



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

Ian Thomas
Interviewed by Phil Hills

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

+44 (0)20 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Track 1 [Tape 1 Side A]

We'll have a go. So, Ian what made you reflect on your life now? What's the cue that's brought this about?

Well briefly, I was contacted by Scope to say they were doing this programme of research and I decided to speak about my life, tell them what's happened. It's been quite a full, adventurous life, as you'll probably find out. First of all I haven't been 'ere all the time, I've only been 'ere for four years.

At St Christopher's?

St. Theresa's.

Oh, St Theresa's isn't it? Sorry, yeah.

Before that I used to live home with my mother in Marazion [in Cornwall], but other than that, I'd had a fall, which left me with spine column bruising. That has slowly worn off, for a year or two I couldn't do anything at all. I was very tight [inaudible] because I've had that all the time, but as you can see it's more flexible now.

That's your right arm?

Yeah.

Yes.

That's my right arm and for a leg which is as bad, but slowly they becomes more flexible.

When you had your fall? How old were you?

About 50.

How much, sorry, how old?

Fifty.

Fifty.

As about becoming disabled, I have been disabled all my life, practically. I was 18 months old when I first became disabled.

At 18 months?

Yeah. At various times my health has deteriorated if by... [inaudible]... or some other thing would come along and I've literally had to learn again from laying in the bed to walking around. This is only about the eighth time I done it so [gulps for breath] I knew all about it. From about, oh I couldn't tell you when, but for 20 years I worked in central workshop employment for a firm called Remploy.

Called?

Remploy.

Oh Remploy, yes, right.

But when I had viral pneumonia, Remploy said, in effect, that they made me redundant. I've had two or three cars and each time someone drove into them. For the last one I had to get rid of [it] because I couldn't drive any more. Basically I'm back from the dead, so to speak, because now I can think so much easier and better. I know waiting for my hand and arm and leg and foot to come back, then I will be moving on from St Theresa's. There is nothing wrong in St Theresa's but I don't want to stay here all the rest of my life.

No, no.

At 56 I know time's against me and disability is against me but with all due respect, I would like to be able to shut my own front door.

Yes.

Which being here I can't,

Yes.

because I live literally in this room.

Yes.

Okay, we have a dining room,

Dining room.

we can go into and a lounge, but in the lounge...

But you're not getting out into the broader community...

No.

... that much?

In the lounge also there's a TV and the TV only works as long as the TV is able to watch. So...

Right. If we go back a bit. You were saying [about] your disability – how far back can you remember? What's your earliest memories?

Oh god. [Laughs.] About five or six I was taken up to school in Devon. That school was a very good school because at that particular time they used to cater for disabled children who had the mental capacity but middle IQ, but they took people who were severely disabled. As long as they... [inaudible]... so our school had a lot of people from Ireland, different social, different counserand [ph]

Different nationalities?

No, counsearand [ph]. Also people from Australia,

Oh right, long way.

New Zealand, [inaudible] Germany.

Don't remember the name of the school?

Dame Hannah Roger's School.

Do you remember where it was?

Ivybridge,

Ivybridge?

Devon.

Devon.

But the trouble is [clears throat] the ethos of education has changed somewhat because every school had to become disability access. Now that meant that the schools changed although the county councils still do send their children to a special school. So it's said to education that all kids learn similarly so the school have lost a little bit of modern now they have to educate people in the preliminary but they're slowly, it's laid down to adhere to but they still have first responsibilities. In our time most were ambulant; most were able to walk around.

Mmm.

At school now they are now more likely to be in wheelchairs, power chairs rather than walking around.

Mmm. Were you with your parents, in Devon?

No. We lived in Cornwall.

So you lived with the school? You boarded with the school?

Yeah. That was another thing which I find slightly disgusting, in that the kids, children, are now taken up on Monday and brought back on Friday which we had to go to school for three months, pack everything for three months.

So you didn't see your parents...

And go back.

... unless your parents went up there?

No.

You didn't see them?

When you started school there was no half-terms, parents used to come for a day [ambulance siren in background] but things [inaudible]. I'm not too sure if it's a good thing or bad thing but when I went to school it was rather than, we were mixed in much more, later what events lagging in general purpose that did have people from 40 year olds or 50 year olds are going through. You know, they're rather sit down and pull the bars in the corner and it's rather pathetic to say the least. Anyway...

So what were your feelings? How old were you when you went there? About six?

Six or seven and I left when I was 17, 18...

So that's a long time.

Yeah.

Twelve years about.

Twelve years, yeah.

And did you make any personal relationships, say with the teachers?

Well you weren't allowed to make relationships with the teachers.

What I meant was [both talking together], did you get on well with any particular teacher...

Yeah I did.

... who could help you a bit more?

Yeah. [Both talking together.]

I remember when I was at school I had a Mr Bond and I actually adored him and he helped me a lot, whereas most teachers I didn't get on with at all, but Mr Bond I just got on with.

Our teacher – Mr Eames [ph] – was good; he talked about flying buttresses, the architecture. He was a damned nice guy.

So he communicated his enthusiasm for his subject and architecture?

Yeah. Very interesting.

Has that come on? Is that an interest you've maintained yourself?

Yes. When I come here, or years later, I started on art on watercolour and then I did acrylics and pastels and American style [inaudible]. And the day care person is very helpful to me because at first I said I couldn't draw and I couldn't paint. But...

He's opened you up and -

... she persuaded me to do it. I'm now doing it quite well.

So -

But at the moment I'm doing a bit of fine line drawing, I don't do fine line drawings but I do what I want to do. Take for instance... [inaudible]... that doesn't fine line.

That the long landscape?

Yeah.

Yeah.

How did he do that? That sort of work they call fine line; Bradford Charles, he did fine line. That is fine line.

Fine line, yeah. But you draw more rhythmically?

Yeah.

Yeah. But enjoy it?

Yeah. [Gasps for breath.] Seem to.

In the school; what were actual conditions like? Were they very Victorian? Was it fairly sort of regimented?

Um. The old school was [inaudible] and that was Victorian but the new school was built about 1960 and a wheelchair could go anywhere, it was all on one level, brilliant, like this place.

So it was much more accessible and you could get about, whereas the old one was pretty restricted?

Yeah.

Before the 1960?

It was all right for me because I could walk, but after a fashion but... [Knock on the door.]

I'll pause it a minute and then we... [Break in recording.] Right. So, just for accuracy, what year were you born in?

'49.

About '49.

1949, Boxing day.

Boxing day? So your birthday's just after Christmas?

It is, yes.

Christmas child. So the old school was pretty, was it an old building?

Yes. That one went back to Victorian times, it was on three floors.

Pretty large? But both of them were in Ivybridge?

Yeah. Because the old school was an orphanage before that.

An orphanage?

And the new school was built on a flat plain... [both talking together].

Purposely built, mm.

... and it looked like an aircraft carrier. [Inaudible. Laughs.]

So lots of space then if it was as big as an aircraft hanger?

The staff quarters in the middle, straight up, two or three floors.

Right.

But -

Was this right in Ivybridge then?

No, on the outskirts.

A mile or two from the town centre or something?

Ivybridge at that time was a small village. It is now... [both talking together]

Yes it's quite -

... a dormer town to Plymouth

So were you lonely out there at all?

Well, didn't have chance to get lonely because there were other things and there were other people to... [inaudible]... you, and other things too, but -

Did you miss your parents? Would you have missed your parents?

Yes, course I did. Parents and me sister. Me father's now dead, my mother's still alive, my sister's still alive but they live locally in Marazion in the old folks bungalow and my sister lives in... [inaudible]. But then there's me down 'ere. [Laughs.]

But you were fairly... you could walk around at that stage?

Yeah.

Mmm. So you were fairly active with quite a few of the other children.

Yeah.

And inter-related?

Yeah. I was fairly mobile from the age of about eight or nine and I became a prefect in this school and one of the guys was a prefect, they found him smoking which was very [?], so they made me a prefect again. And, I dealt with quite a few problems over that guy because he used to come and look round the class and say, 'Right I'm a prefect here so you boys can do what you're told.' And so I had a job of saying right calm him back down. Forget it, you know, 'Forget about it and carry on.'

Bit -

Other than that that life was a bit of a trial. But we managed it. I did quite a lot of committee work when I – no, not when I finished work, work finished me. I recovered from viral pneumonia and I could walk around the bungalow but I had to use a chair when I went out. For about four or five years I was on quite a few committees because I have brain. I enjoyed committee work. One of the committees was a... it was a good committee but I had to stop. Now from Marazion it was an hour's drive up there...

An hour?

...10 minutes meeting and then we're back [laughs].

So we've gone past school now to when you were working.

Yeah.

So you were at the modern school till you were about 16, 17?

Oh yeah. Seventeen, 18 I left school, and I got several interviews for several jobs and...

[End of Track 1]

Track 2 [Tape 1 Side B]

Ah sorry. So, your first job?

Remploy at that time. You could only... At one time Remploy employed disabled...

Ah, right.

... ex-servicemen.

Right.

Now I've never been in service myself but I got in because I was young. I started with them when I was about...

Whereabouts?

... 19.

Nineteen. Whereabouts was it?

Up in Pool.

Oh up near Camborne, Redruth way? In Pool?

Mmm.

All on the industrial estate there, yeah.

Wilson Way.

How did you get there?

By van. The van picked us up by the interface for the Remploy place.

And what did you do there?

To start off was in engineering but Remploy had a cash crisis so they sold off all their engine machines...

Did they?

... to Holmans [ph]

Did they? Right.

Holmans took the top five machines and the best machines.

Do you know what year that was?

No. Don't.

Be mid sixties would it?

About then, was... [inaudible]... when they crashed.

Yes.

[Voices heard in the distance.] The bending machines went to Holmans and press machines went to Hull, for a Remploy up in Hull.

But you started on engineering, did you?

Now because I had been there for a year they couldn't boot me out,

Right.

so they had to enrol me in textiles, so I went into the textiles. Originally they thought I would be an excellent machinist on their cross-stitch sewing machine but I couldn't make it so, I told you, when the Remploy... [inaudible]... I came down there and I was an intermediate, it was better.

Sorry, I didn't quite catch that. What was better? You said it was better.

No.

Oh no, I got that wrong, sorry.

I said that I became an intermediate it's better, in the intermediate.

Intermediate

It was better.

Oh, it was better?

No.

No [laughs].

Inspector.

Oh inspector, inspector! Right, right.

And then we travelled down to Penzance Remploy.

They have one down Penzance?

Yeah.

Oh right.

It's a good one.

Were they quite good as employers?

No, they weren't.

Remploy, they always seem to be a bit sort of factory based and a bit repetitious when I've seen them, but the old ones.

Ahh. When I started you could only work for Remploy. Later on, about 30 years later on, they tried to employ people still in the factory but if you got a job, say in a garage, two-thirds of your wages I remember for paying the... [inaudible]... a little bit over the years but in the end I was leaving, by that time I was out of it. But, in all seriousness, I would love to have been somewhere else because Remploy was a little bit samey. You knew well what you were doing. Also, I had been forced out a little bit unfairly but [swallows] there was this one guy down in the... [inaudible]... he went into the stores and got a lot of stuff for cutting. Now before that I had been walking around finding bits and pieces, a day or two before. And he went in the stores and got his... [inaudible]... to cut. I went down this morning, 'We could sell them this lot,' and he kept all the notes on. Podmore [ph] he kept the wrong names. Instead of being about that long, it was that long. So I was looking around for scrap all the time. But it wasn't approved by the manager or anything. It was just told you'd done a good job and that's it.

Mmm. There's nothing.

In my view it is... [inaudible]... job just because he was fit, well fitter than I am but...
And now of course you get another twist by government who are saying, we are going
to stop incapacity benefits. OK there are certain people claiming incapacity benefit
while they are working but for the likes of me who got a record, who couldn't claim -

It made it difficult for you.

I'm claiming now. Besides I know the age – in about 18 years time I'll be retired so,
you know. [Knock on door.]

*When you were young do you think you should have been given the chance to go to
college, university?*

Yeah, I should have. Because I've been told I've got a good brain.

Nobody encouraged you?

No. Which is unfortunate but still there you are. [Coughs.] Perhaps if I'd gone to
college things would probably been different. I probably would have but when they
come for... [inaudible]... because when I was, before I had viral pneumonia, I went
canoeing and they were doing what they call clean sweep.

Doing?

Doing what they call clean sweep.

Clean sweep?

That Southwest Water were tidying up all the overflows and sewage. Now I took part
in a canoe race and I capsized [laughter] and they think I digested dirty water and
that's why I got viral pneumonia.

Right. So you had to go out in a canoe, is that what you're saying?

No. I went out in a canoe and I capsized...

Capsized.

... in it [both talking together], and that's why they think it's... I digested dirty water.

Right. And where was this again?

Penzance.

I see, Penzance, right.

[Coughs. Laughs.]

So that's what you had to do as part of your work?

No, not as part of my work at all.

No. I'm a bit confused. So can -

Sorry.

No, it's all right. [Both talking together.] So the canoeing – something you did as a leisure activity?

Yeah.

Yeah. But in the water itself?

The water itself was ordinary sea water in Penzance

And they reckon there's some pollution in the water?

Yeah. They were doing clean sweep.

Right.

Tidying up all the sewerage outlets and they reckon I got [inaudible] damage.
Anyway.

Did you get any compensations for that?

No. I didn't because I knew, and me father knew, that we couldn't prove anything.

Mmm, difficult to prove.

We couldn't prove that you had anything.

How long were you ill at that time?

Ooh it's eight months. I got back to work on that occasion at six months but I still had to have help to walk to the canteen or to toilet for about two months after.

But you were walking to a degree at that stage?

I was more or less like [laughs]. Well I've been called drunk one time. And that is one of the things that I do not like. OK I can't help it, but when someone about half a block away says, 'Oh look at him, he's drunk,' that really gets up my nose. I feel like blacking his eye [inaudible].

Yeah that's not very nice when that happens, is it?

It's... no. Originally I took up cab driving. I -

Took up?

Couch driving.

Couch driving?

Carriage driving.

Carriage driving. What, like with horses?

Horse and carriage. Unfortunately I had to pull out of that because health and safety does not allow you to just go with one person, you've now got to send two people, an escort and driver and well that's so annoying.

I've got to admit it makes it all pretty expensive.

Yeah.

Was that with a local society or something?

Yeah.

Yeah.

With the BDS: British Driving Society.

But you enjoyed that?

Yeah, enormously. I got to learn how to fit the horse, put the carriage on, take him for a run, take the carriage off, and then undress the horse too. And I did my test doing

that and I passed with flying colours. But unfortunately, life came round again; something I enjoyed had to go.

Were you the only one that did it, or did you go as a group?

No. Not from there. I went from home, myself. Went up to a place just outside Stithians.

Stithians.

Farm up there. [Clears throat.] I mentioned that I had been on quite a few committees. One committee was a forum which dealt with -

A foreign?

A forum.

A forum.

To do with transportation.

Transportation. I'm on one on shop mobility at the moment.

It was run by, well not exactly run by, but it was loosely controlled by a Cornwall County Council official and it was very interesting because I came from Penzance, there were quite a few from Truro, this part of Cornwall, this end of Cornwall from Truro down. [Inaudible.] We tried to get people from north Cornwall interested; we tried to get all...

It's a bit more difficult from -

... Councillors in charge of disability to get on the committee but... That's what he was called – a disabled access officer.

Disabled access?

Officer.

Oster.

Officer.

Oh officer, right sorry.

The Penzance one only turned up once, the north Cornwall one only turned up once, the Truro man – cos he was already there – he came to a meeting but...

What were the other committees you were on?

Scope, Cornwall. The riding for disabled...

Riding for disabled?

... Committee. The Marazion and district forum. Icansa [ph] committee for a lot and when I come down here and I had to wait a year till I got on the committee. After that I had to resign from all these committees because I couldn't keep it up.

No. Gets a bit much [laughs].

Yes.

So, is there much in the way working with horses for disability now, besides the one that you were on?

Pardon?

Is there much... Could you work or do you work with horses or riding?

Not any more. I was on the committee. The farmer was amazing to get me into riding school and I was put on the committee because I had passed my test and she had thought I was a good one to have because obviously my disability was mild but...

But you never - [both talking together]

sad to say I had to come off.

But that seems to be one of the things that you love – working with horses.

Yeah. Not so much of work, how to describe it? Yes, okay, yes. I like working with horses, yeah.

Because you were talking about the cleaning and the things that you used to do, and that.

When I passed my test, I did it from a wheelchair, from an ordinary manual wheelchair, but manual wheelchair.

Manual wheelchair. [Both talking together.]

That is only because you couldn't take your power chair up to a horse because the time will fly on the Lord Nelson because of the water and the charging of the wheelchair you can't take a power chair on the Lord Nelson.

Sorry? On a?

Of the Lord Nelson.

On the load?

No. Of the Lord Nelson, it's a ship. [Clears throat. Laughs.] The Lord Nelson.

Lord?

Nelson.

Nelson. Oh right, so, right [laughs]. But you couldn't have one on a carriage?

No, you can't have it on a carriage.

Well, you know I'm thinking of along, not necessarily the close drawn carriages, but, you know, a wagon sort of thing.

No, you can't have a power chair on there because of the same reason. If the horse... [inaudible]... it could evaluate quick. You need an ordinary wheelchair for sailing out on the Lord Nelson, your not allowed to take a power chair because of the water.

Do you have to use a power chair? Could you use a manual chair to go on?

Well I've got to use a manual chair, yeah. I have one there, a manual chair.

Is there any disabled horse riding facilities around here?

[End of Track 2]

Track 3 [Tape 2 Side A]

Sorry. We talked about the carriage society.

Carriage driving.

Carriage driving. [Both talking together.]

Yes. Well I couldn't do carriage driving because I was asked to go up to Debens [ph] when they were having a open day and I used to get up with the bloke from my 'ill, I go up to Stevens [ph]. I coped quite well on that, I even passed my road test, which meant you had to dress the horse, pull the carriage on, take it for a drive, came back and you had to undress the horse and put him back in the stable. That was the test and I did very well at it but unfortunately I had this fall, that was when I had a little... [?]
... person living at home and now health and safety prevent me from taking part in that, simply because they stipulate that you've got to have a carer and a driver to go anywhere with you. [Inaudible.] When you get to destination you can generally dismiss the driver but you've got to have two people. So if I have a trip out to... [inaudible]... two people have got to come with me – the carer and driver – whereas before the carriage driver would do it all. Since then I've lost contact with that particular group; there were about eight of us. The farmer used to come down sometimes, sees how I'm getting on, but apart from that I don't see any of them very much from the group.

Mm. Seems a shame doesn't it? You know, it's one of these things isn't it,

It is. [Both talking together.]

health and safety and -

All the time. It's the energy. At my age I got no energy, I forget what about it, but I seem to be too young for some things that are for old generations and too old for kids

stuff. You know so I'm literally through the middle and of course there are things I like to do like climbing. Not bungee jumping [gasps] but is ever so frustrating because I can't do... I used to be able to do a bit of rock climbing and what not but now obviously. I can't but anyway...

Do you go up to Churchtown? [Clears throat.]

Yeah, I been there four times. There again one trip I went... Every time I want to go rock climbing, for instance, the teacher was off sick and when we went sailing the mast broke. [Laughs]

Bit of bad luck, isn't it?

Yeah.

[Clears throat.] Always something goes wrong. [Laughs.] Oh dear.

[Takes a drink.]

So, remember we talked about the college, the schools you went to, and then you had your first job?

Yeah.

With Remploy, wasn't it?

Yes, it was. Umm... Yeah. [Takes a drink.] Unfortunately, business by Remploy was that [gulps] [inaudible]... It's proper technical but if you're employed by Remploy you can get a job they... [inaudible]... average whereby if you're employed as security guard somehows the firm Remploy pays you one bit of their wages and the company you're security guard for pays two fifths of their wages. Before, when you were employed by Remploy, you were employed by Remploy solely. It was a dead end job

so to speak because everyone was disabled, that was it. It was started in 1946 principally to employ [swallows] disabled ex-serviceman, who wanted to do a job of work but who couldn't make out right in open industry so it should have... [inaudible]... workshop. That being the base of it, but I hadn't been in the services myself but I got a job. There were some people in number who had a good service record in the military. Then things went a little pear-shaped and you can't get a job in Remploy now for love nor money. You know, it's another closed shop in the works. When I had my viral pneumonia [swallows] they knew obviously that I would never work again so that day's fee [dog barks] that is why they got rid of me, [inaudible] that's why they made me redundant. I didn't finish work, work finished with me; that's the way I put it.

What year did you leave Remploy?

Oh god, [laughs] can't remember now. About -

Early seventy, eighties?

No... Must have been mid-eighties.

Are they still much the same? Do you think there's still a... Are they still a closed shop in some ways?

Mmm... yeah. There are plenty of disabled people same as myself who would like to have a job; who would like to earn some money but Remploy doesn't recognise that. You've got to be sightly disabled and I don't mean... [inaudible]... and you can't get a job if you're in a wheelchair because of a heart condition. They want people who are just a little bit disabled. But biggest boast, and it is a way of good championing a wrong, biggest boast of any Remploy material is that they employ 95 percent of disabled people. Yes, but are they talking about disabled, or 'disabled' disabled people? You see I've been disabled since I was 18 months old up until about, oh god,

15 years ago. I was lightly disabled, you know, I could get around and could drive, could walk. I was... [inaudible]... but then after my viral pneumonia, I couldn't.

Pneumonia was that?

Viral pneumonia. And then unfortunately everything goes pear-shaped because I couldn't do little things and that's what is so frustrating because you used to but you can't now, sort of thing. But anyway I'm still living privy and eating it. [Laughs.]

How about Cheshire Homes? How did they give you any help on this side of things, in terms of occupation and -

Yeah. There's daycare centre putting them in... [inaudible]... in fact and since I've been here I've started painting and what not; water colours, pastels and acrylics and now I'm going to wools. Also here you can go on Sure. Now the Sure Committee is... [inaudible]... But, in one respect I disagree with it because quite honestly you can bring points up to a Sure representative – Stan Odenshaw [ph] – but they don't do it [coughs] and consequently you get no feed back at all. One point – they've got a bird hide down by the marshes and they built a path. Now they built the path about so wide but in actual fact the path has to be so wide [presumably demonstrates the size].

So the path was about three feet wide?

Yeah. Should have been six.

And it should have been six feet.

And I said to medium once, why don't you get... [inaudible]... so that if anyone else has an idea building a path [inaudible], 'Oh they wouldn't do that, they wouldn't do that,' to clear our path. So, once again you get a closed shop. No one cares. That's only one example, there are plenty more examples.

Is that down here? The Marazion Marsh, the bird -

Yeah. [Both talking together.]

Yeah.

There are plenty more examples but originally I thought it was going to be quite open.

Sorry, who was this?

The Sure representative. Now Sure stands for something, but [swallows] Len Cheshire had their own [swallows] disabled persons forum which [swallows] obviously follows my interest greater.

Do you want to stop for a cup of tea?

Yeah. [Break in recording.]

... in direct sunlight, [inaudible] there's a bit of a haze, you know.

Well I was sort of looking at the scene because you've got this wonderful peaceful panorama.

Yeah [both talking together].

Looking across and as you say, you know, on a clear day like today you can see an awful lot can't you?

Yeah.

And it's also actually a very busy scene and you've got all the tourists over there and the beach and then you've got the trains going down there...

Yeah.

... and you've got the motorway going down there and the cars and you've got the helicopter coming in and out I should imagine then you've got the silly boat.

[Laughs.] So I'm just thinking you've got an awful lot.

Yes.

Quite an active scene, isn't it? But does it make you feel there's lots of things going on out there?

[Takes a long drink. Inaudible.]

You said earlier that you helped out in the making the paths on the bird reserve.

Yeah.

Are you interested in bird watching and things?

Yeah. Well I am. It's...

I was just thinking you could have a bird table and things...

Yeah [both talking together].

... out here.

[Takes a drink.] Yeah. I could have quite a lot out there.

Because this is a sort of a main passageway for birds...

Yes [both talking together].

... here, isn't it?

Yeah. About. Now I'm no gardener but they've just built a sensory garden down there.

Sensory garden?

Yeah. In memory of Annette Brown who'd been here and had... [inaudible]... who died giving birth to twins.

Oh.

But, I mean that's been three years in the making. It's due to open in May.

That's out the bottom here? [Coughs.]

Yeah.

[Coughs.] It's taken about three years to -

But unfortunately the guy who was in charge of raising the money and what not, he didn't ask questions he just said, 'Right we're going to have a sensory garden.' Put it this way, put how he wanted it. Now there were 25 people there in summer only eight people use the gardens at the moment. Now to get down to the sensory garden you got to go down a slope.

Right.

The slope's all right for wheelchairs like this one, but if you're in a manual chair it is going to be a hell of a thing coming up. OK so you ring the staff but the staff have got

quite enough to do instead of pushing [inaudible] clients up the slope if you wouldn't slip. So the old concept has not being thought out. What can I say? It has been... [inaudible]... it doesn't mean really thought out.

It could have had a bit more planning?

Yeah.

Was a good idea but not... [Clears throat.]

It's a very good idea but, initially I would have thought if they'd built a bank [inaudible] of earth like this building is built on, in proximate to the field, if they built the bank up with soil and rubble and then wheelchairs – whether manual or power – would go onto it straight but to go down a slope. That's another thing if you get rain on the cobbles of the slope – what is that going to do to wheels?

It would get slippery?

Yeah. They haven't thought it out.

Didn't they ask what people -

No. 'You're just going to have a garden and that's it.' There are ways. I raise money for different projects in the past; I raised money for a garden although I don't like gardens myself. If they'd have asked me I would have done it but they didn't ask so that's the... Anyway this brings us some interest [laughs].

[End of Track 3]

Track 4 [Tape 2 Side B]

[Clears throat.] So that was in the mid 1980s,

Yeah.

by Remploy. And at that time you were more able

Yeah.

to walk and -

More mobile, yeah.

More mobile. So were you living with your mum and dad then were you?

Pardon?

Were you living with your parents at that time?

Yeah. Now me and me dad 'ad, about 23 years ago. I used to live with mum up in old folks bungalows in Marazion. Now, the thing is this, it was explained to me why I had to come down here, or go anywhere. The bungalows at Marazion were for old folk pensioners, now mum was 70 then; that's why we lived there. Me being disabled and after this bout of viral pneumonia, they explained that to get planning permission for old folks bungalow for an extension for me would be quite a lot to do and then you've got all the expense which would partly come from council but partly come from myself. So I couldn't afford that, so they transferred me down 'ere eventually. Since then my mother has an easier life because daddy came back to look after me, not that I needed much to look after. But she was then released to carry on with her own life. She's now 90, so - [gasps].

Good age. She's a good age.

[Gasps again.] Good age. She'll be 90 in nine month.

Were you an only child?

No, I've got a sister who lives in Goldsithney and she comes down once a week to see me.

Well Goldsithney's not far. [Both talking together.]

And mum come down once a week to see me so I'm all right from that angle. But principally what I want to do is have my own bungalow or ground floor flat which I can shut my own front door; you can't here. OK this is a nice place, fine, as far as it goes, but this is OK now I live in this room. All right and my meals are brought down, but at the end of the day I want something bigger than this room so...

Would you like to be stay in Marazion itself?

No.

Penzance?

Marazion is one 'ill. Penzance'll be all right. But eventually, I couldn't walk, again.

Have you talked to anybody about it? Is there any likelihood of -

Well there could be... [inaudible]... it's going to come. When I first came 'ere my right arm were up against my chest like that, all the time, didn't move, but now I can move it quite well.

Fantastic.

So it's coming.

Mobility's getting better.

It's coming. Course the left hand's all right but that hand isn't quite how it was but it's coming, it's coming.

That's good therapist and...?

Yeah. Myself. [Laughs.]

Best therapist. [Pause.]

Whatever your... Now, in my life I've had things which have really laid me on my back – I've 'ad viral pneumonia, I've 'ad different things since I've been 'ere. Every time I've been to get up, I'm knocked back again, but [clears throat] through my life there're two ways – there's a soft way where you get people to do things for you (and I couldn't use the phone so I'd get people to ring for me), or there's a hard way. Now, people will think, I'm sure, that I like go [to] physio, the truth of that is I don't like going to physio but physio will probably help me so therefore that's why I go. There's an old saying 'when the going gets tough, the tough gets going' so I think to myself, well I'm not defeated this time, it takes me a bit time, a bit longer to get there, but I get there. I can do it simply because you've got to keep positive, if you don't keep positive you've 'ad it. [Knock at the door.] OK? [Laughs. Pause.] Right. Porter [ph]. What else do you want to ask me?

Ah well. Something else [clears throat] – do you have your own computer and things?

Yes.

You've got your own? So that's another, access through the internet

Yeah.

and emails and stuff. Do you have much communication in that way?

Yeah. I [interviewer coughs] have quite a bit. I'm going to change because this may be a bit of a sad point from your point of view and from my point of view but for the last 30 years I've been trying to get out with girlfriend. Now no one's known. I don't know why but no one must know and I tried different sites on the computer but I come blank every time so I just couldn't change all that, cope with someone else, why I didn't know.

That must be a bit disappointing cos in the one way you think going on the internet gives you more access but...

It is. [Pause.] You naturally feel a bit isolated as a person but unfortunately, well, I've known, people just think you're ever... People just don't take it seriously enough which is very annoying, very frustrating at times. Anyway... I shall take after those.

Does Cheshire Homes encourage people to come in here as tutors?

Well, no they don't [pause]. From what I understand of it Cheshire Homes was set up by Group Captain Cheshire in '49, '50. His first cases were Andsome [ph] up in Hertfordshire but his first home was botanic, not botanic, it was down here anyway, in an old airplane aerodrome and [gasps] he's built a lot of homes and adapted a lot of homes. This land it stands on was given by the then Lord [inaudible], his father, the old lord. The land was given and it's dark in section this part and was white with the first of the new buildings, the other ones with the grill are the new build. While Rachel, Len Cheshire runs a home, but there's so much red tape involved. For instance each times you have to apply for, not a payment, but a police check from the home office. Now, unfortunately just to guard against paedophiles and what not, unfortunately all your volunteers have to be police checked too [interviewer clears his

throat] this leads to say 'Joe Blogs would like to do something with us.' When he's finished with police checks he say, 'All right I've had the police check out on me' but when it gets four, five weeks he says, 'I'll be back for that.' And some of them can be kept up to seven weeks.

Yes, great shame.

And you're just waiting, you're just waiting.

Yes they're clamping down more and more now.

Yeah [both talking together].

and it does make it more and more difficult. They have to protect people but on the other hand it stops things socially and meeting people as well. It's difficult isn't it? Do you think if you had your own place in Penzance you'd be able to meet more people?

Yeah, I would.

Because the problem here is, it's nice place but you can't really go very far under your own steam.

No you can't.

Whereas if you were in Penzance you could get around the town centre.

This chair is mine. On the wheelchairs, that's another thing, after 12 hours, if it's driven right up [takes a drink] on number five for speed now with this chair I know that I'm going to be in this chair for the rest of my life... [inaudible]... but I hope to achieve is to be able to walk around indoors and use the chair outdoors. If I get into Penzance OK I'll be living proof, I'll be able to get round the town and meet people.

That's what it is all about, meeting people. For some unknown reason when you're in Len Cheshire [buzzer sounds] home people don't come down from Marazion. They know you're all right, they know all about us, but they don't want to meet you. Friends can come and but they just don't. I don't know what it is but that's it. When the DDA came in – disabled discrimination act – [interviewer clears throat] when that came in, I said well we've got the bones, now it's up to us to put the meat on. Now there are various things like accessibility. Now I was on a committee for access, run by county 'all. Now I thought when I came here originally that they had the facilities but it's sad you know because they don't want to do anything for disabled people. [Inaudible.] But I mean there's Penzance. Now, if you had a couple of disabled people from here, to come to Penzance and test the shops on, say every 12 months or every six months, they paid us, well then they'd have a clear idea of what disabled people wanted. But no, that was another... It is a closed shop.

They need to actually see what its like

Yeah.

for themselves.

Yeah. Now there are three to four people who need [inaudible] training in wheelchairs. One is the doctors and nurses, then there's physiotherapists and occupational therapist. All four need to do six months or three months in a wheelchair when they qualified they need to be in a wheelchair for at least three months.

Mm, just to see.

Then they would get a better idea

Better idea, mm. [Both talking together.]

But... [inaudible].

Do you take part in the disability forum?

No.

No, cos it's based in Longrock [ph] isn't it? Mm. [clears throat]

Yeah. That is a bit of a story because to start out I was on the steering committee of that forum [interviewer coughs] we met at Longrock, but, the leader of it said what we do is this and that and whatever. Now, instead of the secretary saying... [inaudible]... they pretend to the... [inaudible]... like, she went and reported it. Obviously, there was one case when you wouldn't, where Liz (the leader) wanted to buy a kettle she wouldn't give him permission to buy the kettle because of this person. Eventually what happened, we used to meet once a month and this chap [both talking together] said he literally disbanded the group. He said they'd consulted a solicitor [inaudible] so it was legally drawn up and the person couldn't, they fired this person. Legally they found out that she was two or three weeks before her legal contract has expired or the legal probationary period has expired. So legally they could fire her. But all this was done without any consultation with us on the steering committee so it was all done cloak and dagger stuff.

Mmm...

Which is, which is...

[End of Track 4]

[End of recording]