of F4813 Side A

F4813 Side B

And did she have a job?

I think she worked...yes she worked in Longmans I think, publishing, general hand in a publishing house.

And when you came back from Israel, did you have any work set up at all, or were you starting from scratch?

I can't remember. I came back... I can't remember the sequence of events. When I left the London College of Printing I got a job with a designer, a spectacularly bizarre man who had an office in, just off Tottenham Court Road, a well-known designer of the time, and I think, I think it was after working for him for a while I went abroad.

Can you remember his name?

Yes I can.

You're not going to give it?

Not particularly, no, I don't think I will.

So what were you doing?

It was a very good job because it...I didn't leave...I left with... [BANGING NOISE] That's the cat. Come on cat.

You realise you're on tape beating a cat.

[LAUGHS] No, I'm on tape being accused of beating a cat.

The cat and I stand together.

It was a good job, because although I left without anything in my portfolio that I wanted to put in it, I was obliged to run the studio, which meant I had to deal with printers who were lying, and trying to get you to drink all the time, and pass contracts over. So I had to make

things work, I had to make the studio work, I had to get work done by other people, and so on, so it was a very good training actually.

Had you actually applied for the job, or did somebody get you in?

No, I was at the London College of Printing and the guy rang up looking for an assistant, and they said, `Well, perhaps you should talk to Ken Campbell.' And I phoned him, and I said, `What's the pay?' And he said, `Well the salary...' I said, `Before you go any further,' I said, `where I come from we don't talk about salary, we talk about wages.' `Oh,' you know. All of that, you know. So... I found it a useful job to do. I learnt a lot, I stayed there about a year. And it's then I think I took off for Israel, I think that was the sequence of events, and came back, and I think then I got a job with somebody called Derick Birdsall, have you ever heard of him?

I know the name but I don't know what he [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, he's a kind of designer/entrepreneur, who was at the time working for, with a group called, or in a group, or part of a group, called BDMW, which had a kind of Sixties ring to it, and it was four designers who...

We're now in about 1963 or...

Something like that, yes, yes.

Where was that based?

That was in Bloomsbury, and, I wasn't particularly happy there, it was a very kind of...London was beginning to swing then, and to be a designer was to be in a certain kind of heaven for some kind of designers. So a lot of people were beating their way to, you know, up the paths or whatever it is, to the doors of designers, and they were making lots of money, and style was in, and... I didn't enjoy it too much really.

What were you actually working on, can you remember?

Well, I was working, they had a big contract with British Steel I think it was, what was the equivalent of British Steel at that time, which was about to be nationalised I think, and a lot of time designing a magazine called `Steel Review' which had great articles about why it should be nationalised and so on, that affected, that offended my politics at the time. And I found

immediately that I couldn't really have this separation, you know like lawyers say they don't really care whether the guy, or it's not their problem whether the guy is guilty or not; what they have to do is the job of defending him, which I can see the logic of that but I actually was too connected to the material, and I found if the material offended me, it offended me, you know, period. And sometimes tried to rewrite the copy, or insisted on rewriting the copy, or rewrote it and never showed anybody, you know.

Did anyone ever notice?

Pardon?

Did anyone ever notice?

Oh yes, you know. So I found really being a designer, I didn't like the disconnections that you had to have to get through it, or the blindnesses that you had to have to get through it, didn't like it, never have done, and I know other people who have managed perfectly well. Sign of immaturity or whatever.

So how long did you stay there?

Again not long. About ten months. I had a real... There were four people involved in the group, and I think it's fair to say that there was a constant battle of will between two or three of them, and I found it tedious after my experiences on the kibbutz, you know, I mean I just thought, this is madness. And one or two of the people in there tried to...I mean, people make a terrible mistake paying me to do things, I mean I've immediately got to have some kind of revenge, you know. They don't realise they've put themselves in a dishonourable position to offer me work for services. So, that's joking, but I mean I just found I had to resist them, and if they tried to tell me what to do I just found it very objectionable, I really do believe I should be, at that time I thought I should be left alone to find out what needs to be done. I wasn't an easy person to employ I guess.

And, while you were working there, were you doing any of your own work privately?

No, that wasn't that way, no. No in fact I was trying, I wasn't really... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I think the problem was that at that time I...just going back to the employment thing, I mean I think, if that sounds very spikey about saying people are paying me money therefore we've got to suffer, I think actually I was just inheriting old reflexes from my father who was an hourly paid labourer and his attitude was, if I'm paid 3s.6d. an hour to work for

an hour, I will work like a bandit for an hour, and the moment I stop I will do what I damn well like, right? You're somebody's man while you're being paid, but then you don't like it too much, right? And so, the idea of clock work money and the, you know, constant money that comes in and the clock work, mental mechanics that you've got to achieve to let that happen, don't sit with me well. And I don't see this as a point of taking a position that I'm proud of at all, it's just, I think it's just in the genes, you know, it just doesn't work for me.

Do you think there was a part of you that felt your father was probably never paid at that rate?

I think there was...yes that was very...it was a very hard thing. I mean I was actually at one point, because at one point I was doing quite well as a freelance, someone rang me up and said, `You were in the French[??] last night.' I said, `Was I?' you know, `I don't recall too much of that.' He said, `Well, are you OK now?' I said, `Why?' he said, `Well you were giving money away.' Which in the French[ph] is not difficult. I mean people have money off you before, you know, even if you don't want to, but, I mean I was actually giving money away at 24, I was just sick of the way I was earning it. And I think there was something offensive about the amount of it. I mean, even now - not even now, I mean I find I'm very comfortable when I'm earning something like the average wage or a bit more or whatever, you know, not...the average wage of course includes people who are out of work, but I mean, if you are earning kind of a medium wage, I'm very comfortable with that, it can be seen as a lack of ambition but I think there's a certain level of decency, like, if you go to a restaurant and the food is terrific, but you know that it's costing £200, I'm afraid that does me in, it spoils the meal for me, you know. I don't say that I only eat cheap food, but, there is a level where decency takes over. There is a little story about my father - stop me if I've told you this, but I went back to see my father once, Ruth wouldn't come, didn't want to come down, it was on a Sunday, and I went to see him, and jumped in the car and thought, oh damn, I've forgotten my wallet. It doesn't matter. Whipped down there, went to the pub with my father and my uncle, and we stood at the bar and he said, `Well how are you doing these days?' I said, `I'm fine.' He said, `Are you earning...have you got work?' I said, `Yes.' And I thought, well I won't tell him about the freelance work, I'll tell him about the teaching, which is kind of regular, although it's part-time. He said, `How much do you earn teaching?' And I said, `£12 a day,' which in, you know, this is the equivalent of £150 a day, which you can get, if you're very good, or if you're very lucky, sorry. And he looked into the distance like, my son the liar, you know, nothing I could do about it. So, things ticked on in the pub, and I suddenly realised it was my round, and I hadn't brought my wallet. So I had to say to him, `Can you lend me a fiver, I didn't bring my wallet?' And there was a kind of grin of satisfaction on, you know. Had me absolutely cold, absolutely cold. Nothing I could do about it.

But it is very hard to do better than your family, isn't it?

Oh it's...I mean with him it was impossible. I remember when he was very ill, at that time dying of cancer but none of us knew, again I went down to see him and said to my mother, `Is there anything I can do for him?' She said, `Well you can cut some wood up for him, because he likes to light a little fire in the stove.' So I went into the shed and I found the wood, and I found the saw, and I found the thing that holds the wood while you cut it, and I started to cut this wood, and I was doing very well cutting the wood, and suddenly the saw went all over the place, you know, I didn't seem to be able to control it, and looked over and he was standing there watching me, you know. Putting the hex on, you know. My son the incompetent. I thought, this is ridiculous; I'm in my thirties now and he can still make me feel like a buffoon, you know. [LAUGHS]

And did your mother have a reaction about what you were earning, or didn't she ever ask?

Didn't ask. Always glad that I was...she was just glad that I was, as she put it, not in trouble, you know.

As far as she knew.

As far as she knew.

And, talking about nationalisation of British Steel and everything, I mean what did you feel about Wilson?

I thought he was a fairly slippery cove. I thought it of profound interest as to why he resigned when he did, but we now know he probably had Alzheimer's disease but nobody's saying, but I had it, I found it more tasty to have kind of CIA conspiracy theories. But at that time I was totally against the Government whatever, I mean if they were Labour or Tory it didn't matter, I mean it was, as far as I was concerned they were kind of revanchist dogs and you know, we had all of those things, you know. Rampant phagocyte in me bloodstream of the body politic was one I made up, you know, most of... I was once finagled into, I thought I would go straight at one point politically and go canvassing for the Labour Party, and as I did on all demonstrations I have to tell you I never dressed up as a hippy or the way I dressed; I used to dress up as a clerk, a City clerk, I used to wear very careful clothes and a little plastic briefcase and so on, and polished shoes and a tie. People were amazed. I said, `Well it's the best way of not getting beaten up by the police.' Because the police always used to, perhaps still do, I think the most dangerous time at the end of, in a march or a demonstration was at

the end where I think they got control of the thing and then the inspector said, `Well this is worth 99 or 70, let's go and arrest 70 people'. That's what I think happens. This is worth so much, and they go and arrest them. I've seen people taken at the end of demonstrations, never in the middle of a fray. So, where were we, what were we talking about?

I was asking you about Wilson.

Oh yes.

You were talking about going straight and canvassing for the Labour Party.

Oh yes. So I went canvassing for the Labour Party, I think in Greenwich or Hythe or, somewhere south of the river, somewhere terrible. And went from door to door on a hot sunny day for a weekend actually, and on the second day in the afternoon I was very exhausted and found myself banging on a door and this proto-yuppie opened, you know, a real Nigel as we used to call them, with a real pound note, plummy, upper-class accent. And he said, `Oh, Samantha come here, we've got a Labour Party supporter on the step'. And he was in a wind-up mode, and I just lost my rag and I suddenly was screaming at him, you know, things like, `Comes the tumbrels of history,' you know, `you're a bloody...you're a phagocyte in the bloodstream of the body politic, and you're heads will roll down the...' and so on, so on, you know. He was absolutely... I was dragged off and they said, `Come on, calm down, come and have a pint.' So, in those days you had a kind of a completely anti attitude to government, and whoever, whoever was in it was a kind of, you know, how do we turn it round and make it look good in our own minds really.

OK. And, after this little group of four, what happened, when you resigned?

Well, basically I said I didn't want to be part of... The person was actually a generous man, he's still around, and he was a good designer. He was a very good entrepreneur, and you didn't see them normally in design. He was a very un-English, Yorkshireman. As a writer called, his name was Peter Brooke but his nom de plume was...God! I've got James Cameron but it's not him. I might think of it later, but he was a terrific writer in a sort of Canonbury person character who Ruth and I put up when he was very ill once. He's the man who wrote about the Cape Canaveral first moon launch in such a way that, he was hired to do this but he got so drunk with all of these people that he lost it, you know, he actually lost it, and when he got out to his balcony he saw the thing disappear into the...you know. And he wrote a terrific piece in `Queen' about that. That kind of person.

Right.

A real cove. Not unlike our mutual friend Peter actually, the same generation, the same kind of twinkly look about him, you know. [PAUSE] What was this germane to? I'm clearly losing the thread this evening.

I was asking what you did when you left this group and you were saying that the man was actually a good bloke.

Yes, well this writer said of this guy, he said, `Well he had a kind of farmyard smile,' you know, and he was very...he's a very persuasive man, a real entrepreneur, a real Yorkshireman, knows how to organise things. And I liked him for that, because it was a very un-English thing, and it caused problems with people and it was also refreshing. And he employed a lot of people, he made enough work to have people working, and you know, people had a living off him. But I personally found him, I said I didn't want to be part of his psychological furniture, which was a kind of rather prolix way of saying he was a bully, which is what he was. He demanded people that they should be in his pen and stay there, and he's still got those people, I mean he's been with them for thirty years you know.

When you say he's still around, you mean in your life or he's still alive?

No, he's around and he's running a group and he's a designer.

But you're not especially in touch with him?

No. Funnily enough I saw him at the Barbican about three days ago at a jazz concert, but it would have been the first time for years.

And so, you resigned?

Yes, well I mean you resign, I mean I just said I'm going, you know.

And what did you go to? Were you still living in Hampstead with your girlfriend?

No, by this time me and she had fallen out, or fallen on... I remember being locked out here when we[??] turned up. I remember an occasion when she threw an iron at me while she was ironing, and I saw this iron coming up, warp[??] nine to my face, you know, the point, and it just, the lead stopped it when it hit the, you know, from the plug it kind of stopped there, fell

down and broke one of my little toes, you know. And so I found myself out and walking around Hampstead with a couple of carrier bags full of clothes and...

[INAUDIBLE].

Trying to work out my next move really, you know. No, by this time I was living with a jazz enthusiast in an absolutely terrific apartment, or flat, in Sutherland Avenue, a big Edwardian apartment. I mean it was just terrific. But this guy would insist on, he was a kind of print organiser, an executive, and he was short, had a slightly, I mean, kind of...a pasty little bugger really, you know, a pasty little bugger. And his idea was to...he had his room absolutely covered in pictures of birds, you know, of girls, who he, the proposition was that he had been out with all of these, but clearly a total fiction, you know, total fiction. And he would play jazz, you know, you would get Basie at 8 in the morning for breakfast, which took some... [LAUGHING] ...really took some doing. But it was a very good flat. And I think then I just went freelance, you know, I just started to do things, and I got some teaching in Bristol.

Bristol?

Yes. Well there was an interesting guy there called Norman Potter, and it was in the times, I actually was offered some teaching at the London College of Printing, in my old, you know, stomping ground, but I never heard from them and one September, that September the phone rang one morning and it was Tom Eccesley on the phone. `Oh Ken, we've got a class here waiting for you.' I said, `Well you never actually gave me a contract or rang me up, you just said you might,' you know. And by this time I had heard of a bloke called Norman Potter who was running a so-called radical course down in Bristol, a mixture of three-dimensional design, two-dimensional design, and film-making and so on, and I found that infinitely more attractive, because it seemed to be about the right things.

So you commuted back and forth?

Yes.

Right. And...

The start of a long history of me doing that. I mean I would travel for good teaching rather than... I mean I just didn't really like being around the Establishment too much. I mean I was supposed to go to the Royal College and didn't, and there was something about going back to teach at the LCP which I didn't like, really.

So, how do you just suddenly start to teach?

With terror. I actually on the first day went down shaking with fright, particularly because I was worried about my own level of education and so on. I don't think I verbalised that, but that's the way I felt I think. And I had the kind of fright that I still now and again get if I'm asked to do a public lecture, you know. If you don't manage your brains and your adrenalin you could get into a terrible thing, performance nerves, and if you're lucky that adrenalin is rather like the adrenalin the actor needs to turn in a good performance. I mean I actually do perform very well when I perform, and it's quite often because of that adrenalin, although I've actually done it without that adrenalin. But I was...I remember the day, I remember the trip, I remember being in the carriage looking out and just feeling awful. And I got in front of this group of students and started to talk, and a guy called Trotman[ph] put his finger up and said, `Excuse me.' I said, `What?' He said, `You're flies are open.' And I looked down and my flies were open. And I zipped them up, and from that moment everything was fine. [LAUGHS]

What did you actually teach, and how did you teach?

Well, you were teaching design but it was a very loose and open thing. And there were some hard skills to teach, but it was all very concept-based I'm afraid, and teaching in those days was as much a matter of self-expression as it was communicating things to people, I'm afraid. I now look back on that kind of teaching, the teaching I've done, with a rather cold eye, but now and again I meet people who said I did all right, you know, they always remember me teaching them something, and they seem to have got something from it, so...the jury's out on all of that. I've been a very dedicated, I was a very dedicated, very serious teacher, and somebody said, `You're trying to teach, you give people the education you didn't have,' you know, I think I mentioned that on the previous tape. But I also think that it's something that was delaying the time when I would do my own work, it's one of the devils of teaching. What is good about teaching when you're young is that it does, if you are lucky, require of you that you summarise what you have learnt already, so you articulate what you haven't bothered to necessarily pull together in other circumstances. It can of course make you over self-conscious in your work if you get into the critical mode, but that's the problem for critics, you know. But it can make you realise certain things about your work that you hadn't realised before. Not just talking about your own work but just talking to students about their work. Someone asked me once how you get good work out of people, and I said well, if one does it at all I think it's by - and this is, I realised, a rather dowist[ph] idea, but you talk to the work, you talk about the work and not the student, and you talk about what the work's trying to do.

And what that allows is that, you don't praise the student, you praise the work, which means when you criticise the work it doesn't hurt so much. Unless you feel there's something in the work that's not working, or there's something in the work that is working but is germane to the person; in other words you can see the person in it and then I think you mention it. But otherwise you address it as though it's got it's own life, and very often I think it has. Certainly in the way I deal with my books. And the dowist[ph] notion is that, you know, things exist already in the universe and we just bring them forth; we, my phrase is, we are, you know, we are the...we are the midwives of the incipient[??], we bring it forward by looking at what the thing is trying to do, rather than exercising your will upon it.

But when you're looking at a student's work, are you thinking about what you would draw out of that piece?

No, no I think...

Or what that person gets out of that piece?

No. If you...you know, somewhere buried in execution, the book, there is a phrase, `No disciples, no prisoners'. And that's very serious on my part. I abhorred the few people I saw who had the power to make disciples and design an art. I don't like it. I don't like, it diminishes the disciples and it diminishes the man. It diminishes the master. I think what you do is, you look at the...you look at what a person, a teacher's students do. If the students do what the teacher does, I think there's a problem. I can see the argument for learning through a particular, being squeezed through a small hole and learning through that discipline, and then branching out and doing your own thing, but I think a lot, a much healthier thing is to see a teacher who seems to be able to get quite different work out of different students. Very much to do with what the students are about, I'm afraid.

But how do you know how to draw that out of somebody?

You look at the work and try and work out what the work is doing. It's a very odd, I mean I have to give a demonstration, you know, I mean, I remember looking at somebody's work in the Central School, and I looked at it and I said, `This is about...these are very good drawings, and they're about being a male black'. And he was a black male student. And it was very clear that that's what it was about. I can't give you any examples of that Cathy, it's just, it's very difficult, but you have to try and imagine where the work is trying to go, and then work out whether it's interesting, whether it's of interest to think about who the pupil is, or the student is, and whether their work is, their character is affecting the work.

But how often do you look at a student's work and actually have no response to it at all?

Believe it or not practically never. I think there's always something to talk about. You can talk about how it's done, you can talk about the technique, you can talk about how much work there is in there, you can talk about how bad it is and why it's bad. I mean you can, if you've got the bottle to do it. I believe, I mean I really do believe in going straight in and telling the truth as hard as you can, unless you think that there is a problem again with the student and the student needs to be respected because, I mean I'm not insensitive to the students at all, but if the people are reasonable healthy they can take the shock, you know. And, there's two things I think students should know about the teacher. One is what kind of work they do, and I think they should show, you should show students your work as soon as possible, if not straight away. And good students will understand that you don't necessarily have to do good work to be a good teacher, you know, and I know a lot of people who do good work who are absolutely bad teachers. But it does clear the air, they know where you're coming from. And they should know that you are going to tell them the truth and tell them what you have in your mind, and if you don't know you'll go and find out, or rather you, if you promise to find out, you had better go and do it. If you don't think you'll find out, don't promise to do it. But once they know you're dealing that way, they will go an awful long way with you, and they don't necessarily want to turn out like you, I mean, I certainly don't want them to turn out like me. I find this whole thing, you know, workshops in America and other places, you know, `Have Ken Campbell in, he does these workshops.' And what they obviously expect you to do is to show them how you do your books. I don't think it's on actually, I think that there are...I mean I prefer to be teaching the Latin of design, you know, than showing people how to do my books. Not only because I don't want to give away trade secrets, which I don't; I don't mind telling people how to do it, I'm not so sure I want to show them how to do it. But because I think it's unhealthy. Everybody finds their own pathology in work, and I think that's what you go for, you try to set up situations where you can see whether people are actually getting something out of themselves and finding a way of manipulating things, which is not only towards the end that they desire but has also got something to do with, you know, something to do with the way they're put together.

And, did you find all that, I mean obviously you didn't find it all of it, but did you, when you first began teaching in Bristol did you have the instinct to know what you are telling me now, or has that really come over years of teaching?

I think, you know, I mean I got to understand it, but I actually think that I was to a degree rather pretentious when I was first teaching, but I was also very dedicated and I would put a lot of time into teaching, and a lot of time with students.

And with those first students, do you know what happened to any of them, were you...?

No. Well one or two I've seen shape up in different ways, but you know, no. I do remember one or two occasions where students wanted to be in a kind of a disciple position, you know, and.....

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You were just talking about the times when students were veering towards being disciples.

Right. Well I'll jumped back slightly because you asked me if you knew what students became, and I sounded just there that, I sounded kind of uninterested in what they became. There was a bit of a bigger reason than sheer indifference. It was to do with thinking that design was a kind of a core study in certain visual matters, and I didn't really...I didn't look for people to become typographers or graphic designers or, you know, the layers-out of books. I was, like a lot of people in those days, was hoping that they would use that discipline to find out what else they wanted to do. That was very much a part of the times, and indeed a lot of them did, I mean a lot of people came out of the design schools and became anything from rock'n'roll entrepreneurs to the Rolling Stones to estate agents to architects to video people and film-makers and so on, you know, and that was great, and I think that's what you went to design school for, apart from having a thumping good time. And I think we've lost sight of that, we're now in a much more vocational age. And I think that's unfortunate, because the technology is changing so fast it now is a proof that in those days we believed that if you learnt the core of discipline and design you could then go on to do other things because other things would be in front of you whereas the things that you were trained for would not be, and now it's very true. And now increasingly you are seeing some very sad generations of people who are kind of a studio proletariat who are good for the amount of time that they learn the new wave of technology, can manipulate it for three or four years, and then another wave of technology comes along and they are people four or five years younger than them who've been trained and they're the new, you know, and people are being falling off the perch that way. A lot of casualties who should have been trained to be lighter on their feet and less expendable. Dogs should be expendable.

Can you say again the bit about discipleship, because it's not finished on the tape.

Well, one or two people said well, you know, `What are you doing? I'd really kind of like to learn, you know, hang around you,' and I just discourage it.

And what exactly were you teaching them?

What? What was called graphic design, typography and, we used to start with, I used to start with poetry and the language and how to break it up in space, and if you weren't going to do that, how you would respect the text, you know, you took this option about what you were

doing on the surface of the page or underneath it, and would play all sorts of games with the visual display of language and language itself.

And, at this point are you doing any of your own work?

I think I am. Can't remember, but I think I am, yes. Some...you know, trade work, nothing exciting.

Freelance work?

Freelance work.

But not Ken Campbell work.

No. I'm writing poetry at this time, but that's always been there like a kind of malaria you know, it's kind of in the background.

Well you've always been rather dismissive of it before; did it start to get better at this point?

I've always what?

Been rather dismissive of the quality of it before.

Have I so?

Did it start to get better at this point?

Well I question that first statement, but... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I think it got better later, about ten years later.

And how did you get on? What was the name of the place you were teaching at in Bristol?

Bristol Art School, became the Bristol Polytechnic.

And how did you get on with the other staff?

Some very well and some hilariously. Some of them were the old school, people who like to be photographed with silly hats on for the course prospectus, or holding up fish, you know, to

show they were all, you know, showing off their antiques. Moleskin[??] fascists of the West Country, you know the kind. [LAUGHS] I mean Bristol's got this problem, it's got a real problem. Forget about the slavery but it's...it believes itself to be a great city but it's only 120 miles from London, and I think there's a real line to be drawn around London, beyond which cities are, for whatever reason they're their own cities, they're their own people. People in Yorkshire are their own people; I mean a lot of them are right-wing rats but they are their own people, which I like. Within that certain perimeter people are either sucked into London, like Ipswich is...had it really, it's a suburb beyond the suburbs, or there are, like Bristol they're still a city but they're infuriated that they're so close to London and they're always referring to London, and, `Oy, loist week, you know, ain't half pulled no wool over our eyes down 'ere,' you know. So I had some problems with Bristol, and the police force, as soon as you start drinking with the students. There was a kind of air of, [AMERICAN ACCENT] `Don't let the sun rise on you in this county, nigger. We run a tight city here.' What was the question?

How you got on with the rest of the staff.

[LAUGHING] Well there were these guys, you know, these moleskin[ph] fascists who, they thought that...well the photographers used to wear kind of, you know those kind of photographers who used to wear double-breasted blazers with brass buttons on, you know, and cravats, to show they're kind of OK, you know, photographing society weddings, that was their idea of photography. Whereas Michael Cane said about the film industry at that time, it was full of people who would say, `Would you like to come over? Bunty's having a party.' [LAUGHS]

And, you didn't go to Bunty's party?

And I used to do a [INAUDIBLE], `Bunty, it's Bouffy. Have you seen Binty? Laula.' So, I mean these poor guys had tried to achieve a little career in art school that was fairly quiet and these radicals descended upon them, and there was a certain amount of culture clash, definitely.

And were you teaching full-time?

No, part-time. But the course head used to set up things like... Oh there was a dear friend, Richard Hollis, who is the husband of Posy Simmons who were mates of mine. [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE]

Anyway, you were just talking for some reason unknown to me about Posy Simmons' husband. Was he part of Bristol?

Yes. He was...that's right, he got me down there. He taught me at the LCP, and I had a kind of social engagement with him because he had a wife at the time called Tasha, a Russian Jewish woman, very bright, who was mixing with the Platts and the Hugheses, and there was a woman called Sue Moore, and another one, Vanessa Redgrave, who is the only one who's living out of those four, she's the only one who's alive. Tasha died under bad circumstances. She had the problems of being a bright woman in the wrong time; it's a lot easier now to be a bright woman. Anyway, Richard was married to Tasha at the time and lived in Bloomsbury, in Great Ormond Street, it was a terrific flat in Great Ormond Street, for years. And I knew him socially, I knew the pair of them socially, and used to drink in the Lamb and Flag and have all these Fulbright scholars coming in from America shouting and hollering. So he invited me down to Bristol, and he was the head of graphics for a while.

Since he's cropped up, what was he like as a teacher?

Good teacher, very knowledgeable.

Why?

Very knowledgeable. And he like a good teacher knew the history of his subject, which I think teachers should know, and that should actually remove from the scene art history teachers in a way; I always found, even contextual[??] studies or art history teaching slightly false because it assumed that, unfortunately assumed correctly, that the teachers who were teaching either art or design didn't have the history in their heads, and I found that both objectionable and sad. But Richard was one of those guys who had it there, you know, very good. I hope I've got a bit of a grip of design history. So he got me down to Bristol.

And you obviously got on with him.

He's a very eccentric man himself. Bizarre guy. Anything he bought to wear he would always kind of modify, he would either dye it or razor bits off, or stitch bits up, you know, he was a constant kind of customiser for himself. A natty little guy, and he was here last night, and a great sense of visual elegance, really one of the really excellent designers. He set up a thing once where he asked people, he set a project to the students to design something, I forget what it was. Oh yes, a way to encase a wine corkscrew, you know, different ways of, you know, arranging that. And he got this, he wanted me to come in as the outside critic, but

for some reason the pair of us agreed that I should come in and pretend to be an Italian industrialist. [LAUGHS] I dressed up in a keen suit and came in and had to speak Anglo-Italian for the evening, and kind of berate people and shout at people. I ended up berating, shouting at Richard, you know, and attacking him for setting such a project and so on. It was just a bizarre evening.

But you kept, you maintained the disguise?

Oh yes. Well I don't know, I would hope I did.

And, what has he designed that I might know then?

He used to do a lot of work for, mostly, he was a galleryist, I mean he used to do an awful lot of work for galleries. Work for the Museum of Modern Art in his time, and at the Whitechapel in his time. You would know his stuff because it would be seminal[??], you would look at it straight away and say yes, I remember that.

The Museum of Modern Art in Oxford or...?

Yes, Oxford, in Oxford, yes. I haven't got his CV so clearly in my head that I can tell you much more, but he was...

Right. And what about the wife who died, is there something we should say about her? I mean what was she like?

Well, she did, my remembrance of her was that she did a...I think she probably met Richard while she was doing typography at the LCP and got a good degree or whatever, a good qualification, and then she found that unsatisfactory and did psychology and got a first in that. And then she found that unsatisfactory and did philosophy, got a first in that - or was it philosophy first and psychology, I can't remember which. She was like that, you know. But in her time became, I'm afraid, unhinged and problematic.

And she wasn't an artist, she didn't...?

She was I think of a generation, or of several generations, particularly of the left wing, who found it extremely problematic to be an artist. They had the romantic desire to be an artist, and sometimes had the drive, the psychology and the talent to do it, but their left-wing Old Testament puritanism said that this was the wrong thing to do. A lot of the left-wingers

recycled Old Testament, and unless it was to, you know, in quotes, `for propaganda', in other words for the people, or you can replace that with the pursuit of God's good image, you know, it wasn't worth doing-stroke-it was sinful to do. And I'm afraid I knew an awful lot of people who did themselves in on that one, and I think it delayed me getting to what I should have been doing by ten or twenty years. I think when my father died, that opened the door, that was the metaphor for, you know, the control being taken off. So, I think she had the desire to do something creative but she had the politics to stop her trying, and it was hard being a woman I think in those times.

[45" BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....my life in the sense that in the Sixties and Seventies I knew an awful lot of people who were doing that, and it became increasingly distressing to see people do it. I smoked some dope, and I took acid once, hilariously.

Why?

Well, being... [LAUGHS] I had to do it my way as they say. I had split up with this rather fashionable woman who knew Ronnie, Ronnie Laing, you know, it was Ronnie this and Ronnie that, and part of that whole kind of thing.

As in R.D. Laing?

Yes, yes. And, we agreed that I would like to drop some acid, but by this time I had split up with her. So I was...she told me that there was a certain...if anything went wrong to go to a chemist and get something. And I thought, well if you're going to lose your mind you're going to lose it in a nanosecond, so you don't have any props. So I did two things, one is, I locked the door to my flat and threw the key outside so I couldn't get out, and two, I took twice as much as you should do. And I was sky-walking for forty hours, I mean I was awake for forty hours, and...that's the way to do it.

And what do you remember about it?

Some fairly extraordinary matters[??], everything[??] rearranged yourself and went on walkabouts, things rearranged themselves into Cubist paintings. I stood in front of a mirror and material from my flesh went out and met the same material on the surface of the mirror and spread around, and then...it was absolute indigo flesh, just, very beautiful. And then suddenly I think the point of the whole thing came. I had one part of me that was always kind

of me, and I worked very hard as you can; I used to do exercises with pain and, you know, other Eastern things about controlling pain and so on, and I think that that might have helped. But at one point the whole of my face turned into an Aztec mask, as though the Aztecs knew about this, you know, my face was an Aztec mask in the mirror, and I found that diverting, really diverting. But I didn't do anything after that and I didn't get into heroin or any of that. I had taken a little bit of cocaine up in Harlem and the Bronx because it's the thing to do, it's a social thing, and I'm far enough away from it for it to be holiday time.

And what happens when you do?

You talk like a bandit, you think you're the bee's knees, and you bang like a, you know, by bang, I mean you go on and on and on and on - metaphors again - you will talk and jump about all night.

So it's just you speeded up a bit?

I suppose so. [LAUGHING]

But why do you think you had wanted to take the acid?

I think that, it was around an awful lot, and I had just read enough to think it was of interest, although it was against all my principles as they say, and quite frankly I think it was a bad thing to do because I probably wanted to do it afterwards, because I was falling out with this woman and I wanted to show her that I was possibly part of the gang, and I think there was an unpleasant... Does that make sense? I shouldn't be asking you that.

What do you feel about your children and drugs?

I feel very secure about it, because they're of a generation where they've seen it...it carries on, I mean, a lot of it now is very endemic. I know one of them takes a little bit of dope now and again, and it's more regretful to me that she does that because she smokes cigarettes than she actually takes dope, because I think smoking is really, you know, it's in the lungs, you know. The other one I am fairly sure hasn't touched any of it.

So you're not worried about hard drugs?

No, not with those two at all. I might have been at one point, particularly in Oxford which was both a violent city, people don't think it is, and a great place for wrecked young people,

particularly if they're the sons and daughters of the achieving [INAUDIBLE] academic classes. The wastage in north Oxford is colossal, kids who can't match up to their parents' expectations and achievements, just bang into drugs very hard.

And what were you wearing in the Sixties, how did your wardrobe close[??]?

I remember I had flares and...I mean I was always playing a careful game, working against the style. I mean I do remember that I had a...is this in the Sixties? Yes it was. Because it was a huge green Turkish Army coat, green leather, very worn, and with a bullet hole in it with a stain. [LAUGHS]

A blood stain?

A blood stain, yes. And I thought this was a bandit thing to wear, to charge about in. And, I said to a girlfriend I had at the time, you know, as you always did when you were young, `What made you, you know, why did...?' She said, oh it's the green leather coat. I was terribly upset.

Did you ever by the way in earlier years, did you ever own a duffle-coat?

Yes. Right in the middle of the Sixties I got what's called a pea-jacket, it was kind of a sailor's jacket with, you know, it's a bit like a duffle-coat but it's a bit more tailored, and it had, you know, biggish collars, blue look to it, and you can lift the collar up and keep the howling North Atlantic gales out of your ears. And it had these big buttons on with anchors on. And I walked into the Highlander pub which no longer exists, which was the big left-wing and cynics' pub, left-wing cynical and film industry, devilish combination. Well I walked in there one night and the bloke next to me, a 50-year-old rake said, `I see the sardine fleet's in then'. [LAUGHS]

And what about an Afghan?

No, that was unspeakably naff. I mean we set fire to people with Afghans.

What about a kaftan?

No. No no.

Flowered shirts?

Nope.

Ties?

Ties, now and again, but to look deliberately cool. Weddings, funerals and to confuse the police.

OK. And, not just at this period but from now onwards, how big a part has teaching played in your life?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] The system that's now been gotten rid of was in its best, at its best, the thing that produced a lot of good and interesting people, and the idea was that you taught, say, two days a week; if you taught three I thought it was a bit much, four was preposterous. And that would buy you time to do your own work, and if you were in an experimental mode and needed the money you were probably a great deal of use to students, because it was regarded that that connection... Now of course they want students only talking to people who are professionally successful and clear-cut, but the deal was a good one both ways, if everybody did the right thing, and an awful lot of the time people didn't. So ideally you would be working for two to three days a week teaching, depending on how much design or whatever else it was you were doing. So, I tried to keep it that way.

What, for how many years then?

Oh, I don't know. God! Well I guess I started teaching in the early Sixties, '62, '63/4, and I...'62, '72... In 1977 my father died and I had just done three years full--time at the North-East London Polytechnic, because of the course I was involved with, another [INAUDIBLE] radical course, and because we had just had our children, so it was down to me to get a proper job for three years while Ruth took time out and developed a career. At that point her career took off, which was just very interesting really. So, fifteen years, twenty years, teaching.

Right. And where else did you teach in that time?

Bristol, Central, Brighton. Oh all over.

And what was it like teaching at Central, was that a different thing, or not?

Slightly more, it was kind of a slightly more loose place. When I first taught there design, I had kind of two batches of teaching, one some time in the Sixties or Seventies teaching in the graphic design course that was like an Ealing comedy, I mean it was run by the most bizarre set of people. But there was a lot of very good students, and some interesting staff, so we had a rather bohemian existence. Some of us taught well, some of us didn't; some of us taught sober and some of us didn't. People were teaching in the pubs, you know, in the evenings, you know, and so on and so on. The second batch was teaching as an apparent fine artist on the print-making course, and that's through the auspices of Norman Ackroyd and others, which I found less satisfactory because of my relationship with the course and because of what was happening to the schools by that time; I mean Thatcher was getting a grip, or had got a grip, and the people in charge of the schools were as ever unembarrassed by any knowledge of the subject, they were managers, big hair[??], clipboards, and that's just the guys.

So, the actual content of those courses has changed quite a lot?

I think so, yes.

Can you pin down why?

No. I'm uninterested in what's going on [INAUDIBLE].

Right. And, when you were teaching on the course with Norman, what were you actually teaching by this stage?

Well I wasn't teaching etching, but I would join in, I would join any crew, you know, me, but I would...I was teaching elements of typography, elements of book behaviour and sequencing and how to lay things out on pages and so on. But also tutoring people's work, and some people found it useful for me to just talk about their work as artists.

And as he's cropped up, is this when you met Norman or had you met Norman already?

No, I met Norman because, I'm not sure where we were based but we were out of town, I think we were probably living in Suffolk, Ruth and I and the infants, so I would come into town and rather than get into trouble in the pubs I thought I ought to do something constructive, and I thought I would try to do an evening class in etching, and waltzed into the etching class and found Norman Ackroyd, probably boiling up some mussels and serving up

some crisp white wine. `Come on in.'[??] But probably teaching like a bandit too, putting out lots of good work and so on.

I had an idea he taught you.

And I just went in and I said, `I want to learn how to do etching.' So, all right, you know.

So how did Norman teach you? Can you tell me in some detail?

Well the fact is that I had already tackled etching at North-East London Poly, in fact I did that Blake's head, that's the first etching I ever did, finished it, finished it the morning my father had died, you know, my eyes were standing out like cherries because I drank a bottle of whisky to his good name, and finished that the following morning.

Can you just describe it to the tape, which can't see it?

It's a book, it's a plate, an etching plate of Blake's head, called `Blake Said', groaning pun, and it's the death mask that we all know but it's my transcription of it, but I've sewn up the eyes and the mouth with thread that comes from an etching needle, and I've written a quotation underneath about the etching processes of the devilish subject, what is it, satanic subject, the corrosive process. I can't...I'd have to go over and read it. So, that was the first etching. So I tackled etching, so Norman didn't have to show me the absolute principles of it, but he was running his studio the way he does which is...

Well how does he? Because the people listening to the tape, it's not going to mean anything to them.

Well he breezes about, and does his own work, which I think is absolutely essential personally, and chivvies people along and gets people to work up, and criticise it and helps people, shows people how to do it, but it's very much activity-based, on the principle that if you do it you'll get better, if you don't do it and think about it, you're very unlikely to get better, and I think that's healthy.

Is he inspiring as a teacher?

I think he is to some people, yes, they like his gung-ho attitude, and I liked it too, you know, Yorkshire enthusiasm and let's get it done, you know, which is incredibly refreshing in the south of England.

And did the two of you get on straight away, or not?

Yes, I think so. I think we both know we're very different animals, very different animals, but I think we both respect each other because we're gutless[??] without a doubt. We've got energy, and he's got a kind of integrity, you know, and he will help those people he likes, he's been very very generous to me, not through, you know, materially but just the kind of, the right kind of professional encouragement that people like Tyson, Ron King and others have shown, you know. They just sort of touch you and sort of, not with a wand but with a kind of finger which says, `We know that you, with a bit of luck you could do some good work, now get on with it and let's not have any more crap out of you,' kind of thing. And that's the right way.

End of F4814 Side A

F4814 Side B

Can you remember the etchings you actually did with Norman at the beginning?

That one over there.

Can you tell the tape what that one is?

Well it's a bizarre mask face with huge eyes and, from the pupils come down two rods to the nostrils, like somebody said sinuses, like my sinuses, and curled apparent moustache that ends up in rather Paul Klee arrows pointing from the nostrils back out to the eyes. Two painted dolls, marks for the cheeks, and a tight little mouth, and the hair is rather Gothic, lines going diagonally across the forehead and in the opposite direction for a little beard. And it's housed in an apparent wooden frame within the etch with a couple of other Gothic marks. And it's called `Portrait of the Artist as a Young Prussian'. Somebody said it's the best self-portrait I've done, and it's from a...it's not there, it's over there somewhere, it's from an oil painting on paper, a colour oil painting on paper which I had done. There's a couple more around I think.

And can you remember what Norman said about it?

Didn't say anything about it at all.

And what about his work, what qualities do you find in his work?

He's got a feeling for the countryside. One of the, I mean what happened in the...what happened in the class was that I rapidly saw that what I ought to do was to get my own etching press, and more or less said so, and Norman's kind of practical comment was, `Well make sure you keep coming to the evening class and sign on because we've got to keep the numbers up,' you know. But I was...I knew that I was a heavy personality around the studio, and students would kind of get out of my way when I headed to the bath, you know, the acid bath, so I thought this was unfair. No, I thought it was unfair learning, you know, I mean I was in a different position. I was learning about etching but I was sort of, you know, streets ahead in my own time, in my own time, about what I was up to. So I thought the fairest then, you know, it was clear to me I needed to own as they say the means of production, so I bought an etching press.

What year are we in now?

Don't know, can't remember.

Right. OK. And what's your relationship with Norman now? I mean you're still pretty good friends.

Good friends I think. We're family friends because we get on, I get on with his wife and they get on with Ruth, and, you know. We don't, as Penny once said, you know, we don't suffer from over-exposure, you know, but we'll see each other once every couple of months or once a month. Usually some fairly good dinner around either their table or my table.

And do you think his work in any way feeds yours, or vice versa?

No.

So they have no effect on one another?

Not that I know.

And do you tend to agree about other people's work, do you have cross arguments, do you...?

Who, me and Norman?

Mm.

Don't discuss other people's work.

What do you discuss?

I think we just get on having a reasonable time.

What does that mean then?

Well, it means drinking some wine, talking about the state of the Royal Academy and the Central School and putting it right, you know.

But are you very interested in the state of the Royal Academy?

No, no. [LAUGHS]

You were in it last year, are you in it this year?

No. I forgot about it.

What did you feel about being in it last year?

It was...it was interesting because I was kind of against that kind of thing, but I found that, like so many other things in the establishment, it works better than you think. There is such a wide range of work in terms of quality and attention, there's so much of it, that it ends up being like Grand Central Station, and in a funny way a lot more democratic than your average rather over-polite little gallery, you know. And the fact that huge droves of people come in who obviously never go to any gallery and, you know, come in and buy something. Fine, I can live with it. I sold work, about a £1,000 worth, which was kind of good news, but...

What do you think about his involvement, Norman's involvement?

I could see he's a much happier man there than he was at the Central.

Is he teaching at the Academy Schools?

He teaches there a bit as well, yes.

Oh right, but he still does the Central School doesn't he?

No.

Oh I didn't realise that. OK. And, what about things like his interest in cricket, do you go along with that?

Well, his interest in cricket is that of a Yorkshireman, and that's a very different matter to an interest in cricket in the south. I hate cricket, because I suffered at school the niceties of playing cricket, and I saw it as a class thing, and I'm sure I'm wrong about that but that's the way it is, but I think northerners can go riding to hounds, can play cricket, can play all sorts of games and they don't think they're in the game that you're in in the south, and that's absolutely true.

So you can tolerate it?

Mm?

You tolerate it without difficulty?

What, the fact that he likes cricket? Well it's entirely his business. I was once invited to join a designers' cricket team by the person who employed me, I'll tell you about that later, somewhere in Tooting or Clapham Common or somewhere. Designers versus artists, and there were various artists who we all know about now. And I turned up drunk, and put on my pads and I thought, oh God! I've got to do this thing where you hit the ball. And there's a thing in cricket where a professional cricket player - sorry, not professional but a kind of a keen cricket player, addresses the wicket and does a little careful thing of tapping down the divots, you know, near the crease, to make sure - do you know what I'm talking about?

No, but never mind, tell the tape.

To knock down the bumps in...knock down the bumps in the ground to, you know, you can look at it and say, oh, that's a little bit bumpy there and so if a ball hits that I won't be able to tell exactly how it's coming off the ground because I'm that good, you know, so I don't, I say, well I'll just tap that down with a bat, you know. They do this, you know, they come to the crease and they just tap the odd divot down. So I had started to do that when I went on, but I started from the boundary... [LAUGHING] ...tapping my way from the boundary, and drove everybody absolutely crazy, particularly the person who had sponsored me, invited me, you know. So... Not a successful game.

And what about the way Norman uses books?

Well he uses them doesn't he. He uses them as a vehicle for his illustrations of given text, and I don't think that he would say that they're anything as a formula more dynamic than that. It's a standard... He's also said, you know, it's a way of selling prints and it's a good way, you know, and if the poem has inspired the illustration, or the etching, then why not have the poem with the illustration, and in a book form I suppose that's reasonable. It's the standard illustration formula.

And, what about his reaction to your books?

Well it was intense, and I think it still is. I think he is very much on them, you know. We've swapped a big print, I've got a big print of his and I swapped a copy of `Broken Rules and Double Crosses' which tends to get to the [INAUDIBLE] artists.

I mean has he said anything particularly revealing about them?

No, not that I can recall.

And what about the Cast Iron Press, what do you feel about that?

What's that?

Penny's press.

Oh right.. Well she's learning isn't she.

Going back to Bristol, you've got fifteen years that I would like to sort of cover in terms of teaching. So you went part-time at different institutions at different times, and you said you were also doing freelance work.

Right.

How did you get that work, and what were you looking for?

Hearsay, word of mouth, some kind of reputation. I mean work fell of the trees in those days.

What, is this doing posters, is it...what is it?

Yes. All sorts of things. I can't remember too much about the span of the work. I mean I did actually have a load of slides of the work that I did, with some actually kind of bound up examples and so on, but they all ended up on the Oxford City dump, I thought after a while looking, I thought, I've had enough of this. I used to make lectures out of it, you know, and so on, but I just decided there was a certain time to dump the lot, and I dumped the lot.

So was your work recognisable, I mean would people in the know be able to say, that's a Campbell?

No I don't think so. I don't know, they might have done. I mean people, there are one or two people who think more highly of my work than I do, Richard Hollis is one of them and a couple of others, apparently, but...

Can you just drag one or two out of memory, because I've no idea.

No. Well the only...I mean the... The two polar things, there were certain political things I did, but they were very kind of crude on the street stuff, but I mean, something that might suggest the attitude, one is that I designed the standard A'level biology textbook for Nelson's at one point, which I was paid I think £2 a spread and it would have been a good idea if I had have had some kind of commission on the sales because it became an absolute seller. And for me the interesting thing was to gain drawings that were as clear as possible, and I found the guy, you know, the guy who did it, we discussed the drawings, he was very very good, I forget his name. And I made funny little kind of textural decisions like, at all times any illustration should appear on the same page or spread as the text, if possible, if the strategics of the thing could work that way, but certainly never before their mentioning in the text. If they had to be out of the text they would follow the text, you know, so, you know, that kind of thing that sounds incredibly boring but it takes a lot of, a certain amount of ingenuity to achieve, so I was into that kind of thing. So there it was a matter of really respecting the text, and so one might say these books are a complete turning over of that in a way. The other was being, I did for some time a lot of graphics for a furniture firm that was in very early, or the first people in the knock-down furniture thing, you know, what do they call it?

Do-it-yourself.

Do-it-yourself, yes. And the last thing they wanted to pay money for was the explanatory sheet that shows you how to do it, and it was the first thing I wanted to design, and I actually wrote it, I said, you know, you've got to have text where, you know, you've got to imagine that someone is possibly holding a baby, male or female, hasn't got much money otherwise they wouldn't buy it, is under some kind of hassle and needs to be able to show them how to do it as clearly as possible. And every now and again, you know, you read this instruction where it says, `Marry...' you know, a funny verb straight away, `Marry chromium grummet B to, you know, split spline grummet X.' Now quite a few people are lost already, including me actually because I made it up, you know, it's language and images which don't work in people's minds, therefore Victorian engineers, or people who, in workshops who can talk to each other. So I sat down and spent days writing this copy as carefully as possible. I had every single item in the book, in the box, drawn and labelled and all in scale, so you could put it all out and if it rolled away you could actually re-identify it. I plotted the way the text went

so that there was a certain point that you could check to see if you were doing the right thing, you could have a drawing to make it look right, and you could see that you were building a chair and not a parrot cage, you know. And, I put a lot...and it was on a piece of three times A4, so it was one sided so you didn't have to turn it over, so you could actually lay it on the ground, you know, which tripled the amount of paper it was going to use. I fiddled the books so that things could get paid for out of the accounts. I was very proud of it, and they couldn't understand what the fuss was about. But to me that's what design was, that to me was good design, but if you looked at it, it didn't look like anything at all. It just looked clear. And that's one of the problems with a certain kind of design. The answer to a quadratic equation, which is a complex piece of work which I'll never be able to crack mathematically, can be two, nought or one. Now a lot of graphics is trying to show off the quadratic equation rather than the answer, right? And there's one of the real divisions in design and that's really where I had a real hard time with design. And it's bizarre that now I do things that corrupt the text or do their own thing and are visually very rich and all the rest of it; while I was a designer I was a real button-down guy, you know.

So you were nearly always dealing with a text, in one way or another?

Yes, yes. To me the text was pre-eminent, and in a way perhaps still is.

And did you get, I mean it sounds as though you did, a certain pleasure from it?

Oh yes. Yes. I mean one of the pleasures I got was working, while I was working for one of the people who employ me, we did works for Harveys Wine Company, and we went down to the place that printed the stuff down in the West Country and we went to some manor house and were entertained royally for lunch and these kind of boozy representatives of the Harvey wine trade were all over the place and their wives, and were all trotted out to meet us, you know, as people coming out from London. I felt bizarre and extreme. We went to the print shop, and we were warned, I was warned about Harry the foreman, because he was supposed to be eccentric, and Harry the foreman was a man in his fifties, a very large man who I think was either a Methodist or a Quaker, I think he was a Quaker, and that was what was eccentric about him, according to these people. But Harry the foreman I got on with like a house on fire, and he looked at my lay-outs and he said, `Oh they're the best lay-outs I've ever seen,' and he was the man who ran the print shop, and I was so pleased. He said, `They're the clearest thing I've ever seen, they've just got good instructions.' After Harry Beck, you know. That gave me a blast.

And how hard were you working, what sort of hours?

Oh I don't know, I just did what needed to be done to get it done. I can't remember.

And were you making quite a lot of money by this stage?

I was making, Ruth would deny that I made much money but other friends of mine said I was doing all right. I wasn't making grown-up superstar money but I was doing all right.

And what did you spend the money on?

Fun, holidays. I don't know, you know, I mean I didn't have that much money. I don't remember money as a subject. I mean I really don't remember it.

Were there any objects that you really [INAUDIBLE]?

No, I mean I didn't buy many things. I tended to buy very good simple clothes but very few of them. Got far too many clothes now, you know, but I tended to, you know... There was a certain style to it, I mean the Russell & Bromley elastic-sided boots were the thing to have, six guineas, you know, guineas, you know, real guineas. Clean jeans and some very good shirts were, you know...

Where did you go for your shirts?

Can't remember, but they were keen, you know, I would have gone to the right places, and they would tend to be expensive, Indian silk shirts which were terrific to travel with, and they still are. Silk is wonderful to travel with because it actually can keep you warm, it cleans, it's very light and you know, you can wash it in a minute, and it will be dry in five, you know. So, I still travel with silk shirts. Not expensive silk shirts, cheapy silk shirts, you know.

And when did you actually meet Ruth?

I can't remember when. Well, I should be able to work it out, let's think. '68, '67, at a party of, at a house of louche aspect in Primrose Hill I think it was, where mutual friends were hanging, you know, they lived there, they were, it was one of those big houses divided into three apartments, and we knew two or three of the people, the couples who were there, unbeknowns to me. And I was out with a kind of a Pinochio, a fox to my Pinoccio bloke who showed me the world somewhat, and I was following him, he said I know where there was a party, so we went to a party. And there was this wonderful pair of eyes steaming out of the

crowd, and we stopped. And Ruth I think by her own admission was plumper than most, and I found myself pushing this guy aside who was dancing with her, this friend of mine. I thought, `That's very aggressive, very unlike you, why do that?' And then, we were going on to the Roundhouse where there was the usual kind of folderols and hippy happenings and some big dance. And I had my first car at that time which was a real U.S. Army Willis Jeep, which was a whizz, [INAUDIBLE] the house, you know. And everything got out of its way in London because it was made of plate steel, didn't have any wing mirrors, had a learner sign and was driving the wrong side, you know, so cars and buses, taxis, got out of the way. So, we all were off to the Roundhouse and it was a Jeep where if you...you know, depending on how drunk or familiar you were you could get twenty or thirty people into it, you know, hanging onto it, you know, like a kind of a Monkees film, you know, that kind of sparky thing. And I found myself progressively throwing people out of the driver's seat and saying, `No, the driver's seat's spoken for,' and sort of, you know, coming the gent, you know, and things proceeded from there.

And, you seem to have got through quite a lot of girlfriends by this stage.

I didn't `get through them'.

I mean was there nearly always somebody in your life, or not?

There tended to be longueurs, you know, and I...I don't think I had any more girlfriends than anybody else, and I certainly know a lot of people who had a lot more. I mean I don't think I was ever a womaniser, I think I was...I think you've actually got to dislike women to do that, and I don't dislike...I mean I actually like women.

And is there anybody in terms of girlfriends who we haven't mentioned and who did really figure in your life?

I'd have to think about that. So I'll think about it.

OK. And, we've got you teaching for fifteen years.

Mhm.

We've got you doing this freelance work.

Mhm.

We've got you writing poetry.

Mhm.

Were there any other activities in that period that we really should pay attention to?

I was always a manic walker, and I think that's the thing, one of the things like, you know, like those very private things like liking poetry, I say it's like a kind of malaria, by that I mean it's like a shadow in the soul and in the body, it keeps coming, and rather like asthma or eczema, I mean it's...you don't relate it to particular times of your life unless it's really critical. I was always a walker, and loved the activity, so any chance I could I'd go out to the country and walk. I did a certain amount of photography actually, I remember now, especially as a young designer, and as a practising designer, but not for commercial reasons, for arty reasons. There are no photographs around here that I could show you, in case you're going to ask. There's one or two up at the college. Oh, yes there is one. [LAUGHS] A rather large thing over there which you can't see which is that big black boxed thing, it's actually the inside of, it's called `I am a Camera', but it's actually the inside of a camera, a very old primitive camera with, I took the front off and it just looked like a rather wonderful Kurt Schwitters, and I did it as a student and developed it on the floor of the darkroom with a brush, with a mop, and document paper. So that was done as a student.

And later photographic work, what kind of thing is it?

Oh, studies in Kertész type studies, you know, urban funny angles and shadow and... I had I think good, a very strong sense of composition, I think I was, you know, and a certain amount of landscape stuff.

And this is all through the fifteen years we're talking about?

No, I said early, as a designer, so up to the late Sixties I think.

And what kind of camera were you using?

2¼ square, I loved it. I think 35mm is still a terribly decadent thing to do, it's sort of easy, but a 2¼ square big heavy thing, you know, problems, trouble, weight, you know, suffering, you know. But I think it's a beautiful format.

And where would you tend to be walking during these years?

Well it depends... You mean in the country?

Well, [INAUDIBLE].

I can't remember.

But you had given up Sidcup, Kent area?

Oh yes, yes.

I mean would you go up to Northumberland or something, or are we talking locally?

We talk locally unless we went for a...I suppose it was...unless you went for a kind of a trek that was in some way socially geared, you know, go and see Harry in Gloucester, you know, do that, but wouldn't go to Gloucester to walk, I'd go and see Harry in Gloucester and then go for a walk.

There's no particular landscapes that figured at that time?

No.

Right. And what about health, since you mention it? I mean we've talked about you being in agony as a child, did that go away?

I think that I've got, or had, a very strong constitution, and still, I mean I can drive for 8, 9, 10 hours providing nobody bugs me and not come unglued. I walked 43 miles in 15 hours, the lightweight walk; other people have done it a lot faster but, to go for a...if I went on holiday even now I would expect to walk for a few days at 10, 15 miles a day and then up the gears to 25, 30.

But what about the asthma and the eczema and all of that?

Bugs me hardly. It's vestigial now but it's there all the time.

But in these years we're talking about.

In those times I could still have a bad fit of, I think it's probably hay fever, but I seem to have, I think I'm just desensitised, you know, got leather lungs and leather sensibilities.

So it was beginning to be less of an anxiety?

Yes, yes, yes. I think I had learnt to separate my anxieties from my physical conditions, and I think I started that when I was 18 or 19.

And do you think doing the teaching gave you confidence?

Yes. Yes it did.

So by the time...

I learnt to handle people better and I learnt to be better with people, although I don't doubt I was a bastard with some people.

And what was your relationship with your parents by the end of this time we're talking about?

What time are we talking about now?

Well, we're spanning the period when you first started to teach through those fifteen years when you came [INAUDIBLE].

It was...it was...there wasn't much contact at all. I would always fall out with my mother, it was something that we did. My father was very distant. I was concerned about the pair of them but, you know, I was leading a life that I didn't think was entirely resolved and found it difficult to be in front of them unless it was resolved. Distant I think.

Any contact with your sister at this point?

No, not much.

And so, and also, were there any travels that were really important during this time that we...?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well, there was the student frolickings, and then there was Israel, and I can't remember anything after that, that must have been '64, '65. So, I don't know what I was doing in my summers after that, I don't recall.

But by the time...

I went to Crete the year before I met Ruth, the summer before I met Ruth, with a friend.

Important in any way?

No, not really.

And by the time we get you into the Seventies, what do you think you were like?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] A bit extreme. Very vigorous. Still having a hard time finding out what I really wanted to do I think, that was a real problem.

Had you begun to sort of go to galleries more, and be drawn into the world more?

Yes, did more of that, yes.

Had you seen an artist's book by this stage?

No. Oh, at some point, when was it, it must have been in the Seventies, because I knew Asa Benveniste, who ran Trigram Press, I don't know if that means anything to you, but he was encouraging to me, he somehow got slight[??] of `A Few Ways Through the Window', some mutual friend, and wrote me a very nice note, so I wrote him a poem and sent it off to him. And we became kind of friends for a while; he rather thought he was, he and I might work together, and he obviously saw me as his printer and I kind of smelt that one a mile off. And Ruth didn't get on with him at all, and at the time I was...that's right, so I can place it, I was a full-time lecturer and I was going to give up a full-time salary to do this, and I asked him where the money was coming from and he found this a very grotesque question, which answered it all for me, you know. So this was somewhere between '73 and 7 I guess. Coming to the end of the reel?

We are coming to the end of the reel, and also.....

End of F4814 Side B

F4815 Side A

[Interview on June the 14th 1995.]

And when we were talking last time you had just said that you had come into contact with Asa Benveniste, and we came to the end of the session and you were about to tell me what you saw with him, what his press was doing at that time.

I don't think he's...I'm not sure what his press was doing at that time or whether I really knew what he was doing. He had seen a copy of `A Few Ways Through the Window', which was the very first book I did. I gave that and `Terror Terror' away, I think I've said before; I thought that the proper anarchic thing to do, it was those kind of days, was to give the copies away, which is what I did.

No, OK, we need to go further back, because you had been denying having done any of your own work at the time you met Asa. So when did you first start doing your own stuff?

'75. Been denying? I didn't know I was... '75, '77. '75 was the first book, `A Few Ways Through the Window', '77 was `Terror Terror'.

So what you've said so far is that you were doing teaching work, you were doing freelance design work, you were writing poetry, and for a while at least you were doing photography. What took you on to doing something other than that, of your own?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] What took me to doing, that got me making the books was that I was teaching in an institute of advanced education called a polytechnic; there was a course of, a course of...it was called Communication Design, a tautology, communication being design and design being some form of communication, but no one went for that. And what it really was was a mix of photography, TV, film and graphics, with a bit of writing. It was a course that had dreadful problems. It was a course that was really a post-graduate course, and it was supposed to be a graduate course. It was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong money, and I think pretty well all the way through staffed by the wrong people including me. But the problems were massive, and as the problems mounted up... It was far too ambitious. It was for, it was really for people who had already specialised in one thing and gotten to be reasonably good at it, and then hypothetically might have branched out into others. That's why I said it was a post-graduate course; it should have been a post-graduate course. But we were starting in some kind of Maoist way, or, you know, some year one situation where you could re-invent people and teach them everything. I went for that for a while, and I rapidly -

not rapidly but after a period of time, found that it was not working, and other people didn't think so, they thought it was working. I mention all this because the situation on the ground with the students was getting increasingly desperate. They were reliant on technology that was half the time not there because the money wasn't there, and when it was there it was either not working or being stolen, or being handled by people who didn't know how to operate it and teach it. At one point I said to students, I said to the staff, I am going to become a student for a week to see what these people are complaining about, I think I must have told you this already. And they said, `What are you talking about?' I said, `Well you can take my wages away if you like, but I'm going to join the course for a week,' which is what I did. And as it happens that particular week the students were being set that weary word, project, where they had to record things with a hand-held tape recorder and microphone, and by Wednesday I had taken back two pieces of equipment that didn't work and on Wednesday it was the third. And I said to the technician, who knew who I was, `Why did you give me this third piece, when you must have known it wasn't working, as the second and first weren't?' He said, `I had to give you something.' It had got to that stage. I duly made my report but no one would listen very much, but I understood the kind of fix that the students were in. One of the ways out for me was to try to prove to students that it was possible to do things in the face of the evidence, you know, the glorious illogic. And it works a lot of the time, I found. So what I thought I'd do is a book, and it was the first book I ever did, and it was...I did not know about artists' books at that time, it seemed to be a thing to do.

But did you almost make anything else? I mean why do you think you did make a book?

Because I was resource manager of a print unit which I think worked pretty well.

In the college?

Yes, and I had a good technician. I was...oh I was resource manager, subject tutor, year tutor, and several other, you know, paper hats. Large head, plenty of room for paper hats, but too many paper hats. And because I was in charge of a printing area it seemed a good idea to show by direct action that you could get things done, which I think by and large I did in my own time, and that was the first book, `A Few Ways Through the Window'. And I found the business of putting a book together interesting, and it was deliberately democratic, in other words it was on crappy paper, totally acid-sodden paper, it wasn't on acid-free paper or any of that. I didn't know any of that. I printed on poster paper because I found it interesting that poster paper was, one it was cheap, and two, it had a smooth side and a rough side, the rough side to take the glue, the smooth side to print on. And I found by reversing the way the paper was folded, in the Chinese fashion, some pages were rough and some pages were smooth, and

perversely, guess what, perversely, I printed the letter-press on the rough side, I would, wouldn't I, and I used the smooth side for the litho images, which were gained from an off-set rotary office printer of the time with the assistance of the technician.

Had you through the design work got to know quite a bit about paper, or were you nearly always working on standard papers?

No, I was just more or less on standard paper, yes.

So this really was...

All of that was not only a mystery but a folly to me, the whole business of acid-free paper and decal edges, is redolant, or indeed stinks of, that desire to recreate the 19th and the 18th and sometimes the 15th century, and I don't like it and I still don't like it, although I can now have a feel for the better papers, the acid-free papers that work well for physical and sensuous reasons. And I want my books to last, so there's some sense to that, and I have to say to people with confidence that they are archival and believe it. But as it happens, someone passed through from the Getty Centre for Humanities who buy some of my books, and had lunch here, and she of all people, I mean I think this kind of thing is even worse sometimes in America where, you know, the...the cultural frauds are thick on the ground here and in America, but you look across the Atlantic and you see a different kind of cultural fraud. I mean people in America quite often over-respect some people over here, because it feels like the old country and so on, you know, wig hats, frock coats, swords to prove you're a gentleman printer. She said... So I was, although she's got terrific judgement this person, I hold it open that they can be subject to these snobberies, anybody can. Marcia Reed of the Getty, she said, `What I really don't understand are these colossal colophons that you get, you know, this thing...' And I said, `Yes, it's like, I call it gourmet printing menus,' you know, this paper, you see these hands wringing and you drool, aesthetic saliva coming out of people's mouths. `Oh, this paper is made of so-and-so, and oh this has got [INAUDIBLE], it's got a little bit a Brussels sprout in it, and the ink is made, is ground down from the bones of my ancestors,' and so on. And, you know that kind of thing, it's actually, it's written like a very bad gourmet menu in America, you know, salivating, a verbal salad. So, I have gotten to respect some of these things, but get two[??] fine printers and some good book artists, but I hold every one up and look at it and inspect it, is it really worth it? I've actually had collectors say, `Where's the colophon?' It says my signature, and there's the date, you know. `Do you like the book?' For crying out loud. And she said, Marcia actually said, without any prompting, she said, `I'm convinced that it's, the people are concerned about the object and its rightness and totally uninterested in what it's about.'

Mm. I mean I suppose it dates, it's really to do with people who are building up first edition type libraries, isn't it. I mean it's the...

Yes, yes, yes.

It's that vein of the books that's [INAUDIBLE].

I mean in the pantomime of bullshit any costume will do really.

That's a very good Campbellism. And can you for the sake of the tape, which cannot see and which could be listened to by anybody in however many hundred of years, can you actually describe this book so they can sit...

This book is a small to-hand book about the size of a hand, that old business, is this a book, is this a small book, about 7 by 5 inches, 7 inches tall, 5 inches wide. It is a slim volume, some 44, 48, 50 pages long. It's a fairly conventional book of poetry, mine, guess what, with a couple of quotations at the beginning and the end. `Love has an intellect that runs through all the scrutinous sciences, and, like a cunning poet collects all things...' I can't remember the rest, I can't remember the quote. `This he proceeds in.' It's from, it's Middleton, it's from `The Changeling', but I liked the, `Love has an intellect that runs through all the scrutinous sciences,' it's quite nice. And at the end there's a quote from `Full fathom five thy father lies, of his bones are coral made; nothing about him that doth change, but doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange.' And then there's a load of nonsense about `Ding, dong, bell', which isn't really part of the poem, it's a way of getting off the stage. And this, a lot of these poems were beginning to be concerned with my father and his sickness, so that quotation, `Nothing about him that doth change but suffer...' is very much a part of the following books, I think. `Terror Terror', which was after it, was me wracked while he was ill, and you can see that in the poetry I think. So this book is a string of poems, some love poems, some other poems, and...

Were the poems written to Ruth?

No, they already existed. I can't remember, I might have written one or two while I was doing it and I might have tuned up one or two. And they had a parallel device which was in two parts, and this was really the start...I mean Tony Zwicker once saw this book and was shocked in a large way. `What's this?' And she said, `There's so much in this book of the other books that followed,' and I think there's a certain truth to that. The parallel devices was, one, a set of

photographs of some wonderful windows in a small house in France where the very tall, skinny glass panes open inwards and these very tall skinny wooden things opened outwards, and their different intercessions in the visual plane that I thought were delightful, and I took a lot of photographs. And there was a wire hanger with Ruth's trousers hanging on them, because it was our bedroom, and I sort of just lay there amongst plump pillows taking photographs at different times of the day of things that variously opened. So, they opened in the morning, they were wide open in the noon, and they closed towards the evening. I think it was a sequence of about five photographs. And the notion was that these windows opened through the book 10 to a kind of a noon, and then started to close. And the other device was, there were paper, lithographic paper plates that were used in this machine to print the images, and - no that's not true, they were used in the machine that was to print `Terror Terror' later; the images were actually printed on a good litho machine. And these paper plates, where there was a mark on the surface it would accept ink, so what we did, and I don't think it was my idea, was crumple some plates and then flatten them out again, print them, and then crumple them some more and then use these... So this rather, these very random streets got more and more intense, and ended up looking downright pubic, but the notion was, and these increased towards the centre of the book and trailed off towards the end. So the notion was, the locked windows of the mind opened and lots of random things came in, and then the thing closed down towards the end of the book.

How can you crumple a plate?

It's made of paper, I said it was paper.

Ah, right.

A paper plate.

Sorry, I missed that, OK.

I don't know if this device works, I don't think it does, but what it did do was to run a parallel structure through the book, and it was the start of trying to use formal structures to possibly suggest leaning.

And how are the images and the words placed in relation to each other in this book?

I can't remember. They're parallel. I don't think if you look at a particular poem and looked at the next image there would be any correspondence between the meaning of the poem and that image.

No, but are the poems alone on their page?

Yes, the poems are alone on their page, or pages, and here and there you will get... Have you never seen this book, or are you asking for didactic reasons?

A) I've never seen it, but, I am irrelevant; the point is, somebody listening to this a hundred years hence.

There's a string of poems, and they have their own emotional wave to them, and parallel to that there are a string of images, whole page images, with huge black, blue-black borders - that's the start of something else too - and these run parallel to the poetry, and hopefully have their own particular way. It's a musical thing in a way.

And when you decided that you were going to do a book, did you go through any other ideas, did you know immediately you were going to use these poems?

No no, you just...I just go straight away.

And did you have the whole thing in your head? I mean I know you said that the crumbling of the plates came through doing the process, but did you immediately know the kind of visual element you were going to put in?

No, no, it's experiment.

So you had these photographs quite separately anyway?

Yes.

And the two just came together.

I knew the photographs, how the photographs would go, I didn't know what they would look like or whether they would look any good, but nobody knows that.

But you knew they would be photographs of the window?

Yes. But that's actually a constant through the books in that I quite often have a formal problem that I hope will reveal some meaning, but also the formal problem is the framework upon which I add all of the other things I do. So as a designer I knew that I was going to use those photographs in a particular sequence and then let other things happen.

And are the photographs black and white or colour

They're black and white, but as ever there's no true black in them, except at the end there's a particular doom-laden poem with a black device underneath, that's the only black in the poems.

And how are they bound?

Perfect bound, in other words imperfect, likely to fall over, fall to pieces, but I think I did them myself so they haven't fallen apart yet.

And the cover?

The cover is a bizarre thing that I did, which was to take the same paper from within the book and put some mull, printers' mull, I think that's what made it strong actually, between the folded sheets of paper and glue it and press it so it became reinforced paper.

And what does it look like then?

I've just told you.

You haven't, I don't have any image that's on the...

7 inches by 5 inches, the cover is...

No but what does the cover look like?

It's white with a black fading image going to the spine, just a fading tone going to the spine, and large dots from screen-printing, mechanical screen-printing process.

And there's a title on the front?

There's a tiny little bit of title, a little bit of typography, `A Few Ways Through the Window'. So, the notion was, it was a few ways through the window; the poems were different notions of freedom I guess.

And what did you learn by doing it?

Well you can get things done. It felt very good to do.

Did you discover things about the book structure by doing it?

I never sat around thinking that way.

And was it an edition, I mean how many?

Fifty I think.

And were they for sale?

I gave them away. I went to parties, got drunk and gave them to people. Did that with `Terror Terror' too. But then I got a bit fed up because nobody said anything.

I was going to say, what was the reaction to it?

Well a few people said, `Oh...' A lot of people come... I mean I was at the time not moving with people who would really understand this activity. I wasn't around a load of sensitive people, you know, so, people were rather kind of taken aback by this behaviour.

What did Ruth think of it?

Oh she thought, I think on the third book she just said, `Keep them coming'.

And did you show it to your mother and father?

I can't recall, no, I didn't; I showed the third one but, you know.

And, I mean since you've said it's linked, I mean what was happening to your father, what was the matter with him?

He was dying of cancer but nobody knew. I knew there was something wrong with him, kept getting into hospital, but they didn't find it. My father-in-law found it.

What do you mean? Oh because he's a doctor.

Well I asked my father-in-law to look at him, he's a doctor, a geriatrician. Just took him into another room, asked him to drop his trousers and felt around and found a tumour.

And did he tell him?

He told me. I can't remember what happened then, whether we got him to hospital or... I think my father-in-law told my father he must go to hospital straight away - or, no, wrote a letter to his local doctor, who had proven fairly incompetent in these matters, and that the local hospital, he had had barium tests which had failed to show this, this old horse doctor, my father-in-law, just came up and felt it, and found what had to be found.

And what did you feel?

Slightly annoyed, but really concentrating on doing what one could do for him, which wasn't much.

But were you afraid? What did you feel about him?

No, I knew he was ill.

But, it sounds as though your writing, from what you've been saying, was very dominated by feelings about him.

It was an undertow, it was an undertow.

So, in between this book and `Terror Terror' were you doing other work of your own that wasn't in book form?

[INAUDIBLE], I think I was probably doing some drawing. I had started to paint and do other odd works.

Why did you start to paint?

Well I started to paint when I was 15, 16, I painted till I went to the London College of Printing. I suppose I was beginning to stretch my wings in other directions.

So at this stage we're talking about, the Seventies, what are you painting?

Very modern, closely-argued, minimalist things, grid things and so on.

Using oils?

Oil on hardboard, on canvas and so on.

And where were you painting, where...?

In the house.

Which was where?

Those days in Crouch End, in Danvers Road.

And did you actually have a studio in it, or not?

Yes, I had a room.

So was that your first studio really?

Yes.

Right. And did you carry on making etchings at this point?

I don't think I had started doing etching up to that point. I think I started quite soon after this.

Right. And when you had made this book within the polytechnic, did you use it in any way within that, or it was just part of what you were doing?

No, the usual nonsense applied, and some people thought it was great and some people who thought I was a dreadful person to have on the staff either tried to stop it happening or tried to put it down.

And you presumably fought.

No, I had fought with these people in more important matters like the students and so on, and regarded them with contempt and showed it somewhat. I mean I wasn't going to fight about doing a piece of work like that; I knew that whispers were made, you know, but I regarded those people with, as I said with real hard contempt, and I don't think that that's something you fight about, doing good work, you don't fall into that trap.

So did you stay teaching there?

I stayed teaching there till '77 when my father died. To show the nature, I mean this isn't me settling scores but to show the kind of trick that people get into, I was working to exhaustion on that course, we all were, or some of us were, and when my father died I made the decision to keep working, just to have the funeral and keep working to keep straight, and found that I was allowed something like five working days or a week off for a bereavement, I think it was three or four working days. So I said to the head of course at that time that I would stick it out till Whitsun or something, some kind of holiday like Easter or Whitsun, and put it together with the Whitsun holiday and make a week and go to France, by which time I would have been in a better state than I was when my father died immediately. Which I did, and came back and found that people had been complaining that I was taking time off, absolutely disgraceful, and of course the head, this particular head of course was too weak to have slapped people down and said, first of all his father died and secondly he actually was owed this time. It was that kind of atmosphere; it happens in institutions, the dogs gnawing each other, you know. And at that point, when that happened I made a little speech at the next faculty board and said to those who did this, I think this is disgraceful, and everybody kind of shuffled and looked, shuffled their papers, and knew pretty well that I was going to leave. I don't think you can work with people like that. I don't.

So tell me about the second book.

The second book, `Terror Terror', I did at the same place, and that was more ambitious in many ways. It was an essay into photography, and I had a student-stoke-friend called John Smith who became an experimental film maker and teacher, and he helped me do the photography, and what I did was to pin poems that were already printed in wood letter on pieces of paper on a wall and photograph these poems being put up on a wall obliquely and then fully frontal when they were put up. And again there was very severe formal, a very severe formal plan on that, the distance for the photograph, the camera was going to be, the thing laid out in the screen of the camera. It was all very very carefully worked out. But

having done that we did other things, so that business of, again of a formal sequence of the... There was a certain amount of visual drama about this; we were using the space, I was using the space between the camera and the wall to say something about the page, and to say something about photography, and you could see bits of machinery in the corner, and I was playing games like bleaching it out so the paper was white but nonetheless you could see these interferences in three-dimensional space and so on. I found that very interesting, so, it was very movie-like, and if I show slides of it, it actually looks like a kind of movie, a video. I had a lot of fun doing that, and enjoyed doing it with John, who did the photography, and a technician called Brian Hindmarcher[ph], and ex-student, who helped me pin things up and so on. And at different parts we went closer in and drew away, and in other parts you could see people actually working on these things, whizzing in and out of the frame, so it was fun.

Are there any words in this book?

Oh yes, poetry, poetry, poetry, yes.

Similar poetry to the previous book, or...?

Much more crazy and fractured.

Right. And what sort of size and scale is this book?

Again it's about 5 by 7.

And the paper it's on?

Cheap paper, very cheap. To get the paper actually, that was of no consequence.

And how were the images made?

How many?

How.

How were the images made?

In terms of the printing process.

Different...well, they were photographed, I got photographic prints and spliced them together, all in one afternoon; I decided there was enough methodology flying around, so I drank some whisky one Sunday afternoon and just started to do it, and then started to tear things up and re-paste them and so on, which was fun. I knew the thing would hold together, I hoped the thing would hold together and so played various... The other thing was that there was a randomising principle in it in that, if you imagine a spread, two pages side by side, on the left-hand side was the poem being photographed, being put up and photographed obliquely in space, that is at an angle to the wall in space, and on the right-hand side was the poem up fully frontal and completed, fine. So one side there's the wall running away from you, OK, at an angle, and on the other side is it fully-frontal. But, I would then fold that, so that they weren't actually together; one would be on the right-hand side, and when you turned that page, because it's a Chinese-bound page, there would be the other one on the right-hand side. And I therefore didn't know what would be the complete preceding spread and the following complete spread, and I liked that because I had been a designer long enough and I was actually getting fed up with doing what I call tasty spreads, it was too easy, so this was a random, in the structure of the procedure was a randomising principle. I was always laying those two out, but I knew that I would have to fold them and have to cut my nose off to spite my, whatever it is, and I rather enjoyed doing that.

But it's also rather brilliant in that the text and the image are absolutely the same thing, aren't they.

Yes. Absolutely. And also, at the time I had taken against photography and hated lithography, and.....

End of F4815 Side A

F4815 Side B

Can you just say again what you were saying about the photography and...

At the time I had this foolish objection to photography, and didn't like lithography at all, and my attitude was to do something with it rather than to go on, you know, sort of bleating about it and sounding like a Luddite. And so I found it intriguing to use photography and lithography in a book, although I was expressing letterpress printing printed up on a wall. So there were a number of nice things going on, and at the beginning I put a quotation from an old book about lithography, of what a disgraceful process it was; I mean it's exactly the way people talk about computers, up until a couple of years ago, and at the end there was something from one of the Icelandic sagas, an absolutely hilarious thing about two Icelandic heroes. It's really about the nature of doing a lot of work for crazy reasons.

That was full of foresight.

Well it was something like, `Helgy[ph] cut off Frapp's[ph] arm with his sword, Frapp's[ph] arm fell to the ground.' But it would, wouldn't it, you know. And Frapp[ph], you know, no arm, said to Helgy[ph], `What you have done is heroic. That arm has put fear and caused death to many.' At which point Helgy[ph] said, `This will put an end to all that running through with a spear.' [LAUGHS] It's so funny. It's not Saturday night outside the pub, you know, it was some poor [INAUDIBLE] buffoon standing there with blood spurting out of his... So, there were jokes in this book too, there is humour in these books, so I stuck that at the end as a comment upon the folly of the whole enterprise. And the other, I've just remembered, formerly[??] the nice thing was that at the end of the book I slowly photographed my way out of, or our way out of this print room, so we received, you got more and more of the print room as you came out. You never left the print room but you actually looked out through the window, which was a reference back to the previous... So we end up looking out the window.

What typefaces were you using in both those books?

Well I mean that book it was Gill Sands[ph], because we had Gill Sands'[ph] wood letter, which was a legacy from previous administration, and in `A Few Ways Through the Window' I was using Univers because we had that, and didn't like Univers very much but I was working in a fairly anti-aesthetic way.

And what's the cover of `Terror Terror' like?

It's interesting. There's a thing that's now probably hardly known, but a thing called a Grant[??] projector, it's a way of enlarging things up through a kind of a big bellow screen up onto a ground...in a box, with a hood over the top with a ground glass screen to enlarge images to trace or make prints, very early copier printer thing. And what I did was to put the word `Terror Terror' in cut-up film, reverse film, at the bottom of this where the subject should lay, enlarged it, and then took a print of that, and you could actually see the cable. So, you know, it's a very punky thing. Someone said it was the first punk book, very punky looking book, but rather tasty.

And, again was this in an edition, did it...?

I think it's an edition of either a hundred or...I think it's fifty. I mean people are now paying, you know, I mean people want to buy it, but again I gave it away, you know.

What do you think that was about? Was that just part of this sort of time?

Part of the times and part of me. I think what...I've read, was it Cellini or Bellini, his life and works, and I don't compare myself to him of course but I remember the description of his having achieved a particular way of casting huge bronzes, and cast I think a horse or two horses and put them in the Piazza San Marco in Venice overnight, he had them erected, or had put them up, and overnight when he came back he found these poems attached to these horses that had been written by dudes who had looked at it and thought it was wonderful. Now I thought that was rather a good response to any piece of work, and I suppose what I thought was, well, look, I'm giving them away, I would have thought at least people could respond as anarchists, you know, in some like way, like buy me a pint or say how nice it was. I mean I wasn't so much interested, but some similar creative gesture, and it didn't come, and, I suppose at that point I thought I might as well sell 'em, you know, for the next book.

How did you begin to do that? Did you have any idea how to do that?

No. The next book was `Father's Hook' which was a much more rigourous book, a much more, you know, it's a very very beautiful thing, and that was 100, because in respect to my father I just decided to do as much hard work as possible.

Had you known by the time you did `Terror Terror' that you had found something you were going to go on and on doing?

I had a whiff, but really Ruth, who is my muse, which is an extremely difficult thing to be married to a muse who is supposed to be a cold-hearted bitch, you know, a sort of, the person who really gives you the hard answers to all the difficult questions, like, `Is this any good?' `Why are you asking me?' You know, that kind of answer. `You know already,' you know. Just said, `Keep 'em coming,' one of the things that I remember her saying, which was short and to the point.

So, tell me about your father's death then, because obviously it was very important.

I attended him in hospital, he went into hospital.

Where?

In Sidcup, near where we were brought up, I was brought up, and it was fairly...I went to see him quite a lot, and I remember two things, one was he was under some kind of...it must have been, it might have been the drugs that he was under. I mentioned it in one of the poems in `Father's Hook', there was this bizarre thing, his hair went absolutely white, and his eyes used to be brown and they went blue, and I've mentioned this to medical people and they kind of look out through the window and think I'm crazy, but I swear his eyes went blue, which was very bizarre for me to watch. And he hallucinated a great deal, and mostly about who I was, so sometimes I would go in and I would be his elder brother, sometimes I would go in and I would be his younger brother. His elder brother he used to rely on, he used to rely on and sometimes he would go into a childish voice asking for Joey, or, `Is everything all right Joey?' And sometimes I would be his younger brother, who was a criminal from the age of 14, and he would look at me with utter scorn and give me an earful, and I remember once he was saying, `I can't protect you, I'll buy you a pint but I can't protect you. The tecs are over there, they've come for you,' you know. So he was re-living probably some scene in a pub where his younger brother who was a crook and my father had very little time for him. And at one point I was his mother. And it was just hard to keep up with, because I had to run a very odd emotional and verbal thing with him to not disabuse, not to disabuse him of this illusion, but at the same time to keep the thing level in some way so that it didn't go too far, so it was bizarre, very very strange. The other thing was, I took to stroking him, and me and my father had never been in any sense close, I mean he was a sort of a mixture of Scots-Irish Calvinist thinking morals, and straight working-class hedonist, so, perhaps I'm much the same. But I found that I, because we couldn't communicate and he was in a lot of pain, I used to rub his limbs all the time, and he seemed to like that, and slowly his modesty fell away and you could see his private parts which for him was a very odd thing to happen. And to my amusement they were exactly the same as mine, I mean there was all these, you know, there are

different...there are different combinations in the personal jewellery shop, you know, but they were, you know, manifestly the same set, you know.

What did you feel about that?

Pardon?

What did you feel about that?

Well, same set, interesting, you know.

Was it a nice feeling?

Yes.

Had he ever seen yours?

No idea, no idea, probably not. And I got to understand this whole thing of anthropologically, you know, people feeling that they were gaining power from somebody. I felt that I was actually taking his spirit for him.

And that was a good feeling?

Oh yes, very powerful. But at the same time I think in his passing I dropped the idea of having to do the good works in the obvious sense, you know, get a proper job, serve society and so on. I mean I'd done a lot of, you know, in the teaching and other things, I had felt this connection. I don't think it's broken but I realised that I could...I don't think I realised it, I think I started thereafter to do my own thing much more rapidly.

And how long was this process of him being in hospital?

I can't remember, I mean I think he was in for some months.

And what about your relationship with your mother during that time, did that change?

I was talking to Ruth about this. In our family we have a phrase called `mucking in'; I think that our...at times of stress or catastrophe we're built for that. I mean I've often thought that our family should have...my father at one point was thinking of going to Australia when he

was a young man but stayed here for his mother, he was the man who looked after his mother. And I think that is in many ways a shame; I think the way both sides of the family were put together it was therefore resisting catastrophe and making something of it. You could actually attach these people to a rock in the middle of the ocean in a storm and they will hang on, and they will probably inch their way up, you know, they're made like that, and much of their emotional excesses I think are actually emotion that's wasted because the situation doesn't demand things of them, and I suspect that that's true of me. Prolix and over-emotion in lots of ways, but at times of stress I seem to change gear. So, when my father was dying and so on there was never...I can't remember much discussion between me and my mother but there was a mutual getting on with it, and I think we were serving each other in a number of ways which we hadn't done before, but the thing was not dressed up any way, it was just obvious that certain things had to be done and those were the things we got on with.

Was she living alone by this time, had your sister left?

She was living close...yes, she was living alone. Yes, she was living alone in the old house. And in `A Knife Romance' there's the `Widow's Song', which was actually her saying, I remember her saying to me, she thought she would move, and I said, `Why do you want to move?' She said, `Well the house is too big for me, and the garden's too much to look after,' which is the [INAUDIBLE]. I said, `Oh right, OK.' And she said, `Would you mind?' I said, `It's little to do with me, I think you should do what you want to do.' And a couple of weeks later she said, `I've found a house.' I said, `Oh, we'll go and look at it,' which wasn't far from my sister in Kent. And I went to this house and it said, `Bungalow', and it had a colossal garden. I thought, right, there's another plot to this. She wants out of the house because she felt his presence. And I admired her for that, because a lot of women, or partners or whatever, would feel guilty about leaving the spot, but it was a sign of my mother's spirit, will, that she had this self-survival thing. She was quite unsentimental. She realised, she acknowledged that the old man was still there, but she...and so she felt his presence, so she wasn't without feeling, but she understood that it would turn in on her, and so she moved, and I thought that was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. So, `Widow's Song', is that you? you know.

So tell me about `Father's Garden'.

`Father's Garden', or `Father's Hook'?

Sorry, `Father's Hook' we're on.

`Father's Hook'.

Yes, sorry.

Well by this time some copies of both of those books had skipped about, and when I taught I tended to take those books around, and a head of department at Corsham College, which is now gone down the tube, it was a very fancy art college in Wiltshire for backward boys and forward girls, sons and daughters of the gentry, as a kind of somewhat finishing school, but also it actually produced a lot of interesting people in the old art school system. It had been a very good art school, and it had stupendously beautiful grounds in the grounds of some Lord, what's his name, Methuen or someone like that, one of the publishing lords. And he had let an art school, graciously let an art school be put in his grounds, obviously a very tasty tax loss thing, his way of keeping the estate together. But it was a very good school, and I was invited down there to do some teaching and I could use the premises to do a book, and I went down there and they had some very good type down there in very bad order but somebody had brought some very good type. And they had this type called Akzidenz Grotesk, the precursor of Helvetica, which you can now get on computer but in those days you couldn't find anywhere, it was a German face, Swiss-German face, and been designed by somebody who probably went blind doing it, cutting the punches in the end of the 19th century. I don't think anybody knows who designed it. Had far more character to it than Helvetica. Both Didot faces, in other words they were Continental type high faces, Balbidoni and Akzidenz Grotesk, and I clucked and tutted and complained about the state of the type room[??], which is actually a very good type room[??], and spent a lot of time putting all the type in order, and decided to do the most rigourous book I possibly could. A dude called Ron King was teaching there who told me where to get some Chinese hand-made paper. I said I had done two books on crappy paper, I want some really good paper.

How did you know Ron King knew about books?

Because he was on the staff and watching me, you know, I mean we were around. I didn't know he knew about books, didn't know what he did, but he just suggested it. And I found this wonderful Chinese hand-made paper, roughly 2 feet by 4 feet. I was not going to have anything to do with any Greek harmonics or decent proportions; I folded the sheet exactly in half and then in half again and it came up with that size, and I thought great, two to one, perfect, you know, it's all to do with the rigour of my father's life. And I was going to do the most severe typography I could but without a grid, going to place each thing, each poem once set absolutely in the page, which I think was the best way of doing anything, and made the book as rigourous and severe as possible.

So again, for someone who has never seen it, what does this book look like?

It's 13 inches high, 6½ inches wide. Again Chinese bound, so each sheet opens up to 13 inches square. It's on very fine Chinese paper, it's almost like shirt cloth, it's very...it's the first time I fell in love with paper, it's sensuous. I realised that it was unmasculine, you couldn't push it around, you had to accommodate it, you had to do things with it. I cut two lino blocks exactly the size of the boards that contained the book, two beech ply boards hold the book together loosely. The book itself is hand-sewn in colourless, not fishing twine, it's...mending twine, what's that stuff that you sew, sewing thread? It's called mending thread or something, so it's absolutely colourless. But anyway...

Did you do the sewing?

Yes. I did everything in this book because it was my father and all that. I cut two pieces of lino and worked and turned them on a press, which means that you print it and then you turn the blocks round and print it and so on, and got as rigourous images as I could from this, again with something to do with opening up and freedom, also something to do with the tartan clan, to do something about the Scottish roots. And it has pages that are folded to open up, because the backs of these things were very beautiful. The paper was so thin and the pressure was so great that ink went right through the paper and came out the other side, and I looked at it and I thought, that looks very nice. There are various other devices through the book, but somebody said it's the most designed-looking book I had done, even the few books after that, but in fact it wasn't, it was designed only in that there were a couple of formal principles to hold the book together, but every page was considered entirely, and pages were moved around, poems moved around, to get some kind of decent form from it. Very delicate, almost fleshly book, which was the idea. So the cover was printed with varnish that soaked into the paper and made it translucent in parts, in a controlled way, and another sheet was introduced into the cover, again using the same paper as the inside but trying to do something that would make it stronger, with printed reds, again in the same way, so that the red shone through the varnished parts of the outer sheet. I don't know if people will understand that, but it was a very sensuous book or attempted to be a very sensuous book.

What are the other colours used?

Reds, greens, yellows. A lot of under-printing, which was the start of me playing with colour.

How did that idea come about, the layering idea?

Well like a lot of art ideas come out, because the first thing doesn't work; you fight your way out of a corner. [INAUDIBLE] are 30-year[??] glazes.

So, in the previous books, the second book presumably is just black and white, isn't it?

Yes.

And this is comparatively much more colour than in you had done in your first books.

Yes.

Do you know what that was about, do you know why that came about?

Don't know. Don't know. I think it was me loosening up.

And did you have things you rejected from this book, or did it combine everything?

Yes, it's a good question. I remember, because, I've got drawers full of this stuff where I was playing with the book, but I think I established a thing where there was never going to be anything rejected, we had to save everything, you know, like these little babies of mine. I mean I've not lost a book yet. And I explained to somebody, including Ruth who thought I was completely deranged, I would never proof anything on anything but good previous proofs; I wouldn't proof on rough paper, because it told you nothing and it also didn't allow, it didn't have the right degree of risk to it. And it's very close, I don't know if I've talked the last session, about, I think I was very much influenced by jazz through these things, where you actually have to take responsibility on-stage for whatever happens. I mean jazz musicians are most awful people and they're terrible to each other and extremely brutal, but on the night, on the stage, you have a theme, some kind of theme that holds you together and people improvise, either collectively or individually, and everybody has to take responsibility for what goes on. And everything is salvable, and if it isn't you have to put it in a context where it will at least stand up, and that's different to, say, I am going to have this, and I don't care what it takes to get it. It is a far more Eastern attitude, and I find it entirely sympathetic. Finding out what the thing is trying to do, what it's trying to become, which is a dowist[ph] thing, which I'm sure I've talked about earlier.

So, it sounds from the way you're talking as though this book expressed exactly what you wanted it to express.

Yes, I think it did, yes.

How long a period were you working on it?

I think I did it within an academic year, and the timetable was that I would go, drive down to Wiltshire on Monday morning very early, I would teach all day, well all the teaching day until 4.30, something like that. I would do a couple of hours in the workshops, which were open all evening. I would sleep over, I would get up in the morning and go into the workshops that open at half-past 7, and by the time the students came in, which was supposed to be at half-past 9, but was in various, you know, they would be in various states of disarray and be coming in anything between half-pat 9 and 11 o'clock, I would have done two hours' work, physical work, and I felt great. It's a good point, it's a good way to each if you've already done something of your own first thing in the morning, you feel very good about that. And then 4 o'clock I would have another couple of hours, this would be Tuesday, and then on Wednesday I would get up and work the whole of Wednesday and go back Wednesday night. Very monkish, and, not particularly sober but very monkish, and I got an awful lot of very concentrated work done. It was a terrific time to work, it was really good. I got into the habit of working on my own, and you could work with total concentration around the press, very good.

And can you tell me about the writing of those poems?

No, because I don't remember very much about it, about when I wrote them. I think I...most of them were written during the time my father was ill and after, just after, that's all I can tell you.

Do you remember the actual day he died?

It was Valentine's Day 1977, and my mother rang me up to say that he had died that night.

And what did you feel?

I said to her, `Thank God.' I felt relief, because by that time it was wearing a lot of people out.

Did you cry?

I don't recall.

And was his burial or whatever important to you?

His burial was a cremation. These things were out of my hands. It was cremation in south-east London, and it was a rather half-arsed Christian service. Most of the people there never went to church including me, so it was a kind of cut-price thing. And his ashes were scattered under a rose bush, so we are told, in that place.

And did you ever go back to it?

No.

And how soon after it did you start working on the book?

On the book? I suspect it was...he died in February, I suspect it was that September when I started at Corsham, I think it started there. That's right, he died in February, I had trouble from these crapheads at the polytechnic; I delivered what was reckoned to be the shortest resignation letter ever in that institution, it said, `Ken Campbell. Dear Sirs, I resign.' And I got that offer to do some teaching, I mean I resigned before I got the teaching.

And was there ever any thought that you might do a painting as a memorial for your father?

No.

It was always going to be a book?

No, it was going to be that book. I remember when the surgeon spoke to my mother he said his back, spine, was like cake, probably through all of that compact...he was probably light-boned like me but he worked in such a way that, he told me and I don't think he told lies, and I've worked it out, four men in the hold of a ship moved 400 tons of something a day, and if you work it out it means they would move a hundredweight of something every fifteen seconds for ten hours, which is not impossible, and you don't move it very far, you move it...because of the skill. They were skilled people, although they were supposed to be riff-raff workers, labourers, they had certain skills that went with this. They would drop the palette in such a place and they would load things off, so you would pick up a hundredweight of something..... [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE]

<u>End of F4815 Side B</u>

F4816 Side A

You were just talking about your father and the palettes.

Yes. I think the, you know, `Daily Express', bloody dockers and all that after the war, because they were constantly on strike, which caused very hard times in the family, it was an enclosed society about which most people knew very little and they didn't really regard it as a society, but it was. And it was interesting from an anarchist point of view. Externally it looked like a corrupt system, but internally it worked, it faced the facts of life. The facts of life were that dockers were untrained for anything else, probably not very bright most of them, and they were at the front, they were at the vanguard of industrial action, because they were well organised and also self-employed effectively, they worked by the hour. Their working lives were governed by, like boxers and athletes, the sure knowledge that they were going to run out of strength. Up to the age of 24 they were still developing as men and were gaining their strength but weren't very skilled, and after, somewhere between about 24, 25, 26, they were at the height of their powers. The more work they did, the more skilled they got, and the more stamina they had, but they still had youthful strength. So they were useful, at their most useful to themselves in terms of earning power between, I don't know, 26, 28 and 35, 37, 38, 39, maybe exceptionally 40. And the way they organised themselves, I don't know if they ever thought this out but it just worked this way, young buys would be attached to older gangs, but there would be kind of élite gangs who would do extraordinary feats and work incredibly long hours, and earn the top money. So if the `Daily Express' wanted to do something about the dockers they would find out what the top gangs were earning and never talk about the fact that progressively after 35 people would get sicker, iller, more and more injuries, more and more back problems. I mean I've actually seen my father come home and, apparently sugar curiously was one of the worst things, sugar bags, huge ulcers on his back from the work that he was doing that day, and my mother used to dress them. And the next day he would go off to work again. My mother would not, like a lot of wives of working men, would not give him any sympathy, because to give him sympathy would be to encourage him to take the day off, which she knew we couldn't afford, right?

What age did he work till?

He worked till he was about 55 I think. He was pretty broken by that time. He was working on lighter and lighter gangs, and right at the end he was given a job in the dockers' canteen on the docks where apparently he was an absolute terror because he would tell people not to spill their tea and clean up and so on. A very demeaning job for him and he didn't like it.

When he stopped working, what did they live on?

His pension from the Dock Labour Board was ten shillings a week, 50p a week to you. Great, after a life's work. I remember when I heard that his back was like cake, the very old fury came upon me and I thought, for the first time do I join the Communist Party, because I've never joined anything, a), or do I get a gun, or do I do both? And I am very glad to say that I produced that book and it got bought by the Victoria & Albert Museum and I thought that was justice, because he was fairly, a fairly dumb man, he had very little vocabulary. So for me to do the book was a much more positive thing, and to have it bought by the V & A was a curious circular recognition of his life.

What do you think he would have thought of the book?

I don't know. He would have been, he would have looked at it and thought, well what about that? I don't know.

What did your mother think about it?

Well, I showed it to her, I think I gave her a copy. She never said anything. I think she was kind of intrigued. But she was a curious mixture. I mean she was a woman who joined the Communist Party at 16 and was very feisty[??] and individualistic and so on, but nonetheless knew the gynaecological history of the whole of the female line of the royal family, you know, I mean she was a royal family worshipper. Her tastes were odd in that when she was being formal she tried to be very bourgeois and bought kind of things with frills on and what she thought was good taste, and yet she had an eye for colour and so on which was never expressed in those times. So, if she saw a book like that she would feel threatened by the situation, and think, was this the right thing for Kenny to be doing, you know, more than responding to it.

When you had done things like designing that A'level biology textbook, would you have shown that to them?

No.

Not that either? Right. And how did you come to have it bought by the V & A, what was that route?

I can't remember. I really can't remember.

Would it have been perhaps Ron King?

No.

Did Ron give you a response to that book, did he see it as it was being made?

Can't remember. Don't remember it. But he was generally encouraging, you know.

Did you discover that he made books?

I did then discover he made books, and he was doing a lot of things in America and there was someone over there who financed a couple of books and so on, I mean just sounded like a different world, which it was.

And was it a world you thought wouldn't have anything to do with you, or you wouldn't have anything to do with it, or what?

I didn't think I would have anything to do with it.

So, you had decided to sell this one, yes?

Yes.

And how did you go about it?

Can't remember, I really don't. I mean it's just...again, quite a few of these I gave away.

To whom, who were you giving them away to by this stage?

Friends.

And getting any feedback?

Yes, I got some feedback, people, you know, there was a lot more engagement I think this time round.

Because it was a subject they would identify with maybe?

Maybe.

And did it lay a ghost, or not?

I think it laid several ghosts, yes.

Being?

Can't remember. I mean not can't remember, mean I don't know, I don't know.

And did you...do you remember actually going to the V & A yourself, were you part of actually selling it?

There was a guy there who, I can't remember his name, John something-or-other, before Esteve-Coll and others, a real old-fashioned literati guy, who actually asked me if I would print some poems for a friend of his, which had kind of capital letters all the way though it, you know, and said, like, `I want these contraceptives for a friend of mine,' or, you know. But I said no, I had been a trade typesetter and didn't fancy doing it for other people, which he understood.

Had you ever sold work before? I mean, we've never talked about you selling work.

No. Only being a designer.

Right. So when you were doing the paintings...

I sold my, I sold my labour when I was being a designer.

When you were doing the paintings you weren't trying to sell them?

No.

And presumably the fact you were doing minimalist...

I was an idealist, I mean I actually, you know, I was politically an idealist and I actually was part of that bourgeois thing that to do things like that were in its own, were for its own sake.

And was the minimalist painting aspect, was that also to do with the system, was that really relating to everything else you were doing?

It was a lot, yes, it was a lot to do with design systems and so on, but, I also did some rather freer things, you know, you wouldn't know that the same person had done them.

And were you using colour?

Yes.

What kind of colour range?

Good colour people tell me. A lot of browns and reds. But I did one particular painting that was about two blues, very specifically.

What sort of scale?

A metre square, ish.

And, do you remember what you felt about the V & A?

Well what I felt about the V & A was a little bit of personal history because I had spent a lot of time there as a student drawing in the V & A; it's a place where you went when it was raining, and I can still go into the V & A and spot a statue or something that I've drawn at five hundred paces, you know, it's just so, it's burnt into the brain, you know.

So in a funny way it felt like your own?

Yes, it's a very nice thing to sell work to the V & A.

And did you discover at that point what a collection of books they had?

They kept telling me, I've never seen that collection, never seen, I've never seen any books in the National Art Library, except mine. Well, I haven't even seen mine there except in cases. I remember going down not so long ago with a largeish book that the V & A were buying and I got to the library door and a chap with a uniform and cap on said, `What have you got there?' I said, `It's a book.' And he said, `Is it one of ours?' I said, `It will be if you let me in.' [LAUGHS] And let him pick that over.

And let you in?

Yes, he let me in. Quite enjoyed saying that.

And did you try selling it to any other libraries or was it really just the V & A?

I don't remember. Most of these, most of the books that I've sold have come through word of mouth and networking and so on, I mean there wasn't any policy much, certainly not in England.

I was going to say, you're just talking of England at the moment are you?

Mhm.

You haven't gone to Europe or America?

No.

And having done this book, you must have known you were going to do others, didn't you?

Yes. But there was actually quite a gap. That was '77/'78 I did `Father's Hook', and there were no more books until I got a fellowship at Norwich School of Art, the Brinkley Fellowship, the John Brinkley Fellowship, which in those days up till then had always gone to the fine artists of Norwich School of Art, and a rather aggressive tall lanky Scot called Bruce Brown, who is now the dean of everything at Brighton, so-called Brighton University or the University of the Beach or whatever, got to be head of Graphics, and he was a fairly, I had met him at Hornsey, or Middlesex Poly as it was then called.

Had you taught there?

Yes, in some bizarre place, first at Hornsey College which was a load of ramshackle buildings up in Hornsey, and then this vast over-designed... On the outside it looked like a kind of old people's pension home, and on the inside it looked like an Indesit fridge dump. And Bruce went up there and became head of Graphics at Norwich, and invited me to apply for the John Brinkley Fellowship, which I did, along with a few other people, and got it, and did three books in that year.

Which year are we in?

Oh, '80/81 - no, '83/84, but in '80/81 we went to Canada, which I think was an important year for both Ruth and I. Ruth's career as a scientist had taken off by this time, she had started late after the children and did magnificently well, and was invited to do some research in Toronto, or Taranna, and coyly asked, `What shall we do?' And I said, `Well we'll do it, let's do it. You know, I'll carry the cases.' As it happens I got all the teaching I needed in Toronto and Montreal, I used to commute to Montreal once a week and do two classes in Toronto - in Montreal. Sorry, in Toronto. And, we found that we started to peel away from the life we had had before, and realised that it was worth taking chances. I mean we came back with money in our pocket, we didn't pay any tax on that year, and I earned far more than I thought I was going to teaching, and also got far more into the business of doing my own work which there was painting pictures in the basement of the house we had, and so on, you know.

And what were those pictures?

Well very griddy things, you know, stuff I had done before. I actually sold some work over there, which I thought rather pleasurable.

Through a gallery or what?

No, a friend and then another friend commissioned me to do something.

So what sort of pace were you painting at?

Leisurely I would say, but engaged.

And you think you probably wouldn't have done those paintings in England?

No.

So what do you think it was that changed?

I think we both knew that we were floating free. And when we came back we had enough money, depending on how you lived, for arguably, well for certainly... We had enough money to keep us for a year if we did absolutely nothing, and we might have had enough money for two, depending on how you behaved, and we had both had offers over there and we realised that we wanted to come back, we said, for our children, but that's why people get

divorced, they, you know...that kind of bullshit. But I think it was partly true, I mean it was very clear that, you know, you would see people over there who had moved in from England and still tuned in to the Home Service, you know, picked up Radio 4 and listened to all these crappy programmes, and [INAUDIBLE]. But their kids had become American within weeks, you know, you just can't stop that happening. The kids want to get on with the other kids in the playground and they become American in no time at all, and we didn't like the idea I don't think too well.

Why?

Well, you know, it's a crap culture, really very very bad culture there. It's getting that way here, but you know, there's an acceleration over there which we find hard to catch up with. And so, I mean I think within a year we would have had two cars in the drive and Ruth would have had some kind of job over there and I could have picked up teaching. I was told I could have teaching that I had there, certainly in Montreal, which I liked as a town, I really like Montreal; didn't like Toronto. But we both had a good year and we both I think stretched our wings and found it agreeable, and I said if we had this money and we feel good about this year, let's go back to England with nothing and take a chance, which is what we did.

Did you think that in Canada you were just accepted as you without all the sort of...

Oh yes, I find that, I mean I just feel, I feel relief going to another country without question. Bit difficult in Canada because a lot of people like the Queen and everything, which is, you know, is a kind of mild disease isn't it. But in republics I feel entirely at home, you know, I mean I just don't think about it. In New York people are crazier than I am; I feel normal in New York, normal. [LAUGHS] Can you imagine? And people talk to you, you know, in a way which you don't get talked to in England, I mean, so, I'm comfortable in these other places.

And visually did Canada have shocks for you, or not?

Yes, its sheer colossal size, and the wilderness which I have always had a very strong feeling for, I just, you know, am very happy about being out in it. But I actually, by that time was doing very much what I do now, which is to go downstairs and, well I don't now because it's not there, but I go in and start working. I feel I almost know that I've done my looking, but I'm not sure about that.

And did you travel within Canada?

Well I travelled every week from Toronto to Montreal on these huge trains. First, they were going to give me the money to fly to Montreal every week which I thought was pretty broad of them, but the very first week there was a freeze-up and I couldn't get through so I thought that's too, really is too nervous, so I got on one of these overnight sleepers every Tuesday night, or Monday - no Sunday night, Sunday night, huge trains, and it's not like British Rail where you get a cabin with four bunks in; I mean you have, there's a cabin with one bunk in it, it's yours, and it's big. Someone brings you breakfast, and it's great. And I would get on one of these trains and it would go barrelling through the night through snowstorms and howling winds, it was just wonderful, you know. In the morning you would get off and there were these great ice sculptures on the sides of the bogeys in the wheels, and a guy going along with huge sledge-hammers knocking them off, you know. Very very romantic. I mean the trains in North America are fantastic, and the big howling noise of them, you know, says everything from the movies. It's a good sound.

And did you, you didn't travel any other parts of Canada?

I got to know some students in Montreal, one was half Ojibway Indian, the other two were two, a couple who were French Canadian and Anglo Canadian. And went out with them variously in the wilderness in, called the Five Townships or something like that, south of Montreal, on the Vermont border, and I remember having a terrific time cross-country skiing in the hills and going through, you know, you can go on skis where you may not walk, you know, crossing frozen rivers on skis and stuff like that. It's really terrific. Finding bear tracks and...

And did you go into America at all?

We saved up our money and I said to Ruth let's do the Route 66 thing. We got a new car with a radio in it, and we put the girls in a summer camp, because I didn't want them sitting on the back of the seat waiting for the Rockies to turn up over days. We really dumped them in summer camp. They had had a good education in Toronto, probably a better one than they would have had in England, and, I thought the summer camp was the right thing to do. And I just thought we deserved a holiday and we got the car out, put some camping gear in the boot, and put some money in our pockets and set off, clickety-split. Got out of Canada as quickly as possible, drove across Wyoming, stayed in one of the national parks, Grand Teton National Park, it was absolutely wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Stayed in motels and camped where we thought we'd camp. I was meanwhile, I was reading `The Oregon Trail', which is a fabulous book by Francis Parkman that would one day make a great western, and it was full

of stunning images, and found that we were actually following the route of that up the Platt[ph] River, and so there was a thrill in that. And went to Oregon and got to, went over into California and then up the western seaboard and back through Canada.

Right, it's a fantastic coast that one, isn't it.

It's absolutely wonderful. Good trip, good trip for both of us.

End of F4816 Side A

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F4817 Side A

[12st September 1995]

We are at Ken Campbell's house, and the date is September the 21st 1995. Tell me how you are this morning Ken.

Well reasonably relaxed, my pulse rate has gone down after doing my exercises. I had a minimal breakfast, and terribly glad to see y'all.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

When we were talking last time you had just come back from Canada and you had got the Brinkely Fellowship at Norwich.

Right.

During which time you made three books. I would like to talk about the whole time at Norwich. Did you actually go and live there?

No. I can't remember what Ruth was doing, she was either, I think she was at University College in London. I had one or two days teaching at Norwich in the Graphics Department, and so I would go out and do some teaching and then spend the rest of the week working on the work that I was doing in the Brinkley Fellowship. It was something like that, it was one or two days, so I spent the majority of the week out there, the working week.

But you were actually living in London?

Yes.

Mhm.

I would drive up once a week, come back at the end of the week.

So where did you live in Norwich, just to get those details out of the way?

Well I spent some time at the head of department's place, I spent some time at Brian Catling's place, and I ended up renting some space from [INAUDIBLE] mum.

So it was quite a time of interaction with other people as well as a good time in terms of the fellowship.

Yes. It was also an odd time mentally, because I think I was then pretty well 40 or 41 or something, and I found myself for the first time living the life up front and out of the bathroom openly as an artist, you know, I had come out of the closet as far as being entertained, being engaged entirely in the business of doing work that was self-generated. And I found it a very disturbing kind of wild experience.

Can you go into that a bit?

Well, the first thing I suppose was that, it's something that people rarely mention but it's quite obvious, it's a technical thing like running a kitchen. If you are running your own work, generating your own work, you are not operating to any deadlines that are set, unless of course you've got an exhibition coming, but that's not so because you're not known. In any of the other trades, journalism or be a designer, and I've done a little bit of both, well a lot of being a designer and a little bit of journalism, you are working to a deadline, and that fires you up, you think, you have this kind of bar-room psychology about working to deadlines, and I'm not sure how accurate it is and how truthful it is, I think it's very often an excuse for laziness, but often it's the thing that's required to produce the adrenalin. And when you stop doing that - and of course the other thing is you are interacting with other people a lot of the time, and when you stop doing that it's a completely different way of working. You have to get up in the morning and make your own adrenalin, you have to get up in the morning and decide whether adrenalin is actually needed or whether you simply ought to be doing a job rather than doing things, you know, in a rather Dionysiac way off the top of the surge of adrenalin. That was an interesting thing too, I found that once I was doing my own work, much of which is colossally repetitive, I actually enjoyed that.

Hang on, you mean it's repetitive in process?

In process, yes, when I'm printing the books or whatever, quite often I have to be engaged for days, and sometimes the point of the work is the grinding, the obvious repetitiveness of it, rather like mantras or prayers, and I found that, I suddenly found, or I suddenly realised, that I was beginning to find such behaviour very interesting, not boring, interesting, like a monk no doubt finds it interesting. And this was me after all through, you know, the circle had come round in that respect, because I started off coming from a family where they by force majeure

they had to do incredibly boring things to destruction, and I rejected that, but I found that I could now find myself doing such things and finding them actually stimulating.

So was this in a way, it happened with three ingredients and maybe more; one was what we've talked about which was that, with the death of your father you, a) worked through quite a lot directly in book form, but you also let yourself off having to be, in quotes, `good'...

Right.

Which you talked about a bit, you know, doing a boring job and earning the money or whatever. The second thing, you talked about the time in Canada being quite a liberating experience in that way, maybe to do partly with what you are actually doing and to do with being Ken Campbell in a foreign country where people didn't make all sorts of assumptions about this[??]. And thirdly presumably the fact that when you got back you were kind of rubber-stamped by being given the fellowship.

Yes. I think to be more accurate, the liberating thing about Canada was a two-fold thing, and again very practical. One is that Ruth and I found ourselves making money in a way that was quite different to the way we had made it before. One, Ruth through her fellowship, and me finding myself extraordinarily well paid for a great deal of teaching, and we came back, as I probably said earlier, with money to keep us going for another year or two.

And therefore confidence.

And therefore much more confident, having a slightly different view. It's [INAUDIBLE] where each chapter starts with something like, and did [INAUDIBLE] have the look on his face of a man who had been on great travels, or been on a long journey; in other words you do change when you travel. And the other thing was, I wasn't so much liberated in Canada, Canada is not exactly a place of great liberation, but I was liberated in the basement of the house. I mean I found myself working on my own on the things that I found interesting, and I did that for a year, and that was a good thing to do.

Yes. Was there any other ingredient, you know, that got you to this point in Norwich do you think, or do you think that's a fairly truthful set of strands?

I think somebody said, Bruce Brown the head of department who had more or less got me the fellowship, although I was in competition with other people, said that what I did there was to ruthlessly, and I didn't like the word but I mean I think he was probably right, I ruthlessly

used whatever was there to effect; in other words, whatever its disposition in machinery and materials was, and the skills that were available, it's where I met Brian Catling and a very good man called Ian Welsh who was a friend of Brian's and so on, they all helped me in different ways, and I used what ws on tap, on offer, to a best effect. So it was a very collagist, very creative arranging whatever was in front of me.

What were the terms of the fellowship, were you just given money to do whatever you wanted, or what?

I was given some money, not much, to for a year pursue the making of artists' books. Now this Brinkley Fellowship in fact for almost the term that it had been given from the moneys obviously of a man called John Brinkley, had been given to the fine arts, graphic design being a poor relation, but Bruce Brown is a tough Scot and when he cruised in, suddenly he looked at the books and saw this and realised it was arguably time for graphic design to get one, much to the chagrin of the fine artists.

Do you know how it had come? I didn't realise it was specifically for artists' books. That's amazing in this country.

No it wasn't specifically for artists' books. It was for anybody in the arts in the art school.

But to make books.

But as it happens the artists have scored it, the John Brinkley Fellowship, for most of the time it had been operational, so people were doing it in sculpture or fine art, whatever, but Bruce Brown being canny realised that a good bridging subject would be artists' books, I mean in any case he wanted me up there because at that time I was tolerable to him.

And did he have a big interest in artists' books?

Not much.

Right, so it was a means of getting...

I think he kind of liked my work.

Right. And you went up there thinking in terms of artists' books, or it was much broader from your perspective?

Well of course I knew what the scoop was, that we were supposed to be artists' books and I certainly did them, but these other things were on offer so I found myself doing sculpture for the first, and a bit of poetry reading and stuff like that, you know.

Can you talk about the sculpture a bit?

I did one very strange piece of sculpture with Brian Catling called `Bibliophagy', my name, book eating itself, in which I took a roll of paper from the mill, heavy paper about as long as this room, about fifteen feet or something, chain-sawed it into smaller rolls of about twenty inches wide, then hand-folded it into a great pile, this exact pile, then chain-sawed that in half and made a book out of one half from the photographs that had been taken of me doing this; up to this point Brian wasn't in this. And at that point returned all of the books, printed the book, printed the books, got three copies of it somewhere else but the majority of the book is in the sculpture, and at that point returned the book to its original pile state of paper, and bound it up in steel and poured acrylic all over it and returned it into a kind of, turned it back into itself, it ate itself. Brian then came along and helped me clamp the thing up and we poured hot lead, lead from type, all over the other bit, so it stands as two piles. And that was fun, that was fun.

Where is that now, did they keep it there?

That's at my studio in Bow, and a very fine piece it is too. Someone ought to buy it, and I'm working on it. And the other thing was, I had a very bizarre idea, I wanted to mould, I mean sculptors are supposed to be builders or moulders or constructors or whatever, or carvers, there's various ways of carving it out[??]. I conceived this very odd thing of three bronze hooves. The lead hoof is a big horse's or nail[??] hoof, and is...I'm sorry, a big cow's hoof or female hoof, taken from Assyrian models in the British Museum which I stood around drawing and so on, with a stem as it were of the ankle going back at sixty degrees and on a triangular section, the top of which is cut and polished so the top is a triangular section of the top of the ankle, or as it were a section through the shin. Behind that, taking up the two implied lines of that triangle, with their own triangles, are two male hooves, so it's too men in pursuit[??] of a woman. And hanging over the top of that are seven sheets of varnished hand-made paper, varnished so you could see through them so they look antique, and on each of those sheets of paper are two letters in large Gill wood letter, one in black and one in red. They vertically stack so that on one side you see the word, `Amoroma', a palindrome I made up, which means `the scent of love' or `I love Rome'. And that goes progressively from the back to the front and the front to the back, however you like to see it, when well lit; on the

other side is the same vertical stack of the same letters in red, saying `Amoroma', but crossing in the other direction, coming forward in the other direction. And that's all bound together with two lumps of wood and some evil stitching needles, female vengeance, and it's suspended in the air by clear nylon cord. The interesting thing about that was that I thought I had invented the word `Amoroma', but the Cathars invented their anti-church, and they called that `Amoroma', for much the same reasons I found.

When did you discover that?

Well I've got the clipping somewhere, it was in the `Guardian' some five years after I did them.

Oh. And what's this piece called?

`Amoroma'. I love Rome, or the scent of love.

The hooves are wonderful. I mean, you have them around quite a lot, don't you?

Yes, yes.

Did you make an edition of them?

A hypothetical edition of three, I've sold...have I sold...no I haven't sold them, no. I was thinking of the other sculpture. There's another sculpture called `The Hand', or `The Maker's Hand', which is associated with `A Knife Romance', which is two hands put together, it's vaguely onilistic[ph] joke, it's two hands put together with the whole like a double spread of a book, an open book, it's called `The Maker's Hand'. They're my hands of course.

Naturally. And, were there other sculptures while you were up in Norwich?

No, that was it, I did two sculptures up there.

And that was quite a transition for you, it must have been exciting.

Yes, it was great, I mean I was doing everything, you know, up there, pretty well. And I would be in, you know, I would...as I did at Corsham I would crash out wherever it was I was staying, I would be into the studios at 7, 7.30 and working, and work, I mean if I was teaching

that day I would teach when the students turned up, which was in various sorts of disarray from 9 till 11. But if not I would work all the way through the day at my work.

What were you teaching then?

Graphic design.

And since that time sculpture had been a strand of your work?

Yes. I wanted, I mean I've now gone into modelling wax and getting them cast. I have had some ideas for big pieces of sculpture but I just haven't the wherewithal, the money or the time to get them produced, and they would be very bizarre. I mean they're ideas which are for someone who had spent a lifetime doing sculpture, if they were any good, I mean they're big pieces. One is called, if you want to know, since you're about to ask, one is called `Purification of the Army' and that comes from a very good book by Robin somebody-or-other on Alexander the Great. When the army, Alexander's army had finished a campaign and done what all armies do, which is in the long run misbehave somewhere, not just in the battle, the army was marched through two halves of the dead dog that had been cut in half as a purification thing. It's just such a peculiar image, a wonderful image. I would like to build that with the army represented as a kind of a, as the phalanx, as a kind of a carapace with loads of things sticking out like some kind of trilobitic object from the sea bed, but dangerous, swords sticking out moving forward, the army as a single thing with motivation and two halves of the dead dog with a piece of gut trailing across the road to the other half, after-half.

And what scale would that be?

Big.

Human scale?

My size or bigger.

And a big dog.

And a big dog, yes, I must catch a dog.

But how does the sculpture lie in terms of the amount of work and pace of work and place in your head?

I don't do that much of that sculpture. I mean it's, most of the time now, I mean I also started painting, I was beginning to paint in Canada, and you may have seen my paintings around and print-making and so on. I do a wide span of work but I don't do a great deal of it. And sometimes the print-making comes naturally out of the printing of the books or leads up to the printing of the books; the paintings and the sculpture take a back burner thing. A wise friend, Ron King, said for some reason it's extraordinarily difficult to do something like painting or sculpture and do a book at the same time, and they probably eat either at the same dog bowl in your soul, or they are eat at two different dog bowls [INAUDIBLE] you know. Your soul's distracted.

But is it inconceivable that you would do fewer and fewer books and more and more sculpture, or do you think the books will always be the larger [INAUDIBLE]?

I don't know the answer to that. I remember one time, and I can't remember exactly what time it was, I was lying in bed with Ruth and woke up in the morning and found that on my side of the bed on the floor were a poem being re-worked for the, I don't know how many times, and I had got up and I think, what do I do next? Have I got to teach? Shall I get onto this poem or shall I get back to the painting that I'm doing? And I thought, what's the problem? You haven't got a problem, you know. Jung's great question is what to do next. What to do next is usually in front of your eyes, and we're so distracted we're usually looking at some kind of [INAUDIBLE] horizon or horizon of desire, which distracts you completely from what's right in front of your face. The important thing is to try - the trick, the skill is to see what's in front of your face, and if you're very lucky there's loads of things to do.

So what did you do?

What did I do that day? I can't remember. It's just another day.

And what about the poetry at Norwich?

I think by this time I was starting to write less and less poetry. I turned up one...I was rather surprised that I turned up one very long poem which, for me long poem, for `Broken Rules and Double Crosses', which is a book on the manipulation of the Christian cross and finding the pairs, which again was another Cathar or Gnostic notion, I found out later on. But I produced a long poem for that and two or three small ones, specifically for the book, or at least while I was doing the book, called `Of Officers and Men', a linguistic distinction I always sound interesting. And it was really about why people do as they're told, that's how

they get into the trenches and get killed. So it's about authority, and really that book matching one cross with another is really about authority. The notion of Christ can be a brother rather than something up in the air, which is a Gnostic notion, they proposed it and it's Judas Thomas, Christ's twin, and the Roman Church didn't like that because the Roman Church was built, rather like Marxist cells, it was built on survival, authority, cells linked together by authority in a hierarchical thing for survival. So they didn't like those democratic things[??].

Well since we've gone on to it, tell me about that book. What came first, the poem in this instance?

No, it came...no the first, the thing that came first was... The problem with this is, it's not just a failing memory; there is a kind of, you know, like women are supposed to bear pain better than men because of the pain of childbirth and all that hypothetical stuff. There is a problem about, when you initiate work there's a kind of a sealing-off process in some ways, as though the muse doesn't want you to know how it started, because otherwise you might not go through it again, rather like the, you know, the sealing of pain through, you know, after childbirth. I think that might be the mechanism. So I have a hard time getting back to remembering how I started a book and why, as I do quite often have a hard time remembering how I actually did it. But if I can still try and answer the question, I think what happened was, I got very interested in - I know, ah, got it. I was doing some very...they're very unsung things in the work, but they're dotted around, a very very bizarre set of pencil drawings through a grid system, very much of its time and perhaps seen to be boring now. The whole series was called `Dervish' and it came out of a time, while I was at Corsham I think, looking up into the sky one winter's day and seeing things spin and remembering Dervish music, people dance to Dervish music with one hand up to God and the other hand pointing down to the earth so that you channelled God's vibrations down to the earth so that man was seen as something that was connecting the two. And I had this idea of making grids that spun in different ways, and they turned into certain drawings and certain paintings. But also out of them came a concern with the cross as an interstices, as a meeting place, the crossroads, the Christian cross and so on. And I looked at the cross and thought, well, it's kind of like a body, a head, two arms and two legs put together. What happens if you waggle the head? What happens if you wave the arm up and down? And that became an interesting little design, because I'm a designer it became an interesting little design proposition, how, what size, what proportion would the arms to the head to the legs be, what would be the thickness of the thing? Could you make a diagram of this? Could you make a diagram of them articulated? What would happen? So it became a little hermetic design problem for me. And having found it, I realised that there were doubles, there would be left- and right-hand equivalents. If I moved the...if I moved the head to the left and the right arm up, there would

be a left...you know, and did nothing else, there would be a left or right hand, depending on how you looked at it, equivalent, bilaterally symmetric equivalent. And I realised we had pairs, and I found that interesting, I found they looked like brothers. And I realised...and then I invented a typographic form, that is a thing that constrains the pieces of metal that would make this thing happen in the bed of the press so that it was a double, it was a complete invention as far as I know, I required to apply pressure from the centre outwards rather than from the outside in, and that became a thing that I worked out on the bed of the press. I talked to somebody at the time about doing it on a computer. I thought about cutting the shapes out in wood or lino or making them, but when I realised that I could overlap given elements over each other, or why it would take far more printing, and saw the build-up, the resultant build-up of inks into almost a sculptural thing, I realised that's what I was going to have to do. It's one of the first books where almost the point of, almost the point of the book was the sheer labour required to do it, and it was the point of the book, I mean it was one of the points of the book, it's one of the things that made it interesting for me to do, and for some people to look at.

So what's the balance between the kind of mantra effect of that labour, and punishment?

Well you have to be careful, it's not just punishment. I mean I don't mind punishment, I don't mind punishment myself, but I'm damned if I'm going to have other people watch it. And I think that one of the... [LAUGHS] ...so far. I mean one of the problems with print-making and fine books and art in general, about which I now have very very cold and distant views, such that I don't even spell them out to my artistic friends, what it's for, why it's there, and who has it and for what purpose, there are I know creepy collectors who want to feel the pain, you know, they're paying for the pain, you know. I mean I met somebody who had a friend who had a friend and all of that, whose sole job in life was to creep over prints and see if the artist had dodged it at all, or made it, you know, made it right or altered it or whatever, to complete the edition. You know, `Daddy, Daddy, what are you doing today?' `Oh I caught out an artist,' you know. `Oh gosh, can I be like that when I grow up?' `Just hang on son and I'll teach you all the tricks of the trade.' Now when you see that William Blake, William Blake, trying to achieve an edition of 25 or 50, would have certain plates start to break up on the fifth print, and would spend the rest of the time dodging it to make the edition, I would bet a pound to a pinch of shit, to be crude, I would actually be very very sure that any of these collectors would pay good money for a William Blake, whether it was dodged or not.

Did his plates break for the same reason yours break, because of the force he was using them on?

My plates don't break, but, I can't remember what went wrong, his...his edition started to go wrong into the edition and he had to do things to maintain the edition.

OK, but it wasn't because of the passion with which he was working at them, it was...

Oh I've no idea.

Right, OK.

I've no idea, I've no idea. I'm trying to make the point that there's a lot of hypocrisy about the constancy of editions, whereas once the reputation is established I think things get solved. But what people are after very often, they're paying for the pain, you know, and I don't think they're necessarily paying for the message.

But leaving their response aside, what's your element on it?

So, what I have to be careful in my own mind is that I'm not getting into the business of doing things by the length as it were, you know, not as... I mean I gave a print to a friend once and said, `Do you want to choose one of these to do an etching?' And he chose one and I said, `Why did you choose that?' And he said, `There's more lines.' [LAUGHS] So, I don't want to get into the position where people are buying the pain, I want to know that... I don't have a problem with it. If I find...have I talked to you about the book I'm doing at the moment?

Well that's what was making me ask the question really, because...

Well you see, just to recap, I've just finished doing a sequence on a book which has still got a long way to go, where to complete one poem with stencils, printing from zinc stencils instead of printing through them and printing off the surface of them, therefore accumulating a poem letter by letter, times the edition, times two because it's a dos-à-dos book, going to be repeated, I've had to crank the machine over 66,000 times to produce a five stanza poem. I can tell you that when I realised that that's what I had to do, I remember it very specifically, in the studio, I gave a shout of laughter and just held my side, roaring with laughter, to think that I'm going to have to...I thought, what's going to break first, my body, the machine, the paper or the stencils, you know? We'll have to see. And the other thing was that it was a completion of the thing that, in all of the books there's huge risk. There's constant accumulation of things done, and therefore through each run, through each pass of the machine, there's an accumulation of risks, hopefully won or got out of, or solved in some way, and I always proof on those sheets. So everything is at risk all of the time, and to do

something that requires 66,000 turns of the press, not knowing what's going to break up first, or if I'm going to run out of space. Because I was running from the left to the centre and from the out, from the right to the centre, hypothetically there was a thing where it could be that I crossed over and met in the middle and had to cross over. So I didn't know if that was going to work. And what would I do when it happened? So I was always predicting, I was always... Anyway the thing was so full of risk that I found it exhilarating and I had a huge laugh.

But, 66,000 turns is, in one sense is safe place, because you've got a path that you've got to follow.

Yes but...

And on another sense it is a torture. I mean what is that balance?

It's... It is a safe place in that you know where you're going for the next while, but keeping on that path is extraordinarily difficult. This sounds like fundamental Christianity in a way, but, or Judaism. But keeping on that path is very difficult. As I said, it wasn't doing a matter of, just matter of doing something incredibly automatically; all the time I was adjusting the colours of things, the playing around with blue-blacks to brown-blacks, readability, spacing, making sure that, trying to calculate and predict how much was going, how much space was going to be used up and where the thing was going to fall. It was constant sense of prediction and fine tuning, or whatever, or guesses. So you can say it's like sailing a yacht from here to the Bahamas, but, you know the route but there's constant shifting of wind and constant swinging of the wheel.

<u>End of F4817 Side A</u>

F4817 Side B

I just want to finish something there. I mean I think that's...a lot of people's external notion of what artists do or what craftspersons do or whatever you like to call what I do, is something to do with the grand romantic gestures and inspiration and so on. There is a sense in which, when you are engaged on something like this, it's constant adjustment and prediction. It is really like steering a yacht, something that I've done twice, and rather like photography or drawing it is an incredibly exhausting thing, because all of the time your senses are being used for fine tuning. Now I think it's probable, well it's almost certain, that once you become an expert yachtsman, that goes underground and becomes automatic, and therefore becomes easier, and I think that that's what I do now a lot of the time. But the adjustments are still there, it's till being done.

But how do you...when you talk about, you weren't sure which would break first, you, the press, whatever, that reminds me of your horrible situation with your father when he got to the point where his spine was cake.

Right.

Is there a parallel in these things?

No, only in that I think that underneath all of this, why I am located with the way I'm producing books at the moment, is that they are inevitably acts of labour, physical labour, and I probably am still matching myself to my father in that sense. But I also find, I mean I'm slightly addicted to it, after you've been on the press for six hours a day you are pretty short of sleep that night, and in the modern world, you know, you don't always have that physical exhaustion.

So it's a sort of addiction.

Mildly, yes, like people get addicted to work, you know, as you get older.

And since we've...I want to go back to the book in a minute, but, tell me then a bit more about what it is you are not saying to fellow artists about what you feel about art and how, a way of looking at it, and using it.

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Let's start at this end, that is what's happening at the moment. It's an interesting thing that's happening that, as far as I understand it there are certain critics

and writers who say, well, the art isn't that important, the text is; in other words, what I write, my interpretation of the art, is almost as important or is more important than the art itself. You've heard that notion?

No, but it's why I started `Artists' Lives'.

Right. Now I think that that's interesting. I mean it's of course a massive arrogance, but it is interesting, because to me it's an extension of something else that's been happening, which is that the artists themselves have almost handed that baton over to this caste of half-bitten priests and attenders at the shrine. They have for a long time behaved as though they don't exist as artists unless they get the catalogue, unless they get the review, unless they get written about. And I think that the critics and the art historians have smelt that lack of confidence in the artists, and have really brushed them off the throne and gone onto the throne themselves. Now, why have the artists gone unconfident? Partly I think through certain political movements that have encouraged them to think that art isn't quite the right thing, there are more responsible ways of going on, and we all know about that, and something to which I have subscribed in the past, but I think it also goes back to something to do with the romantic movement, and the people who really sustained the culture in which we've been sitting for the last three or four hundred years are the bourgeoisie, from whom most of the good ideas have come and the good feelings, and the liberal imagination, all of which is now under attack politically very much. That's under attack because the base skill, although the bourgeoisie wouldn't have this, their base skill, rather like the base skill of an architect is to keep a Rötring pen moving, the base skill of the bourgeoisie is the accumulation and processing and storage of information. That skill is now taken from them by computers and new technology. Now it's no accident that at the same time this pugardist[ph] bunch of right-wing thugs have come upon us who have no respect for those particular people from which they came, because they smell intuitively that the source of their power is being removed through new technology. Unfortunately what's going with it is the good things that the liberal imagination for the bourgeoisie produced, like caring for other people, a sense of civitas, listening to good music, looking at the countryside and so on, all of that. However, from that imagination came a separation from certain kinds of religion, and I think they in a way promoted the artist into a rather enfeebled god-head through the romantic imagination. Part of that imagination was fearing where they came from, that they should be guilty about where they came from and what they've got, because the older class was supplying their money. `A Passage To India' was not about India, it was about Manchester, the stews of Manchester really. So they proposed this person who would take their guilt for them, the artist, the suffering artist, they love their artists to suffer in debt, not rich or famous. And a lot of the appreciation of art is deciding I think who best represents, who is the good image for the

particular period or time, and then putting that image up on the wall. And I don't like that relationship at all, at all, I reject it. Is that clear to you, or...?

Yes. Do you think there was a better time? I mean what used to happen actually was patrons and...

I think that was a better time for some artists, but we of course now, every mother and father's son or daughter wants to be an artist. There might be a reason for that too, which is that what would have been the productive classes are becoming unproductive in terms of that which generates wealth and holds an empire together in ways that we don't like any more, and so the way for young people is to say, `I want to be an artist' to avoid those things. I am example of it in a way.

But so, how could things...I mean was there ever a time when you think things were [INAUDIBLE] and how could they be improved?

I can't think of it, I can't think of it. The other thing is, I wouldn't want to represent, I don't much want to represent the kind of society that we've got, so, whether I approve of the relationship between artist and symbol, or martyr, or object, or object of desire, or scapegoat for the guilty imagination, or whatever, all of that, some of that's true, some of it's a bit woolly in my thinking; whether I approved of that relationship between the artist and society or not is swept aside by the fact that I don't like much what society is and therefore don't wish...or have a difficulty in representing it.

And yet obviously you are inseparable from it.

Obviously. Now, for instance the other night a worthy silvery dude of the artistic community was downstairs tapping my King James Bible and picking me up on it, saying, `What the hell's this doing here?' And I think, well that's your problem chum. I tried to explain to him that, you know, the language of the King James Bible is vital to me, and I don't have a problem with it being there. At the same time I have pinned on the wall, `The owl is abroad, the bat and the toad, and so in the cat [INAUDIBLE] mountain', you know, the witches charm. It doesn't mean...

This is Peter Townsend presumably is it?

Of course. It doesn't mean to say I'm, you know, a satanist to have that wonderful poem on the wall. `The moon is red, the stars are fled, and all the skies are burning,' you know. Well I

don't do that every night, so I think I can have a King James Bible on my shelf, but clearly he's jivey about it.

He's good at winding you up.

Pardon?

He's good at winding you up.

Well I don't know.

But going back to the book, I mean, one of the exciting things about it is the integration of the printing material, the rule, with the whole being of the book.

Right.

Can you talk a bit about that?

We're still on `Broken Rules and Double Crosses' are we? Yes.

Yes. I mean, we haven't said actually what those materials are, for people who don't know.

[COUGHING] Excuse me, it's an asthmatic cough. The crosses are made up, there's one cross on each page. The page is Chinese folded, in other words Chinese bound, in other words the page is really two pages linked at the fore edge, that is the outer edge, so, if you imagined plucking that page out of the book, it would open at the fore edge, not at what was the spine, at the spine there are two leaves, it would open out flat to give two crosses. On one side would be the left-hand equivalent of the right, and on the right would be the right-hand equivalent of the left; in other words they're mirror images. So all the way through the book implicitly there are mirror images but folded so you don't see them as mirror images except in the mind as you turn them. So, the book was printed two crosses at a time as twinned pairs, which was the point of the book, but hidden when it produced the book. The crosses are, the book is about 12 inches by 15 inches shut, and on each page is nothing but a huge, relatively huge black cross. The very interesting thing for me to do was to design that cross to be exactly the right size in that page, which I found an interesting thing to do. I also found it interesting not to trim that page to any size that I designed, because I found that something to do with meanness and, you know, just keeping...presenting myself with a problem. The cross, I decided that the unit that I would use to build the cross up was a twelve-point rule. A

twelve-point rule, twelve points is roughly a sixth of an inch, it was the standard measure for type and type materials in the days of hot metal relief printing, pre electronic printing, and the twelve-point rule was reckoned to be the standard measure, so I thought, well if nothing else I've got this page size and I'm going to make up a cross made up of multiples of twelve-point rules, that is my problem. I found that ten twelve-point rules made a very meaty head, arm or leg, and that I think a proportion of two to one to four or something, something like that, I worked the proportion out by trial and error, not through theory as I think you should, I think you should find out what's right and then measure it and find the, find the rule expressed, and if you can then bring it to that rule. Snap to grids is what they say on the front of a computer screen, so you're given a grid and you can snap it to the grids. But I think you should find out what's right to the eye and soul and then measure it and see if there's a rule being expressed. I then was faced with the problem of getting the rules to any particular length, and I realised that normally you would cut them and shamper[ph] them and make them perfect; I thought, no this isn't the way to do it, what I did was snap them to make them cruel and Christ-like and suffering, so there's a jagged edge to the ends of these elements, OK? Then these rules were put together in groups of ten deep, and they would make a rectangle and these rectangles were printed, sometimes one at a time, so that in the centre they overlapped, whether at 90 degrees or at these funny angles, and when they overlapped there was ink upon ink and it became very sculptural. So it was very methodology. For printers I would say I had to, as I said earlier this morning I had to invent a form or a frame or a container on the bed of the press that would hold the whole diagram of these things so that I could lock up as they say, constrain the type on the bed of the press from the inside out, and put it into different slots to make the thing up. Does that get roughly where we're at? So it was all to do with the labour of that.

What about the excitement of making the materials for the book so to speak, can you talk about that a little bit?

Well it was exciting because you're cracking a problem, you've given yourself a problem and you have to find your way to the means of doing it.

But the economy of it is exciting, isn't it, the economy of thinking.

Yes. Yes. It's very nice to, you know, the answer to a quadratic equation can be one, you know, the amount of labour being something to produce a simple and elegant result can be colossal and it can be very little, and I think there's great pleasure in, it's called elegance, I think there's great pleasure in doing it either way.

And, you again...

Sorry, just to finish that, I mean because I'm kind of getting at what you're, where the question goes. There are times, the bed of the press is, you look down on literally a flat steel bed, upon which things are put, physical objects that stick up, and where they stick up higher than the other bits ink is applied and pressure is applied and paper and pressure is applied and you get a print. So the majority of what is used to make a particular print is not seen in this circumstance, it's blind, it's hidden, it is the...it is the boiling mob under the grill, you know. There are times when I find it extraordinarily interesting, depending more to do with how I get up and what I feel like that day than anything else, I find it as interesting to compose what's going on on the bed of the press which is not seen as it is what's going to be seen. And people have come along, I remember somebody coming along and looking at the bed of the press and saying it looked like a kind of a Japanese painting, what was going on on there. I said, `Yes, you're right, but you should have seen it yesterday.' So if I'm in that frame of mind it becomes a philosophically very interesting thing to put out what's called the furniture and all of the other bits, which is never going to be seen, as beautifully as possible. It's like, I don't know, a lady laying, or somebody laying the table, and the person, this second person is dead or something, you know. Or the person isn't going to turn up. But just to do the table well is enough.

But it's also I think quite unique to you, the extraordinary aliveness of all the materials. They're not just a means to an end, they're vivid the whole time.

Right, right.

I don't remember coming across anybody who is as awake to that as you are.

I don't know where that comes from, except to say that I think I was a very bad apprentice printer. My father was fairly incompetent with tools and so on, I mean he was a labourer but he wasn't a craftsman, and late in life I found the power of that and I don't know what it is, you know.

Is it linked at all, when you were talking about as he was dying, taking the power away from him, is that too literal?

It could be, but that's a little bit dramatic. I think there's a long history of appreciation of...I mean, Ruth, poor woman, married to me for so many years, said, you know, there's an awful irreducibleness about me which some people see as egotism, there's no doubt there's a great deal of that, but I know a lot of it is simple irreducibleness, and that makes some people climb

up the wall, and I know that I'm in trouble with people sometimes very quickly, and nothing that's been said, but there's not...I am not somebody who moves naturally, or easily. And I think part of that comes out of spending a great deal of time on my own when I was young, looking at things. I mean I read certain texts. I would go to the park and look at trees, and you know, it's in all of the Eastern books, you know, I would become part of the tree and all of that, and I learned to live on my own in my head. And I some time learnt to appreciate physical and visual situations as having their own life. I am not an artist who wants to grab the world and turn it into my own image, and there is a curiosity about these books which is that they are not acts of my will, they are an accumulation of what's there. It's this dowist[ph] thing that other things exist and we are bringing them forth, and it's my cant phrase, we are midwives of the incipient, you know, we are bringing the things forward. And I think it's something that, in my relationships with other people, that one of the difficulties is that I am not really a person who is pursuing power or trying to manipulate situations, but at the same time I'm not that easily moved myself. And some people find that hard to cope with, they're used...my suspicion is that most people are used to power situations of one kind or another.

But I think it's true to say that you are also not terribly interested sometimes in the other person, it's a rather one-way activity that's going on.

I think that's a perception that people have, but I don't think it's true a lot of the time.

But that maybe wasn't...

Ruth says I've got an awful habit of actually not... I think what happens is that I don't address what they are doing on the outside in a way that suggests I'm interested in them, but I actually come up with what she calls the grain of people, you know, I come up with an image of how they're made up.

You do, but I suspect you make a lot of assumptions about them that might not be true.

Well of course, that's called inaccuracy. We're all inaccurate.

But maybe that...when you say when you were a child on your own you would go and do these things, looking at trees, whatever, maybe it was not also part of your training, that kind of social interaction.

I could be a bit unsocialised, like a lot of people can.

No but I don't just mean that, I mean, being taught to think round the other person.

Accommodate the other person's behaviour?

To notice about them in fact.

I rather feel that I do notice more than people think, but I don't notice...I don't give out the signals that I am noticing in the way they would like me to notice, or I should behave when one is noticing all over the place. I think I'm doing it a different way. But we can argue about that.

But I mean it has a plus side. I mean, what's important in your books, particularly so the one we're talking about, is, what would be absolutely wrong to put in it, what you leave out is crucial.

Yes. But I would also make the positive thing that those bits of type on that paper, I'm giving them life. I mean I don't push them around in the book; in my head I don't. I actually recognise the things for what they are. They may be saying, he's not taking any notice of me, these bits of type and so on. But I actually think that I am understanding what the type is all about and the lead and the paper and the metal. I am supplying it with the means of coming, becoming what it is.

But you're also ensuring that it is undiluted, because that's what [INAUDIBLE].

That's right, yes, yes.

And I would suggest, perhaps completely wrongly, that there's a part of you that's doing that in the whole of your life.

Yes. Undiluting other things.

Ensuring that you are undiluted.

Ensuring that other things are undiluted as well.

Both?

Yes. That could be seen as a positive thing.

Yes, absolutely.

Yes. But it could be uncomfortable for people.

And for you.

Mm, yes, but I'm used to discomfort, but I think the, you know, the kind of things that you've just said can register the discomfort of other people and they may be misinterpreting what I'm doing.

Are you comfortable with comfort?

It's rather like the word happiness, I'm not sure what it means.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

And, you've really alluded only very briefly to the text in this book. Can you [INAUDIBLE]?

Yes, I'm just going to say something about comfort. I'm actually comfortable with other people who are mildly discomforting, apparently... I mean we spent a wonderful, unpredictably wonderful time in Australia because we were with with four, there were four of us, all of whom produced their own work, and every morning were acting, not acting out little acts of personal will but trying to find out what they wanted to do today, and all four of us were obsessed with our work in different ways, me less so because I was on holiday, but still looking and photographing and doing things. But the other three were active, eccentric scientists who wanted to get on with each other but also trying to work out... Now this made for a kind of a discomforting series of occasions where people are trying... But we all knew this, we knew this so well that we were all comfortable with it. That kind of comfort I like. Do you understand what I'm saying? And we therefore had a good time together.

Yes.

But we weren't, we weren't seeking all the time to only accommodate the other people.

But it's like your relationship with Ruth, you can fight like crazy but you know you are fighting within something that's going to remain.

Well, we don't know that at all. I mean, what keeps us together is knowing that we can renegotiate our contract at any time. Nothing given at all. I mean that. You ask her.

Tell me about the text in `Double Crosses'.

The text to...

`Broken Rules'.

`Broken Rules and Double Crosses', I think there's a short poem by me about the business of doing things. It's this kind of inductive poem that I think quite often poets need to bring you in to the thing. I can't quote it, I'd need the book in front of us. There's a quote from Rabbi Akiba about the business of doing things well, and there's a long poem about, there's two poems at the beginning of the book, one's about doing things, I forget what the other one is. As I said earlier, there's a long poem called `Of Officers and Men' which is really, the word panegyric, and I'm not sure what a panegyric is. What is it, do you know?

It's a hymn of praise isn't it?

Yes, a hymn of praise. Well it's a hymn of praise to the foot soldiers who died in the First World War and a comment on the fact that because they did as they were told they died, I'm afraid foolishly, and regrettably. So if the visual burden of the book is about any acceptable authority figure like Christ should be, you know, at parallel to oneself, rather than above, it's, the verbal is about the business of not doing as you are told after the Nuremberg trials unless you can see a bloody good reason for it.

And more text?

There are two other bits of text which is, of course when you think about it, there are two occasions where the Christian cross has no bilateral symmetric brother or sister. One is - well three. The cross itself, and then with the cross with the arms raised up, with the arms lowered, so what, I mean I didn't have a left or right equivalent, the true cross I did, just a straight cross. So what do you do when you can't draw? You write, don't you, you see. So I put a text... [LAUGHS] I put a text about doing things well according to... Because, you know, the Christian religion was in this book so I put something about the business of doing things well according to the Muslim religion, and according to the Jewish religion, and the Muslin religion was about, they have an interesting notion about, I remember speaking to you about this actually, [INAUDIBLE], about doing a carpet, but always putting in a mistake,

because if anything should be perfect, in a sense the world would become unzipped, or, it's impossible to do anything perfect and it's an arrogance to try, and I think your counter-argument was, well, you know, if it's impossible to do something perfect, why not keep trying? Because you're not going to do it. The Jewish thing was that, I noticed while in Jerusalem that a lot of Jewish houses, old Jewish houses had a brick on the top of the entrance, on an arch over the entrance, painted black with usually some Hebrew script above it, or below it, and asked somebody I knew in Jerusalem for a translation of that, and it didn't come, and I kept writing and it didn't come. I knew what it was about, so I thought, oh well, Ifraim is not going to send this, so I wrote, sat down and wrote it, and it was to do with the business that, among certain sects, among the Chasidim and others, they regarded this Jerusalem on Earth is not the true Jerusalem. The true Jerusalem will come on that particular day. And they have this wonderful phrase, which I regard as centrally[??] pressing for the end, everything you do is pressing for the end in some way, is loaded, that therefore no house in Jerusalem should be complete, so they actually blacken one brick to suggest that it's not complete yet, you know, so...

So they think they can cheat.

[LAUGHS] Well, yes, it slightly was as well, you know. No, it's symbolic, it's OK, I can live with that. I think it reminds them, rather like a cap, you know, a capola[ph] or a [INAUDIBLE] or, Muslims wear particular hats to remind them that there's something between them and the other place. So there were those three references, and with, you know, symmetry needs no mirror at each point. So it was about the business of doing things well. And, you know, the book is faulted, it has ink spots on it because it was done at a flying passion, and it's very much a thing about having a black cross in a pure...it's not a pure white ground, it's, the paper was interesting, it's a kind of a, just off-white, a bone colour, it's a wonderful colour, can't get it any more. So, it was about, mostly about doing things well.

But, I think the...

The labour of it.

The other thing that's interesting is the bringing together of these various references which is very much something you've consistently done.

Yes that's right.

Into something that makes it feel as though they couldn't possibly be separate. I mean it always works...

Yes.

...incredbly strongly.

Yes.

Can you talk a bit about that?

Well I can, and tell you that it's almost an act of cheating to do it that way. I mean one of the things I didn't say to dear old Peter Townsend the other evening is that I actually use that King James Bible in a very odd way, I mean almost blasphemic. I use it as an act of divination, like very often while doing a book, have that book out. It's a big, very big King James Bible, well printed, quite old now, it's about 1820, and every now and again I turn it, so this great flop of a book, so it's to me, it's resonant of books, it reminds me, you know, it's this great flop of good paper. And I just point and look, and I scan, rather like a fighter pilot. I believe in peripheral vision, you know, peripheral vision's very useful, it tells you an awful lot. I noticed a lot of women have peripheral vision which, if they know they're being looked at they'll look slightly off, but you know, they're watching to see what's going on, so I believe in peripheral vision. Have you noticed that?

I certainly know I can do it.

Yes, right.

There's a slight freezing of the face which gives them away, that they're actually clocking. So, but peripheral vision is very...so what I do is scan it, and if certain words jump out I look and read that, and very often I've found certain phrases in that book, in that King James book which I.....

<u>End of F4817 Side B</u>

F4818 Side A

Well, as I was saying, I find quotations that either tie things up or lead to other things, and it's very much a collagist technique. Close to cheating in a certain way. That you say they all seem to be interlocked, is I think a compliment to the technique being tested hard, but it also proves that, I'm glad to hear that you can't see the joins, that you don't see how I put this together; it looks, it sounds the way I describe it as though I've constructed it, but more often I found it, do you see?

Yes, I think that's what I'm saying, because actually you can see the separation but it's right that it's together.

OK, now the interesting thing about that is that this is...I maintain that I'm always pursuing pure form in these books, but I'm not doing it in the normal way of constructing and designing it and putting it together; I'm actually find it by certain methods of chance and certain methods of guess-work and certain methods of hope and sailing forth. But..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] Whereas this technique is close to cheating, it's not as constructed as it looks, it's flailing around. Once I've found a thing in the collagist method, or if I can come back to it in a moment, in the improvisatory method, I really test it to see if it's nonetheless the truth. So I don't just put it in because it got there, I put it in and bang it about and bite on it to see if it rings, and very often it rings. Now that to me is a mystery that I found it that way, but I don't take what's found unless I find it to ring. I keep it around for a while, and sometimes a whole book will steer to it, but quite often later I will find out why the thing is there. Do you see what I'm saying?

I think it's also that, the way you work and the wholeness of what you produce is utterly utterly different from somebody who is using a book as a container into which to pour ideas.

Right.

It's an absolute unit in what you produce, which is a very different way of being with a book.

Right. I think I've always wanted this unity, but I can never find it in being a designer. Going back to the method, I said to someone the other evening who is a musician, and I've said it others, I mean I think I've said elsewhere that some friend of mine, a Scot who helped me who is both a musicologist and a Gaelic speaker, helped me on `Martyr' said, `These books aspire to music,' using the English in a very spare Scots way, `aspire', don't get there. But I mean there is something musical about the way the elements, once put down, then are rotated and

interwoven and so on, played off against each other. But there's something more to it than that, which is that, for good or bad when I was young I was a very bad jazz musician, and one of the things about jazz music is that of course it has its, people say it has its limitations, but they don't understand that it's the Dionysiac mode rather than the Apollonian, and it's up to something quite different, apart from expressing rage. It is really doing something different in a different part of the soul than the more Appolonian kind of music. But one of the things, it's not just improvisatory, it's not just a matter of winging it after certain statements are laid down; it's actually taking full responsibility for what happens thereafter. You can't edit a solo that goes wrong; you can now electronically, and that really begs, you know, I mean jazz shouldn't be on records in pure theory, it's a nonsense to hear jazz on a piece of disc, although we all do it, but you have to learn, when you're on the stage you have to take responsibility for not only what you are doing, but what everybody else is doing. Although jazz men are total bastards to each other and their wives off the stage, traditionally, they on stage have to live with each other and be responsible for exactly what's going. It is an act of faith in which everything must work, no matter how transitory. You take full responsibility. So, this is very...I mean this isn't theory on my part, this is, I've found this out while doing the books. I take total responsibility, I haven't lost, with the exception of one, I haven't lost a book yet, they're like little babies, none of them have aborted. I take an incredible amount of risks with everything, but I take full responsibility for what happens at any one point and try to correct it or try to live with it, or try to bring a greater truth to it, but I don't throw anything away. And that's the very, instead of as you said, seeing the thing as a container for other things to be poured in it, I go back to it, you know, this hard-faced bastard who's supposed to not really see other people, I actually see what's there rather than trying to put other things in it. I'm trying to allow the thing to come forth, and give everything, the paper, any given image. I just don't throw things away. I somehow try to bring them in and give them life, and bring them all together. Do you see what I mean? It sounds like the claims of a half-arsed wizard but it's actually very very important, it's to do with no waste, no wastage.

But I think it's also to do with the energy of the book itself. I mean somebody who had done a lot of work with Beckett once was trying to explain about his plays, that they're not about something, they are something. You know, they're not about something outside yourself, they are the thing itself.

Right.

And I think the same is sort of true of your books really.

I think it's true, yes. They start off, and they are about something else but they are themselves.

They're a response to something else but they're not...the point is to be there at the performance and experience it, not think, oh yes this is about somebody walking down the street last Thursday.

Right.

Which it is also about that.

Right.

But because it's a constant in a way.

Right.

But they're not reference performances or reference books that depend on something exterior to them other than life, I suppose.

Right. Yes, all of that. I find, I mean I find out...I don't...and quite often at the end of the day I don't quite know how things get done. I mean I have to, if I bothered I'll... It's like you've got, you know, there's a wizard with a slightly unruly room, you know, things are whizzing about... [LAUGHING] How did that get over there, you know? And it's...yes. It's a total response all the time to what other things, what the things are trying to do, and I can only say it's as bold[??] as that.

But with, say, the quotation that's in `Broken Rules', is that one you had known for example a long long time, or one that you discovered during the process of the work and it was obvious that...?

The quotation from Rabbi Akiba? No, I think that was...I can't remember when that turned up. I mean I had read a certain amount of writings about the Cabala, not the Cabala itself. There's a man who I think has got an absolutely wonderful mind who I think's still alive called Gershom Scholem, who is a great Jewish writer, writes in German, but even translated his language is just wonderful, I mean it's just, you just get the feeling of clear, absolute thought. And he doesn't believe, he's a non...you know, somebody said the most dangerous thing is a non-believing Jew; well he doesn't believe in Hebraism, but, rather like my mother-

in-law, who is a non-believer, nonetheless she is determined that she's a Jew. And what he does is write about systems of Jewish religious and philosophical thought without necessarily believing any of it, and this produces enormous tension in his work. I mean I have to say, you know, downstairs Townsend couldn't understand that I can look at a King James Bible without necessarily... I mean the business of belief doesn't come into it as far as I'm concerned, it's just not important, and I mean that. And he's hopping around, unless he's winding me up he's hopping around like a flea on a hot brick with the burden of his family past and, you know, his belief and non-belief, you know, thinking if you've got that thing there, it means something. It means something, but it doesn't mean what he thinks it means, right? Now Gershom Scholem is a wonderful writer who I've read and constantly returned to, sometimes about the Cabala and sometimes not, but it's his fullness, his quality of writing to me which is the most prime thing, and somewhere in there I found this quote of Rabbi Akiba. `All is foreseen and freewill is given' is the start, this wonderful phrase, and it explains so much. So whether I...I would have that even[??] in the back of my mind, I would have it pinned on the wall as a piece of paper, waiting for it to come good, or I would read it while I'm doing the book, to me it's an irrelevance.

But you are a very wide-ranging reader, aren't you.

Wide-range what?

Wide-ranging reader.

People say so, but I don't think I read anywhere enough.

But tell me what the sort of span is. I mean it's pretty broad, isn't it?

I mean there's a book on the Syrians[??] who I've got an interest in, because I've got this mad notion I'm, you know, descended from the Syrian[??] kings and all that nonsense, but the Syrians[??] were precursors...I mean the line from the Syrians[??] to the Celts across Europe is interesting [INAUDIBLE]. Not a very good book but I've read that. Homer, the `Iliad', I think that's FitzGerald is it? Yes. I've not read it, and it seems doubtful that I will, but it's the kind of thing that you have around, but while in Richmond, Virginia this spring I stayed with a lecturer whose wife I found, you know, fifties, maybe sixties, very interesting woman who sits and reads and is a terrific person to talk to, and while in her toilet I found this. It's one of the few translations of Homer that I think...isn't all of that [INAUDIBLE], you know, that spear is a dangerous looking object, you know, that kind of pondering, that clunking prose that actually reads [INAUDIBLE].

But you read philosophy, comparative religion, classics.

In parts. I mean I...

Music.

Yes, I listen to a lot of music. I'm an expert on none of these things.

Science?

I, you know, I don't want to bang the thing about, the drum too hard about not being formally educated but I didn't have a formal education, and I still haven't got one. I read things till they...you know, if I find a resonance in something I'll read it, but if I don't, I don't.

Do you read science?

No, but I talk a lot of science. Well I do read some science. One of the great things this summer was reconnecting with Peter Dodd who is one of the most sophisticated minds I know, and we talk science while drinking and not drinking. We can talk it for weeks, to the amazement of Ruth and Barbara somewhat, and chagrin. And that was something that we used to do in London as well. But really science, now he is an interesting man because science for him, and he's a very good one, he's one of the top few in Australia in his subject, although he's a complete burden and a trouble for the establishment I'm glad to say, he hangs himself out over the pit with them with the money on the end of it, you know, him on the end of the money, and he still spits in their faces, which I think is the way to do it, you know. When someone's standing on your fingers and you shout back, that's real rebellion. Such fighting as only the weakest know, as T.S. Eliot said. But he's got a living brain, and for some reason he and I can communicate about things in a way that I can't with other people, and we use science as a way of talking about a great many things, and we established this summer that, yes he's a passionate scientist but science isn't the whole of his life. Science is a window through which he looks at much deeper matters, and I think that that's what I do through my work. I am not an artist in the romantic sense. To me...I keep saying to people I'm not sure if I'm an artist, and the likes of Catling say, `Oh it's a lack of confidence'. And I think, well, at first I thought he was right but I don't think it's true; I think it's that I don't actually pursue the function, and I'm not sure how it is, that other artists pursue. To me it's a window to something else, it really is a different matter. It's a way in, or a way out. And Pete Dodd, Pete Dodd was at dinner in Sidney while they were...I was being given a small dinner

by some very nice people in Sidney who were a couple of critics and people like that, and Peter looked at me and he said, `I'm going to teach you some science,' you know. So we drove back home singing `Alberta, Alberta' through the wallaby woods and all the way back in his big car from Sidney to Brisbane, and he gave me the works of Stephen J. Gould, who's a popularising writer on science but again a very good philosophical head, and I read about five books straight in his courtyard with fruit-bats flying over and a glass of rum in your hand. And it was a wonderful holiday. And then in the day, you know, during the day we would talk about Stephen J. Gould, and evolution and all that. Yes, so yes. At one point I used to talk to Ruth about her science a great deal, but her, I don't know, maybe we got fed up with the activity, but her career took off, maybe she got more confident in, or maybe I'm obtuse and don't listen to people or whatever, but now we don't talk science so much.

Can you just say a bit what her career is?

She's in cognitive science, she started off, I mean she's a trained psychologist but she has moved more and more towards the scientific end of psychology, how the nervous system works, how people see things, and almost the physiology of it.

But even if you're not talking to her in any sort of consistent way about it, the fact that all that's in the air and somehow that discipline has entered your life must be quite a stimulus I would have thought.

Well I think, yes it's an enormous stimulus, and I think we are both, believe it or not, her ego is measurable to mine, although people don't see it that way and it's, you know, to perhaps our mutual convenience, or to her convenience to look like the retiree and all this, but she has got her own ego and she does all her own work and she's been absolutely ruthless about getting her work done and quite rightly. And there's an air of people thinking about their own work a lot. But we are nonetheless in some way kind of a muse to each other, and I regard Ruth as my muse, which has its own difficulties.

I think one of the other things about your books is, although there's a sort of tremendous sense of wholeness in them, there isn't a sense of rest, and that's part of the excitement of them and the energy of them.

Yes.

Whereas with other [INAUDIBLE], I mean suppose we take the other extreme of the books that we were earlier talking about, that neither of us particularly like, the sort of frightfully beautiful paper and beautiful...

[INAUDIBLE] 19th century and all that.

Well, even, whatever, even if you were in the 19th century, the sort of placing and the calm and everything. I mean in that sense your books are alive, because they're not closing something off; they're not about finding anything peaceful and still, there is this tremendous boiling in them.

I have done the simple and calm stuff, and I did it actually I think in that abstract of `Firedogs' just as an exercise, and now and again do it but I use it as a tool rather than as a goal.

But it's because of...because your...

So sometimes I'll do something which is very calm quite deliberately, because even there's a message there, or it's a contrast between what's happening.

Actually before I lose it, can you just say a bit more about the idea of the muse in practical terms in your life?

Well, the muse, the muse is supposed to be of course a woman in traditional terms, and is supposed to be a distant and cold-hearted bitch who is always trying to destroy the poet, typically, the artist, who is always throwing himself at the foot of her tower, and will always give him the bad news. And I think that, you know, time after time I've said to Ruth, you know, `What do you think of this?' and she would say, `Why are you asking me?' `Well what do you mean, why am I asking?' She said, `Well you know it's no good otherwise you wouldn't be asking me.' You know, circular replies like that. On the other hand, when she saw the...she saw `Father's Hook', the third book I did, I said, `What do you think?' Because in those days, I think I must have said on...I didn't know I was doing artists' books; to me it was just an act of passion, or a summary of what I had done, or desperation. She looked at it and said, just put it down and said, `Keep 'em coming'.

But in other words...

What's important at that point is that she said, `Keep 'em coming', and it made no economic sense whatsoever. I was a man with half of a career and half of an income, and to say, `Keep

'em coming' was an act of...I mean I remember it, you know, it's still in my mind, it's like a little flag in the brain, got to keep 'em coming because Ruth said so. No one else said so. I mean other people have made complimentary noises but it was her saying it that meant, do it.

But in other words she's a muse in terms of her responses, not in terms of inspiration.

The fact that she said, `Keep 'em coming', yes. And in the sense that artists are always trying to maintain a position of isolation and virginity in the head, and by virginity I mean like Aphrodite, after every act of love she bathed herself and re-established her virginity, so after every act of creation in a way artists do something or other to recreate their mental clean slate, and therefore attachment to people is a dangerous thing, for a number of reasons. They nonetheless require some recognition, come out of the woods after thrashing about in the thickets with wrestling their angels and devils, coming out in the morning and leave things on the path for somebody to come along and say, `I like that, I wonder who did that?' Come on pussy[??]. She's nice. It's almost to her that I'm putting it out on the path.

Tell me about `AabB'.

`Abab'. That was done as a kind of joke. It's also in a way dedicated to Bruce Brown, this tall Scotsman, who was the head of department who got me into the Brinkley Fellowship thing. I was staying in his house for a short while and while there was watching television with him and there was this [INAUDIBLE] story being told that was of course complex and convoluted, and I heard this little voice in the head, which was obviously the start of a poem, and I was watching [INAUDIBLE] and I went off into the other room and wrote `A'. Think of a C, B. You mean the letter, that's B for Brown, that's why it's on a brown line, but it's also the blue for the sky, brown for the earth, green for the grass and so on. Think of the sea, you mean [INAUDIBLE]? I said, `No, an ocean made of paper.' [INAUDIBLE]. And it turned into a convoluted thing where it just got done, the whole book got done, it's a kind of cell-beating[??]. So, it was a conversation between A, me, A, me, not B, me, A me and B Brown, but in brown. And that was part of the inspiration. The other inspiration, part of the inspiration of that book, was a purely practical thing. I was given as a present two wood letter fonts, trays of wood letter type, both of different heights, one Continental and one English, or Anglo-American, and one very condensed and beautiful, I guess German by the exactitude of its geometry, and the other very Anglo-American like Bodoni or Falstaff[ph] fat letter caps, the other was [INAUDIBLE]. And they were so disparate and yet so represented, the two polar ends of type design, for me, in the Anglo-European, the American-European system of printing, I thought, they're so weird I've got to do a book that brings the two together. And I realised what they do is they kind of shunt, you know, there's a very thin thing and a very fat

thing and they kind of move in an odd way visually. So I was determined to make a book out of it. And then I just thought of a thing, an ocean made of paper, think of an ocean, think of a notion, and there's a revolving four-part thing in the blue at the top which I don't doubt you've picked up, a verbal thing running all the way through. I also wanted to do what's called a leporello[ph], you know, and I thought what the hell's a leporello[ph]? Is that somebody in one of these operas, you know, Leporello[ph] sings his heart out? And realised that it was a poncey name for a zig-zag book. And I quite fancied doing that, and explored that, and I realised what you do is, you would never pull it out, that's why I made the covers very heavy. It was just nice to know that it will do, and although I've displayed it sometimes, it's pulled out, I think in some ways that's a diminution of its form, although it looks very good. So I sell out now and again.

So what?

So I sell out now and again, I, you know...

Even you?

I let people... It was a fun book. It's also a proposition for a piece of sculpture, if you want to have a read of it.

As a piece of sculpture you might actually still do?

No, done it in the book.

And, is there something that we should say about Brown himself? I mean you've said what his role is. I mean...

I'll tell you what I think about him. He's a very intelligent guy. He's now the king of everything down at Brighton, which I now think now is called the University of the Beach or, I don't know. It's one of those art schools that's been absorbed into a university. He was a shaker and mover at different places, a good graphic designer in his own right, but obviously wanted to be a man of power. I once pinned on his door, `There's nothing more frightening than a young Scotsman on the make.' But he's a good man and was encouraging to me to my work. I think he thought I had drank too much, you know, kind of a [INAUDIBLE] friend. And, he reminds me of those itinerant Scotsmen in the Middle Ages onwards who would end up in Renaissance courts across Europe who could be depended on to be the good mercenary

with the sword, but at the same time had the education to set up, to decorate, have a church decorated or get a building built. Do you know what I'm saying? You know.

And, something you said earlier makes it sound as though your relationship with him is not very good now, is that true?

Oh, well we're just distanced, you know, got distanced fairly early.

And what about Brian Catling then, what was he like when you first met him, do you remember?

Yes, he's very...I mean he obviously heard about what I was doing and he sorted me out while I was at Norwich, crashing about.

Was he teaching up there too?

No, well, he was doing a Henry Moore Fellowship there in sculpture, and wasn't doing, you know, things on pedestals with art, as someone put it, and, I found his sculpture very exciting, not...

Do you remember what you saw?

No. I saw an exhibition at what used to be the...oh dear. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] An East End gallery from... Atlantis Gallery, used to be in Wapping, and he had a show there which was very good, and it's where the first, I think, good book art exhibition was on that was curated I think by Ian Tyson, which I thought was disgraceful that people didn't come to see it from the West End but, you know, it's only a taxi ride and they're on expenses, and that the British Council didn't snap it up or the Arts Council didn't snap it up and tour it, because I think it was the first good definitive show.

What did you like in it?

Pardon?

What did you like in it?

I liked its breadth, and it was well chosen. I think I had one thing in it, `Father's Hook', at the time. But it was a very good statement of what was going on at that time, and you know, do you know what I mean? It was...had everything in it, Paolozzi, whoever, you know.

Was that the first time you had showed your work in the context of artists' books?

I think so, yes, probably, probably.

And you were at ease with that, you felt that was right?

Well I found it a bit odd because already I looked around at certain kinds of work and thought, I've got nothing to do with this, you know, but at the time it was obviously, it was a panoptic show and I found that OK. I think in a way, now the exhibitions tend to get clogged up with a load of stuff that I don't feel at ease with at all, and as of now I've got a policy, I'm afraid to say, that I want to know more about the exhibition, which is an act of arrogance and curators don't like it, and don't really like the idea of being in mixed shows, because I think there's a decaying effect, you know. Things end up looking like craft shows or...

What about that line, I mean...

Or second year at the art school, you know.

And you really dislike craft? I mean craft is now used as though it was something rather distasteful but I wonder what you actually mean by it.

I didn't say I dislike crafts. I mean I...you see I think the word, in relationship between art and crafts, I think we must have banged on about this in another part of the tapes, but I think the relationship of art and crafts is very powerful, and crafts are misunderstood, I think as I think arts are, but I mean crafts are, within the notion of craftsmanship, is an enormous amount of, you know, almost hermetic power, and I think it explains a lot of the Masonic and craft guilds' attitude to the secrecy of processes. That secrecy is obviously first of all dedicated to the retention of the earning power of the person who invents it or gets good at it, so he doesn't want it to be passed on. Under all oaths as an apprentice, you were enjoined not to pass on the processes of your master to somebody else, and a lot of, there was a lot of straight bribery and corruption trying to find out how people did things, because it was important. But I also think that the processes of craft themselves are powerful and have meaning. When they're very good they come close to a certain truth, and I think it's possible that a certain power in my books is to do with the fact that someone who is good at something else can look at

something and feel the paths[??] coming out of that process in a very odd way. The craft is a way of almost, what's the word? It's a way of talking within a group of people to each other without necessarily use language or language that other people understand.

So really actually...

I certainly know engineers and craftsmen and people who make things can look at work and not use language, and understand how that work was put together, and how that was put together was sometimes using very high intelligence and invention. Something that the literary and language based society in which we live does not recognise, no matter how much they demure, because it's mostly controlled by people who write, quite naturally, and don't do. But there's a big problem there, and I can end up sounding like a Rousseauian nut and natural philosopher, but there is a big distinction; I mean there is no doubt that certain engineers and scientists, particularly engineers to whom writing is not the first skill that they have, are deploying not animal-like cunning but high intelligence in what they do. It's not recognised. The interesting thing about the culture in which we sit, in which Richard Ingrams said in last Sunday papers that heard[??] that government banging on again about techology...what was it now? Technology, mathematics and science, none of which has got anything to do with a decent education. Well, now he may be being a good old Fleet Street hack, because he wants to raise some letters and cause some dissent, that makes him a tart of course, which he probably is; but it does reflect a certain way that the old establishment do think, they do think like that. And my answer to that is that many of the scientists I know they're very cultured people in all respects, and it's much more likely that you will get a decent conversation out of them at dinner about the arts, which is what we're really talking about, not culture, we're talking about the arts, than you will if you have dinner with artists or people of the arts about science, by a very long way. And scientists think, I mean I know scientists who think science is the apogee of human existence and that deranged man, the human gene, what's he called, the bloke who says that, you know, we are nothing more than a bunch of genes pursuing each other, that genes are the things there to...what's his name, `The Selfish Gene', the guy who wrote `The Selfish Gene'. [BREAK IN RECORDING] One might as well say that the whole purpose of human existence is feet, it's feet that want to survive and we are just the vehicles for carrying the feet around. You know, that's complete nonsense. What he's really doing is fighting his father, who was an Anglican minister you see. Somebody who can't kill his father off, poor sod.

But going back to where this took off from...

Can you stop because I've got to replace my.....

End of F4818 Side A

F4818 Side B

.....what we were actually saying before we had a break. You had made...the reason we were talking about craft was you had said that you didn't like finding yourself in shows with books that were virtually craft. I think what you're actually saying...

Well, no I said...no, sorry, let's get this right.

That's why I [INAUDIBLE]. But what you're actually saying is, rather feeble work really.

I'm really saying feeble work. I'm saying that in a show where my work was, Ruth looked at it and said... I said, `What do you think?' She said, `It's a nice craft-looking show.' And by that she doesn't mean that it was just craftsmanship really, it's just it looked craft-y.

Like bad craft.

Like bad craftsmanship, like craft hanging out, you know, like doing a piece of woodwork but making sure there are chisel marks on it to make sure, you know, that it's been crafted, whereas a good piece of woodwork wouldn't show any chisel marks.

And that cropped up because we were talking about the Atlantis Gallery, Atlantis show, artists' books at the end of... Can you just give me an idea of some of the other artists who make books who you find interesting.

I can't do that.

Because you don't find any interesting?

No.

Are you interested in other people's work at all?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I am interested in what hits me, I don't go looking for it, so I get probably more inspiration out of music or reading because that's what I do and I get, it's gets to be hit. So it isn't, although it sounds like me turning aside the rest of the trade, I think there is a part of it, there is something to do with that, but it's also, I don't go looking for stimulation, I tend to have it visited upon me. I don't for instance go to the theatre any more; the reason for that, that I tell myself, there is of course sloth but setting sloth aside it's because

I think that people have in the past and still do go to the theatre for reasons other than the play. They go there because it's an event, it's part of a good life...

Yes, OK. Yes yes. Let's not go down that...Ken, you said this before.

Let me finish. Part of a good life. And two out of three of the performances are not going to be any good, they'll still go. I don't do that. That means I'm not looking for it.

OK, but, when you have an exhibition and people perhaps don't go to it, possibly for the same reason, you're still very hurt.

Am I?

You don't like people not going to your shows.

Is that right?

Isn't it?

I don't know. I mean, I haven't had any shows in England where I've really considered that. I had one at the V & A but, that was on the landing of the V & A, you know. I had one in the Museum of Modern Art, hard up against the Mars Bars and meat pies in the basement. I didn't go around checking who went to that.

What about the Beardsmore show?

Well friends of mine went to see that.

But on the same basis that you're talking about...

I mean I don't remember standing around saying, `Who the hell's been to see this show?' As far as I'm concerned a commercial gallery, like the Beardsmore Gallery, have the, ought to be turning up people who you wouldn't expect to go, that's what they're there for, instead of trying to find out your list, which of course is what most galleries including the Beardsmore do.

But don't you think that that's one of the problems that artists have these days, is that the fact is that there is so much stimulus around that people aren't needing to go to things in the same way?

Well maybe that justifies my position, there being so much stimulus around I don't need to go and look at other work.

I'm not attacking your position, but, if you take it far enough, there is no audience for anybody is there?

Why? Because we're so much stuff or...?

Everybody's interested in what they're doing and what they're thinking, what they're following themselves.

I don't believe that's true. I think that I...I mean there's for me a notorious pair of artists around here, not Gilbert and George, who, a male and female double act who, the kind of people who go around, they look like Jehovah's Witnesses, dressed like it, and they've got a kind of a, they've always got a folder with their huge transparencies of their work in and go everywhere with it. They both show their work and as far as I know they spend all of their time going round to shows and going to private views. There are people who you know who spend their whole week going to private views, not only for the cheap wine. They go round to check up, check out, see and be seen, they seem to be working terribly hard at stimulus and stimulating other people, getting stimulus.

Does it work?

I've no idea, I haven't got much time for them or that life, never have done.

I'm not talking about going to private views, I'm talking about going to exhibitions and [INAUDIBLE].

Well it's the same thing, going to, you know, a private view is a rather good way of doing what English do which is go and drink the wine and turn their backs to the work, but...

Exactly, that's what I'm saying. Is there a need any more for people to go and look at art?

Good Lord! I've never thought about that. I don't know. I don't do it, and I don't know if I do it out of sloth or because I don't have much time for wall art except for the best, for the reasons that I don't have much time for the theatre except for the best. I am not willing to put up with looking at two bad things to look at one, which may be very mentally lazy of me, maybe you have to look at three things to get one good thing in front of your face, but... I mean if I want to go and look at something good I'd go straight down to the Piero della Francesca and I'll go straight down to the Rothko pictures in the Tate. Show me something else, pal, you know.

OK...

I do get some nice surprises, and usually I'm dragged there by Ruth.

Tell me the last nice surprise.

The last nice surprise was in the Brisbane Gallery in Australia, and the national gallery in Canberra, where it is obvious that, first of all I found pleasantly in Australia that the Australians have a great deal of Celtic inheritance, a very large and conscious Scots and Irish input. They don't go around saying, `We're Scots Irish,' but they go around knowing that they are from Scots Irish, and quite often from convict stock, either because they were criminals or because for political reasons they were forced to be criminals in the 19th century. And in the galleries there is a strong sense of very good curatorship. Where you have a gallery which is supposed to be showing the best of either English or modern European work, modern English or modern European work, usually there's not a duff picture there. Really, it is not a provincial gallery, it is a very good gallery. You will find that the galleries tend to be curated by, sometimes by revolving subjects, so I've seen, when I was at Brisbane the whole of the gallery was put together, or a whole section of the gallery was put together with the notions of different kind of agriculture or working people through from I should think the 18th century right to now, and I've commented upon this and said how, a) good the pictures were and b) how this was put together very well, and they said, `Yes, but it will change in a couple of months' time'. They have that kind of policy, they will put it together and hang it together intelligently with very good captions, it's not didactic, it doesn't nag you, it's not purposely political or whatever, but it's just very good and revelatory. But the other good thing is that you find all sorts of painters, and not just Australian painters, who are very good who you would have thought you knew about. There is an Australian painter called Max Meldrum[ph] who is now dead I think whose work is absolutely stunning on anybody's count. It's about...

What's it like?

Well it's sort of post-Impressionist. He's only got one in the National Gallery, apparently because he fell out...he was one of atonalists when atonalists lost to the figuratives or something like that; it's one of these kind of local art spats, you know, which is bad for everybody. But one also found Scots and Irish painters who are either alive or of the 20th century who are really very very good, and you will never see them in English galleries, whose names I regrettably can't remember, but very good, and I think it's because these people, the curators, came out of Britain and either by force majeure or because of the way London works or because of political persuasion decided they preferred to be a curator in an up-and-coming gallery in one of the colonies and do some good work rather than hang around waiting for crumbs to fall off the London table.

And...

So, the answer to the question is, I saw some good paintings in Australia, that's the last time I saw some good paintings.

And do you think...

And they make me think. The galleries...sorry, the galleries made me think, that's the important thing. I didn't just go and look at one or two good paintings, I had a sense of some interesting questions about the colonial experience and about the development of curators and so on.

But the difference also was, you weren't actually working on your own output there, and maybe that's also quite important about, that when you are working on [INAUDIBLE] following ideas you can't actually afford the mental energy to go out and really...

I think that may be true, but I think there's another truth that that leads to. I think that's a good point, but also, I mean I was working in the sense that my brains were still going round and I was, you know, Peter Dodd stirred me up all the time. But, I think the other thing is that working in London, I mean I've said that, I've often thought of working in another part of the world, you know, where I can make it financially work but I would have cleaner air and better lungs and a number of things like that, but there's something as this society collapses, there's something, you know, a different kind of energy; it's like a collapsing star gives out a different kind of energy, and you can look at Vienna and Paris and Berlin as their prospective empires collapse, the same thing happened. If you like the bourgeoisie stops being productive and starts being creative. One way of putting it. You could say there's a more psychic thing

going on, if you like, if you want to put it that way. And for some reason I prefer to work in a society that I feel discomforted in more than anywhere else in the world, which is England without question, rather than...

That slightly goes back to what you were saying about [INAUDIBLE].

I'd rather swim in the sour vinegar of English society than flop about on a Lilo in somewhere else, you know. Bizarre kind of analogy, but, while out there it means that I'm not fighting what I'm fighting here, so if I go down the Tate, and if I go to the Royal Academy, parts of my hackles rise and my skin cells start to take a walk in a way that I would never do in another country. In other countries I feel at ease, particularly if I'm in a republic.

But don't you...

So, the...I'm extending your answer and saying that when I'm looking at work or visual things in another country, I am not measuring myself against certain things.

But it's partly because you have been not properly celebrated by the institutions in your country.

Well it could be.

That's partly why you feel like that. I mean Ian can hardly bear to go in the Tate because of the way he's been treated.

Right.

And it's nothing to do with anything that's in there, it's to do with that whole history.

It could be, but I, you know, I'm but a baby in this thing. I mean I may, that may be right, it might be a mix of the two, you know, that... It might be a mix of three, which is that, to keep creative you've got to keep separated, and it might be a bad thing to be celebrated too much. I mean you're going to have a different set of battles to fight.

But I think however well celebrated you might be, or another artist might be at the end of his career, if you've had that battle, that lack of understanding for so many years before it's never going to be erased, it's always going to be [INAUDIBLE].

I think that's true, but I mean I have got friends who I'm not going to name, and you will know some of them, who - as well as enemies of course - who you can see have been assiduously backing their way into the establishment for the last twenty years, and they've got, you know, various forms of so-called art school so-called politics, they've got a series of gestures in their head which they think adds up to political positions but they don't, they're to do with a set of cultural banners to be waved. But they've been backing their way into the establishment, and it's got nothing to do with jealousy about their work being recognised or the quality of their work against yours or whatever; it's that you know that personally they've been assiduously courting that recognition above, not above all else but at least as strongly as the engagement of their work. Other people have got a different way of doing, of living.

But it's also conceivable that they actually are much more at home with those values. It's not necessarily that they're being cheap[??].

Oh absolutely. I mean they're at home, they're swimming in their own soup, you know, there's absolutely no doubt about that. I mean it's nothing to do with rank and birth either, I mean, someone we've talked about already who is specifically working-class is fine, having no trouble whatever backing he she or its way into the establishment, and has always done so. I mean I've seen him do it, and I've seen him give a lecture where he was farcically emollient; I mean he said to, as each slide came up, `Don't worry, I mean don't get excited, don't, you know, I don't want you to be, you know, in any way disturbed,' kind of thing, and I thought it was the most extraordinary way to go on about your work.

But, we've actually gone on a huge tangent. We started because I was asking you what Brian Catling was like as an artist.

Oh, I'm sorry, it's more or less a circle actually. [LAUGHS]

In the... Oh I thought you were talking about somebody [INAUDIBLE].

A little bit of geometry there. [LAUGHING]

I thought you were talking about somebody else. When you encountered him in Norwich.

Yes, go on, what about him?

What was he like as an artist, what was he like as a conversationalist and as a person?

I thought his sculpture was extraordinarily interesting and thoughtful and poetic. He's something of a poet himself, a verbal poet, and I think unfortunately his investment in what I call the bricklaying Gothic, you know, the writers who write about, typically and interminably about, what's his name, Ian something or other. The Jack the Ripper, or `Killer Dogs' or `Living on the Estates in Dalston' or whatever, that way of looking at the working classes as a series of grotesques, that kind of Dickensian underworld down in the stews thing, I find offensive because it turns people into grotesques rather than human beings, who are quite often more, far more interesting than the people that they describe, and it's an old middle class thing of seeing the working class as a brothel in their mind, you know, where life might be more exciting, exotic, but it tends to come out as seeing people as cut out coloured dreadfuls.

What is his background?

I think an orphan, brought up by two step-parents in south-east London somewhere. But, you know, this is a carp. I mean I found parts of his poetry very interesting, but there's an investment in grotesque language sometimes which I think has clouded some things, although he hits the spot sometimes. I mean he wrote I think a very perceptive article for the Beardsmore thing about my work, and again the language was at times something that was difficult, but what was said in some cases was...a very very bright and perceptive man, without question.

And you felt quite a rapport right from the beginning?

I felt a rapport with him at the beginning.

And can you just fill me in a little bit. I mean, the sort of social life you were leading in Norwich, it sounds as though it would have been a lot of talk about work and a lot of exciting toings and froings.

Yes, yes, yes. And some people very helpful. I mean Brian was very helpful, he helped me enable things, found a place that would, you know, would be a foundry for the hooves that I made. Made it feel possible that I could do certain things. A man called Ian Welsh who is a friend of his who was running the Foundation Department was very helpful with his own techniques. You know, a generous man.

Any comments on `The Stumbling Block'?

Which stumbling block?

The book Brian did with Bookworks.

No.

Because you don't know it?

I do know it.

Have you looked at it?

You said any comment. I said no. You ask a question, I gave you an answer.

But it's because you don't want to say it on tape, or because you haven't got a response?

It's because I take you at your word, and if you ask me a question I give an answer, I would have thought that was the end of it.

But there's another question.

Where's the other question?

Never mind. Tell me about `Horse'. Back to your own work, you'll be all right.

`Horse'. I was just thinking whether I ought to clear up what we've just been saying, but we'll leave it at that. `Horse' was an example of a book that was a real sleeper in the head, because when I first went to America many years ago I stayed in the apartment of the mother of a friend of mine who is married to another friend of mine, her name was Edna Coleman, her husband, Sam Coleman had died. Sam taught philosophy at Colombia University, I got on very well with Sam. He died of a heart attack, I was given his suit, it fitted, so there was a kind of almost an old Jewish story about Sam's suit passing on. Sam was I think at one point something like deputy chairman of the Communist Party in America, an extraordinary life organising as a Communist Jew in the southern states of America with blue-rinse eyes, you know, blue lenses on his eyes and things like that. I mean dangerous living. Told farcical stories about being in a hut and being surrounded by State troopers in Arizona who expected the Devil to come out, and this is two kind of shambling intellectuals, you know, who came out of the hut and got arrested as Communists. Anyway, I stayed at their flat, they're

interesting people, Edna I count as a friend, she's in her eighties now, and while there I plucked a book off the shelf and there was a translation of a Sanskrit song to the universe, and the body of the horse as a model of that universe. These people, Aryans in the Far East, at that time Far East of the Russias, worshipped the horse and consumed the horse and used the horse, the horse was the central object in their society. And they used the horse as a form of prediction; they would send a young male colt forward every spring and they would follow that horse, and wherever it went their herds grazed, and if anybody wanted to stop them they would sort the whole thing out. And of course at the end of the year ate the horse, you know, away you go. But it's one of the predictive ways like throwing a spear forward, wherever the spear lands you go.

Well presumably actually it's quite a logical way, because the horse would go [INAUDIBLE] to the best place.

Absolutely, it looked for good grazing, looked for good grazing. I found it an interesting song, and I remember turning it into a poem of my own - I mean it's half a poem of my own, where I played with a central spine like the spine of a horse looking down on it. Oh, and each part of the body of the horse is related to different parts of the universe, like, you know, its piss is rain, its flanks are so-and-so, the stars...its bones are the stars and so on.

This is in the poem, or this is what you did?

In the poem, in the song.

The original?

The song, the Sanskrit song, in translation. So I re-worked it into a kind of almost a concrete poem, trying to make the centre like a spine so it ranged left and right, and the qualities, I swapped the qualities, the relationship between the qualities and the parts of the horse over, parts of the universe, parts of the horse, so they alternated to make them more rhythmic and repeated certain things to give it a rhythm and a space and so on. Played with it almost in a very abstract way as a piece of poetry, but it never quite finished, you know, and I played with it for ten years and put it in the drawer. `Horse' I think was the first book that I did in north London after the Brinkley Fellowship.

Oh right.

Now this was important because there was this whole thing about, could I do it elsewhere, like not at the Brinkley Fellowship, because in the Brinkley Fellowship I did `Broken Rules and Double Crosses'...

`Abab'.

Abab', two bits of sculpture, and arguably a book out of `Bibliophagy', so it's three books, two bits of sculpture and various prints and so on, loads of prints, big, busy year. But there's always this thing, it's rather like having a Letra[ph] 22 as a writer and then moving on to a, you know, an electric typewriter; will I still be able to write, you know, kind of thing. So, I had a little studio built at the end of our garden in Hornsey and put the press in there. Oh, ah, now this...

Hang on, had you bought a press?

Now that's interesting. That's the other thing was, at the time I was at the Brinkley, just finishing, an old friend of mine rang up from North East London Polytechnic where I had been a teacher at one point and had done the first two very simple books and said, `By the way, the press, the Vandercook, is out in the yard more or less, we're throwing it out'. I said, `We'll buy it.' And I bought it for, I don't know, fifty quid and the removal expenses, a bottle of whisky here and there. And that was the book that, I then went on to do ten other books, but it was the first book that I had printed on my own press, so `Horse' is an important thing, and I was very worried about whether I could do a book. And I decided to convert the poem `Horse' into a book, which I have now converted back into a poster. Have you seen that downstairs, the poster `Horse'?

Yes, you showed it to me once, yes.

Yes, right, right. I can't remember how it proceeded on the bed of the press, but again the logic was entirely driven by what was happening under the bed of the press. I had some paper that I wasn't...I wasn't going to buy any more paper so the paper had to be a certain way. I knew I was going to do it line by line, I had decided to use big wood letter because it was brutal and physical, and I decided to, when you use wood letter it's very good to use bearers, other rules, to hold the paper up off of the wood letter, so you can actually get quite a lot of pressure without things breaking up.

What did you say it's called? A bearing?

Bearers.

Bearer.

Well in other words they bear up, but they are in fact thick rules about half an inch thick. And the logic came out of it, I worked and turned it and I can tell you by spinning the paper round in a peculiar way found the logic of the book. So instead of just having the book proceed line by line from left to right from beginning to end, the book actually proceeds from left to right, line by line, from beginning to end, but also from end to beginning with another line, line by line, and I let it cross over in the middle, producing the wonderful middle spread, bone star, star bone, you know. And it struck me rather like `Abab', it was a very concrete piece of poetry, but not looking like concrete poetry tended to look.

Actually one thing I realise I never...it's a very basic question, but, when we were talking about `Broken Rules', what literally is a rule for in printing, I mean what is it?

A rule is a thing that is a piece of metal, lead, as high as a piece of type, which is linear, of different thicknesses, and when it's printed it supplies a rule underneath type, or a border, a black line, or a coloured line of varying thickness. It's called a rule.

And it's never used in the way you're talking - well I suppose it is, sorry, it's a silly question.

Used in all sorts of different ways, typographically.

Yes. And, talk of concrete poetry reminds me, you were going to tell me about how you almost worked with Ian Hamilton Finlay.

Well, I knew a poet in the Seventies or Sixties, I think Seventies, called Stuart Montgommery who is from Rhodesia originally and set up a press the name of which escapes me for the moment. He and his wife knew Ruth from a past existence. I got to know them. I remember floating my poetry towards Stuart and he didn't respond to the poetry, but he must have had loads of it turning up at his desk every day, which made me grumpy, because I was at that age when I would get grumpy about such a thing, perhaps I still am. And there was an evening where we were invited round because he was being engaged in some project with Ian Hamilton Finlay, and I had a massive flu as well as feeling grumpy, and we sat there in this large flat overlooking Southampton Row, and he put this work out on the floor that had been done at the Chelsea School of Art by some students and it was very bad.

Of Ian's?

Of Ian Hamilton Finlay's stuff in some way. And I was just very mute and unresponsive, and so Stuart sensitively didn't pursue the matter. But I think it was one of those projects that ended up more or less in court, poor Stuart got strung out with Ian Hamilton Finlay and there was the politics of resentment, or they were all swimming around Grudge Harbour, which I think's a nice invention.

Oh right.

And, I think with my personality it might not have been...it might not have gotten that far if I'd had to mess with Hamilton Finlay. [LAUGHS]

I think it would have been very interesting actually.

It might have been interesting, it might have been all right, you know. But I think frankly, I think that I would have always found it difficult, because it wasn't my work. I was not a natural interpreter of other people's work and never have been. I've been asked now and again if I wanted a print of so-and-so and I said, well I used to do that as an apprentice and I don't print other people's work now.

Yes. And, just tell me about this house in Hornsey. Is that something you had got when you came back from Canada?

Yes.

And you bought it or what?

Well we got it with a mortgage, yes.

So was that the first house you owned in that sense?

Yes I think so, yes.

And why did you go to that bit of London?

Why did we go to that piece of London? Because we looked for... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No we had lived in Suffolk, and had our children there, and Ruth nearly went

crackers there. Living in the country is now what it appears at all, but it was a good start for the girls in terms of health and so on.

Could we just talk about that. Can you remember roughly when you went to Suffolk?

No, not really.

Do you know roughly how long you lived in Suffolk?

'68, '69, '70. I would have thought somewhere between the early Seventies and about '77, '78.

Oh quite a long time.

About five years.

And why Suffolk?

Well I think that it was at the time not expensive but beginning to be trendy, you know, we were at the front of that kind of wave, you know, we brought the aubergine coloured doors to Islington, in fact we lived there before they became aubergine coloured, you know.

End of F4818 Side B

F4819 Side B

It was in driving distance of London. It wasn't a bad place to bring up kids.

What did you have, a cottage or what?

We had a converted primitive Methodist chapel.

Open plan?

Yes, very open plan. And famous there, I remember bringing my father with his 150-word vocabulary to the place and I said, `Well, what do you think of it?' He looked at it, he said, `It's fine if you like living in a church.' [LAUGHS] He had a very wicked tongue, very.

And did you have a place to work there, or you were working in that space?

I put up a large kit shed, you know, a shed that came in a kit, at the bottom of the garden on the river with willow trees and everything, a small workshop. Very pleasant.

And at that stage you were painting really?

No I was being a designer.

Right, OK.

I was teaching more than anything else.

Right. And when were the children born?

I ought to know that oughtn't I? 25 and 24 years ago.

And were they born in a hospital? Where did it all take place?

No they were both born in a hospital in, was it Great Ormond Street? I think it was Great Ormond Street.

Oh not in Suffolk.

No.

Why?

Well they had been moved out...no hang on. No they were both born in Great Ormond Street, so we must have moved out when both of them were born.

Right. Were you present at the births?

I was present for the first one, which was fine, I didn't have any problem there, glad to have been there. The second one I missed curiously; I don't know if the ward sister took a look at me and thought, well we don't want him around or something, but I somehow, I was in one room and it didn't happen, you know, it all happened...I think it perhaps happened quickly. And the first one I had stomach cramps like primitive men sometimes have, you know, sort of sympathy, or, it's either sympathy grabbing or sympathy giving, these blokes, and spent all night laying down tiles in the room, making the nest good. And when Sadie was, I tell this story interminably, Ruth gets fed up with it, but it's true, that when Sadie was born, the first one, it was, I think it was Great Ormond Street, I went in and - or was it University College? I went in to...I think it was University College Hospital, I went in after a couple of days, and of course I had been before that, and looked at Sadie and said to the ward sister, `How much does my daughter weigh?' And she said, `Oh you don't want to worry about that Mr Campbell,' you know. `Oh yes, I know, but I'd like to know how much she weighs.' And she said, `Well you don't understand embryos.' I said, `Yes I know, they eat up their fat for the embryo, first the sac, the embryo sac, and they lose a little weight and then they put it on, but can you tell me how much she weighs?' And she said, `I hope you're not going to be difficult.' And I said, `I can assure you that it's going to be easier to weigh my child than have me thrown out of this ward.' And she kind of gave me a level gaze and decided to weigh the child, and found that it in fact she hadn't taken any milk from Ruth, Ruth's teats were clogged up although they were full of milk, so she wasn't having milk passed her. This was because, as she put it, she said, `Well we have a kind of relaxed attitude,' you know. I said, `Well, as an anarchist I know if you have no rules you must have eternal vigilance.' But she kind of didn't smack my face, she just got on with the business and drew a curtain around Ruth and got on with the business of unclogging her breasts.

So was it just instinct?

Ruth's mother says, who is a physician, says I probably saved Sadie's life, because the first thing that would have gone was her brain.

But was it instinct that made you do it? Why did you think to ask her?

I'm an observant person. I look at things and look at their state. We had this conversation earlier which, I'm not sure if it stuck.

So you thought she looked...you could actually see she looked smaller?

She looked wizened, she didn't look right to me, so I pushed the lever over and went into first gear.

And why is she called Sadie?

Because I wanted to call her Ruby... [LAUGHING] But no one would have it. So Sarah was...Sadie's a good name.

But why...

It's a biblical...because she's Jewish, under Mosaic Law law Sadie's Jewish, because Ruth's Jewish.

Why Ruby though?

Because I was listening to too much Ray Charles at the time, `Ruby you're like a flame'.

And has she a middle name?

Sarah Ruth. Esther is Esther May, because she was born in May.

Why is she Esther?

I don't know, Ruth chose that name.

Right. And did Ruth enjoy being pregnant, was it a good time?

Ruth is a fairly stressful person. I think at the time she did. No, she found it very exhausting, and now kind of says she wishes she didn't have children and all the rest of it, you know,

because of the trials and tribulations, but I don't think she means that, I think it's...she's just registering the pain and the eternal martyrdom of women, of motherhood.

And did the fact they were daughters mean something special to you?

No not at all, except when one of them, I can't remember whether it was Esther or Sadie, I had a friend at the time who was, his wife was pregnant, who was an actress at the Royal Shakespeare, and her father, a big popular businessman, rang me up - well I rang him to talk to his son-in-law. `Oh I hear that, I hear you've had one too with a bit missing eh?' I thought, oh sod you. I mean I actually felt very angry with him. And, I've often thought about whether it means anything to me not to have had a son, but it doesn't, it doesn't.

And were you very involved with them as babies?

Ruth said I was like their second mother. I said, `That's a profoundly sexist statement, withdraw it.'

So you did the feeding and nappy-changing and bathing and...?

I didn't do much nappy-changing but I did a great deal of caring and looking after, particularly in the years that Ruth's career was taking off. I mean in Hornsey, I was the first man to take the girls down to school, you know, at 3 or 4, and I would see these wives with angry baby-buggies ratting among the pavements, you know, and giving me a look, and then, you know, months later I would see their husbands bringing the kids down and giving me a very nasty look. But I used to look after them a lot, you know.

So Ruth was trying to get her career under way at the time of having the babies, was she?

No, she tried to get her career under way after having the babies, almost immediately after. In fact it was me insisting we move out of Suffolk because she was very unhappy in Suffolk, and I think that was something to do with the burden of motherhood, it was something to do with the vigour and difficulties of our relationship, and I think it was something to do, most of all, with - well, it was something to do with the closed society in Suffolk which is very stifling, and most of all it was to do with, Ruth is not really bearable to herself and others unless she is doing her own work, and I mean there was a year where she magnificently did Open University tutoring in Suffolk so she would be in the car and crashing off to all sorts of places to, like a doctor, you know, into the night, you know, go and see people and correct their scripts and so on. But it was obvious that she needed to be doing something else, and I think

she then did a...I think she then did a rather misbegotten M.Sc. at Brighton, but it wasn't a failure, it just wasn't very challenging to her, or something, you know, it just wasn't a good course. And then somehow she started to do a little bit of research, and then she got into...she got some research done, and you would have to check this out, and by that time I think it was very close to the time we got invited out to Canada and she was absolutely floored that someone should have read a paper of hers somewhere, and should read the paper and say, `Do you want to come out and do some work in Toronto?' And she coyly said, `What do we do?' And I said, `We'd better do it,' you know.

But had Ruth been happier in Suffolk, would you have been happy to carry on there, was it a good place for you?

I don't know. I think, you know, we're like a rowing boat with two oars, you know, sometimes, you know, we're out of sync. Sometimes we pull together and sometimes we're out of sync and there's a lot of difficulty in the relationship. The fact of that being out of sync means that one oar is pulling in a direction and the other oar follows, or something like that, you know, it feels difficult at the time but it ends up with one of us following the other person, and a lot of what I've done is due to me being irregularly employed, or me generating my own money, which has allowed Ruth to do certain things, and I've sometimes just given it up and travelled with her. On the other hand, I remember very specifically when I was being a full-time lecturer somewhere, absolutely hating it, I mean it was a very very invidious position, and Ruth's work was taking off and I thought, bugger this, she's having fun and I'm going to have some fun, kind of thing, you know, and I actually realised that it was time for both of us to put the foot on the accelerator. So we both induce in each other for good and bad certain changes.

And going back to the children, when they were babies were they like one another or were they very distinct?

Quite different, they were quite different.

What were their personalities?

Well, at the time we had two cats called, a male and a female called Ronnie and Reggie, after the Krays, they were vaguely psychopathic, but I noticed that, something very odd about the cats, they...one was out the back of the house and the other would turn up at the front, and it's a curiosity that whichever house we moved to, they would take up the same position, which I say to people, particularly scientists, they don't want to know, I suggest the cats have got

some kind of architectural sense or territorial sense that's related to architecture, put it round that way. I can tell you, whatever house we go to, one, Cleo[??] will take the front and [INAUDIBLE] will take the back. And in many ways I think that siblings, particularly if there's two of them, there's a tendency for the two of them to make up one whole personality. There's not just complimentary things, they are sometimes like a greater personality halved, but that's not to diminish him, do you see what I mean? So sometimes it's worth seeing them as a pair, to their regret, because they don't want to know about that. So one is more aggressive and one more retiring. Surprisingly the younger is more aggressive, so she's clawed her way out of the basket of being the baby, and the other one I think sometimes has taken a step sideways to allow that to happen. I once asked Sadie, the eldest, I said, `Did you use to fight, the pair of you?' She said, `Yes.' I said, `Physically?' `Oh yes.' I said, `Who won?' She said, `Esther was stronger, but I had longer nails.' [LAUGHS] There's a sort of elegance in that I think.

And did they go through periods when they were very close, or not?

What, together?

Mm.

I think they've always been close; it's just a matter of whether they've been getting on with each other or not. And they're now I think very good friends with each other and know each other's faults rather well.

And have you been equally close to both?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I think there are different ties to both of them.

And have you ever minded, or perhaps been pleased really of being the sole male with the three women? I mean presumably as they've got older...

Well Montgommery has actually had children, you know, Stuart Montgommery is a very quiet but nonetheless very kind of, very full of protesterone or preposterone, which is my [INAUDIBLE].

But they had daughters, is that what you're saying?

They had only daughters, and the mother said, `I don't think he could have stood a boy around.' So I don't know, it's a mystery what would have happened. I might have revelled in a son, and I might have fought with him terribly.

But, no, leaving that side out of it, I mean what about being with three women, particularly as they've grown up. Is there a sort of link among them?

Oh yes, I think there's a conspiracy amongst women to, you know, my mother worked actively to diminish my father's position in the household all of the time, and that's, although I've complained about that I think that's a natural tendency in families, whatever women like to say. And I think women are aggressive, and I have arguments with people about this and they say this is not so. Inevitably aggression is linked to violence, and I think you could argue that to be true. There's another kind of aggression which I think occurs in all people, which is a kind of mental or spiritual aggression, and, we were talking about this earlier, and most people are used to it, people try to gain power one way or the other, without recognising it, and I think that happens in families, and I think that women are good at it, very good at it.

But do you quite relish their femaleness? Do you quite like being a spectator on it?

I don't think I'm a spectator, I'm a part of it. What was the question, being part of the family?

No, their femaleness.

Their femaleness? Oh right. I don't know if I'm a spectator of it.

A celebrant of it perhaps.

I think I'm a celebrant of it, yes, yes. I mean I remember one, I was sitting here with a couple of empowered artistic women persons here, and Sadie and Esther were over there cooking something up, and I put some music on and they both kind of did a kind of, a self-mocking dance, you know, together, and this, one of the women who can't be more than in her late twenties or early thirties were staggered that they could do that in the same space as me, but I mean, you know, we have those jokes going, and if we're at a party I'm quite likely to dance with the pair of them as not. But they're all [INAUDIBLE] up that there's fat old Ken dancing, you know, but also enjoying it. Lots of things going on.

Sorry, I can't remember, did you ever tell me why north London, why Hornsey?

I think that we...I think I was looking for something in striking distance... I mean when we first went to Suffolk, the other answer was, it was cheaper, we couldn't afford London, and we thought it would be[??] sold out brilliantly through Ruth's clever manoeuvre, we were having a hard time selling that place because...

Which place, the Suffolk place?

The Suffolk place.

So you had bought that.

Pardon?

You had bought that?

Yes.

So the north London place wasn't your first house?

Yes, sorry that's right, that's right, yes. We were having a hard time selling the place, because people forget that the property market collapses periodically and this was in the Seventies or whatever.

'74 or something wasn't it?

Yes, and it just, just as we were selling it started to fall to pieces; just as we bought this place it was starting to fall to pieces, and we paid too much for it. We were beginning to be strung out in Suffolk, and Ruth just had this wonderful idea of putting an advert in the `New Statesman', and we got a call from a pair of very tough Australians, who crucified us on the price but we should do it[??], but a reasonably good price which was realistic. They were potters I think. And I think we bought the place in north London, we...what happened? I can't remember the logistics of that. Something to do with the market, something to do with probably me being able to drive to Walthamstow and Ruth getting in to University College, something like that. Something where it was...I mean when, another answer is, when we first bought this place, which is a converted industrial, small industrial four-storey loft, as you'd say in New York, five years ago, and it's all very white brick and no wallpaper and therefore, as I said to my girls, one of them, `What do you think of this?' She said, `Well first of all it's too good for you.' I said, `No it's not, this is the hippie joint we couldn't afford when we were

hippies.' And she said, `Secondly, are you telling us that we were brought up in Hornsey, you know, and not a terrific place like this, which is Bethnal Green, and just for our own good?' I said, `Yes, you were brought up in Hornsey for your own good, and not in Bethnal Green, because this is a tough area to bring kids up in. And yes, we made the bourgeois move of taking a nice Edwardian, small Edwardian house in Hornsey because it was a damn sight better place for schools and gardens and all the rest of it than scuffing around in Bethnal Green.'

So what was the house like?

It was a nice elegant Victorian - Edwardian house; not Victorian, Edwardian house.

How many bedrooms? Did the girls have a bedroom each?

It had three bedrooms. One, two, three bedrooms, and a box room, and we converted one of the, the box room into...what did we do there? [INAUDIBLE]. Oh yes, there was a second toilet or something. We did a little conversion at the back with a builder to give the girls a bedroom each and a toilet and a bathroom, and there was a kind of, a middle room or guest room which separated us, and we had a front elegant bow windowed, large sticking-out window bay bedroom, downstairs with equivalent spaces.

And how did you use the downstairs rooms, how did life take place?

There was a kitchen that I extended a bit, tall... I mean, those buildings were built for a futurish family, kind of, perhaps one step up from hooter[??], and a maid, you know. And so the tiny rooms and the kitchen, the kitchen was a galley in which the maid was performing, but because I do the cooking, always tended to do the cooking, I turned it into a reasonable place. And we put a large conservatory out the back, extensive conservatory, which I thought was great, and it keeps the house warm. I'm a great fan of a conservatory, it keeps the house warm and moderates the space between the inside of the house and the outside, very good for a temperate climate. So we would eat out there quite a bit. There was a breakfast room, a rather dark breakfast room, where we would have breakfast and eat during the winter. A largeish drawing-room with elegant carved woodwork and French windows and all of that, which curiously we didn't use that much, you know. We're people who live round the table really in a lot of ways, just didn't have the habit, but we would flop out and we would have people in there if we had parties or whatever. There would be a piano in there, there was a piano in there. And the large room at the front was my work room where I had at one point an etching press, and was starting to do my own thing.

So when you got the printing press, that's when you built the outside part was it?

That's right, yes.

And you had a garden presumably.

And I moved out the back room and that room, I can't remember what that room became actually.

But you had a garden?

Yes.

Yes. And, we talked about the interiors and the decoration and furnishings of houses in your childhood. How would this house have been different?

Oh it was painted all white. I tend to go for painting things out white in a very Sixties way, and bare boards, and that's a persistent thing, I find it difficult to look at things for too long, they bore me.

So you didn't have carpet?

We had carpets in certain rooms. But I was going to go on to say that usually our places, including the cottage in north Yorkshire and this, are a careful mix of what I want and what Ruth wants, you know, there's no...

Those are different then?

Pardon?

Those are different are they?

Oh absolutely, there's no...there's no way of me winning all of the battles or her.

So how do you differ, what...?

Well, you know, Ruth will, you know, whereas I like to see something absolutely clean, Ruth, you know, that nice chair over there is very elegant, got a sprung cane bottom, Ruth will put a cushion on it, because that's what good Jewish families do, you know. But Ruth and her mother have got a terrific way of making things eccentrically comfortable, and if you went to Ruth's mother's place you would see it, and it comes out of Berlin, it comes out of, you know, she will put loads of books and little carpets and cushions around, and little prints and etchings. Over-stuff the place as far as I'm concerned. But not badly done, you know.

And in Hornsey, what would you have had on the walls?

I think work by me, work by friends.

Such as?

A couple of paintings that are still around.

But who are they by?

Me, and paintings by a friend of mine called Ian McGee[ph] who I've lost touch with, a very good Scots painter who was a neighbour at one point. That etching over there was up there.

The tape can't see that.

Well, it's an etching by Cedric Horner of Roundhay Park in Leeds, but a rather poetically done coloured etching.

And how would you have acquired that?

Oh, almost certainly we would have got drunk together and he would have given it to me and I would have given him something else. I think I gave him a copy of `Father's Hook'.

And what about this painting here, what...?

It's by the same guy, much more recent, and he had a show in Suffolk where he was living up to his [INAUDIBLE]...I think he now lives down at Rye, and he returned to painting from etching, and I, Ruth and I made a move on that painting and bought it at the gallery minutes before his other friend who was an RA wanted to buy it.

And what do you like about it?

It shows a deep love of the country. It shows the sun and the moon in the same sky, as indeed that one over there does, that etching, colour etching. And I think that's him and Janet, his wife. And there's a view of the country which is a very, it's dark umber fields on, I would say a November or February evening with great piles which are probably manure on the side, and some eccentric puddles of water reflecting the sky which is I think eau-de-Nil, and the puddles are obviously generated by tractors. It would be an image knowing Cedric of something seen, he's got a mind like a...I was going to say camera, but those instant...

Polaroid?

Polaroids, he's got a mind like a Polaroid, he will just snap it and hold it and hawk it back, and turn it into a poetic interpretation of the original.

Speaking of which, what's your visual memory like?

I think I've got a very bad memory, but other people say I've got a very good memory, and I can remember things from a great time ago and I can remember things visually very clearly, if I want to remember them or if they have done the appropriate piece of neurology in my brain, I don't know quite how it works.

Are you a keeper of notebooks and sketch-books?

No. No. I used to be as a student.

And you don't keep diaries?

No.

OK. Tell me about `Night Feet on Earth'.

`Night Feet on Earth' is done at the time of Halley's Comet coming to England, we all went out to Halley's Comet; I don't think we can see it but never mind, it was nice to know that there was one on the way. We were living in Oxford, Ruth by this time having become a don, or a donette or whatever. I went to a dinner at Green College where all these dudes and their wives were. I was once invited to spouses' night.

That must have been a very hard evening.

I would have been the only man turning up and so I didn't go. And on this particular...

Did you almost go?

Almost went, yes, just to see what would happen. I was sitting next to this...

Sorry, did Ruth want you to go?

I think she was interested to see if I would go or not, as simple as that. I mean she would have been there because she was a spouse - I mean she was the, you know, owner of the spouse as it were. I found myself sitting next to some woman... One one side was an old friend of ours, a good friend of ours who is a scientist in her own right, and the other side was a woman and I said, I questioned, `What do you do?' And she said, `My husband's a linguist.' I thought, really, you know, that's your answer is it? And that's the way Oxford was, and is. I mean have no illusions about Oxford, it's an outrageous, absolutely outrageous place. And I said, `Oh, is the...that's interesting,' I said, `is the plural of spouse spice?' Which I suppose was cheeky, but it was Christmas. And while I was dealing with all this I found myself a Christmas cracker and opened it and put the silly hat on my head, and found in it a little thing like an articulated hat rack, you know, like these two zigzags together. It was a horse that you could open and shut like that. I thought, I'm going to do a book about this. I thought, Halley's Comet, the horse, and had this poem in my mind that is the poem in the book. And cut out a zinc horse in its different attitudes, opened and shut, and moved it around the given firmament and made a big plate of stars and decided to make the stars at regular grid intervals pierced, drilled in with a drill to the thing. Just a nice little bit of mechanical engineering all round. And rang the book, I think it followed `Horse', and in many ways it's rather disturbingly similar, because I rung... [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE] It's similar because of course it's got a horse in it, and I don't know why it followed that it should have a horse in it except that I found a horse in the Christmas cracker, but it obviously resonated with the previous book that was the meditating on the body of a horse. I also find something about [INAUDIBLE] horses' hooves, there's something in my mind about horses that is obviously some kind of poeticism that I'm not aware of, some poetic strain, and I have no history of physical contact with horses, although I've done a bit of horse riding up in Yorkshire, but we are not horsy people at all. So the subject is there, and also this business of left and right and reversals, which is a very strong thing in the books. I think it's something to do with left and right hand of the brain - not, that's rather trendy, but left and right handed, the personality, the dark side and the light side. But in the book, in the first half of the book, if I

can try and manage to make this work verbally, on the left-hand side in very airily spaced capital wood letter letters about an inch high is the pursuance of the poetry going down the left-hand page from one left-hand page to another left-hand page to the following left-hand page. Each left-hand page is linked, or most of the time it's linked by the old device in old good books of putting at the bottom of the right-hand page the word that's going to be at the beginning of the left-hand page when next turned. I did that, but I also played with it verbally so it had certain poetic resonances or rhythm changes, so it's therefore a couple of reasons, but it links. Meanwhile in the first half of the book is the second...this is all on white paper on the left-hand side; on the right-hand side is a big blue firmament of graded colour with yellow printed underneath so sometimes the stars are white and sometimes yellow on graded blue-black to give a, I think a very mechanical but beautiful rendition of the sky in mechanically spaced, regularly spaced stars. Rather eerie to look at a firmament with regularly-spaced stars all of the same size. Over which disports this horse in black, almost as a metaphor for the comet, almost as a metaphor for the divine child descending which in many ways the poem is about, so the falling Christ figure is almost like a falling horse for some reason that I can't quite get to. And sometimes parts of the horse, the horse dismembered or the horse distorted or what. So the poetics are interesting. And over on the right-hand side in the blue-black is the second half of the poem running down, so if you care to look, if you care to dig as they say, [INAUDIBLE], you can see a connection between resonances rather like in `Horse', the book, of the left-hand poem being expressed but resonating with the accidental conjunction of that part of the right-hand poem in the right. And when we get to the middle there's the horse torn to pieces, perhaps we're getting to it, the Osiris or Christ figure torn to pieces, and disported around a completely white centre spread. There's something about stars being made of iron by the year ten to the power of twelve or seventeen, I can't remember what it is. And then we move into the second half of the book, the right-hand side has got the second half of the poem running down as I described before on white, as indeed it did in the left-hand side in the first half of the book but on blue. And on the left-hand side is the first half of the poem that now, running down from page to page, but now on the blue background with the horse being spread around or torn to pieces. So it's a very structured book, there's a heavy structure with again the idea of resonances coming out of two things being combined, and yet hopefully the whole thing itself being clear.

<u>End of F4819 Side A</u>

F4819 Side B

Meanwhile at either end, in different parts of the book and the cover, is the horse's tail distorted by a simple graphic means on a distorted grid to go from the tail to the...the head... Sorry, one of the rear legs and the tail is distorted in such a way as to give the tail extension an expansion towards its end so that it looks like hopefully a comet's tail.

And how distressing is it to you to see the horse dismembered?

It doesn't touch me. I only realised it was dismembered while talking to you.

Because in a later book you have a woman's form that you've cut up, don't you.

I have Shiva, who is both male and female, being dismembered and reassembled on `Tilt: the Black-flagged Streets' dismembered on the left-hand side and being reassembled on the right, which is true to the myth of Shiva, and in `In the Door Stands a Jar', a groaning pun, the jar that stands in the door is both a woman's thick body and a jar on its background which is cut up, dismembered and moved around, but I don't think cruelly so, I think it celebrates the shape.

OK.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

OK. I wondered if we could now talk about `In the Door Stands a Jar'.

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I really can't remember where the motivation came from for that book. I know that in formal terms, and there's usually some kind of formal problem in the books; by formal I mean a way of dividing space and making things, dividing space up for good clear reason and for making things work in sequence, there's a notion that a double spread, which is a designer's term for an opened book, the two pages looking at you left and right, the double spread, I had this notion, I don't know where it came from, of making a double, putting a double spread on one page and putting the same double spread reduced on the other page, so you're looking at two double spreads as a kind of visual pun, and playing with that, and in certain parts of the book seeing a metaphoric page turning on the page that was printed as a projection of a square into some kind of lozenge that looked like a page in perspective or at least in projection. There was also a notion that this of course produced very large dark borders, and I had started to play with large dark borders, and I wanted to bury

words in those borders as a kind of visual echo of the words being used in the poem, as almost as a metaphor for where words come from in one of the ways of creating poetry that you hear echoes of sound and meaning from other places. And where the figure came from, the jar, I don't know. I know that I enjoyed making it; it was moving on from `Night Feet on Earth' in which I cut a big piece of zinc mounted onto a piece of wood which I drilled and played with, and for the background this time I actually mounted a big piece of zinc on a piece of wood and cut the whole zinc and wood together into four blocks, which were then manipulated and moved around, and drilled rather painfully I think the delicate aura of the ring around a nipple expressed as a series of drilled holes, rather like the drilled holes in the stars of `Night Feet on Earth'. Again it was a very formal piece. It was a very sculptural sort of thing to do. And then I took the poem, which is about some kind of relationship which has its own, the poem has its own dynamic, but in fact the image in my mind was in the jar, in the door ajar, is from the end of a movie with John Wayne of all people, at the end of a film called `The Seekers', a rather strange and difficult film. I think it's called `The Seekers' or `The Searchers', where a daughter is captured by Indians and the uncle or elder brother, I think it's the uncle, John Wayne, goes out looking, and it turns his mind, it becomes brutalised. It's a much written about film, it's an interesting one. And at the end part...not at the end, in part of it, or is it - yes it's at the end, you see John Wayne going out of this house that's in the desert that was the family home where all these terrible things took place, and there's brilliant sunshine outside and a door ajar, which slowly closes, and he stands and turns to the camera, which is inside the house, and he clutches his arm. And this is a reference to a lame cameraman who died while on the film, and this was an in thing for the people who made the film. There was something very poetic about John Wayne the big man, disarming himself by clutching his arm after a film of some power about masculinity and honour, to a closing door, the door ajar, of the consciousness of masculinity, of the vagina, and so I put this woman's body in this door ajar and the woman's body was also the door ajar, so it's playing with that. And then let it rock.

And the title was always as it is, or did you play with the title?

I think the poem came before the title. I don't remember when I made the title up. It was a book that went very quickly, very very joyous, very pleasurable, and there was some waspish woman in Oxford who, where I was doing at the time there was a new studio that I had built that I had in Oxford who said, `Oh this offends women'. And I thought, well it offends you but, you know, it's not quite the same thing. And it wasn't, it's a, I think a joyous celebration of the female form, both as a joyful thing and as an absolutely terrifying thing, you know, because men have ambiguous feelings, or mixed...not mixed but separate feelings about womanhood. Quite right too.

Do any of your books actually take the male form? They don't, do they?

What do you mean, like penile or what, I mean what do you mean by...?

No I mean, what you are talking about, the female.

Oh, when I take the male form. Oh taking the male form? Well, in `A Knife Romance' of course there's a penis in it, which is the knife, which is actually...

But not the whole body?

Not the whole body, no, no. I don't think so. Well, you could say `Broken Rules and Double Crosses', Christ on a cross, arms and legs, but then it's not particularly male. You could say Shiva was a male form, but it has breasts, which is an ambiguity about the structure of it, you know, the thing itself.

And it sounds as though, I mean if it all went very swiftly really, it was a very, again a book that was absolutely complete.

Yes, it was quick and speedy and a joyful thing to do, and I, formerly I did things like, you know, it's almost a tilt back to my designer past making a page move in almost a cinematographic way through the book, in the spaces between the two verses, taking the body and printing it in variance of white, white on white paper, white with a bit of varnish in it which makes it go a little yellow after a period of time, rather tactile. White with a bit of varnish with a bit of pink in it, so it actually looks like flesh, which it does, whereas in other parts of the book it's rather more expressionistic and gaudy.

Actually one of the things I was going to ask you, when we were talking about the previous book, you said you had done that in Oxford, does that mean you actually did very few books in your London time? Is there a great gap in between?

Yes there is a big gap, you're right. The first three books I did, two were at North East London Polytechnic, '75-'77, then nothing until I went to Corsham. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Can't get the dates right. Then I was invited to Corsham to actually do some teaching and what turned out to be `Father's Garden'. That was '77, and there was nothing until '81 - '83; there was no book between '77 and '83/4 when I was at the Brinkley

Fellowship, and when I came out of the Brinkley Fellowship then I started to do more books, roughly one a year.

You said that you only did one in London then? When did you move to Oxford?

I can't get that right.

How old do you think the children were when you moved to Oxford?

I don't know. Oh yes, they were about 15, 14, 14 or 15.

Something's very wrong with this chronology.

Probably.

Because you got them being 3 or 4 when you are in London.

Right.

And then you don't move to Oxford till they're about 15.

Well I think they were 2 or 3 when we were in London and then we moved out to Suffolk, and then we came back to London, and then we went out to Oxford.

So there's at least ten years of being in London where you don't make a book.

Possibly, yes.

And do you know why you didn't, I mean what was...?

Well I didn't know I was doing...you know, I mean, I was doing other things, I was still being a designer and teacher and I thought that was the end of it. I hadn't any...I didn't have the means of production. I didn't have a press. I mean I had a press when I was at the North East London Poly and I had a press when I was at Corsham.

So when do you think you bought the press?

The press I must have bought... I don't know, can't remember.

But what you've also said is that you taught for fifteen years. You must actually have taught for longer than that.

Oh I have taught for a lot longer than fifteen years, yes. When did I say fifteen years? I didn't say it today did I?

No.

Well it was a little while ago, so it's a bit longer. [LAUGHS] I have taught since...I have taught since about 1968 or '67. In fact earlier than that, '63, '63, I've taught since '63.

Let's forget the chronology. What about...

So I've taught for thirty years now.

And, `In the Door Stands a Jar' was printed on the same press, was it?

`In the Door Stands a Jar' was printed on the same press, yes.

And have they all been from then on?

Yes, with the exception that `Knife Romance' was partly printed on the Vandercook press and printed on an etching press, either because I was putting etching prints on and, or I was doing relief prints - sorry, blind embossing, up to me buying Ian Tyson's press, which I think the first book I did on that was either `Firedogs' or `Skute Awabo'.

And what was the one you bought from Ian?

A Fag it's called, it's a Swiss machine.

And what's the difference between the two?

It's marginally bigger in the bed, about an inch all round, which is significant, it gives you just a bit more freedom. And it's far better engineered in a rather Nazi way, rather unforgiving Swiss-German way, I mean it's very rigourous. You can't...it's an interesting cultural comparison. The Vandercook is Anglo-American and well engineered, it's a well made thing, far more flexible and apparently a bit looser in its engineering, not to such fine

tolerances, but it allows you to bend it a bit, to play with it. The Fag is unforgiving, it does not allow play. On the other hand it's got an adjustable bed, which makes life incredibly more interesting in a different direction.

Do you think Ian's work is like it is because he's been using that press?

I think he bought that press because of the way his work is.

Right.

I mean people swear by the Fag, it is the top, it is the top of its kind, I think it's the best of those presses, but it's unforgiving, and I can't quite...I don't quite know what the comparison is but it's like, it's like having a top racing bike, that Ian has, you know, but it's not...a top racing bike will get you down the road very specifically and at very great speed, it will go up hills on a particular kind of road, but you won't go off on the beaten track, you won't do what you're not supposed to do with bikes, and I very much do what I'm not supposed to do with letter press. So I have to fight this Fag press.

And you've now got both the presses?

No I haven't, I sold it on to...

The first one.

Simon Redington, who is an ex-student of mine at the Central, who now curiously is, the press now sits beside me by some ten feet at the new studio space in Bow, because Simon's brought his stuff to that space, after me telling him to get rid of two-thirds of what he had, but he's kept that press.

So what made you change presses?

I felt that I was running out of things to do with the old press, with the Fag.

No, the old one.

Sorry, the Vandercook. And I suspect that the Vandercook might have been coming towards its material life in the way that I was using it; I mean Simon doesn't use it anywhere near as much as I did. And I had always wanted an adjustable bed. And I also have to say that I

suspect, although Ian is a man of some financial skill, he persuaded me, and I think it was true, he actually wanted me to have that press, he saw it going to the right pair of hands, and that conditioned my thinking a bit. But it's certainly a better press than, you know, materially it's a much better press than the Vandercook.

So no regrets, no going back?

No, none whatsoever. It's just that I've got a more difficult dog to deal with, you know, I mean, I had a dog that rolled over on its back when I tickled its belly and it could catch hares, and now I've got a dog that's very good at guarding the door and I get to stroke it on Sundays but no more.

And it still bites you.

[LAUGHING] It's a different set of, you know, I'll make something out of it.

What about `Tilt: the Black-flagged Streets'?

`Tilt: the Black-flagged Streets' was I think one of the widest in terms of what happened on, you know...it was the widest-cast net, bringing the most disparate things together in time, space and being. It started with me being in Canada and writing a poem called `Storm Song', or `Tilt: the Black-flagged Streets', and its inspiration, if that could be called, was the honking sonorous tones of a Canadian pop singer who sang, or folk singer, who sang a thing called `The Work of the Edmund[ph] Fitzgerald'. [SINGING] `...where the cold wind doth blow. Over the place they call Michigan Me[ph].' [LAUGHING] Do you know that? [SINGING] `Some people have said...' No. `The [INAUDIBLE] don't give up its [INAUDIBLE] till the winds of September blow a lean[ph].' You know, ding! ding! a clang of guitar strings, ring of a bell. And in fact it's not a bad piece of kind of pop folk music, as a matter of fact, and crappy though it is in some ways, that's sometimes how things get started. But I wrote this `Storm Song' with at the same time in mind the Whitby steps up to the old cathedral at Whitby, whereat we have a cottage; it's not so very far away by some thirty miles, so it's not...and frequently we would drive to Whitby and buy some oak-smoked kippers and food and look at the place. And these steps are vertiginous and they reminded me of Orson Welles in the pulpit in `Moby Dick' the film, reading...that's where he read his peroration from, his sermon from, in the Whitby church. And somehow there was this notion of a storm song, and the kingly fisher of men and all of that, and the notion of the Whitby steps, but also the black flag is the black flag of anarchy and disturbance, and in my mind I linked the disturbance, such disturbances, with storms. Now, the poem got wrote, or written, and I was planning this

book, and it had something to do with black flags, and I this time bought a load of printing equipment from a technical college in the north Midlands for a sum, lots of stuff, lots of type, and on the galleys or trays there were some old mounted lino blocks which were of different rectangles, obviously had been a teaching thing for printing when printing was taught in the method that I use; by then it was moving onto computers. And I looked at them, because they were random sized squares I thought, well they're black flags of different sizes. And my word, they're all different sizes that I haven't determined, and so there's elements of chance in here and I'm going to use them in one way or another, so I had a poem about black flags and disturbance and storms. I had some black flags of sizes that I didn't like or care about, I mean I hadn't determined them in any way, so chance was lining up, if I might put it this way, on my side, because there was things happening. And at the time there was a conference in Oxford I think about artists' books or printing or, I don't know, and I gave a speech there, and I met a wonderful man called Berthold Volper[ph], now dead, a Jewish German whose work is very much, a great deal of his work is to be seen in the Klingsborn[ph] Museum in Germany, which are now collecting a lot of my stuff I'm glad to say, but hadn't done so at the time, didn't know about it. But I met Berthold[ph] knowing him to be the man who designed the Albertus typeface, one of the great typefaces in English typography, which I had always admired, and it seemed to take a German Jew to understand the intriguing waywardness of the English spirit, that it would take a little bit of, that it would take hard geometry and always moderate it, soften it.

What was he like as a person?

He was a nice fluffy old man, slightly plump, with a lot of sensibility hanging out, and we talked, it was rather nice to talk to him. And he said how he enjoyed my talk, and I talked to him about his typeface, and he had done a lot of work I think with Fabers or something through the years. One of these people who came out in the late Thirties for all the reasons, and did a lot of good work. And I privately made...oh yes, and with the type that, the stuff that I had bought from Alsaguer[ph] College that I described earlier, with all of the other bits and pieces, there was some Albertus type, albeit rather beaten up. So when I went away from the conference I thought, the next book, which is Tilt: the Black-flagged Streets', about which I know very little, so far, except that I have a book - I have a poem and I have these black flags, I'm going to do an Albertus, a very un-modern thing, in respect to Berthold Volper[ph], right? Didn't tell him that. So here I've got some beaten-up Albertus, which is very un-modern, I've got a poem, and I've got some black flags. But Ruth and I then went to Zurich, as we've done, we do now and again because of a professional connection there, and we stayed at an apartment of a woman called Marianne Regard[ph], who I suppose now is in her fifties, a handsome woman, lives on her own, has been a feminist in Switzerland for a long time which

is not an easy thing to be anywhere, but there... And she is a good, professional colleague of Ruth, and she is a very good friend of both of us, and she let us stay in her apartment while she was not around. The apartment is close to a place called, to a park, a beautiful park close to the, whatever See it is at Zurich, Zurichsee I guess, and there's a park with something called the Rietberg Museum in it, I suppose put up by somebody called Mr Rietberg or Herr Rietberg who was a big Swiss steel magnate and left huge amounts of money to put up an ethnographic museum in which there are wonderful...it's a beautiful small palace in which Wagner used to live, or someone, or, one of the German composers, and in every large room there are the most stunning collection of ethnographic statues and from all over the world, the Pacific, India, you know, so every time you go there there's something to see that you haven't seen before, and usually they've changed the stuff around, there's obviously loads of stuff in the halls. So, it became a bit of a shrine of mine. I walked into this. Now this is where we must all suspend belief, but this is the story that I have. I walked into this place and walked up to a statue of Shiva, it's about this big, which is a plump Indian person with limbs hanging out and in funny angles, and lightening in his/her or its hair in a big wheel of fire, treading on the monkeys or the demons. And like, you know, Blake is supposed to have said, this statue said to me, I can remember this statue saying to me, `I'm coming into your book'. And I thought, well there's a thing; I'm not supposed to be hearing voices, but what the hell has Shiva got to do with this book about the `Storm Song' and the Whitby steps and black flags? And I thought, well I'll do as I'm told, right? And next to it was a little dancing girl, OK? And I thought, well you're coming in too, I don't know how. But that little dancing girl is at the beginning and the end of `Tilt: the Black-flagged Streets', crudely carved into a piece of zinc in a big circle. I went back home to Marianne's house and sort of thought about it, and Ruth came back, and I said, `Yes, funny day, I went to the Rietberg again, it's a rather interesting place'. Went to sleep, got up in the morning, made coffee, had breakfast, I think Ruth had whizzed out with Marianne to go to the laboratories. And sat there and had a piece of tracing paper, and I've still got the drawing somewhere, with a pen, drew the figure of Shiva that's in the book, but with breasts. And I looked at it and thought, what the hell is that? That's one of the most frightening things I've ever seen in my life. And I realised it was Shiva as a puppet, right, who I am going to dismantle, and that's OK. I went back home and found out that Shiva...I wound[ph] up Esther, my youngest daughter who is very intuitive, and sometimes you find things out by letting people run round the corner and have a look, and she was doing religious studies. And I said, `Find out about Shiva.' She came back, she said, `Shiva, part of the Shiva myth is that Shiva is dismantled and reassembled in another place to get out of the wheel of fire of the passions.' And I thought, how about that. The passions, the storm. I thought, oh, might be a connection. I said, `Go back and ask these people if Shiva is male or female,' because I had imagined Shiva as a male deity. She went away and she said, we were living in Oxford, she said, `Well the Oxford dons say that it's

male, but my Indian friends have asked their Indian elders and they say it doesn't matter. I thought, fuck the Oxford dons. So he she or it stays female. So, I made a puppet out of zinc pieces in a zinc background, and progressively dug out a piece of the body which I nominated in the first parts of the cape, you would notice that it's, if you could be bothered to decode it you will find that the, because it's on a four-page sequence, and in the first part a line is shown on the left-hand side constrained by the black flags. So it's a line of Albertus revealed between the paving stones, the black flags which are then arranged all the way down in random ways. A part of the body is nominated by a flash silver star that I made up from the decorating materials, and then the next part, the...in varnish the body is, in the next spread, in varnish the body is starting to be built up and the first part of the body that was nominated in the previous page is taken from the right-hand side and put to the left. Meanwhile the wheel of fire of flame, passion or whatever you like to say, is beginning to be cut from an arc; meanwhile there is a border of decorative composing materials all the way round the edge which changes every page, and this with respect to make it look like two things; one to make it look like an Indian restaurant decoration, and the other is to reaffirm the rectilinearness of the page because of what I'm going to do to the cover, which is to make it wonky and tilted and disturbed, OK? Now that little bit of business pursues itself all the way through the book. The body is disassembled and rebuilt from the right to the left, which is right for me because I'm left-handed, and the... [LAUGHS] Everything I do, if it revolves it revolves anti-clockwise. And the poem is built up line by line by line and reassembled on the right; you know, it's built up on the left and reassembled on the right, Shiva is disassembled from the right and rebuilt and put up on the left. And that's a systemic thing that goes, a systematic thing that goes all the way through, and then there's a final page where Shiva has disappeared from the right and is complete on the left. Close, and then the whole poem altogether, close, and then there's the little dancing girl and all the rest of it. And in it there's, one of my groaning puns is the kingly fisher of men, which of course, either Christ, Osiris or whatever, and so I looked up, I thought, kingfisher, halcyon, looked it up and found out that halcyon was a mythic bird, Greek mythic bird, like a kingfisher, that made it...of the equinox that made its storm upon...it made its nest upon stormy waters, thus calming the storm. I said, well, how about that.

<u>End of F4819 Side B</u>

F4820 Side A

So, if you like to say that the poem had its faults, you can say it was at least made a little better by the circle almost being completed by the doing of the book, which was a bizarre experience and not unfamiliar, it was beginning to be that way with the books, which is why the books became compulsive I think, and why the poetry dropped off. There was a point where I wasn't writing poetry any more, as I now do not, and I said to Ruth, I don't know whether, to quote somebody else, sue the muse for breach of contract. But she said, `Don't worry, I think the book's in the poetry now.'

Good muse.

Good muse. And good news. And, it didn't cost me too much, people think I ought to be bleeding to death, but I think I am doing it. It's almost as if, though I've said this to you before, it's almost as if to say the poems that I made or wrote were almost like eggs in an ovary, they're there when the female is born and they just keep coming down, right? It's as though the poems were, I gave myself a clutch of poems to be converted and to slowly become what the books are. Now who can say? Could be an argument of convenience. Then, I completed the book and thought, well it's a pretty strange book, and of course it's strange because of the bizarre binding, which I designed and got effected. When I went back to Zurich the next time, which I think was two years hence, I remembered Marianne and we went back, I don't think this time we stayed in her apartment but it doesn't matter, I think we stayed with a mutual friend. We met again, and we didn't know each other that well but we were very fond of her, she was quite...she's a quite, on the exterior a very stern woman, you know, as a presence. I said, `Hello Marianne,' kissy kissy kissy kissy. `I produced this book after having stayed at your place, you know, staying at your place,' put it that way. `and there's a couple of spreads from the book as a present if you would like it,' you know. And she looked at it, `What's this?' Oh, and I also showed her, I handed her a postcard of the statue of Shiva in the Rietberg, as a link. She said, `What's this?' I thought, oh Christ! it's the breasts, you know. [INAUDIBLE]. I said, `What's up?' She said...I said, you know...`Is it...what?' And she said, `No this.' And it's a photograph of the Rietberg. I said, `Well what about it?' She said, `When I was 16,' when she lived in that apartment, when she was 16, in the other, she was totally obsessed with that statue to such a degree that her mother was going to have her put under psychiatric care. She would go and look at it for days and days and days. And I stayed at her apartment, went to the, looked at the statue and said, `I'm coming to...' Now, do what you like with that.

Did you find out what she thought about what she had been doing with the statue? Did you discover what it was?

No, I never talked to her about it.

Was it ever frightening using an element like that in a book?

Sorry?

Is it ever frightening using an element like that in a book? Did you have nightmares about...?

No, I think that it's the world I live in, you know, I think that's where my imagination lives. I mean I've found plenty of other examples of apparent strangely serendipitous things in my work and in my life, I've never [INAUDIBLE].

No I wasn't meaning that, I was meaning using a god, a violent Indian god.

No, none, no problem. I mean to me it's normal, see, I think that's an act of imagination and that to me is a normal, it's not disturbing. I am pissed off [INAUDIBLE]. I am disturbed when I'm not in that world.

Do you dream?

Oh yes, always dreamt.

And use them?

Yes.

Nightmares?

I wouldn't call them nightmares, I would just call them strong dreams. I mean I used to have visions in the night time, you know, waking visions, and they turned into sometimes like sort of super-reality dreams that were hyper-real, hyper-colour, visually strange dreams.

And, at what point did you have the idea about making the binding crooked?

Well I knew I was going to do something strange because of the title and the business with it being the black flag, black flag of anarchy, and I pursued the rectangle ad nauseam through the book in a way, and I knew I was going to do something with it, and so I drew it, and I got Rob Hadrill to knock up two versions, one where, one what it is now and one much more on a kind of, like a parallelogram, I can't quite remember the thing, who made the two dummies up, but it was very obvious which one was going to be the right one.

And was that the first time you had used somebody else to bind the books, or...?

Oh no, the first...I think `Abab' was the first book that Book Works bound, with some acrimony I might say, unnecessary acrimony, and then `Horse' was the next one.

But why...

There were problems with it.

But why, with the early books you had done everything yourself; what made the transition happen?

Yes, I mean, `A Few Ways Through the Window' is perfect hand-bound, `Terror' bound, bound myself, all the same kind of binding, you know. Eventually dubious, called perfect binding, profoundly imperfect. `Father's Hook', out of respect to my father had to be done better, so I found out, although it's not difficult, how to do a Chinese binding with a reinforced edge, and spent a lot of time picking the, what's it called, colourless thread or invisible thread so that it picked up the local colour, which I thought was a good thing; took a long time to get that right. And then `Abab' I got...oh, `Broken Rules and Double Crosses' I bound myself, but Norwich, again it was Chinese binding. And then we went to proper binding on `Horse', `Abab' and `Horse'.

But why, why did you make the change and what is proper about them?

Well, in proper I mean it's European binding, it's sections, that is folded sheets sewn together, or inserted into each other to make up sections and then bound together. What happened, the reason for doing it is that they open flat. There are a lot of attractions about Chinese binding but the ratio of distance from the spine that you can pierce it to the overall length of the page is such that it's got to be very great for the page to start to open flat, or anywhere near flat. It never really opens flat at all. And the greater you make that ratio the more the spine is at risk through the weight of the thing. It's really made, that Chinese binding is made for printing on

very fine Chinese paper for reasons that are technical, so, you know, a European binding is a much more substantial activity, and much more engineered.

And with these books you went to somebody else to do them because you either didn't want to do it or you couldn't do it?

I couldn't do it, didn't want to learn. I mean there's, you know, I mean at one point I bought a big litho machine and I decided I didn't want to learn litho, I mean it was just too much to learn, and I don't want to make paper out of Brussels sprout tops, you know. I don't want to get into the whole thing where the craft... You know, there's a point where you can invest yourself so much in technique that you lose sight of the, you know, that your eyes are not on the prize. The prize is meaning and not technique.

And for people who don't know, what was Book Works, how did you know to go to them?

I think Ian Tyson put me on to them. I said I'm looking for somebody who knows how to bind books, and he said, `Well there's this bunch of young people under London Bridge arch who got some money from Tom Phillips.' Have you heard of Tom Phillips? Some guy who put some money into it and helped them out. And they were all from Camberwell, and they were binding books with an interest in artists' books.

And, they also did exhibitions and were for a while a sort of meeting place.

That's right.

What did it mean to you?

They gave me a little exhibition with a book binder called David Sellers[ph], which I think was a bad combination. Although I'm grateful to them for it, I didn't find myself going down there and meeting much people, because already they were putting on shows of kind of instant so-called installations which tend to be kind of lumps of rubble and stuff that I wasn't into at all; it was already that...the theme that we see now was beginning to burgeon and they were into it and I wasn't.

So it wasn't very important to you that it existed?

No. No. I mean it was, while it lasted the connection, having my books bound there was OK, you know.

So tell me about the relationship between you and binders. It must be, I mean...

Tricky.

Presumably really what an artist wants is to be able to go and say, I want X, Y and Z, exactly that, but it never works that way, does it?

Well I think that you should be able to tell people what you want if you know it, and if you don't know it you're looking for somebody who has the interpretive skills to find out what either you need in artistic terms or if you need just to solve the wretched problems that you've set before them. And most of the time it's the latter. I mean I am difficult with binders because I don't do things normally myself and I quite often end up with problems. There is a problem, there's two problems with...there's two problems, there's three problematic kind of binder, let me put it this way. There are absolute egomaniacs; there are egomaniacs who, and this is all part of why they're egomaniacs who think that they are artists beyond all other things, and have had, I've had one actually declare he doesn't care what's inside the book, you know. I suggested to him at a meeting that he might consider designing a copy, binding a copy of the Yellow Pages, the ironies of which flew past him. And so they become a problem in that sense, because they want to be in on the act and on the message. That doesn't happen very often, because I've just not done it. It's not happened to me with anybody, because I don't want to have that kind of binder. There are binders who, well, come on like English gentlemen somewhat; I mean I remember while in Oxford I was looking for a binder who didn't find it at all interesting to come round to the studio and talk to me, he thought that I ought to drive fifteen miles to him, you know. Or they've got a timescale which is completely, you know, some other century really. And I'm afraid there are some binders who, having learnt it at college, think they then know it, because the range of skill presented to them at college, rather like the range of skills of printing presented to people at college, is extremely restricted. We must remember at all times that the, what I call the reflective arts at one point were probably at the cutting edge of technology, and coming out of that cutting edge of technology two things happened; one is that they become reflective, and reflect on the processes as well as the thing that was trying to be carried by it, but inevitably it becomes less skilled. Now I don't care which way people cut that, I always tell you that the people that I worked with as printers in the East End of London in the Fifties were infinitely better printers in, within those specific reins that are supposed to be printed, than me or anybody else I know, with one or two perhaps exceptions in artists' books, OK, without question, and I think most printers I run to are arrogant through ignorance, and that must be... It doesn't mean to say you're not going to do work, you're going to do very very different work, but you must

have your eye on that. So the span of technical knowledge is quite, or the depth of technical knowledge, let's put it that way, the depth, because I do things on the press that nobody is supposed to do, so you can say there's a big, I've got a much broader span of what I attempt; the depth of knowledge, what it requires to get a good result, is far greater, it used to be far greater, at the front, when it's at the front of the technology, without question. It can't be gainsaid. And so I think the binders...so by the time it ends up in the art schools as a reflective process with possibilities of so-called expression, although that's a thing I've never, I've seen insisted upon but never taught, self-expression, and I don't believe in it, I think you'll express yourself one way or the other whatever you do, I fear that what's laid on as the craft of binding, apart from the tooling of leather and doing nice images, isn't necessarily what it used to be or what it has been when it was done in the very best shops of the Renaissance under the twin goads of religious compunction and economic terror, which is what has made a lot of craftsmen great. And remember craftspeople were only one step up from labourers and they got to be good because if they didn't they lost their place. And the idea of guys prancing about in wigs and swords with frock-coats and saying [INAUDIBLE] being compositors is nonsense. It was a form of slave labour when I was doing it, but marginally better than being an actual labourer.

But going back to the binding...

So anyway, binders, yes.

I mean how does somebody like Rob Hadrill differ in approach from somebody like Charles Gledhill, who you've also worked with?

I think Rob's kind of more punky, you know, and will let it flow a little bit, but unfortunately I haven't worked with Rob for some time and it was a difficulty that I had to close down on him because of some mistakes made and the inability to resolve them. And I offered, when he got very angry I offered to talk to him about it, but he didn't, I mean I think he found it very difficult, he was younger than me, but I said, you know, I mean I like him and I would be very happy to sit down and talk to him about it, but that didn't happen.

Which book was that on?

Well, there were one or two books that were problematic but I won't go into it.

But we're not...at the time of `Tilt: The Black-flagged Streets' he did that well?

`Tilt' was a transitional title, I think. In other words I got part of it bound by Rob and [INAUDIBLE] and got the rest of the edition bound by somebody else, David Simaleavich, who is probably, or was, one of the, probably the best binder around.

Is he someone in Holland or something?

Yes.

Right.

But he went crackers as far as I can see.

How do you spell his name?

Simaleavich, which is S-I-M-A-L-E-A-V-I-C-H.

And how did you find him?

Through a fine press man, who was a fine press man, Graham Williams who I think is probably the best craft letterpress person I've seen, or used to be, he's now given it up to do sculpture, and he recommended to a very good friend of mine, John Burk[??] who worked at Rotas, and it was John I asked and he introduced me. I mean David was just a superb binder, but unfortunately went off the business of binding, and I realise now that when he came over here he was already going off the business of binding but thought working with me might kind of, or, other people like me, or people in England, might revive his interest. And he went off to California to start a snooker hall empire, you know. [LAUGHS]

And do you know what's happened?

Pardon?

And do you know what's happened?

No, but he left behind his very nice young assistant, Philip, who I think he abandoned somewhat and Philip made some mistakes and I couldn't put them right, and so I've now moved on to Charles Gledhill, and I just hope that works out.

And before we leave...

Charles is a very good binder.

Before we leave it...

He's got a different kind of problem.

Did you show `Tilt' to the man whose typography you were using, what was the...?

No, I never got in contact with Herbert Volper[ph], and held it in my back pocket and then he died, I saw obituaries and so on. No big thing, I mean it wasn't a good use of, he wouldn't have been...I think, he wouldn't have been proud of the use of Albertus because the Albertus, apart from my problems with press work the Albertus was very beaten up, you know, so it had, it wasn't a good representation of his type, but it had its own visual effect in the book which, you know, accumulatively it did the right thing but it wasn't perfect Albertus. He also designed something called Albertus Light, which [INAUDIBLE] discontinued which I would just love to get hold of, I mean you know, I would like a font of Albertus and Albertus Light, it would be wonderful, but maybe I can find it on computers.

And, just before we move off the binding thing, has everything subsequently been done by Charles, or not, or is it a mixture?

Well he's done...he's finishing `Ten Years in Uzbekistan which grinds forward at a sedate pace. I think that's what he's bound so far, and he's corrected a few things, and he completed a few editions that were already, so far incomplete.

Oh right, because I mean for instance we're, I hope, about to talk about `A Knife Romance'; who bound that?

Rob Hadrill.

Right. So tell me about that book if you would.

[SINGS TO TUNE OF `A Nice Romance'] `A knife romance with no kisses, a knife romance my friends this is.' So it's about a knife which, it's a fairly kind of, it's a sly dig if that's really the word, about masturbation and so on, and the artists' position. It's got a lot of levels to it, I'd say. But it is a fact that I had a sheath knife which I still have, medium length, which was, I bought as a Boy Scout, and my mother kept burying in the garden because she feared the

crimes it might commit me to, as I said on the phone. And this is partly because I had a great uncle who is rumoured to have stabbed a man and hung for it, and so my mother feared knives, you know, from the working class and so on. Partly as kind of a grotesque Freudian example of the mother trying to de-sex the son, you know, or control him. So, I don't know if that was true, but I found it, you know, kind of interesting and I wrote a poem called `A Knife Romance'.

When did you write the poem?

Can't remember. I really can't remember. Didn't have a[??] relationship of that poem to that book at all.

But it wasn't an adolescent poem, it was an adult poem?

No, it was an adult poem. I didn't like the poem, it was ugly, ugly-minded poem, and some people have been upset by the book, but you know, I can live with that, because art's [INAUDIBLE], you know. And, how did it go? It's a book I did in, I think it's a transitional book, it went from London to Oxford this book because it took four years to complete. I did, I think I did `In the Door Stands a Jar' and maybe `Tilt' while `A Knife Romance' was in operation. I had learnt etching through Cedric Horner and Norman Ackroyd to a degree, and I had this bizarre idea coming out of `Terror Terror' many years ago where I photographed wood letter on a wall, and putting wood letter in that condensed face that I used in `Abab' on a long table, I can remember it actually being laid out in the studio in Danvers Road in Hornsey, and according to the laws of reasonably good modern typography, put all these little bits of paper printed off in the press, so it's all getting rather omenistic already, you know, and I photographed it at an angle from the foot, or from the head down, so that when you looked at the image and turned it upside down it looked like an expanding, almost knife-like or gravestone thing, OK? And then moved all of the lines up six lines and put a new six lines on the bottom. So I think through, I think four or six passes it's almost moving over of the poem coming up through apparent space, then etched onto a perceived[??] plate describing the shape of the imperspective table making six or seven plates, the thing runs right through the seven plates actually, so it revolves hopefully. And I found this an interesting kind of post-movie thing to do with a piece of old technology. And set that in the background of a piece of zinc that I ran over progressively with a drill and put an etched ground on the back so that it absorbed different degrees of oil and ink as a putative background to this thing. I meanwhile started to drag in one of the stories of Solomon's, well the story of Solomon saying to two women disputing as to which was the mother of a child, `Bring me a sword,' or `Bring me as word', altering those [INAUDIBLE]. Offered to cut it in half and the true

mother said, `No, let her have it'. That was [INAUDIBLE]. So a knife was employed in that. I wrote...I started to lay out elements of the book, and it's about a knife going into the page; it's about cutting. I started to lay out elements in the book and to progressively revolve them and do things with them in a rather more musical way than I had done in any other book, very much more risk, very much more improvisation. And it's a book that didn't resolve itself for a very long time. I did another plate which was a kind of a background that was supposed to look like skin, with cross-hatch with little kind of follicle hairs coming out, and I was trying to work out what that was and I started to destroy that through the book. And at that time I realised that my mother was dying and I think, I suddenly thought that this book was tracking my mother's death. And I had already had this experience with `Father's Garden' - `Terror' followed my father's death, `Terror Terror', sorry, I don't tell most people that, and `Father's Garden' celebrated it, but `Terror Terror' was the first tracking of it, with the Dies Irae in the middle of the book hand-written on the wall. And I found this very alarming because by this time this relationship with the work where I was either predicting, was...you know, it's hippy and tenuous, and it's also, but it's also poetic. It's very close to inducing; the notion from predicting to induction is, or tracking, it just very muddled, and it's rather creepy. So, I had to face myself although I pursue that, and I wrote a poem called `Widow's Song' and put that in the book, which I slowly accumulated and dismantled, and that was recognition that this book was actually being done while my mother was dying, I did it by the time she had finished, but...I finished it by the time she died. So that's the book.

You did keep going with the book?

Yes.

It did keep that chronology?

Yes.

And can you actually, what does it look like if you see the covers, what does it...?

Oh God! Well the outer box, the slipcase is a very big, heavy thing with patterns and textures gained from a background and the bizarre rectangles that I used - not rectangles, the, what's a four-sided figure with no right-angles in it? Four-sided figures that I used for laying the poetry out on. It's a rich textured book with a rather calligraphic feel to it, slightly Eastern feel to it.

Scale?

Scale is about 20 to 24 inches by, I should think 12 inches wide. Big book, and it only got to be, I was normally driving for my 40[??] edition of [INAUDIBLE], but it got down to 25 because of wastage and accidents and... I also, it's one of the books that produced an enormous number of other prints through experimentation and desperation.

And, we've sort of not really talked about it, the move to Oxford from your point of view. I mean it happened because of Ruth's career, did it?

Mhm.

From your point of view, was it something that you found easy, acceptable, or what?

I found it easy because I was part-time teaching a lot and didn't care; I mean I enjoy my teaching but I didn't care for, I haven't cared for many art colleges, I don't like what goes on there, I don't like what people do, and I don't like the people there very much. I think they're, you know, there are some good people around but, no, you know, it's an institution and like all institutions it's got elements of decay in it. But I found, I mean it was obvious judgement that Ruth's career was a lot more dynamic than mine at that time, I mean at least in terms of locking into institutions. A scientist unfortunately needs institutions, you know, Schweitzer was a...was it Schweitzer, or Einstein, was a customs clerk and could work it out on the backs of some paper, but thereafter people needed huge institutions to prove what Einstein put down, you know. So when she was invited to go to Oxford it was obviously a good thing to do. And also she was very fed up; she gets miserable quite often, I mean she's a moody piece, and she got very fed up with University College, and that usually is a mixture, as for the reasons that I get fed up with things, it's a usual mixture of a good perception of what's going on in a place and the difficulties of one's own personality. I mean the trick in life is whether you're going to do anything about it or put up with it.

So where did you go to live in Oxford?

Well my judgement was, if we could afford it we ought to live in north Oxford which is where all the dons and donettes hang out, because if you're going to live in Oxford and do that thing, I said, `We'll do a three-to five-year stretch here,' you know, like a prison sentence, and that's exactly, we did a five-year stretch, and I thought, well we could go and live in east Oxford where it's both working-class, pretty devastated, there's that ugly, as you get it in Cambridge, feel of town and gown, the town resenting the gown, both envying and feeling very aggressive about it. And, you know, the suburbs of Oxford look pretty much like

anywhere from here to Southampton. My judgement was, we might as well live in north Oxford if we could afford it because we'll get the true Oxford experience, which is what we did, we went and lived in Southwall[??] Road, which is by the canal, and I call it the Rive Gauche of north Oxford, it's some run-down street, I would say, run-down, rather vertiginous Victorian houses that used to be the discreet brothels along there for the fellows, when the fellows had the taste for that sort of thing. And it's now student flats and it was student living, and has rapidly become, it rapidly became a place where dons and other professionals lived.

Did you know Bridget John who lived in the road?

No.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Just before we take you to Oxford, where did your children go to school in London?

They both went to, I think, Hornsey High, which is a school for girls, and we had a lot of trouble with our left-wing friends but by that time the evidence was coming out that girls do better at single-sex schools than boys do.

This was one of the direct grant schools was it?

Not direct grant, no, you know, open school.

State school?

State school, yes.

Oh right.

And I must say that I think that it was probably, it might have been a bit of a disaster for Sadie to move to Oxford. She hated Oxford, and she left a very tight little group of girls who were very high academic teams[??] together, and I think ironically for the mother to move to Oxford wasn't great for Sadie, though I will never be able to prove that.

Where did they go to school in Oxford?

They went to...well, there's a school in north Oxford, you know, like Hampstead High where all the kind of north Oxford, Hampstead type people go to, send their kids to, and there was only one place available, and it was either that or they both go to, again a girls' single-sex, you know, single-sex school, and I thought, well, they did well at the single-sex school in London, let's put them there, because we didn't want to split them and they didn't want to split. And they did have a reaction against going to this other school because it was full of professionals' daughters and sons, and I sometimes think that might have been the wrong kind of reaction from them, but they were voting members of the family and I'm afraid that's the way we run things, that at 14 I wasn't in the business of telling them what school to go to. So they went to this other school which got closed down and merged with a boys' school eventually.

While they were there?

On the way to them leaving, yes, it being slowed down.

End of F4820 Side A

F4820 Side B

And do you feel your children had a good education in England?

I think they had a not bad education that was available in England, but I don't think it was a particularly...I sometimes have doubts about their education, particularly in Oxford, ironically, and we had a big battle with the school that Sadie was going to because they promised...they found it quite impossible to understand that Sadie wanted to do both English and science, because she was good at both. I mean, don't we need enough people who do both English and science? And I suspect they didn't expect girls to do it. So they promised it, couldn't deliver it, I threatened them with a legal iron bar, and to his credit, the local MP at that time was John Patten and he bounced all over them and we got money to have Sadie taught English by a tutor, out of the tax-payers" purse I might say, to fill in the gap, which was sometimes a teacher from the school so the teacher had the pleasure of getting pocket-money for, you know, teaching Sadie. And then Ruth [INAUDIBLE] next door. I don't know how well that worked out. But she did well, but she...she took the, I don't know if I ought to say this on tape because it's her life. I suspect that she took her foot off the accelerator somewhat out of resentment. It's hard to say.

And you were quite involved with their schooling then, took a lot of interest in it?

Yes, I would say so, yes.

And what was family life like in Oxford, how did you feel as a group in Oxford?

Well, slightly under siege, because Oxford life itself I didn't have too much time for, but I built a studio in the back of the garden - well first of all I hired a studio out in the woods, there was a big space but it was the time when people were beginning to let off their farm buildings to make money out of the crafts and arts and so on, develop them, because farming had shrunk in terms of numbers of people using them, and so on. And that was gong to become expensive and it was difficult to get to, we had to negotiate who had the car and when I didn't have the car I cycled there, and I sometimes cycled in the middle of winter and my head froze, you know, I mean it was just incredibly cold, very hard to keep moving. I did some good work there, I don't regret it. But then I put some money and had a thing built in the back of the garden, which was a very good building, built by a really terrific builder, and we designed it together. I was very pleased with it, a very tight little place, you know, about the size of the basement down here, perhaps a little smaller, but I got a lot of good work done in that. So I was cosy. I spent probably too much time thundering across the country in a car

to get part-time teaching to earn my crust and keep my end up, and one year I did the sums with my accountant and I said to Ruth, you know, `I've practically destroyed the car, and made only so much profit doing it'. She said, `Thank God you recognise that. I mean I couldn't say it but I thought it was a waste of time, you know.' By that time we were on our move to London I think, moving back. So I spent a lot of time on the road, the rest of the time I did work, and that was OK, I mean I got confident with what I was doing.

Did you miss London?

No, I live where I'm put. I mean, I missed London in the sense that I didn't find much in Oxford; I made a few friends there, for which I thank them, but I think Oxford society was fairly disgraceful. It's élitist, it's sexist, and whichever way they cut it it's got some explaining to do. One of the good things about living in Oxford was that we made a lot of foreign friends, and the reason for that is because, you know, if you've ever been in a London art school, very often at some point through the term you will find some people from, I don't know, France or the Argentine, or from Germany, who have been invited over and they're wandering...and no one's met them, no one's on tap to look after them, you know. The English are incredibly rude in institutional terms, outrageously so. And Oxford is not beyond that at all, and very often Ruth said people would turn up who were there to be visiting professors and no one would meet them at the airport. I mean when we went to Canada we were met the airport by this very strict observing Jew who made sure that our cases were carried, he took us to the house we had done a swap with. He walked round the house with complete chutzpah to inspect it to see if it was all right as far as he was concerned. He organised a dinner with, two dinner parties to introduce us to his family and to other people, and then he would think he had done his duty, and by God he had, you know, and he apparently gave a little tea, you know, at his department, and introduced them. That's the way to do it. It's civilised. It's not much, if you're interested in the person. Typically in the art schools in England, and certainly in Oxford, people would turn up...they had been invited to be visiting professors, I mean they're, you know, they're some of the best in the world, and they don't get met at the airport, and they turn up, there's nowhere for...they've got to find somewhere. I mean it's all of that. So, the consequence of that was, Ruth and I would...so, hell, Ruth would turn to me and I would say, `Well invite them round for dinner'. And we made some very good friends that way.

And for her was it a good time professionally?

Well I think now she would say it was, but again, you know, she got a bit...I mean she said, you know, one of the first things that happened was that they had a staff meeting at the

department, she was... They said, `We would like to welcome Dr Ruth Campbell to our...' da-da-da-da. `Now next Wednesday we've got a Professor so-and-so coming over from so-and-so I would like you all to meet,' and this of course contradicted what I've just said, but later we'll... `And maybe Ruth you would like to bring the sherry round.' And she looked at him, she said, `Only if you give me a black dress and a white pinny.' And he didn't ask her again.

This was at work?

This was at Oxford. And, you know, she would run into that kind of thing all the time. And she said as she went into her...she went into her office one time and found a six-foot-six rowing jock sitting in her desk, in her chair, legs draped across her desk, inviting her to tell him how she was going to help him pass his exams, is the way she put it. And I said, `Why didn't you tell him to get up out of the seat, go outside, close the door, and knock?' She said, `I don't think that ought to be part of my social skills in a place like that.' In a way she's right, but unfortunately you do have to have such skills.

So what did she do?

I don't know.

Put up with it.

Put up with it.

What was the actual job she was doing at that time?

She was a lecturer in psychology, and there was a certain amount of teaching, a certain amount of experiment. I think she got a lot of good work done there, and I think she did some good teaching. I think she found, you know, I mean I think the bed-rock professionally I think, it did her good, both in terms of her reputation and her work, but she found a lot of the inequalities. I mean there were, you know ditsy things, it's just straight out of Ealing comedy, it's where the English get kind of fey, they think they shouldn't contact the world too much because of course they feel guilty about where they got their money from in the Empire, and they didn't...you know, they had a reformation which made them puritans which made them think about, you know, the consequence of their action, so the poor things would have been better off Catholics, you know, in a way, but to be puritans and a third of the world is a very hard thing to square, right? This is as I said earlier why I think `A Passage to India' is about

the middle class guilt of Manchester rather than India. She...what was the question? I've diverted myself.

We were talking about Ruth's, whether it was a valuable time to her or not.

Oh right, well, I mean she... She would find people from abroad who would come in and say, `Well, you know, people here are good but they're not that good,' you know, which I think was an astute thing to say. So that the whole camp of being Oxford and having all of that money, they're always crying they've got no money but they own huge sums of money which they are determined not to spend, is spent on a remarkably small number of students, in this case Thatcher is right, and they've got huge...they hold, they are part of the Establishment, they know how to raise dust and raise cane. As I was going to say, part of the ditsy thing about, you know, the feyness was that she found that, she said, `I found out that a lecturer is obliged to give lectures, but not tutorials.' This in a very heavily tutorial system. Not obliged to give tutorials, but he's obliged to give certain lectures. Students, guess what, are obliged to gain tutorials but not to go to lectures. And I just know there is a raft of English people including artists who just think that's tickety-boo, they think it's wonderful, but God! if you have to work there and want to get a job done, it's not good enough. She reversed those rules in her department for a period of time. It wasn't appreciated, you know. That kind of thing, that kind of thing.

And also, during this period your children were reaching adolescence and I was always terribly impressed with the way you dealt with that. Can you talk about that bit?

I don't know if...well I don't know why you should be impressed with that. I mean it's there we had real trouble with both of them, I mean, but it was the normal adolescent stuff, you know, late night parties when you weren't there, late night parties when you were there, trashing the rooms, outbursts of temper and, you know, disrespect, you know.

I can't quite remember a story you told me that so impressed me, but I think it was to do with, it was definitely one of them being outside, and it might have been to do with smoking. It was either to do with not coming home or to do with smoking.

Can't remember. Lots of incidents.

But I mean, you didn't deal with it by being the heavy authoritarian father.

It wasn't going to work, they're two very intelligent, very powerful women, and we made then that way, so you know...

What did you do?

Well, I think the bottom line is, when things get bad you have to hang in there. I know through the druggy culture, somebody once pointedly said, you know, `I've never seen anybody come back from drugs who were abandoned by their parents.' And you have to hold on to them, and you sometimes have to eat crow, but you have to be big enough to eat shit and still be there, you know, even though they're incredibly rude. But some times you have to resist them, and you have to be the target of their, you know, unpleasantness, and that's not saying you're not going...I mean I don't think I ever said, `You're not going to have five bob,' or, you know, `I'm going to...' you know, I'd certainly never beat them. I mean, I never said, `You're going to stay in tonight,' or `You can't have so-and-so,' that wasn't the way to do it. I mean it was just some other kind of pressure that you can exert. I mean in the long run, one way of putting it is, while you upset them they still loved you, or at least had a connection, if you know what I mean, and so you had to dispense that disapproval with care. I'll put it another way, and it's to do with the whole business of hitting people, which of course everybody disapproves of all over the place, everywhere. In `Whisky Galore' I think it is, Finlay Curry[ph], a big Scots actor playing a big Scots man, do you remember this film?

I haven't seen it.

Pardon?

I haven't seen it.

Right. Has a disagreement with a young man. This is in the Western Isles, you know, someone of a small Scots community, and this film was made in 1940-something so it's a different time. But he formally slaps this young man hard, and the man is devastated. And I think what was important about that scene, it struck me that people who mitigate against physical violence on young people or anybody else have got it wrong, because they think that, they argue about whether the physical violence is a good punishment or not. I don't think that's the point. I say that because when I was young I was heavily brutalised at my grammar school, or people tried to brutalise me. I mean I caused trouble from the day I went in there, and I got progressively beaten by people in the playground, I got beaten physically by the prefects who had the right to beat me, they had the right to beat me with a scout's stave, you know, and I was beaten by the masters, and I was beaten by the headmaster with a sworn-off

cricket bat. I can tell you that there wasn't a chance of them ever turning me around, and I can tell you that I was adept at making them lose their temper, and once they lost their rag they knew they had lost me, and I would enjoy making them lose their rag. Now this is not something I boast of; I'm trying to lead you to the point where, what was devastating in that scene with Finlay Curry[ph] and that boy, it was like a lioness cuffing her cub. The boy was ashamed of the disapproval that he had gained from Finlay Curry[ph], so a clip round the ear from somebody who you respect is a devastating thing, not by virtue of the violence, and no amount of violence is going to turn somebody who has got no respect. Do you see what I'm saying?

So what was the metaphorical clip round the ear you gave them?

The exercise of my disapproval, where I think it...I mean I wasn't, you know, I wasn't necessarily in control all the time, you know, but you had to hang in there. Sometimes Ruth and I were at loggerheads about what was going on. That's one of the problems in families, you know, you get...there'll be two, quite naturally two different interpretations. I mean in the hierarchical family where only the father rules, or only the mother rules, then there's not much of a problem, although there quite often is because the underperson learns how to subvert the situation despite the apparent authority. But, you know, there are natural disagreements about what's going on, and of course there is a real authority thing going on that if I do it one way Ruth will try and do it another way because of the way we are, and vice versa.

So it was a pretty turbulent time.

I don't think it was as turbulent as some... I mean there were awful stories that the girls used to bring back about... You see one of the problems in Oxford was that there was a lot of sons and daughters who had high-achieving fathers usually, mothers rarely, and the expectations on them, not only because of their parents but because they were in Oxford, were huge. Sometimes they weren't motivated or didn't have the brains that their parents have or whatever, or the fortune, so they would rapidly turn to drugs although they were at very good schools, and drugs and drink and raving and acid was absolutely rife in Oxford, there's a problem for an awful lot of people.

So in fact from that point of view the children were almost safer in London.

Well, no, from that point of view I'd say they got a certain education in early and hard and they had supportive parents and they didn't get into too many of the wrong things, and they got it out of their soul. I mean what's...I think where you've got to worry is where you've got

somebody who's rolling up dope at the age of 26. I mean you see somebody rolling up dope at 16, I don't like it, but when it's 26, you know...

And there was a sort of transition wasn't there where you had moved to London but they were still in Oxford in the house?

Yes there was, there was some funny...it's funny you should remember that. Yes, there was some funny kind of cross-over. There was a bit where I was here but Ruth was in Oxford because she was sweeping up her contract, and then there was a bit where they were finishing, either both of them were finishing school, but by that time Sadie had moved out and was leading her own life already, so she was up to whatever she was up to. I can't remember the phasing.

Did they both do A'levels?

Yes. Both did well.

And then, when you moved here I was also very struck by you saying you hadn't built it to accommodate them.

I what?

You hadn't built any accommodation here for them.

That's right. Because they had left home in their own minds. But we have now in fact mellowed and I'm out of the basement and I've...because they're obviously going to be up in London a lot more, and because of the pattern of employment, or unemployment these days, I think we've all got to be a bit more flexible, so, you haven't seen down in the basement, it's all converted. There's a bedroom and a bath which we've never had before.

So one can come home at a time really.

Yes, one can...yes, well, two can, the other can sleep on the ground floor. I mean how long do you have a house with a spare room for all of your children?

But do you think in terms of getting a different balance in your relationship with them, actually moving away from them might have been quite significant?

I think it's a very good thing. I think it's a very good thing.

It must have been quite a shock to them, wasn't it?

No it wasn't a shock to them, it came as natural as water running, and it was very much in my experience and Ruth's experience, we are both people who left home to gain our own independence and flail about. And at one point Ruth said, you know, we've bred these girls for independence, and they've got...I mean they know how to handle themselves.

But you now all enjoy each other's company a lot, don't you?

Oh yes, we're good friends I think. I mean I don't think you could ever...I don't think you should ever really be totally friends with your parents because, you know, it's an embarrassment to them, there's a part of it that's embarrassing. They don't expect to have the same soul next to them of somebody who is both their parents and thirty years their senior; I think it's a different, slightly different deal. You're still friends but there's still a kind of, a watchful thing, I suspect.

And have you liked their boyfriends?

I've kept very quiet about their boyfriends, and I said to them at a certain point where they started to ask me what I thought of Harry or Jim, I said, `Look, the point is, if I don't like the boyfriend, this is not going to be good news for you, and I don't think you should hear it. Secondly I might be wrong, you know. Thirdly I've got to deal with my own competitive feelings. But also if I like the boyfriends that's a problem, because I might...if I get on with them too well that puts a pressure on you to retain, a small pressure but some kind of pressure to keep the relationship going when you don't want to. So I think I am obliged until you signal to me that this is a serious thing to keep off in terms of opinion, unless of course I see something which is completely out of hand.'

And have they had steady boyfriends?

Oh yes, yes.

And what have they gone on to do after school?

Sadie has become an elegant fop who reads novels but works in, at the moment works in playgrounds in Bristol. Tried to get employment in Sheffield where she did her degree, she got a good...

What was her degree?

A degree in English and American Studies. But really stopped wanting to be a scientist before she had finished her A'levels, and nothing has replaced it in terms of ambition. I wonder whether she is still in, whether she is in competition with her mother and may so be until she's 30 or so, I don't know. Esther May has gone from strength to strength, stopped living a life of rock'n'roll and being not a natural academic turned round and just started to study for eighteen months and came up with good results, and I said, `You've got a prize, what do you want?' She said, `A year off, and I want to cross Africa,' which we helped her to do. I mean she was going to do it, so we either let her do it with fifty quid or we helped with a safari, which is what she did. Well I have a picture downstairs of her sitting next to a silver-back gorilla up in the Zairean jungle, everybody else having fled except for the guards. She came back home, we found out later she met a Dutch boyfriend and swapped safaris, you know, didn't tell us; came back home too late to start a new course. We started to talk to her about learning keyboarding skills. She didn't listen to that. Walked into the King's Head theatre, where the phone was ringing while all of these elegant would-be stars, male and female, posed around, she just walked up to the phone and started to answer it and take notes. By the end of that she had made herself invaluable to the place, worked there for three months and became assistant stage manager to a play called `Kvetch'[ph], I'm trying to think, of the Edinburgh Festival, I'm trying to think of the star who's an East End, rather aggressive psychopathic star, what's his name? I'll think of it in a minute. Came out of that, did a three-year film and drama course at Bristol, she's just finished. She's always been into drama, or she got into drama at school I think through a good teacher who, through the reading of drama got her into books; she wasn't the natural reader that Sadie was, so she has actually got back into language via the study of drama. Has done film and drama at Bristol, has already made a couple of films that have been sponsored, had one short-listed for the BBC in the shorts, you know. She's a goer, she's a person...as I said earlier, two cats make up the same personality.

And how much interest over the years have they shown in your work? How involved are they?

Well they keep their eye on it, but, I said, `Do you like this?' Once I think Esther said, `Well we would do but we've been growing up with it.' But I have them, I don't know if I told you this, I mean there was a time when they were between 5 and 9 or 10 where we would give

them an hour a day. I would give them a drawing lesson for half an hour, Ruth would give the other one a piano lesson for half and hour, and then we would swap it round, which worked very well, it was a kind of, what the American call quality time, but I mean it was...I found you could teach people drawing much younger than you thought, and...

But had they for instance, have you given them each copies of your book?

I've given Esther a copy of `Tilt', because she I think was kind of helpful in the generation I went... And I did think about giving them more, but I am saving some for them, because they move around a lot and I know what it's like to be a bachelor or a bachelorette; I mean moving around a lot you shouldn't have too much stuff, and these places will be, these books will be kicked to death in a couple of years.

But have you got one of each book for them in the future?

Yes.

Do they know that?

I don't know if I've told them.

And have you seen them actually spending time with the books, or is that impossible for them now?

I can't remember, I think they have done, yes.

Right. OK. And, `Martyrs' was done in Oxford, was it?

Yes.

Can you tell me about that, because I remember seeing it there.

`Martyrs'... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] How did `Martyrs' start? In my mind `Martyrs' started with Ruth and I going to Edinburgh to see if it was a place for Sadie to go to university - sorry, at Edinburgh University, for a number of reasons. I thought education outside of England might be interesting, and it might be good to go to a country where education had a different place in the national psyche. Sadie didn't want to go to Edinburgh, that's the way it is. But while there I went to the, something like the national museum, a museum in

Edinburgh where I found Ogham script carved on a stone, which I knew from Robert Graves and the White Goddess was the old tree alphabet of the pre-Roman script of Britain, of the Celts, you know, tapping your nose to say, I know what's gong on, is the residue of a language where you tapped with four fingers and signed on your shin and your nose and your arm, and that was the same language that you can see running along the bottom of `Martyrs'. It had its alphabetic equivalents with the exception of P or Q, depending if you are a P Celt or a Q Celt, and, I think the Q Celts are Welsh and Cornish and the P Celts are Scots and Irish, or the other way round, I can't remember. I recognised that script and transcribed it on a piece of paper. And I also went into the Institute of Scottish Studies which I just happened to pass, the Institute of Scottish Studies, so, I remembered this absolutely wonderful music that I had heard twenty odd years ago, twenty-five years ago, of what turned out to be... And I questioned this extremely patient lady who had brogues and a long severe tartan skirt on, as to what I was after, and you know, just tried to describe this music and did some sound noises and... She said, `Well that's obviously the singing of the reverend Murdo McLeod[ph] - not Murdo McLeod[ph], what's his name? Can't remember his name. `On a record by, so-and-so label that they produced, of polyphonic singing up in the Western Isles in the, you know, just after the war.' So I got that, and I said, `Can you sell me this?' Sort of Highland, Shetland fiddle music. She said, `Mr Campbell, this is no' a shop.' [LAUGHS] So I said, `Well, do you want to sell me the LPs or not?' So I bought the LPs, went home, played the music, it's the same stunning music that gets right to your soul, I mean it's very upsetting. It may be you have to have Scots-Irish blood or that romance in you, but it's deadly music, absolutely deadly. And I played this for a while and I got a friend of mine, Stuart Elliot Rae, who I had taught with at North East London Poly, who is an Anglo-Scot and a Scots Nationalist, and I got him to, because he's a musicologist amongst other things, he transcribed the music for me, and translated the Gaelic and matched the Gaelic to the music, what was being sung. So I did a very simple thing of, as a note was sung the vowel that was being sung - not the vowel, the consonant or...what's the unit of, the simple unit of speech, the..... [BREAK IN RECORDING] Their syllable, when the syllable was being sung, the note was being sung, so I put the note at the top on a stave, hypothetical stave of rules and a figure, and the syllable that was being sung in Gaelic and underneath the Ogham script equivalent which looked faintly marshal and certainly not Roman. And so spelling out that language, and the idea was to show the language off almost as at that time blacks were showing off their skin as a thing of beauty, I thought I would show Gaelic as a thing of beauty, and just spell out this thing. And this song called `Martyrs' describes I thought the condition of the Scots in many ways, we have become a burden to those that are around us, you know, a thing of this, that and the other, of disgrace, and it showed something of the Scots' both aggression and lack of esteem, because they're conquered, but nonetheless they were used by the English to supply at one

point 38 per cent of the English infantry when they were nonetheless 3 per cent of the population of this Nation State.

Why do you know that?

I don't know, I read it somewhere.

End of F4820 Side B

F4821 Side A

And my memory of that book might be wrong, but I remember it as being a relatively small book, is that right?

About the size of `Father's Garden', book size, hand book size.

And how was that one bound?

Pardon?

How was that one bound?

With great difficulty. I wanted it to be bound flat, and it's one of those things where Book Works worked against my wishes. I did fairly[??] express it clear, so I wanted it to come out as flat as possible and it came out rather less flat, so some of the type dribbles into the spine, to my regret.

What about colour in the book?

Oh the colour was celebratory, it just goes from cool to hot; I mean purple, royal purple and gold and silver, to add dignity to the Scots case.

Dignity?

Dignity, yes. And also the proposed Andrew's cross hopefully seen as such, made out what appears to be granite hopefully seen as such, moves in four successive cycles as the sun goes...I think it goes five, four, five, four, in numbers of pages, rhythmically. I only noticed that the other day. The thing becomes more blue, goes grey to blue progressively, it's a form of blue, is the saltire of St. Andrew. Put the flag of St. Andrew diagonal[??] cross of blue. Realisation.

And was that quite a calm book to do comparatively?

I played the music a lot, you know, and it's very emotionally charged.

And you made...

I also at the end put all the noughts together that showed the notes, and the notes were made up of, those noughts were made up of vembo[??] italic capitals that are six-point, turned on the side to make it look like a peaceful[??] note, [INAUDIBLE] notes. And I put them all together as a chain, because the Celtic Ogham Hercules figure, who was the inventor of language, according to the Celts, produced chains from his tongue of language going to every man, woman and child who spoke that language. So I put the notes together to make a chain.

And were you listening to that music in your little outbuilding?

Yes, much to Ruth's distress.

Oh so she could her it?

Well yes, she can't stand Scots music or, particularly peeboroch[ph] music which I will play interminably.

Right. I've never...

I never play in a car, because if you play in a car you're doing a hundred in no time at all. Just...[CAR NOISE]

And how much of a gap was there between this one and `Father's Garden'?

Can't remember.

And did `Father's Garden' grow out of it in any way? I mean, when I said to you about...

I don't know which came first.

Oh right, OK.

Can't remember which came first.

So can you tell me about that one?

`Father's Garden'? Done on the same paper and therefore the same size, because I took the sheet and cut it down the same way as `Martyrs'. Interesting to do something different with the same paper, called Zirkar Gehemet[ph], or Hamet[ph], it's dished[??], like plannish[ph]

paper. Rabbi Itzhak Luria of Safed in Upper Galilee, one of the founding father's of Cabala and the Chasidic religion from whom Ruth is supposed to be descended...

How very frightening.

Not frightening at all, particularly since, as Ruth's father says, a lot of Jews claim that kind of thing, you know, just to... So, anyway, her name is Luria, she's one of the Lurias, and there was a great scientist called Luria as well, and across Europe when they were left alone to flourish. Rabbi Luria of Safed blessed [INAUDIBLE], used to get up in the morning and pray at sunrise because he thought the world was innocent of all sin at dawn, which was a nice way to start.

I should think it was at its filthiest.

[LAUGHS] As well. He had to start somewhere. And he regarded his garden, which was of apple trees, trees of wisdom, as Jerusalem or Jerusalem therefore as a garden, and I thought it was a nifty thought that a type page was like a garden, because it has rows in it from which things grow and words, and therefore ideas. So I propose the type page, set within a page. If you look at the book there's a page within a page, and that was proposed of Jerusalem. Now you can also argue that there are eight typographic exits and entrances which I would be hard to explain to you but it's in terms of design which are figured as round bits. I propose that there are eight gates to Jerusalem, and I rang up a friend and said, `How many gates are there to Jerusalem? And make them eight.' He rang back and said, `You're very lucky,' he said, `there are seven gates to Jerusalem but one they don't talk about,' because in fact the Turkish gate is boarded up. I thought, great. So I set off and did the book, which is processional in that a line of the poem is exposed by the removing of one of the furrows or bars. The bar is set aside, both as a stave, a notion of a stave, because our father's juice flows everywhere and that stave implanted in my real father's garden, which he tried to control all the time, being a Protestant docker, nonetheless kept flowering. He was somebody who couldn't stop things growing or living, he had that touch, right? He poured concrete on everything to try and control it. So each stave came off and was set aside vertically in the book. The staves were also put to make the portcullis in one of the gates as a formal part. And as each line was removed randomly, I was going to do it one by one at one point but got it wrong, I thought, oh God! and I thought, well do it random, it's actually better, so I randomised it. So the poem slowly revealed through lines being revealed, but also the masculine formal Gill bold that it's set in is slowly picked apart and more feminine and elegant, benbo[ph] italic, it replaces it. So the thing loosens up, my father loosens up his garden, stops being such a puritan, right? And the thing is printed. Meanwhile the formal aspects of the layout are moved around and

allowed to dance, and meanwhile as each section, each - yes verse is finished, there's a formal dance with the elements and there's also a flowering of typographical material, inspiration for which I took from an Arabic, or Turkish book in the British Museum where I go quite a lot. But it just flowers, you know, as each verse finishes another flowering in the margins. And as each verse finishes I reveal one of the typographic equivalents to the three religions of Jerusalem, Islam, Christianity and Hebraism, right? So, it's a dance around that idea. Meanwhile I'm printing solids on the tops of these waves in the dishings of the paper, the surface of the paper, and sometimes printing inside the Chinese folded page, because each page is a double page, again at the fore edge, and then I varnish the pages and the inks show through the varnishing, because the varnish makes a faintly translucent, rather more parchment like. So it's a riot really, but pretty solid in terms of procession and methodology, and I think it's a great and interesting book because it's very book-size again, it's like a small, I dare say so, it seems like a visual bible, it's got that kind of jewelled thing to it, and I'm very pleased with the book.

Do you relate it back to `Father's Hook' at all?

Kind of in the senses about my father, but a different aspect of him, but it's also about God the Father and Son, it's about father's juice flows everywhere, and it's about Aaron's rod being planted and bursting into... So at the beginning I put in some rather misleading little vegetative decorations that I found just to make it look like it's going to be a very formal book, and at the end those vegetative decorations go up Aaron's rod and flower, you know, that rather phallic imagery.

And we're talking garden colours?

We're talking garden and flesh colours, and Nilotic colours, colours, particularly on the cover, which is very rich, which is very of the Nile and of Palestine, I hope, and very Arabic in a way.

But going back to the link with `Father's Hook', is it also a way of looking at your father X years on? I mean `Father's Hook' was still quite close to the death and everything.

Yes.

There's a sort of resolution in it isn't there?

Yes, yes. I think that book went relatively quickly, took under a year.

It's slightly more accessible to people, that book, I think.

It's because they think they're looking at[??] books, you know, they're used to looking at books in the same way[??].

I think it's, though, that what you've done with, the lines and furrows and things, is, it's easier to grasp on to what's happening than it is in some of the other books. It's less hidden in that...

Right, yes.

I mean there obviously are all these other layers you're talking about.

Right.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

`Hadrian's Dream' was the one you did with Ron King's advice[??], wasn't it?

Yes.

How did that come about? Because that's a bit of a blip for you.

Well that came about because, well obviously because Ron King asked me to do it. I mean he was doing a series of small books to celebrate him moving his press from A to B through people who made artists' books or people whose work he had published one way or another under Circle Press. And as I put into the catalogue for the New York Public Library show, I knew Asa Benveniste, who wrote the poem `Hadrian's Dream' a long time ago and he was one of the first people to see my books and encourage me. He actually wanted me to go into business with him.

Yes, we talked about that.

We talked about that. And I decided it wasn't the thing to do, and we kind of mildly fell out about it, not very heavily. But it was very nice of Ron to ask me to do that because I know that Asa was, although he was a cunning selfish artist like so many of us are, was nonetheless somebody who encouraged young poets particularly a great deal, he saw it as his job to do it, and it gave me a chance to thank Asa retrospectively by doing that book. So Ron was kind of

astute to ask me to do it. And I suppose I took up the rather traditional position, for me traditional position, of illustrating the text, because the text wasn't mine.

Had you ever done that before?

Never.

And were you uneasy about it?

No. I found it interesting. But you know, that, it goes back to that old problem of illustration of text and so on on, which I discussed before, but in this case the text not being mine I inevitably had to illustrate it. And I found...

Would you have taken it on if Asa had still been alive?

That's a good question. Probably not. But there's a figure in it of a radio, you know... Asa used to start his poems in this inductive way, I mean I think the old heroic poets used to read out a poem to induce the muse, they used to call the muse down with poetry at their own devising and then a muse would come down and supposedly the poetry flowed from the muse through the poet. And I had done that a few times myself both in the poetry and the books, there's some small poem that as it were prefigures the main poetics of the thing and it's an inductive happening, it's not just a kind of a preface. Asa's poetry, which somebody else called a kind of inspired meandering, you can feel him talk himself into the peculiar states that you have, or some people have, when they write poetry, so he starts to meditate on the sound of the radio and the position of the typewriter and how the sun goes round the quadrants of the day and lamp[??], and he mentions the lamp[??], and it's as though he's talking his way into the poem by looking at what surrounds him. But knowing Asa and how he concentrated on these things, I took the window out through which he looked at Hadrian's dream, the subject of the thing, near Hadrian's Wall, and I saw the, in my mind the four panes in the window as the four quadrants and let the sun peruse round it, and the light and darkness I made it a black sun, and the light coming, and the radio, I think I put them on notes coming out of the thing around the...I can't quite remember the graphics of it, but it was an attempt to illustrate certain aspects of the poem.

So what actual, what form was the art work? What have you done?

First of all the poem was set out in Gill extra bold and staggered, and I printed it here and there. Then I turned the poem literally upside down so it's standing on the face, on its face,

and I printed off the feet as an abstract of the poem, so there's funny lines, staccato lines as the poem turns upside-down physically, as you may recall. And the illustrations are from pen drawings that I had turned into magnesium plates, and printed from them.

And did you...

I don't think the book works that well, I think that I weaned it a bit too much, and the way the thing folds and unfolds is a bit confusing.

And did you make any false starts on the images?

No, just drew them.

And how, in terms of time, how does that relate to the others?

Well, it was done fairly quickly.

And did you have feelings for or against, being part of that series?

It's a good question. No, I took it...I mean I kind of took it like a design brief in a way. I mean once I said yes to Ron, I had said yes to Ron, you know, and [INAUDIBLE].

And is it something you would ever consider doing again?

No. But who knows? I mean someone like Ron might come along when someone like Asa's dead, who knows?

OK. And, totally different project then, `Execution'.

Right. `Execution' is a book that a lot of people have had difficulty with, including me. I am certain that when it was reviewed there was difficulty with it here and there. But as time goes past I find it a stronger and stronger book. It certainly moves away from some of the narrative forms of, what's the right term for this? I was going to say narrative forms of visuality. In other words the progress of images being manipulated and turned into things, or being in some...you know, you can feel it as a structure. Other things happen in the book and things... There is a visual structure, and what happens is that I made a steel plate etched and painfully sawed of a diagram by Jan Tchichold, who was a book designer, a classical book designer of the Modern Movement if I can put it that way, in the Thirties, Forties and Fifties,

and it's the, I think, rather dubious carving up of space that happens to establish certain, make[??] tones, and it's supposed to show you how, the best position, from the best side, and the best proportion of the disposition of type on any given rectangle of wide space. Of necessity the diagram is very angular, and the rectangles described by the diagram, the rectangles implied in the white space are made up of wood to suggest the rectangle, and steel to suggest the more irregular angular geometry of the diagram. And I saw that as, in a way as the structure of a book, and the lines of type were described by thick rules half an inch deep, printed over black in white, and these were suggestive to me of ribs to a body and were manipulated in that way, they took a walk, like certain elements of `Father's Garden'. But also if you looked at the page fully-frontally, the open spread, the double spread, it was rather like two eyes or a face, or two halves of a head, and there is a notion running through the book of the wolfman revealed; the other half that Jung describes, that in each person there is two faces from any one face. There's the person who normally looks at you and there's the other person looking out of the side. Now for the moment, just to switch my gaze to that other eye of yours, and I don't know if you're discomforted for it or don't notice, but that's the person who doesn't look a bit, that's the person who looks... Now, fancy or otherwise, that's a notion that's in Jung, and it's a powerful notion in my mind, there are two people looking out of any one face. And the wolfman can be seen as the, what's called in mythology the tarnist[??] or the person who comes to kill the king, the revived person, the revived year, the green man, one who is therefore killed by his[??] person who replaces him, sometimes twice a year, sometimes once a year under the old calendars. And there's an odd notion of destruction and revival. There are some tilts of Egyptian mythology which I think are not clear. So, the diagram is progressively destroyed through the book, taken to pieces, to reveal a cracked black mirror which is the mirror in which one half looks at the other half. There are four faces I think who I have described as four faces in search of one personality to represent youth, age, and there's a Dionysiac little imp that skips about who's a shadow self, who is the shadow self which you keep looking at when you look at the other person in the face. So it's a very odd book, and it's almost entirely without words excepting that I have described one dream of mine which is spelt out in simple words, in almost a Beckett way, which describes a dream where I found myself - shall I tell you the dream? Got it on computer somewhere but I'll make it short. I certainly made it short in the book. Found myself in a blond[??] room with, and I realise it's an old school room with blond[??] desks and so on. There are grown-ups standing up beside each desk, you know, grown-ups, you know, in a sort of room of 10-year-olds, and they're all looking very distressed, and the reason they're distressed is that I am going forward to the podium where the teacher is, you know, in trouble again, but at the podium is not the teacher but a large muscular man with a dark, young man with a dark face. Now immediately you may think that this is about repressed homosexuality or whatever, I don't mind if you so think, but the consistency of this dream and its different manifestations

suggests that it's the tarnistry[ph]. Now what this young man is doing is looking very upset too. What's he's upset about is because he's playing with a huge axe and a bloody block and he keeps throwing the axe at a piece of wood to show off that he's skilled, young and muscular and so on, and he keeps muffing with it[??]. And I say to him, `Relax. Everything is all right.' Because what he's got to do is behead me. So I lay my head on the block and I hear the whisper of the axe. You know what I do? I wake up, which is brilliant. Now what I did was to make a condensation of that dream down to about a dozen words, and I set it in a particular type called Spartan[??], or copperplate in American, which has been used for visiting cards, and it has caps of different sizes all that align, you know, you can say `Dr. Ruth Campbell' and it will all be in caps, capital letters, but the D of R[ph] and the R of Ruth and C of Campbell with be slightly bigger but it's nonetheless aligning. So it's a particular typeface designed to have four or five sizes of cap all aligning the same size. And I found that looking at it I could actually by dropping certain syllables down a size I could actually condense this story, which is already of a dozen, only of a dozen words or so. And that's what I do. I slowly collapse the story into the most, you know, most peculiar metals you have on stars that look like five million tons a square centimetre or something. So there's a condensation, there's a discussion of the left and the right, of one person destroying another person and being revived, and that's about it really.

If I remember rightly that's a physically very heavy book isn't it?

Very heavy book, yes, and it's very condensed, a massive amount of printing. Quite a joy to do, I mean I found a lot... The other thing about that book is that every now and again there are books in the canon, if that's what we call it, or series of books, that summarise what's been found out in the previous books in terms of technique or design or process or psychology, and sometimes predict what's going to happen in the others, because they're a kind of a free fire zone of experiment. And I think `Execution' is important if only because it does both; it kind of encapsulates what I've done in other books, and it starts off other hairs[??], and it will take a long time for us to, for me to tell you what they are, dismantle the book and so on.

And it's a very black book, literally.

Dark book, yes. Well it's blacker than what I'm doing now.

But what is the range of colour in it?

I don't know, what you mean, what's the range? A lot of colour, a lot of darkness and a lot of colour.

I don't remember it well enough. It's not all very black and...?

No, there are very black bits in it and very colourful bits in it. It's generally tonally dark.

Is there sudden colour in it?

Mm?

Is there sudden colour in it?

Yes there's a lot of sudden colour in it, that's the way; I mean it's dark generally and then there's sudden flashes of colour, that's right.

And did you arrive at that, as we've talked before, through improvisation, or were you aimed at that?

Yes, although I knew I was going to dismantle the grid and I was going to do certain things with it, yes.

So did it feed partly into `Firedogs', is that partly what you're saying?

Yes, although `Firedogs' formally harks back to `Father's Garden' in the lay-out of the pages, and except what I've...I mean you know, in `Father's Garden' there is a page within a page as it were, but in `Firedogs' there's a page within a page within a page, there are kind of three grids operating, and I reverse the polarity of black and white on each page. So what's a border on one page, black, the same border will be white, and the inner border will be black on the other page, and that reverses, and I play with that a lot.

And, `Firedogs' is the one, isn't it, where you have those sort of scraped things, shapes from nails that look slightly like tadpoles, slightly like rain.

Yes, you call them tadpoles, yes, well it's more me working on the plates with a drill on the bed of the press.

Can you really talk about that, because I remember when you did in the past, it was very exciting the way that book came together because of all those sort of, almost like explosions and chemicalising.

Well, there's a sequence again, I mean this was done during the, what's called the Gulf War, or the first Gulf War, time will tell, and I found myself listening to the news and thinking about all this destruction and waste. What I did was to use six poems, first of which starts in a valley in the north of England that Ruth and I saw more or less raped by log cutting, because an estate had mismanaged its affairs and the banks insisted that pines would be put in. And it goes through to other matters including the title poem which is called `Firedogs' which refers to a dreadful event that happened a little while before that of, in the Thames estuary under privatisation in the contracting-out of the destruction of waste from hospitals, obviously one of the contractors hadn't bothered to burn any of it and they just tipped it in the river, so you got all of the worst things you can think of coming out of a hospital, including foetuses and spare limbs and swabs and bits of entrails and just dreadful old needles. And it seemed to me a terrible comment on where we were going to. And there were some other bits of verse from references to the Blitz and wartime and bombs and so on. And I placed them intuitively in a line, and over, I think it's six parts, because there are six poems, I did six things - well, not six, I did a couple of things. One was to, as with `In the Door Stands a Jar' where I think I did it first, I took out various phrases or words or syllables from the text and buried them in the margins, the dark margins, as kind of echoes of things, and what I did in this book, I took that further. If there's hypothetical...there are six poems, 1 to 6; I took 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 poems, I took phrases or words, mostly phrases, from each of the poems, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and then reversed their order so that around poem 1, somewhere around poem 1 there would be phrases or words from 6 as a predicted thing, and then progressively all the way up to 6 there would be phrases from 1, which would be echoic or, you know, an echo of what you've read. I don't know if this works but I found it an interesting thing to do in language terms that one half, you know, progressively you're being reminded of what you've read, or you're being told of what you might read somewhere. At the same time I took type, I took elements of what type, typography and letterpress printing were put together with in the past, that is bits of type and bits of metal from which you print, and the type I laid on its side to type, I had nails[??] which contained, constrained the metal. I tapped the nails into type high, which is arduous or tedious, and printed from those. I printed from bits of metal that described the grid of the book, and I took type and laid it on its side and made it up to type high as it were like bits of things, like randomised elements of wastage and so on, and in different ways suggested implosion, explosion and fire and waste in black bits of ash and, you know, one place put in a piece of pidgin from the South Seas, ashes, ship [INAUDIBLE] on fire, which I think was a nice thing to say.

Sorry, this is ashes of a pigeon?

No, pidgin, the language pidgin from the South Seas, pidgin speak.

Oh, OK.

Remember pidgin?

Yes, pidgin English.

Pidgin English, yes.

Because what you're talking about of the waste products is all waste in print terms isn't it?

Yes, but also it's an analogy of the waste that was going on in the world and also using the bits as waste. But the poems were about wastage in different ways as well. Meanwhile there were three thunderbolts of Jove, admonition... Sorry, I forget the... Premonition, admonition and punishment, but there was another word.

Hang on.

End of F4821 Side A

F4821 Side B

Premonition, admonition and retribution. And these were thunderbolts from Jove, which is what Jove visited upon people, and they turned from simple arrows of metal looking like rules, more and more I hope like, I made them more complex and looking like scorpions or F16s or whatever, as things that are visiting fire and destruction. So it's a kind of a destructive book. The other...but to me the other interesting thing about it, it was...it's a very beautiful book, and it was this old thing about roses growing out of shit, this whole thing, problem about art and artists, about strange and beautiful things flowering from extremely difficult and violent circumstances, which is one of life's truths.

But wasn't it true that while you were doing the printing things were breaking off it all the time?

Oh yes, that's right, yes. I mean I was working, yes, I was working with the...I pursued this thing of working with a drill on the metal of the press and, you know, some of the type was lifting off that had been stuck down with superglue and things like this, you know.

And when you are working on a book like this, what kind of hours do you do, what's your pattern?

Well, an architect's wife said to me, this was in Oxford, `Do you work all night?' I said, `No I don't. I get up in the morning and have my ablutions and I have a breakfast and I do the `Guardian' quick-quick crossword and read `Doonsbury' and I go down to the studio and I hopefully test the racks and find everything to be dry, and I usually start work at 8 to half-past.' Or I was in those days, I start a bit later now. And I de-rack and sort things out which takes a lot of time, and there's a whole kind of rigmarole and process of, you know, loading pages to drawers and checking things off and making sure you know what you're doing and then finding you don't know what you're doing, and all of that. But then I normally start printing about 10, and because of the disposition of my racks and how you can move works from drying rack to drying rack under certain circumstances, I usually finish all of my finish...I fill up all of the racks and I finish my printing usually on, dead on 6 o'clock, wash up if I'm going to need to wash up, the press, and sit down and open a bottle of wine, and a book.

A very good life.

It's regular, and it keeps you fit, and I don't work till 11 o'clock at night. On the other hand when I'm on a book and it's hot, I mean I'm not...I'm on a book and it's not hot because I've

got great interruptions and I'm still coping with coming back from Australia and I'm dealing with a new studio where the drying is different and... But when I'm hot I will work seven days a week on it, you know.

And, why is it called `Firedogs', going back to the book?

Firedogs are, as far as I understand, the irons that hold a fire in a grate, so it's a kind of crucible, open crucible.

In this case, did the title come quite late on?

No. I think it came quite soon.

And what's the reason there's firedogs and then an abstract?

Because people keep beating me over the head and saying, `Yes, but why don't you show your poetry off on its own?' you know. `Are you shy about your poetry? Is this kind of constant concealment?' and so on. And in this particular instance I had set the type in Bodoni type bought in specially to be as pure typography as possible to play off against all of the wilder things I was doing. So I set it within a frame, if you remember the books, they sat in a window those poems, almost as boringly done as possible. Ruth thought it jarred, but I thought it was apposite, it wasn't harmonious but it was apposite. And then I thought, well I've still got these... And usually by the time I've finished a book, everything is destroyed around me, there's nothing but bits, but in this case I found myself at the end with six nicely set poems, and I thought, well why not drop it into some paper without any other images and just see if you can still do that thing of, you know, without trying to be traditional, but to see if I can do a piece of modern clean poetry typography. So I did that, thought it was an exercise, a nice, you know, clean-fingered press-ups I call it. And so I did 26 of those because I had enough paper to do 26, and I printed on...I printed on some repair paper, archival repair paper, which was very difficult, very nice paper but very difficult to print on, but I had it, and as usual I was playing chance to see if it would work, and I was rather pleased to do it.

And my memory...

So I sold a few and I've given a few away.

My memory of that book was that there's this very sort of extraordinary sort of soft apricoty colour every now and then.

Yes, right. That was the binder put the apricot in the paper and it was just the end papers.

But also within it you get sudden...as if something's been scraped away and there's bright colours, there's blues and greens and...

Don't remember any of them.

No? [INAUDIBLE]?

I used the type images as a thing to be seen through the paper and I printed down[??] again. A rather Japanese way, you know, rather careful. It's a very cool piece of work.

You were talking about...who bound that then?

Simaleavich.

But, when we talked about the early books you were at the stage then when you were giving them away, and one thing we haven't talked about in the progress of all this is, you have actually realised that you needed to go out and sell those books.

Yes.

You've been doing that quite consistently.

Yes.

Can you say a little bit about that, how did you [INAUDIBLE] that?

Well, when I say I gave them away, I mean the first three books, `A Few Ways Through the Window' and `Terror Terror' and then `Father's Garden', I gave away most of the first one; I gave away pretty well all of `Terror', I've still got a few left. Even gave one to Clive Philpott[ph] just as a wind-up. `It's about time you did a cheap book,' and I said, `Here's one. And what's more, you can have it.'

Was this a long time ago?

The day before yesterday.

Oh I see. I thought you meant you had given it to him...

No no, the day before yesterday. He's still banging on about democracy and cheapness and stuff. And `Father's Hook' I gave away quite a few, but I've still got a few left, and I did start to charge for them. And I think what happened was, I remember going around parties drunk and sober and saying to people, `Did you like that book?' `Oh yes, it was really great.' I thought, well, that's, you know, that's it is it, you know? So there's a certain arrogance come in there. But I did really, I do remember reading, is it Cellini or Bellini's `Life of the Artist as Sculptor', in Venice when he first cast the horse, the big bronze horses in the square, and he said the day after he cast them, which was a triumph to do and I don't compare myself to this man at all, but the position is similar although disparate in size, magnitude, the next day the horses had poems printed on them, pinned to them, by citizenry who had seen it, just gone home and written a poem. Now, what I was saying was that I didn't think that I should give my book away and have poems pinned about my person the following day or be celebrated, but you would have...I thought, I suppose I gave them away as an anarchist but I also gave them away expecting a response, and I didn't get that response. So I thought, I'm afraid, well in that case I'll sell them. And now and again I still give them away, have given them away, but I realise...

But how did you go about selling them?

How did I go about selling them? I think I sold a few around privately for kind of ten quid or fifteen quid or whatever, you know. I think that Tony Zwicker had caught up with me by this time and had sold a few, and she's a woman who still will sell my books when I do something. I respect her, and found her entirely honourable, with one or two kind of exceptions through slips of memory and what she said, but she's adapted to my situation over the years, realised that I'm in the market whether she likes it or not, and has come to put up with it. I think one or two other people I'd started to deal with but fallen out with them and I shall not mention their names, and what I have to say about one of them would get me in court even if I was right, I think, for defamation, but this person's been found out by others now, what I found was that I would be much happier, would have been much happier if dealers could sell enough for me to sit and home and sell work, but they don't and they cannot, and that is partly to do with the fact that my books have got increasingly more expensive and difficult, so people who normally buy antiquarian books tipping over into artists' books just don't

necessarily automatically see what the books are about and respond to them, and they're expensive, and for some reason I can sell them, and I'm quite good at it.

How do you know who the market is, how do you know where to find them?

Well it's a secretion of rumour, hearsay and experience, and I still don't know. I mean if someone like, Ron knows lots of people and he's...and I suppose he was a kind of model, I mean I knew that he went abroad and did the business and I knew that people took the mickey out of him somewhat for doing that, and that's the old English amateurism and a little bit of racism in there too. But I found that, you know, I found that that was the only thing to do, it's the only way to do it.

When I first started to write about your books I remember they were all at Bertram Rota. What was the relationship there?

The reason for that was, I had met this, I can't remember how I met him, this wonderful guy John Bern[ph] at Rota's who's a classics scholar out of Cambridge and, don't know, can't remember how I met him but... Oh I think I rang up Bertram Rota's because of a friend in Canada, Larry Walridge[ph] who used to be a book seller in London, he was one of the first, one of the early beats in New York, hid Bobby Seal[ph] in a flat when the FBI were shooting Black Panthers, worked on the Navaho reservation, and turned his American nationality in when they voted Ronald Reagan in, went to Guatemala, or Nicaragua, in the worst times, and gave away a load of wolf drills sandals and jeans, helped people build a hospital at the age of 65, which I think showed a bit of class. A good man, a good man.

Was he one of the people who died recently?

Yes, one of my four friends who died the other year. But he and his wife, who is still alive, Tony, I think suggested that they knew Bertram, they knew John Bern[ph] at Rotas and I went to show him my work and he was very alarmed by it but he has got a good education and worked at it and slowly got to like the works, and I found it convenient to leave the books there so that if anybody ever said, `Can I go and see these books?' I could say, `You can go to Bertram Rota and see them.'

Oh right, so they weren't particularly selling them for you?

They sold a few, and if people went to see the books there and wanted to buy one they would buy through Bertram Rota's because their discount was very civilised, 25 per cent.

And do you still have a relationship with them or not?

No, because John's left there, and you know, the other dealers have been working from 30 per cent up to, they now want gallery prices, anything up to 50, 60 per cent, which, that's because they think they can, gallery people make people's careers. Good luck to them, they're not going to make mine.

And at what point did you start managing to sell to the V & A?

Well, I gave a talk in Oxford at a conference in Oxford, and I was absolutely crapping myself with nerves; I mean it was worse than giving a talk on graphic design or talking about art. For some reason I could hardly handle it, and Ruth took me for a walk along the Isis or Thames early that morning and calmed me down a bit, and I gave a talk with everybody said was good, although, you know, shouting and hollering. I had taken a great deal of care as a designer to get good slides and done the slides myself, and this woman came up to me at the end and said, `My name's Elizabeth Esteve-Coll,' and I said, `That's an extremely peculiar name.' I said, `Which are you, Esteve or Coll? I don't understand.' I mean I was actually confused. She said, `Oh well I'm, you know, at the V & A. Call me.' So I called her, and she said she wanted to look at my books. And I think I was teaching at Brighton, I was hacking it from Oxford to Brighton, was one of the places I was going to, and it was at a time when, it was that year there was a colossal snowstorm, you know, trains went off the rails, everything froze up, I mean the roads were land-locked, and I had an appointment to go to the V & A from Brighton on a particular evening after teaching, and I got into the car and I thought, I can't get back to Oxford, I doubt if I can get to London. This was in the car. Everybody was sliding off the road and I had been in Canada and know that you drive on roads in a different way when there's snow, you don't just crawl along a mile an hour, you do it differently. And I hacked it to London and I parked in, by the V & A which looked like, the street looked like Leningrad, you know, banks of snow, cars parked at funny angles, people scurrying about in ones and twos and huge coach, you know. And I dragged the case in there, and she said, `I just didn't think we were going to see you.' And I said, `Well here it is,' and I did my number. She said, `First of all these are grotesquely under-priced, and secondly I'm going to buy this this and this.'

What did she buy?

I can't remember. `Abab', I don't know, she bought...got them at good prices. But they've gone on to buy all of my books except one, which they say they can't afford.

Is this `Ten Years?'

No, it's `Skute Awabo'. I think they think I'm probably going to give them a copy.

They must be mad. Well tell me about that book then.

`Skute Awabo' is again another odd and difficult book, but I think a ground-breaker. It's in an edition of twelve because the labour was colossal. There's this whole thing about paper you know, what kind of paper you print on, and sometimes I'm supposed to choose my paper with care but quite often I choose the paper with what I've got left over in the cupboard, unless it has some, I've got some other need to buy a particular kind. I found the idea of printing on a cycle of papers, this book again is cyclical, it's in first of all two halves, the first half being a meditation on water, visual meditation on water, the second being a meditation on fire, because skute awabo means fire and water, or water and fire, I think it's water and fire, which of course if you turn it round is whisky, but it's also...the subtitle is, `Wasa Wasa' which means long and difficult journey, or far away in Ojibway Indian.

What language are we in?

Ojibway, North American Ojibway Indian, or native American as we now call it, which is both patronising and inaccurate because [INAUDIBLE], and I would prefer to call Indians by whatever they call themselves, which is usually `the people', and which usually translates into the given name we've got, so Ojibway is, you know, the Ojibway nation and the Cree are a nation of the Ojibway language speakers.

How do you spell Ojibway?

Ojibway, there's many ways of spelling it, there's several ways to spell it, but the way I spell it is O-J-I-B-W-A-Y.

Right. And how do you know all this, I mean why do you know their story and their language?

Here we go again. Because, for two reasons. One I went down to the ethnography museum near Cork Street, what's it called?

The Museum of Mankind.

The Museum of Mankind. And went into the language section. They weren't happy about it but I said I want to look up some Indian Ojibway words.

So hold on, where had you got the words from in the first place?

I'm going to tell you in a minute.

Right.

That's the first reason. I went to, I know them specifically because I went to that museum and rooted about. And also because I was shown, I was given a book of short stories by a friend of mine, Cedric Horner, who did that etching over there, we discussed already, and that painting. He was a Jack London fan and a countryman. These short stories were by two people, Westerlund and McFie, two young men, one Scots and one I think Swede, who at the turn of the century were on the Alaska and Yukon borders trapping, young trappers, and they must have been in their twenties, extraordinary lives, and also seekers of gold. One winter they found...I mean there's a whole series of short stories in this book called `Wasa Wasa', OK? There's one particular short story, it's called `Wasa Wasa', and this is the story. One winter in the dead of winter they found an Ojibway Indian nearly dead of cold and they carried him into their cabin and they saved his life by doing what you have to do which is rub her[ph] mouth curiously with ice first and then slowly bring him to consciousness, not heat him up, and they fed him certain things and watered him, and he understood that they had saved his life, which they certainly had. And they talked to him, and he said, well he came from some place up in the north and they said, `Well we've noticed around your neck you have a necklace with bears' claws on and also set in beautiful deep red gold'. And they said, `We would very interested to know where that came from.' He said, `I know you would, and I was figuring when you were going to ask me,' he said. `But I recommend that you don't go and look for it, because the people up there are bad ass Indians and I'm one of them, and we will be very...they will be very angry. I owe you, but if you go up there you won't come back.' So of course they went up there. And in my mind the book is about the pursuit of gold, which is an analogy for blood because it's red gold; it's about lust and blood, greed and blood, and travelling in water. They go up in pursuit of this gold and one chief, John Lequoi[ph], there's the chief of this band of Indians, discovers them when they found gold. They find gold curiously, although it's not in the story, by having a very bad time looking for this gold, they don't find it, and they shoot a moose or an elk to feed, and where the moose falls they find the gold. And they're starting to dig it out and Laquoi[ph] comes past, which I misspelt in the book by the way, it's Laquoi[ph] not Lequoi[ph], can't alter it now. And bad

things happen, and in the, they're captured and in the end they escape and go down a river, and in pursuit, they are pursued by these Indians who mount fires either side of the river to illumine them as they go down in the darkness, which I think is a wonderful image that, through illumination you might find destruction. So the book is about the pursuit of gold, pursuit of greed, pursuit of gold and blood, and escape through the waters which are amniotic through birth and rebirth. And it links to Moses and Aaron smiting the Egyptian waters and turning things into blood, turning the river into blood through...to tell the Pharoahs who are a model of the State, they represent the State in my mind, to watch it. So one half of the book is a meditation on water, and I thought no wavy lines, so I got a big piece of six-point, four-point rule and put it on the bed of the press and just applied pressure to it so it took up these two beautiful curves. I thought, terrific, and I'll have it running down the book like this all the way through, that's the thread. And there was a gold and silver thread because there's the gold, the red gold and the silver of the water and the moon, who is Artemis who is a terrible trouble to me all through my life, I have trouble with Artemis, but I will win.

What do you mean?

Well she collects people in and breaks their...makes broken creatures, and she pretends to make them whole but never lets them out of the cave, because of her ravishment. She's a huntress that was ravished and vows to vengeance thereafter.

And when do you think she got you?

Mm?

When do you think she got you?

Never does. Artemis, bitter waters, the bitter root, the bitter weed. So, the first half is a meditation on water; the second a meditation on fire with the figure of the river running through it, the figure of, the notion of a rod or a staff, Aaron's rod and staff running through it, and thereafter it's a revolution of five or six different kinds of paper for different reasons running through, and other devices, and a grid made up of mounting blocks raised up to type height to look like a rather primitive mask to counterpoint the curves and so on of the river. The word mounted above the staves, `wasa wasa' is spelt out through the two halves, `wasa' on one half, `wasa' on the second half, and that goes through a cycle too. There's a grid to suggest, the grid that holds a fire again which bursts into flames through the thing, and so on. It's notional, it's rhythmic; some people get to it, some people don't. A colossal amount...pardon?

Colours?

A colossal amount of colour, colossal amount of colour. I mean there's a lot of colour.

And what's the edition of that?

Twelve, with three artist's proofs, bound in vellum.

Vellum is a very un-Campbelly like thing, why did that happen?

That was Simaleavich's suggestion and it's not a bad one. The problem with it is that the vellum tends to curve under the wrong...

And it had to be expensive because of the materials, apart from anything else?

Yes, and the extremely limited number of, extremely limited edition and the sheer amount of time it took me.

And if people want to see it in a public collection, where is it?

Well it's not in England in a public collection, it's in the Yale Centre for British Art, who have got all of my books now, and the New York Public Library, and I think the Getty has got it, I can't remember.

I mean going back to the selling of the books...

The Getty's got it, yes. Oh, and I know who else has got it, the University of Colorado at Boulder.

And going back to the sale of books, I mean America is an important market for you isn't it?

Yes. But I am doing things in Germany at the moment which are interesting.

How did those come about?

Well, first of all by default because a very good seller of books who I won't name in Germany, who I am very friendly with but nonetheless they haven't done anything for a long

time, so after a while I have to decide to make my own moves, and I was offered the show at the Gutenberg Museum this spring, and went over and went to Leipzig, went to a couple of other places, and got a good reception, sold a lot of work, so I shall do it again.

And you go and do a sort of comparable American tour to sell to Ron, or is your route different?

I think it's different, I think we cross at certain places; I think...he's got far more contacts than I have, and good luck to him, and I think he sells, I mean he sells far more than I do, I think, but I don't know. I mean it's just something that we don't really, shouldn't really talk too much about together. And I think he touches a different market and he sells roughly in a different price range, so, in a way they're not comparable.

And do you enjoy the selling part or not?

Yes I do. I do because I do it far better than I ever did as a designer, and I find that if people are responding to your work well there's no pain to it at all. The only question is whether they're going to buy anything, and if they say no I know it's because they haven't got any money, or they don't want to, and that doesn't cause me any pain because I haven't got...I don't think it reflects on the work.

But it must be quite a worry, the cost of travelling round America to sell books must be huge isn't it?

Well, do you know that's something that...no, that's something that drives the dealers in America wild, because they can't understand how I do it, and a simple way is that you get a transatlantic ticket for roughly £250, £300 these days, and you could have add-ons for £180 or £160, depending on the season. You can have three flights in continental America, which means hypothetically I can go from New York to Los Angeles, to New York to Los Angeles, for £150, just preposterously cheap. You can then put add-ons to that for £60 or £50 a flight. And all you have to do is to work out which is going to be cheaper in America, to buy it locally or whether it's going to be, you know, cheaper to buy it for £60 that leg.

But that's nevertheless still an expense [INAUDIBLE].

No way, it's 500...let's say that's £500, right? £500, and in some places you will stay in motels and some places you will be put up by kind people and nice people.

So you're not...you're almost certain to come back with money rather than just breaking even?

I always come back with money. I mean I heard about someone, who I think we both know, who went over to America and was there for so many weeks and didn't sell anything. I mean I...I don't think I'd blow my brains out but it's just never happened.

And were you partly trying to sell while you were in Australia?

Yes I did.

Tell me a bit about that.

I didn't do everywhere that I could have gone, but I understood that there weren't that many places. I mean, Australia for a start is a small country in a big land, you know, it's only 17 million people there. Well, you know, put Scotland, Ireland and Wales together, you might get 17 million people. And so there are only a limited number of institutions. Ron King had been out there before, just before. And I found people very pleasant, they liked the work, and where they could they've bought, and I suspect I might sell more.

I thought a lot of their museums just bought Australian art.

Well there's that thing over there, yes.

But you didn't find it a problem?

No. Only in one place that I won't name. I mean there was a person who wanted to buy more of my stuff and there was obviously a big, big Australian galoot with an attitude who was rude and difficult.

And did you go out there to teach?

I understood why, you know, it's no problem. Pardon?

Did you go out there to teach?

I had a gig to do a bit of teaching there, but it blew out for logistic and organisational reasons.

Wasn't that the reason you went in the first place?

No, I went out there because Ruth was invited to go out there and do research in Brisbane with our friends, with her friends.

Oh I see.

Right.

And do you feel changed by Australia at all?

I don't feel changed by any long journey. [BREAK IN RECORDING] Are you going to put a...

Go on, keep going till the end.

I mean it's half-way to being a republic, so it's half-way to being a democracy, unlike here, you know, which hasn't got a chance. And I feel the same thing in America, I feel like I'm in a republic, and that feels good.

End of F4821 Side B

F4822 Side A

You said that you had only ever lost one book in the sense of it not progressing.

Yes.

What was that?

I was wondering why you didn't ask at the time, but while in Oxford I bumped into some art dude there who was a printer who made representations to me that he thought we should do a book together, and I kind of talked to him about it, because one of the, you know, the particular subject that I was willing to pursue very much lent itself to the image-making processes like lithography or silk-screen, and he's a silk-screen printer. And I did a great deal of preparatory work with photography and so on but I found him very difficult to work with and costive and uptight, and I knew that he had his own personal problems about being costive and uptight in his own work, and I suspect he wanted me, by working with me he might loosen up, but he wasn't going to, and I ditched it, you know, before there was any bad blood.

And are you ever likely to use any of the ideas from it? Was it a project...?

I don't know, I keep digging it out and looking at it, but I've got a lot of stuff like that, it's like loam in the garden, I mean... Just before I start anything at all... [SIRENS] They're late home for their tea again I expect. Before I start any project I find myself opening drawers and bringing out old negatives and images. I could do something... I go through this bizarre ritual, bizarre because it's the same every time, of planning how I might turn this particular set of images or whatever, this material, into something. I've got three or four things like that, and they never do, you know, well so far anyway.

When you've finished a book is there then a sort of latent period, or what happens?

Well usually where I think a book is finished is usually dreadfully inaccurate, because there's usually a lot more work to do, correcting, you know, looking a it, putting something right, seeing a lost opportunity. I mean I've sometimes said that, you know, in many ways you've got the mentality of a fighter pilot or a rock climber; you have to know precisely what danger you're getting into and in a funny way forget it, you know. There's an element of self-deception in flying helicopters and rock climbing, and doing this kind of thing where you persuade yourself, `Oh I'm going to crack this in two weeks,' you know, `Oh I'll get up there

in,' so much time or whatever. I can do this. In fact it's never two weeks, you know, it's months and months and months. So there's a cut-off point where you think things ended. I mean there's this whole problem about when is a painting finished, and the same is true of these books. When is it finished? And you predict when it's going to finish but the thing is only finished when you stop working on it, and you can go on a lot longer than you think you would, long after every intention has been fulfilled. And then there's the whole Stich about the wrestling with the binder and getting it bound and getting a copy out in time, and then you've got to go through the business of letting people discreetly know that the book's available, and working out when to take it around and who to show it to. So there's a certain commercial thing that comes in, but it doesn't mean to say you can't be already playing; I mean as I've said I've actually been doing two or three books at once, sometimes, but it's very rare.

And how often do you look back at the past books?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No answer to that, I don't know.

But not never?

Not never, no.

Right. And how alive are they in your mind, or are they something that's finished?

Well, you see that's an easier question to answer about paintings because I think of paintings, you know, they're sometimes radioactive; even when they're finished they're still beaming out at you, informing later work. It's hard to say that about a book because the thing tends to sit in a drawer, or in a cupboard. But I think they inform. I mean I was looking at the books the other night because there were some people around looking at books, and you know, a good friend said they're still a joy to look at, you know, and she knows them very well. And I said, `Yes, they are, it's interesting, you know.' But during my working day I don't think that way, I've got to be looking at what I'm doing at the present.

And which of them, of the past books, do you think is closest to your soul?

I really think they're all very close, I mean I really do. I would say very specifically I would say `Broken Rules and Double Crosses', `Father's Garden' - `Father's Hook', `Father's Garden', `Firedogs', are actually I think, you know... `Abab' less so.

Because it's so playful?

Because it's so playful, and I wasn't particularly involved with it so much; I mean I prepared the art work but somebody else printed it.

It was sort of circumstantial as well wasn't it.

I don't know what you mean by that.

Well that it came out of being, staying in a house and...

Yes yes, I think so, yes. Yes I think you're right, it was...yes it was a neat little bit of gymnastics. I like them all for different reasons. It's like having a family of grotesquely different children, you know, but they're all yours.

And when you have exhibitions like the one that will come up at Yale and like the one in New York, you see them in relationship to one another don't you. Do you think of them like that?

You do very much, but you also see them in relationship to the person who laid them out and how it's done. I mean without question the best show I've ever had was the most recent one at the Gutenberg Museum, which unfortunately, got reviewed in Mainz, a couple of good reviews, but it didn't get photographed properly, which was a catastrophe because it looked terrific.

What did you like about it?

Well, it was laid out, it was in a...the mise en scène, it was a very good Germanic modern room with really good cases. I mean as a show room it's a terrific place, very very good lighting. Eva Hannebüt-Benz, who is a terrific curator, had her own ideas about how it should be done, could not be shaken from anything unless she saw a good reason, but nonetheless we ended up collaborating.

How do you spell her name?

Eva, E-V-A Hannebüt H-A-N-N-E-B-U-umlaut-T hyphen Benz, as in Mercedes Benz. We collaborated to put on a very good show with it clear being that she was the leader. I mean I said to her I have to make decisions about curators these days as to whether I'm going to fight

them or let them do the job, and I decided to let her do the job, but thereafter, you know, we talked about it but she had the...

What did she actually do then?

Well she picked the books, we decided which books were gong into what. She made a decision to put up `Ten Years in Uzbekistan' all the way round the walls in spreads, which just looked...because they're very, they're poster-like, I mean it was just a stunner, it looked absolutely wonderful; wish we could have photographed it. She very much wanted `Amoroma' in the...she wanted `Bibliophagy' but it was too heavy to move.

How do you spell that?

Bibliophagy? Well, spell it yourself. Come on, it's what I used to do with my daughters. They say, `How do I spell this?' I said, `You have a go.' Have a go. Bibliophagy. How would you spell it?

Well how do you spell Fagey, F-A-G-Y?

P-H-A-G-Y.

Well exactly, that's why I wanted to know.

Phagus, eating. Bibliophagy. B-I-B-L-I-O-P-H-A-G-Y. She wanted `Amoroma' in, and we put it in, we had difficulty putting it in because of the lighting and so on, and we ended up putting it up in the air, and it was like a flying angel, it was absolutely...at least, you know, three bronze hooves very heavy up in the air but on the black felt tray, you know. Absolutely outstanding, you know. She's got very funny kind of German playfulness. I mean I said to her, `You are clearly an Anglophile, Ava,' when I first... `Why is this?' She said, `Vell,' she said, `I vent to the Hampstead School for Girls.' I thought, right, OK. And she said, `When I first came to England I came to Liverpool Street Station and on the platform in the sunlight was a man in, what do you call it?' And I said, `A porter.' She said, `A porter. And he was tap-dancing.' She said, `I think I like this country.' [LAUGHS] Tap-dancing.

But she obviously understood the sculpture in them didn't she.

Yes, she's got a very good eye, a good eye for the books, and it was just, it was a pleasurable, really pleasurable show. It just physically all went together, the cases matched the books, you know, and...

Were they made for them?

No, they were existent, they were existent.

And were they flat or were they raised?

Flat, and they're kind of groin height so you can lean over, but quite large and perspex that come out from their bases, so your feet can be underneath.

And did she show several pages of books or what did she do?

Yes, we did a whole mixed thing of multiples and prints that I've done, and sculpture. It's a lovely show, I mean...

And did she show covers?

Covers?

Mm.

Oh yes, covers and slipcases.

Was it all in one room?

Yes. Well, yes, and some of it was up on a landing, a little bit out on the landing.

How did that show come about?

Well, through Ron King, who had Ava over in London and said, `Well you've got to go and see this guy Ken Campbell,' and she actually came over and looked at the books and, very much to his credit.

That's nice. And, tell me then about `Ten Years in Uzbekistan', which is very unusual for you because it's a collaboration.

Yes. We, the man I collaborated with, David King as he now calls himself, he used to be Dave to me, we were students together at the London College of Printing. He went on to have a fairly glittering career as an award-winning graphic designer, was one of the first people to put together the Sunday colour supplements, and you know, went into Fleet Street and did all of that, although his politics were of the extreme Left I think, and still are. And he also did sterling work in the Anti Nazi League, did all of those strong posters and so on. He's done a lot of publishing with his particular rather vigorous constructivist style of graphic design, for which he is known. And we've kind of touched base, I mean I didn't know him well at the London College of Printing, I think he was in a year below me, but over the years I suppose we've kept an eye on what each other's doing, and we met a couple of years ago and agreed that we might do a piece of work, and I said, `Well, I don't work with other people, and you work perhaps too much with people, I mean you're used to telling people what to do.' `Oh no no no, it wouldn't be like that.'

Is he your age?

He might be a year or two younger. And he came up with a couple of ideas and then said that he, because he, I know, I knew at this time, I had known for some time that he owns...first of all he's been a designer, and now he's a professed photographer, and you would have in the past seen his photographs on the front of the `London Review of Books' but has now since been cast out. But he does other things. He also owns the archive, the photographic archive on Soviet art in London that most people ring up publishers when they want something. So, kinds of, as I put it, he's making a living out of the corpse of Soviet art; I rub salt into a non-open wound on that matter. But in one of his trips he went to either Moscow or...Leningrad or Moscow, found the estate of Alexander Rodchenko who was a designer and artist, as they were in those days, and had produced a book called `Ten Years in Uzbekistan' which boasted of the triumphs of ten years of Soviet rule in Uzbekistan, and it was beautifully designed with great fold-outs and printing and great design, and mug shots of the, full statistics and mug shots of the members of the social committee of Uzbekistan, who one by one fell out with Stalin who had a low boredom threshold and one by one they were removed from office or killed or destroyed or otherwise went away. And as with Trostsky, one by one they were removed from all graphic representation in Soviet propaganda or printing or records. That creepy thing. It's as though, you know, you put the icon on the grave with the photograph on, and if you take the photograph away the dead body isn't there, you know. But in a funny way I think there's a sort of transitional thing that's happened in Western culture, the Nazis understood that, you can manipulate images and remove people from existence by taking them away. Now what Rodchenko felt obliged to do because of the nature of the terror was

that as each person was disappeared he took what was called his own designers' copy of this book, which he kept in the privacy of his own house, and wiped these faces out with Biro or ink to ensure his own safety, so as not to be found with the representation of these people because they had fallen out with Stalin. I found this an absolutely terrifying image; not a comment on the Soviet system, more a comment on the nature of censorship and self-censorship. And I also recall, you see there's another phrase in the book saying, `Here we die for it,' which is what the Russians say about poets. Now, I remember someone coming here, sent to me by Ron King, a young Russian bookmaker woman, who went down to the basement and saw my...she showed me her work, she does one-offs, and then I showed her my prints and she said (she had no English practically), `The technique, no technique.' I thought, technique? What's she talking... And I realised she was talking about the technical ability. People, at that time, this is slightly pre-Gorbachev, didn't own printing machines. To own a printing machine is to invite disaster. But before we get smart about that, I reminded myself that in the 19th century and later all printers had to be licensed, because that was the way of relaying information then, and the government agents and the forces of security were very interested in what the printers were turning out, because they feared them. So don't let's get smart about Russia, right? And I also remembered and realised that you can be a poet in England or America and nobody gives a damn for you, they're not frightened of you. Now, it could be they're not frightened of you because we live in something called a free society, but they could not be frightened of you because there's nothing to fear from poets. It's a different nation that fears its poets, OK? So I did this book with David, he wrote an essay and I hand-set it and did the design, and it got very difficult between us because he was used to telling people what to do, I'm not used to it, and he said, `I'm going to let you do what you like,' and he didn't. On the other hand the battle between us I think produced a remarkable piece.

What kind of things were the battles about?

Well, let me first of all finish this. So I did kind of, the [INAUDIBLE] of the book by over-printing one huge picture over another, and the previous one, so that they as it were not only were silenced but they silenced each other.

When you say `they', you haven't said what it is.

The figures, the people.

What are the people?

The people, nine members of the Soviet committee of Uzbekistan who had had their faces removed by Rodchenko.

And what you've used in the book is what?

I had blown up those pictures, blown up, photographed by Dave King, blown up to almost the size of the page which is quite large, and around it I put a border to, first of all to better reveal the picture, to make it look like a, but also to make it look like an icon frame, all those things that they put photos in [INAUDIBLE] on graves. I played around with those edges in terms of colour and firing staple guns into the metal to make the thing look violent and also restrictive. And it was my idea, where we could we found out what had happened to these people, and that's I think one of the things that makes the thing chilling, you could say that they disappeared or their fate was unknown. The difficulties we had, I think, you see I did...why I am telling you that now is because I did the burden of the book, you know, the first part of it very rapidly on my own, and I think David - this is personal [INAUDIBLE], but in a way I suspect what happened what that David was so overtaken with what I had done that he felt that he was having no influence on the book, although he had supplied the idea and the text about which I was I should say at first not happy, but I came to accept it. And then he wanted to play with it, I mean he would be trying to tell me how to set the type and various things like that. Got very upset. And in two cases, three cases, there were spelling mistakes in the setting, which is, it happens, I mean it just happens; you always need someone else to spot your mistakes, you need a reader, and in two cases it was my fault and the third case it was his fault because he went off on one of his international trips when I told him it was going to be read on Thursday and it had to be re-set. But he blew his top and said, `All right, you don't want this essay in and that's why you keep making...kind of imply [INAUDIBLE].' I had to calm it down and said, `No, I'll simply sit down and re-set it and print it again, which is what I have to do,' and he couldn't believe the kind of labour that you have to go... I said, `That's the way it is,' you know. But we, I think we are both very proud of the book, and one of the good reviews of it, by Charles Hall who was at the time writing for the `Arts Review', said that clearly the two people bottled[??] each other down, you know, they kind of...

They did what?

Sorry, they didn't [INAUDIBLE] the wrong phrase. We constrained each other to make a much stronger thing.

And would you consider a similar collaboration again, or is that it?

Well, we've talked about doing something else, but the only other thing that he's come up with is me doing something with his photographs, and I am not pleased about that. And, I do rather wonder what he would feel about doing something from my ideas, but I haven't come up with an idea that would make a sensible collaboration. I've got a suspicion it's a one-off.

And do you feel differently about it because there was somebody else involved?

No. I think it's less to do with the hard..... [BREAK IN RECORDING - INTERRUPTION]

Who did the binding on that book?

Charles Hadrill.

And that's one you're happy with?

Yes, although it's a difficult book. It's extremely heavy paper, made even heavier because it's a [INAUDIBLE] paper which book artists don't normally use, and more of an industrial paper [INAUDIBLE] pretty acid free. And it's got huge quantities of ink on it, so each page is colossally heavy, which means that the spine is under some strain and it has to be kept flat [INAUDIBLE], so, I tell people to treat it carefully.

And was there a slightly different market for this book because of its subject matter?

I sold it to the likes of East Germany. Somebody wants me to send details to Russia.

But other than that it was roughly the same?

No... I'd have to look at the list. One or two people might have bought it who might not have done, I can't remember.

Right. But, also what...you've touched on this a couple of times, what...now you are working in some way using computers. You're using both technologies, the old presses and the computers.

Yes.

How does that work?

Well, if I tell you, let me tell you about the book I'm doing at the moment, which demonstrates where I'm at, I guess, in relationship to computers at the moment. Two years ago at New Year Ruth and I took the girls, or the young ladies, our daughters, to Madrid for the first weekend of the year as a way of opening the year up. I mean they don't want to be at parties with us really, could be embarrassing[??]. A weekend in Madrid I thought was a nice idea, it was Ruth's idea. We went to the Prado, and went to the Queen Sofia Museum and so on, and Sunday afternoon we went to the flea market, and in the flea market we found, or I found, zinc stencils about that deep, about six inches deep, by four or five inches, three to five inches. And they're made of zinc and they're in [INAUDIBLE] lettering, stencil lettering, and they're a kind of graphic cliché, I mean graphic designers have been using them for years because it's like a grainy photograph has [INAUDIBLE]; they suggest integrity and speed and so on, because they're tea-chest lettering. Are you with me?

Oh I see, right.

They're an old graphic cliché, and...

But they are the actual letters themselves, they're not for printing off?

They are the letters themselves as a stencil cut out of zinc through which you push ink with a brush and make a stencil with a little lip on to hold. And I thought, well they're such a massive cliché, I mean after all, Tom Phillips used them, I want to be able to turn this around. So I bought them, and there are one or two letters missing, no A and no W. I suspect the A is missing and I expect W might not be in the Spanish language. I realised that if you turned them over they would be the right way round to print [INAUDIBLE] and it could be constrained in the furniture of the press, along that lip and slid along. So I would do this poem called `Dear Judas', and the book is about mining and it was[??] darkness. Letter by letter, had to be letter by letter because I had to abut them, bring them together and reduce the amount of space between the margins of the...not the stencil, but if the margin's too great, added together would put the letters too far apart, so I had to bring them together and reduce the amount of pressure along[??] the margins. So it had to be done letter by letter in this Stone Age technique, letter by letter times two because the book is dos-à-dos, which means it's a double book but turns in on itself [INAUDIBLE] circular, which I liked, a very Celtic thing. Letter by letter times 45 times 2, times the number of letters in a five- six-line stanza poem, means that I had to crank the machine, according to my daughter who added it all up, at least 66,000 times between September and March/May, with two trips abroad. And, this is colossal, this is so ridiculous that you, as I said, you give a [INAUDIBLE] realise what you've got to do. But meanwhile I found on mounting the bed of the...that I put blocks on, an

impression of the tail of the comet from `Night Feet on Earth', so I printed off the bed of this off the top of this piece of wood.

Sorry, the comet from what?

The comet from the tail, comet tail, from...

Oh, `Night', sorry, I thought you said nine.

I took a print off of that, and had it scanned and turned it into an image, a photographic image, reversed it, put it side by side and made these two angels' wings which are part of the book. So I'm dealing things out of the old books, having them scanned, manipulating them, and I've done that with the letters too. After printing the stencil I've taken that poem, created it in freehand in stencil typeface, and put it at a funny angle and that becomes one of the wings in the book too. So I'm mixing things found in a rather Stone Age technique, things found from previous books and converting it into computer and finding other things. So I'm mixing the two, and I find it very interesting for the moment.

And what's that go to do with computer technology?

I thought I told you, which is that I created the images in something called Freehand which is a programme on the computer.

Oh I see, I took you literally to mean you did it freehand.

No no no, sorry. And, also the lettering I changed on computer, distorted on the computer.

So what computer have you got?

An AppleMac.

And when did you start using that, do you know?

This year.

And are you self-taught on it?

Yes. This is advice from some rather irritating[??] friends.

And what have you found, what have you discovered with it?

I think it's wonderful. I'm glad I wasn't into it five years ago because I suspect although my brain would have been livelier and younger, I suspect that the technology is getting easier and easier all the time and clearer. One of the problems with the computers is that the people who operate them quite often are like disciples and entirely uncritical. I mean there are illogicalities in computer think, and people won't face up to say that, and the manuals aren't written well, some are written better than others, and there are illogicalities in the way the thing works. But there's no doubt in my mind that some of the software, that is the programs that are written to enable you to do things, enable you to do things that you could never have done as a traditional typographer, and I can prove that time after time. And so it's a great releasing[??], provided you know what good typography is, you know, it's a great release. On the other hand this software, these programs are written for a previously existing aesthetic; that aesthetic was to do with the constraints of the old technology. Now what's interesting about that, it is as if they had invented a way of carving marble in classical Greece that didn't require chisels, hammers and [INAUDIBLE] out the dust, and although it appears to be a magic process it will inevitably produce a different setting, inevitably, nothing can be that easy. But nonetheless [INAUDIBLE], and it allows me to do things as I said that I couldn't have dreamt of doing under the old technology.

And is it inconceivable there would ever be a Ken Campbell but a Ken solely through computers?

I think it's very conceivable. It might even be that I produce videos and disks, but the problem, the problem is, there are two things. One is, the physicality goes[??], so far; the printers that they've got are upgraded, you know, you see a lot of kind of, you know, inkjet printers, and nobody can tell me how fast this technology is, in other words how, by fast I mean, how long it will last, will it stay on the paper, will the paper last for two hundred years, four hundred years? I suspect it won't, and I suspect that the reason they can't tell me is not only that I haven't got to the right source [INAUDIBLE] a promotion, but possibly because they couldn't give a...couldn't care less because the technology is going to change every three years. That fastness that we could get out of letterpress printing on paper is one of tradition that goes back, well, you know, depending how you specify it, four hundred years, but in the making of paper far more hundreds of years than that; and in the mixing of inks, thousands of years, right? Now that's not...that's not going to be provable, testable, for a very long time. And that's what's stopping me, because I'm already, there's already an absurdity about what

I'm doing, which at the moment I find interesting, but at some point may find uninteresting, so...

What's the absurdity?

Well that I am generating images and then turning them into metal plates.

I see what you mean. But the longevity of your work matters to you?

Well yes.

Because?

I don't think necessary [INAUDIBLE] ego, like, you know, that it will last a long time, it will survive me, and that if I am selling things at some price, it's like to say, you know, that painting there, which is, you know, whatever you think of it, I know to be very well built in terms of how paint goes onto the ground, what it's made of and so on. It's even sized at the back to stop the back going rotten. It's a well built object, there's a certain pride in that. And if you are selling things of anything over £50 a time I think you ought to be able to say to say to the curator, look, that's, you know, it's going to be there for a long time.

And, have you any interest in working on the Internet?

I put an order in for the Internet, and it hasn't come through yet but the...increasingly I'm finding that people that I sell to are on the Internet, it would be good to let them know, not to keep writing letters; and secondly you can have your fax come through on a modem, come up on the screen and decide whether to print it up to save paper; and thirdly I'm getting something called a quick time camera, which means that I will hypothetically be able to point my, by appointment I think probably I will be able to point my camera at a page and beam it over to somebody who might be interested in how it looks.

End of F4822 Side A

F4822 Side B

You were saying you were interested in creative [INAUDIBLE] exist only on the Internet.

Not yet. Not yet.

But you could [INAUDIBLE].

I don't really know, no.

And when you said just now that had you been working with computers five years ago your brain would have been five years more agile, I mean are you feeling that sense...?

Well, only that, I mean these things are very hard to compare, because there's no absolute rule of thumb as to how bright you should be at any particular time, but it's a struggle some... I mean I got on with it very well and went to Australia and forgot a lot of it. In fact it happened in the spring, I forget when I got the computer. I did an awful lot of work on it. Ruth was in admiration of how I went about it, learnt a great deal, and went on my travels to Germany and America and came back and found I was almost at square one, because it's just not burnt in. Now whether it's not burnt in because my brain is 56 years old, or because of alcohol, or because that naturally happens, I mean I've spoken to young people and they say that happens to them.

I wasn't meaning just in relation to computers, I was meaning, are you feeling a process of not being 25 any more, of ageing?

I'm feeling a process of not being 25 any more.

And what do you think about it?

I think that it's something we all have to put up with, and it's...it has its compensations and so on.

As in wisdom?

Something called wisdom, for which they have found neurological possible explanation, did you know that? They by and large say that the brain stops growing and certain decays occur, but they've found one set of neurons that seem to carry on growing. They may think it's the

seed of wisdom. That's a wisdom that I don't think it's got many compensation, I think it's rather a miserable business, it's not too much fun.

And, it seems to me...

Wisdom seals your tongue I think.

I don't think you're getting anywhere near that point Ken.

Relatively. [LAUGHS]

Given New York, Germany, Yale, the excitement of the books themselves, life seems pretty good?

Are we coming towards the end of this tape?

No, I've got something else on [INAUDIBLE].

Right. Life's OK. I'm not too happy about some of the attention that it gets, but it's not too much of a problem. I could do with a lot more financial security, but I do all right. It seems to me a small price to have to lug your stuff around to be able to do work that you are fairly proud of, although you're not sure where it comes from.

Do you see yourself doing that indefinitely?

I would hope not. I mean I don't...but I don't see any answer, but I never saw any answer to any of the problems I've got, and you play it by ear and do what's in front of you.

And, assuming you are able to, you would like to go on making books till the end of your life?

I would like to go on doing good work till the end of my life.

You haven't got any dream of going to live on the Isle of Mull and just looking out to the sea?

Yes, I keep having that dream, but it doesn't face up to reality.

Right. And...

I see myself standing on the outside of the city looking in, sometimes shouting at the walls, sometimes turning my back to it.

And going back a bit, when you realised you were going to move from Oxford back into London, what were your feelings?

Glad to get out of Oxford. Didn't really relish growing moss up one side of me, you know, and having a cheap mortgage and port to lay down in the cellar, although Ruth's college wasn't that rich, but other colleges do that to them. I think it was good for both of us to get out.

And are you...you are both quite sociable. You're obviously both working very hard but you have a lot of conviviality in your life, is that right?

Ruth controls that. We don't have as much as we would if I were, I think, but in fact, and rather a nice...I'm a very polar person. When I'm working I'm like a shepherd on the hills, I mean I could work for...and the reason I'm working in a new space is, a) we needed a space here that we're sitting in, a converted space in the basement of the house, for putting up guests and kids, but I also was getting slightly stir-crazy, but I have been working for years including in Oxford where I would not talk to anybody all day except for Ruth on the phone, and that didn't, doesn't bother me still, so, although I am as you put it convivial, I tend to come out of the hills raiding rather than doing it every day. I mean we're not out every night and we're not entertaining every night.

Do you think you could live on your own?

I certainly did so for quite a while when I was younger. I don't think I was particularly happy doing it, but I think it's one of the reasons some people get married too early because they find it hard to live on their own. I think it's a trial and a triumph to be able to learn to do it. I think I could live on my own, yes.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....your new studio?

I just wanted to say that whereas I think I could live on my own I would regret to even think about the reasons that I might have so to do. Yes?

Tell me about the new studio.

It's rather more space than I've got here, although there still isn't enough space. It's in an old industrial building that used to be a workhouse, just opposite Bow Church, it's called Bow Arts. I reminded them that they missed an opportunity to spell Bow B-E-A-U-X, and it could have been Beaux Arts, but there you go. And I'm sharing a space with somebody called Tony Martina who is an Anglo-Italian etcher from the Central School, a very fine guy, and Simon Redington, who is kind of an ex-student, and some kind of printer and some kind of print-maker. And it feels good.

Is it...I mean it must be psychologically different to walk to and from a place before you start.

Well I don't walk, I catch a bus.

Well, whatever, but the fact that it's now [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, but I've often...I mean I've often switched that. I mean I've, in Oxford I would walk to...and Hornsey, I've walked to the bottom of the garden, and that meant you could, you know, you had to have underpants on, but you didn't have to get dressed that much to walk down late at night with a glass of wine in your hand and look at what... The great thing about having a studio near you is you can look at what you are going to do late at night and think, I'm not going to touch anything because I've had some wine, but in the morning I'm going to do this. You are quite perceptive at that stage, so you've programmed yourself for the next day, which is brilliant. And you are also able to look at the proofs and think, I know that tomorrow morning those prints will not be dry, so I'm going to have to look for something else to do, not find out in the morning, right?

And when you go back the next day, does it look as you expect, is there [INAUDIBLE]?

Yes, there's the notes, and it makes sense, most of the time it makes sense.

But there's no gap between memory of how you left it and what you actually find?

Sometimes there is, but you know, I think most of the time preparing yourself late at night is the right thing to do. It's a good thing to do. And if there is a change, well, you've got the luxury of a double judgement, two judgements, the latter is going to have to be the best.

And in terms of other domestic spaces, how did you come to have the Yorkshire cottage or whatever it is?

Ruth's parents, two refugee Jews from Germany, met together when they had to re-do their medicine in Edinburgh, because the British demand that despite Hugo for instance having studied under Maximum Frisch in Switzerland, the B[??] man, I mean you know, could have told them all how to do it, but he was grateful, and re-did his medicine, and met Balbina, who's from Berlin, and they married and came south to Sheffield and then Leeds, where Ruth's mother was instrumental in setting up gynaecological care in the north of England in the Forties which was something to do really, and Ruth's father was a founder of geriatric care in this country. And they loved the country and they loved music and all of that, and they went for a ride in their little car up into the North Yorkshire moors and bought the two cottages which were very small for a few hundred pounds, had them put together as one cottage, which is a medium-size cottage now. One was the old reading room, so-called, and in that area the Quakers or Methodists, I'm not sure which, I think it was the Quakers, persuaded the local gentry, or they did it themselves, to put a room in every...a house in every...a small cottage in every village, so that the men when unemployed, and remember that most agricultural men were either unemployed because there was no work or it was unseasonal, to keep them out of the pub, so they would spend their time in what was called the reading room and were supposed to read improving texts, you know, and so forth, but I think they played billiards and dominoes and have a drink anyway. But it was a nice idea, it was a way of improving the life of country people, which most city people think was fine but actually has its own problems. So this house has been in the family for 35 years or so, and really it's become, I mean I've had things done to it, and we have done things to it, and it's become like the real family centre, it's the place the daughters relate to more than anybody, anything else. And it's I suppose the place in England we relate to most, because we've moved around so much.

And how important is that landscape to you?

Well, it's very important, but it doesn't feed my work at all.

And how much time have you spent there? Have you ever lived there at all?

No, we've spent time there, I mean we spend all of August there normally, and Easter and Christmas, and we get up when we can. We don't use it enough.

Have you ever worked there?

Ruth started to work there, now we've got a telephone in, which she resisted, but it means she had plug in, and I've done some work there but usually of the thinking kind rather than the active kind, although I've now got a small studio up there and do some painting, and that's beginning to develop, but I'm staying there more.

You're beginning to paint more are you?

Yes, more paint up there, yes.

And [INAUDIBLE]?

A couple of painted one-off books.

Oh!

Yes, but I'm not telling anybody about that..

And where exactly is the cottage?

Gillamoor, which is at the head of Farndale, which is just inside the national park. While the Tories haven't sold off the national parks yet it's protected, and overlooks Farndale, so you can see all the, you can see all of the daffodils in the spring down the river.

And how do you spell your mother-in-law's name?

Balbina. B-A-L-B-I-N-A.

And what's her surname?

Luria, but Droller, married name is Droller.

Can you spell both?

D-R-O-L-L-E-R, and Luria, in the most commonly used spelling, L-U-R-I-A.

End of F4822 Side B
End of Interview

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F4805 Side A

[Interview 17th January 1995]

Born Nov 1939, probably in Middlesex. Mother's side of family were storytellers, therefore facts not always certain. Maternal grandfather `a huge and roguish man'. Maternal grandmother left home to live with a man called Brookman when KC's mother was about 12. Details of family history. Mother's maiden name was York. KC's family rooted in East End of London, details. Maternal great-grandfather `the Butcher of Aldgate', stories of him and his three daughters. KC's relationship with maternal grandfather and uncle during his early teens when due to bombing in London joined relatives who were then living in Sidcup. Problems between KC and mother over KC's relationship with other family members. Cousins. Description of aunt's house. Cleanliness of East End doorsteps etc to distinguish `proper' houses from prostitution or destitution. Details of Brookman. Mother had to bring siblings up after grandmother left. Details mother's upbringing. Maternal uncle, Teddie, a natural draftsman. Mother aged approx 14 won a prize for writing at Toynbee Hall; was in Communist Party by 16, was trade union organiser in sweat shops of East End. Mother went to interview to become a secretary, friends mocked her so became factory girl instead; tried to project this self-image on to KC and his sister. Teddie's drawing. KC returned to live in East End aged 50, understanding of the area. Mother close to East End Jewish community, details. Mother was firstly a weaver - KC connects this to his work. Details of Jewish family who first employed mother. KC tried to get mother to write in her old age but failed. Significance of mother's habit of opening cigarettes from bottom of the packet.

F4805 Side B

KC's relationship with mother in her later years, saw her as a feminist before feminism. East End and world of fashion. Mother's character. Family songs. Mother's use of language. Details of mother's siblings. Aunt Flo and cousin David, Dagenham. David's children. Aunt Li. Anecdote re funeral party with Hounslow relatives. Grandfather a cabinet maker, builder etc. Grandfather's stories. Grandfather anti-racist. Figurines KC kept from mother's house. Blitz broke up East End family clans.

Mother went to work aged approx 15, details. Was cleaner in Sidcup when KC a child, which he resented. KC hit by social differences when went to grammar school. Memory aged approx 5 of overhearing and reacting to father calling neighbour `guv'. Relationship with father.

F4806 Side A

`Caste' system in England. Mother obsessed with royal family. KC a republican aged 12. Patriotism. Mother born 1910, father 1909. Mother's politics. Mother a clerk in Ministry of Defence in her later years. Members of KC's family who have signed Official Secrets Act. Mother's working life. Mother's female friend, `Aunt' Em and her family. David's resentment of KC going to grammar school. Pressure on KC to get into printing in order to work in Fleet Street. Pressure to train as typesetter in Stepney Green. `Spanish practices' in Fleet Street. Aunt Glad, mother's friend in Lewisham. Description of mother, Elizabeth Ellen York, known as Bet.

Father, George William Campbell. Details of Campbell family forebears. Father's parents; mother's relationship with them. Father apprenticed to his father as a docker in East End, left school early. Damage done to father's back in docks. Dockers' community. Father's health.

F4806 Side B

Dockers cont. Generations of father's family in docks. Father upset that KC didn't become a docker. Through latter half of war and just after war KC would be taken from Sidcup to East End, father would be carrying coal for grandmother - memories of grandparents' house. Religions in father's family, dim memories of a wake. Mother's stories about 1926 strike. Father's jobs when unemployed from docks. Father's politics and personality. Violence of dockers. Funeral of uncle Joe, details of family (22 male Campbells), including gun dealer. KC's father never beat him, most other children were beaten. KC's response to parents' rows. Mother hit KC ferociously.

Details of father's siblings. Father's brother, Johnnie's, punishment by police. Father's hallucinations when dying. KC's intolerance of people's behaviour. Ethics KC learnt from relationships with women.

F4807 Side A

Parents married 1936/7. Father considered emigrating. Quality of parents' marriage. KC's emotional swings.

First house KC remembers. KC unable to understand point of toys when a child. Sound of sparrows under eaves of house. Memories of mother being pregnant with sister when KC aged 8. Relationship with sister not close due to age gap. Mother worked during KC's childhood. Babysitters who used to look after KC. KC bullied because had passed scholarship to grammar school. KC had eczema and asthma; mother rejected him because of this; had to be strapped down in bed. Was in skin hospital aged 16. Effect of illness on childhood activity. Realising connection between mental and physical states.

Few books in parents' house. KC compulsive reader of library books from age of 5. Buried stolen books in park. Returned to library as an apprentice to continue self-education. Had feeling for history. Was a disruptive pupil, always being punished. History book which changed KC's thinking. Bad self-image as adolescent, realisation that he had to believe something about self beyond what others told him. Had begun to write poetry. Was clever at school, best subject maths which now can't do. Re-invented self.

Reaction to sister's (Diane) birth and later relationship with her. Mother furious that KC had escaped her influence, Diane didn't escape. Father's involvement with his young children. Father's didn't read much, mother didn't read fiction. No memory of books, comics etc in early childhood. Radio important. Early ambition to be a doctor. Early attempt to express form of Greek philosophy, details. Encounter while at infant school with team of educationalists.

Sculptures seen as a child.

F4807 Side B

[Interview 3rd May 1995]

KC's involvement with nature when growing up. Details of second house lived in with parents, where lived until left home at 19. `Nature vision' which evolved into poem in `Father's Hook'. Felt separated from society. Further details visions relating to nature and dreams. Countryside in Kent. Cycling and walking. Sketching in countryside. Poetry read during this period. Sleeping outside; asthma. No street life as child with grandparents, was kept inside.

Description of house in which spent most of childhood. Piano. Nowhere quiet to do homework. KC's bedroom as an adolescent decorated with charcoal murals. Microscope; fear of seeing God; alchemy.

First schooling. Local infants and junior school. Grammar school aged 10. Did well at junior school, details. Playground fights. Aged 8 was in love with schoolgirl. Sex education. Infant school. Compulsive drawer and reader. Veered between isolation and leading schoolboy gangs. Cubs and Scouts. Sexual experimentation at schools. Heroes.

F4808 Side A

Transition junior to grammar school through passing scholarship. Pressures on KC at this time. Cost of school uniform etc. Constantly in trouble at grammar school, punishments. Unhappiness continued until 18/19.

Family poverty. Holiday on Isle of Sheppey. Adolescent holidays and main friendship. Did well at art whilst at grammar school. Areas where succeeded at school. Rugby incident - impetuosity. Art education at grammar school. Making gunpowder and guns.

Early awareness of paintings. First visits to National Gallery.

F4808 Side B

National Gallery cont. Adolescent visits to London.

Visits to schoolfriends' homes. Stay at embassy when travelling as a young man.

Left school aged 17. 6 O'levels. Encounter with Joan Littlewood. Playing jazz. Clothes as an adolescent.

Became an apprentice in 1965. CND. Suggestion that KC should go to Sidcup Art School. Suggestion that should become newspaper reporter. Knew within a week that apprenticeship was bad idea, too late to get out.

Apprentice to printers in Stepney Green, description building, characters and work. Night school. Learning by watching people. Union dispute. Tough male culture. Master printer, Stan. Dickensian premises and characters.

F4809 Side A

Further details printing workshop and people in it. Bindery. Management. Class pressures. Union and strike. KC's attitude to pace of work. Terms of apprenticeship. Had gone into apprenticeship with resignation. Description of three buildings which housed compositors' workshop, machine shop, bindery; elegant Regency building which housed firm's offices. When things got tough, printed soft pornography. Clothes worn in workshops. Further details working code. Worked 8-5, which meant getting up at 6. Commuted for three years from Sidcup. Wages. Tools. Development of printing skills, details.

Sensuous quality of lead type. Later became designer to get out of being an apprentice. As a student rapidly moved towards criticism of content of copy. Margin for creativity. Roots of work on bed of letterpress in future learnt from apprenticeship.

Through day release school was introduced to Arts and Crafts Movement. Skills acquired by time became design student at LCP. Impatience to leave apprenticeship.

[Interview 24th May 1995]

Further details day release classes and night classes that KC attended during apprenticeship years. Self-improvement. Evening classes in music, English, history, print technology. Day release took place at Stamford Street, trades part of London College of Printing. Was taught typography by H.C. Beck, who designed London Underground map, details.

F4809 Side B

H.C. Beck cont. Other teachers on day release course. Further details evening classes.

Transition from apprenticeship to course at London College of Printing. Studied Typographic Design - NDD. Sold saxophone in order to pay fees.

Started as full-time student at London College of Printing in 1959, at which point left home to live in London. Details of where first lived in London. Earned money by working in summer holidays at Grosvenor House washing up. Fell in love, details. Other places KC lived in London at this period. LCP premises at this period.

Details of content of LCP three-year course. Rolf Brandt, brother of Bill Brandt, taught KC in six weeks a great deal about how to control visual spaces.

F4810 Side A

Further details Rolf Brandt, who taught in relation to Bauhaus principles, for KC a `visual gate' opened. KC seduced by Bauhaus style; feelings about it in retrospect. Aspects of the course led to growing awareness of language. Began to do political works, also Schwittersesque work. Developed interest in architecture. Further details Rolf Brandt. KC was reading Ruskin; Arts and Crafts Movement for apparent politics and emphasis on craftsmanship, but became critical of this.

Felt shouldn't want to be a clever designer for art galleries, hated advertising. Mock project as spoof on advertising. Aims at this stage.

Put on weight at this stage as still had eating habits when doing hard labour as apprentice. Found bohemian life attractive, details. Pubs KC frequented. Political demonstrations; Solidarity (anarchist movement) and protests re South Africa. Friends. Relationship between what learnt as an apprentice and what taught at LCP.

Details work produced at LCP, photographic images, Pop art. KC worked on `Private Eye' and on LCP magazine, `Typos'. Experiments with structure of `Typos'. Serving the text.

KC's reaction to finishing his latest book two days before recording. Turning point when KC's father died; book done in response.

Political events while KC at LCP included Sharpeville. KC's photographic experiments. Using `Express' photo of Sharpeville; response of head of department. KC formed a commune to run LCP in different way, details, lasted two weeks. Details about Hornsey protests in 1968. Overall response to 1968 political activity. Sees activity at Hornsey as start of `politics of style'. Relationship between students at LCP and art school students. Reason why KC didn't go to Royal College. LCP students' vision of themselves.

F4810 Side B

Further details KC's work with photography at LCP. Further details teaching and facilities at LCP. Didn't consider making a book at this stage. Threw all work away at end of second year. Writing poetry. Royal Court plays. Read the `New Statesman' but also `Spectator'. All students at LCP did drawing; nude drawings in studio and drawings in street or in museums, eg V&A. Response to sculpture and painting at this time; attitude to art galleries. Reaction to work in the Tate.

Relationship between visual arts in Britain and language. Stanley Spencer. Different reaction to KC's work abroad. Paul Nash. Edward Burra. Impressionists. Cézanne. Picasso. Braque. Matisse. Giacometti. Schwitters. Ben Nicholson. Moore. KC's drawings with meat bones which looked like Moore drawings. Hepworth. Gabo. Rothko. Malcolm Lowry. Magritte. Ernst. KC doesn't believe in sub-conscious.

F4811 Side A

Further details KC's theories about consciousness. Religious aspect to KC. Thomas Mann. Clothes worn at this stage. Tactics on demonstrations.

Dislike of comic-strip culture. Films enjoyed at LCP stage. Further details re work at `Private Eye'. Eric Gill. Design magazines read as a student at LCP. Awareness of furniture design etc. Television. Bill Brandt. Max Bill. Aspirations of LCP students.

[Interview 31st May 1995]

KC's third year work at LCP. KC's politics. Tom Eccesley, head of department at LCP. None of the students wanted to be graphic designers by end of course. KC had no further contact with people in company where had been apprenticed. KC's decision not to apply to Royal College.

F4811 Side B

Relationship with parents at stage of leaving LCP. Description of self at this time and aged 40. Attitude to suicide and to fear. Thoughts about death. KC's desire for children.

Finished LCP in 1962. Travel in summer holidays during LCP. Austrian refugee camp; selling newspapers in Nice; working on kibbutz in Israel. Details working in Austria and journey there - first time abroad. Seeing mountains for the first time.

F4812 Side A

Travels in Austria and work in refugee camp cont. Learnt about Holocaust in early childhood. Visiting Holocaust camps whilst in Austria. Brief visit to Paris.

Summer spent in Europe, working in Nice.

F4812 Side **B**

Summer in Europe cont.

Carola Casson, fellow student at LCP. Divisions amongst the students.

Journey to Israel. Exchanging stories for hospitality. Orient Express.

F4813 Side A

Time in Israel.

[Interview 7th June 1995]

KC's experiences on kibbutz in Israel.

Feelings on return to London; basement flat in Hampstead and girlfriend.

F4813 Side B

Further details time of return to London. Job with designer with office near to Tottenham Court Road prior to going abroad. Working in Bloomsbury with Derick Birdsall, designer and entrepreneur, BDMW design group, approx 1963. Work on `Steel Review'. Dislike of working on material, the content of which KC found offensive. Personalities clashing. KC not doing own work at this time. Feelings about earning more than father had ever done. Handing out money in pub. Remains comfortable when earning average wage. Story about visit to father re their relative earning capacity.

Feelings about Harold Wilson and politics of 1960s.

Further details re working with design company. Split with girlfriend.

Teaching in Bristol. Norman Potter. Fright when began teaching. Approach to teaching.

F4814 Side A

Further details KC as teacher of graphic design. Freelance `trade' work. Continued to write poetry. Further details teaching Bristol School of Art (later became Bristol Polytechnic). Richard Hollis and his first wife, Tasha.

Drugs. Clothes in 1960s.

Teaching after Bristol. Teaching at Central School of Art. Lived in Suffolk with wife, Ruth, and their young children. Learning etching from Norman Ackroyd. KC finished first etching (Blake's head) on day father died, 1977.

F4814 Side B

Details `Portrait of the Artist as a Young Prussian', etching. Purchase of etching press. Relationship with Norman and Penny Ackroyd. Royal Academy. Norman Ackroyd's use of book form and response to KC's work.

Details freelance work during fifteen-year teaching period. Designed standard A'level biology textbook for Nelson's. Graphics for furniture firm. Harvey's Wine Company.

Ways in which spent earnings. Met wife, Ruth, approx 1967, at a party. Girlfriends. Continued to walk a great deal. Photography up to late 1960s. Health. Relationship with parents during teaching years.

KC - description of self by 1970s `extreme, vigorous, having a hard time finding out what I wanted to do'. Association with Asa Benveniste.

F4815 Side A

[Interview 14th June 1995]

Asa Benveniste. `A Few Ways Through the Window', KC's first book, 1975. `Terror Terror', 1977. Teaching in polytechnic where there was a problem-filled course called Communication Design, KC joined students for a week to see what they were complaining about. KC tried to prove to students that it was still possible to achieve something despite problems on course, decided to make a book. Hadn't seen any artists' books at this stage. Details `A Few Ways Through the window'. Cultural frauds in Britain and USA. Rejection of colophon. KC's description of `A Few Ways Through the Window'. Quotations from Middleton's `The Changeling', and from `The Tempest'. Link with father's sickness. `Terror Terror', KC's pain during father's illness.

Further details `A Few Ways Through the Window' - Tony Zwicker's comment of how much in it paved the way to future work. Windows in house in France which inspired the book. Printing process involved crumpling the paper plates. Use of formal structures to express meaning. Experimentation. Use of photographs. Binding. Cover. Poems. Gave the books away. Responses to the books.

Father's death through cancer. Drawing and painting during this period; minimalism. Lived in Crouch End at this period, had room to paint in. Opposition from other staff re `A Few Ways Through the Window'. Stayed teaching until father's death in 1977. Decision to keep teaching when father died. Staff complaints when finally took time off led to decision to leave.

`Terror Terror', essay into photography, done whilst still teaching. Student/friend, John Smith, later experimental film maker and teacher, helped with photography. Description of evolution of images. Poetry. Paper. Printing process. Random element within structure.

F4815 Side B

Objection to photography at time of making `Terror Terror'. Humour in book. Window reference back to previous book. Typeface. Cover. Edition. Gave this book away. `Father's Hook', edition of 100, more rigourous book. Ruth, KC's muse, encouraged him to make books. Had idea by `Terror Terror' that would make more.

Father's death. `Widow's Song' in `A Knife Romance' linked with mother wanting to leave marital home after father's death, details.

`Father's Hook'. Corsham College. Swiss German typeface. Ron King, teaching at Corsham, advised KC about Chinese paper for `Father's Hook'. Process of folding paper. Book about rigour of father's life, form embodies this. Description. Lino-blocks. Hand-sewn by KC. Sensuous book. Colours. Underprinting. Rejected material is always stored for reuse. Influenced by jazz. `Father's Hook' made within an academic year whilst teaching at Corsham, details of routine. Poems written during father's illness and soon after his death. Memories of getting news of father's death and of his cremation. Began working on book in September following February of father's death. Damage done to father's body due to lifting weights continually at work.

F4816 Side A

Father's working conditions cont. KC's feelings about father's suffering. Book in V&A's collection. Mother's reaction to book.

Ron King and Circle Press books. Decision to sell `Father's Hook' but also gave some away to friends; greater response to this book. Dealing with the V&A. Idealism about art. Hadn't tried to sell paintings. Details of paintings. Has never looked at any books in National Art Library.

`Father's Hook' made 1977/78. No further books until got John Brinkley Fellowship at Norwich School of Art, details. Made three books in 1983/84. Had gone to Canada in 1980/81 with Ruth, whose career as a scientist had developed and who was invited to do some research in Toronto. KC taught in Toronto and in Montreal. Returned to Britain with money. During time in Canada, KC was painting, got into routine of doing own work, sold work; probably wouldn't have done these paintings in England. Decision to return to England despite job offers in Canada. Details of time in Canada, including travel in America.

F4816 Side B is blank

F4817 Side A

[Interview 21st September 1995]

Period at Norwich during Brinkley Fellowship. Part-time teaching and rest of time working on Fellowship. Based in London but stayed in Norwich during working week. Good period in terms of contact with others and `coming out' as an artist, also a disturbing experience. Working without deadlines, self-discipline. Enjoyed repetitive aspect of own work.

Canada liberating because KC well paid for teaching, had gained confidence; important working time and space in Canada. Made full use of opportunity of Brinkley Fellowship. Terms of Fellowship; artists' books. Bruce Brown.

KC's sculpture with Brian Catling. Three bronze hooves and seven sheets of varnished handmade paper, lettering; `Amoroma'. Place of sculpture in KC's work since Norwich. Started painting in Canada. Printmaking. Relation of KC's work in other media to book art.

Poetry during time at Norwich. Poem for `Broken Rules and Double Crosses'. Pencil drawings with grid system - `Dervish', derived from time at Corsham - led to concern with the cross as meeting place. Design proposition of the cross; evolution of forms which appear in `Broken Rules and Double Crosses'. Labour involved in the book one of the points of doing it. Collectors who `pay for the pain' rather than the message. Book KC working on at time of recording; process requires cranking machine over 66,000 times.

F4817 Side B

Physical aspect of printing KC's books; analogy with steering a yacht.

Critics and writers who believe their text is more important than the art. Artists craving critical attention due to lack of confidence. Reason why artists became unconfident. KC not wishing to represent society in which he lives. Peter Townsend's attitude to KC having King James' Bible being in KC's studio. Witches' charm also pinned up in KC's studio.

Further details `Broken Rules and Double Crosses'. KC's relationship with printing bed and methods.

KC's `irreducibleness'. KC's difficult relationships with others. Parallel attitude to people and to type and printing materials. Recent visit to Australia and relationship with fellow travellers.

Further details `Broken Rules and Double Crosses'.

KC's ability to draw together diverse references into a unity. Way in which uses King James Bible to determine direction; peripheral vision.

F4818 Side A

Peripheral vision, collagist technique. Desire for unity which couldn't find as a designer. Parallel with music. Sources of references in ` Broken Rules and Double Crosses'.

KC's span of reading. Science; Peter Dodd. KC unsure if he is an artist in the way that others are; his art as a window to something else. Ruth's career in cognitive science; psychology. Ruth as KC's muse.

KC's calm work, eg abstract of `Fire Dogs', a tool rather than a goal.

Idea of the muse in KC's life. Ruth's reaction to KC's work.

Evolution of `AbaBc'[??], dedicated to Bruce Brown.

Brian Catling. KC part of book show at Atlantis Gallery curated by Ian Tyson. Dislike of finding his work mixed with many other kinds of artists' books. Relationship between art and craft; power. Dominance by those who write in our society. Educational values. Art and science.

F4818 Side B

KC's books being exhibited in wrong context. KC gets more inspiration from reading and music than from looking at other artists" work. KC's attitude to exhibitions he has had in Britain. KC not going to many exhibitions, prefers to go to National Gallery and to see the Rothkos in the Tate. Exhibition KC enjoyed in Australia. KC likes to work in society in which he feels discomforted, ie Britain, details. Being outside Establishment.

Brian Catling. Social life in Norwich.

Source material for `Horse'. KC's text. `Horse' first book made in London after Brinkley Fellowship. Bought press towards end of time at Norwich, set it up in London and used for ten books, `Horse' being the first. Converted poem `Horse' into a book, later converted into a poster. Work driven by bed of press, details.

Explanation of term `rule' as used in printing. Stuart Montgommery, Ian Hamilton Finlay.

KC's house in Hornsey, bought when returned from Canada. Period when KC and Ruth lived in Suffolk with their daughters, 1970s.

F4819 Side A

Time in Suffolk cont. Birth of children, Sadie and Esther. KC's involvement with his children when they were young. Ruth's career. Reasons for leaving Suffolk. Children's personalities. KC's role within family of three women.

Choice of north London to live. Present home in Bethnal Green. Description north London house. Etching press. Work hanging on walls of London house and present home. KC's visual memory. KC not a keeper of notebooks, sketchbooks or diaries.

Evolution of `Night Feet on Earth'. Structural connection with `Horse'.

F4819 Side B

`Horse' cont. Dismemberment of horse; dismemberment of Shiva in later book; `In the Door Stands a Jar' also dismemberment, parallel woman's body and jar.

Structure and making of `In the Door Stands a Jar'. Source of image is a John Wayne film. Poem came before the title. Book joyous to make.

Male and female forms in KC's work. Further details `In the Door Stands a Jar'.

Gap in making books. First two books made in London at North East London Polytechnic 1975-77. No further books until time at Corsham where did `Father's Garden' in 1977. No books between 1977-1983/4. Children approx 14-15 when family moved to Oxford; confusion about chronology. Reasons for periods when made no books.

KC bought Ian Tyson's Fag press, first book done on this was either `Firedogs' or `Skute Awabo'. Difference between the presses KC has used. KC sold his old Vandercook press to Simon Redington, former student, now sharing studio space.

Making `Tilt: the Black-flagged Streets'. `Storm Song', poem KC wrote in Canada. Whitby steps leading to remains of cathedral, close to KC's cottage. Orson Welles in `Moby Dick'. Black flag of anarchy. Printing equipment KC had bought from technical college included lino-blocks used in this book; black flags. Conference in Oxford where KC met Jewish German artist who designed Albertus typeface. Visit to Zurich museum in which discovered statue of Shiva told KC it wanted to come into book. Dancing girl in book also came from Zurich museum. Began to draw Shiva as a female puppet whilst in Zurich, wanted to dismantle it in book; later discovered Shiva dismantled as part of myth and could be male or female. Construction of book.

F4820 Side A

`Tilt: The Black-flagged Streets' cont.

Bindings by KC for own books and by others. Craft aspect. Book Works. KC's exhibition at Book Works. Problems with binders. Erosion of printing skills. Comparison of Rob Hadrill and Charles Gledhill as binders. Simaleavich, binder.

`A Knife Romance'. KC sings, `A Nice Romance'. Symbolism of knife. KC bought knife as adolescent and mother buried it in garden because she feared what he might do with it; mother trying to de-sex the son. Details of evolution of the book.

Move to Oxford. Children's schooling in London and Oxford.

F4820 Side B

Children's education cont. Family life in Oxford. Foreign friends made in Oxford. Ruth's career in Oxford. Children's adolescence. Attitude to violence as punishment.

Transition of move back to London to present address where no bedrooms for the children until recent months. Current relationship with daughters; attitude to their boyfriends. Children's post-school lives. Daughters' response to KC's work.

`Martyrs' began with visit to Edinburgh when KC came across Ogham script; musicologist Stuart Elliot Rae's help with music. Details of evolution of `Martyrs'.

F4821 Side A

`Martyrs' cont.

Evolution of `Father's Garden'. Link with `Father's Hook.

`Hadrian's Dream', part of series published by Ron King of Circle Press. Asa Benveniste.

`Execution'. Use of diagram by Jan Tchichold. KC's dream which fed into this book.

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`Firedogs'.

F4821 Side B

`Firedogs' .

Working pattern, hours etc.

`Firedogs' and `Firedogs: abstract' cont.

Finding a market for the books after early practice of giving them away. Tony Zwicker. Bertram Rota. V&A.

`Skute Awabo' (subtitle `Wasa Wasa').

Sales in Europe and USA. Comparison with Ron King's market. Sales in Australia.

F4822 Side A

Book (potential collaboration) which KC considers `lost'. Ritual of considering how to use material not incorporated in previous books. Pattern on finishing a book. Attitude to books made in the past. Attitude to the books being exhibited.

`Ten Years in Uzbekistan'.

Book KC working on in 1995. Use of computer technology. KC's concern with longevity of his work. Future use of Internet.

F4822 Side B

Computer technology cont. Sense of ageing. Assessment of success so far.

Feelings on moving back to London from Oxford. Degree of sociability. New studio. Yorkshire cottage. One-off books. Details spellings of Ruth's family names.

End of Interview