

Care Leavers' Stories project

Darron Nixon

Interviewed by Rahma Mohammed

C1597/11

In 2013 this Project was carried out by the Social Care Institute for Excellence. The British Library acted as archive partner. The Project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

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Social Care Institute for Excellence

Interview Summary Sheet

Title Page

Ref no: C1597/11

Collection title: Care Leavers' Stories

Interviewee's surname: Nixon

Title: Mr

Interviewee's forename: Darron

Sex: Male

Occupation: Consultant in Care and Support for people with learning disabilities

Date of birth: 1965

Dates of recording: 22.06.13

Location of interview: Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London, SW1Y 5BH

Name of interviewer: Rahma Mohammed

Type of recorder: Canon XF 305

Recording format : .mxf

Total no. of tracks: 1

Mono or stereo: Stereo

Total Duration: 2:15:12

Additional material:

Copyright/Clearance: Full clearance

Interviewer's comments: The last two questions at [2:13:55] were filmed as clarification about earlier comments in order to be as clear as possible about the situation in the home.

Track 1

Camera rolling.

If you'd like to begin by telling us your name and kind of what you do now?

Yeah, my name is Darron Mark Nixon, I live in Durham and currently I'm a commissioner of services for people with learning disabilities and I'm in the process of leaving my job and actually setting up my own consultancy company to do training, management support advice, guidance for providers who provide services for people with learning disabilities.

How did you come to the decision to leave your job?

It's a very stressful world, in the world of commissioning and with the changes in government and the pressures, the austerity measures it's become increasingly a high pressured environment to work in. I feel very strongly, I've got a very strong moral base and I really feel very strongly about providing the right kind of services for people with learning disabilities and unfortunately when finances are limited it becomes very very difficult to do that. As a consequence of that, started to affect my health and I decided that I would really be better off doing something else. And sadly one of my – one of my friends died and his wife approached me and asked me if I would work with their company and shortly after that another company approached me and asked me if I'd work with them as well and that kind of filled up my week for possible consultancy so I decided to give it up and to start again and do something completely different. And I've called my company Inspire Insight, and it's a community interest company, it's not for profit, so I think that's very very important and hopefully I can still continue to do some good but do the things that, you know, I enjoy and that I'm good at in terms of teaching and training and supporting people and mentoring and advising. Rather than getting involved in the financial sort of side of things which can be extremely stressful.

What would you say motivates you to do some good?

I don't know, I have a very – I have a very strong moral sense, I have a very strong set of values. I've no idea where they come from but I really feel it's important to do the right thing and I've had some – I think my childhood obviously has influenced the way that I am today, and I feel that, you know, I've had some very good examples and I've had some very bad examples of, you know, how I've been sort of supported and looked after. And I think at the same time my early experience, when I did my nurse training 'cause I'm a registered nurse, was very traumatic to me because we didn't treat people with learning disabilities very well in the 1980s and you know it was really quite a traumatic experience. So I felt a very strong moral obligation to be involved in the right kinds of services and have the right kind of approach later on, so I guess that has influenced me as well.

So have you lived in Durham all your life?

No, I've moved around a little bit, I lived in – I lived in Ferryhill for a short while, I lived in Newton Aycliffe when I was doing my training, and I've lived in Stockton, lived there for a while and I've also lived in Durham. I've lived in Durham for about the last, I think it's about nineteen years now. My wife's from Durham which is another reason why I live in Durham.

[03:28]

So before coming into care do you have any memories or –

I have a lot of memories, I was – I was born in a house in Peterlee which is a little town on the east coast, and my early memories I have was of a raging fire in the living room, there was an absolutely raging live coal fire. And my mum had just stoked up the fire, we lived in a normal sort of council house in Peterlee, and my dad was away at work as an insurance man, and basically all I remember is this roaring fire. And my mum coming up to me and saying, 'Son, I'm going now, tell your dad I'm not coming back,' and I was sat in front of this fire [laughs] on my own at the age of about five years of age for what seemed like a long time. My dad was late home that day and

when he arrived the first thing he was shocked to see was the fire, the fact that I hadn't been burnt, and he asked where my mum was and I said, 'Well my mum's gone Dad,' and she went missing for about three years, we didn't know where she was. So I think they did everything but almost dig the garden up to [laughs] see where she was. What we found out later had happened is that my mum had been working in a betting shop and she'd been taking bets on the side and some horses came in and they won the race and she was asked to pay up and she couldn't pay up 'cause she didn't have all the money behind her that a normal booking shop would have and of course those bets weren't logged on their system. So my understanding is, and this is all things I've been told over the years, so I believe this to be true, my mum disappears and went to go and live in London where she met a man called Fred, Fred Brum and she lived in London with him for the next sort of three years. She then contacted my dad, found out where my dad was and my dad was shocked, 'My god, you're still alive, where have you been, it's been three years,' [laughs] and she'd been obviously living with this guy and she wanted me back. So I was promptly put in a car and driven to London [laughs] and given to my mum at the age of about eight years of age. I was asked – the question that I was asked was, 'Do you want to go and see your mum?' I said, 'Yeah, of course I want to go and see my mum,' I thought she was dead, I didn't know where she was, she'd been missing for like three years and I was only – I think I was about eight years of age at this time. And she said, 'He's,' my dad said to me, 'Well you can either see her now or you'll probably never see her again,' and I said, 'Well I'd like to go and see my mum.' So I was taken down to the London Metropole Hotel, dropped off and given to my mum. I didn't even recognise my mum 'cause she had long hair, I couldn't hardly remember what she looked like and my dad disappeared in his car and, you know, I basically went to live with my mum and this man called Fred Brum. He'd started to do some work in social services helping the elderly, he was a bit of a kind of relief warden I guess, we moved around and had a couple of different houses. He wasn't a nice man, he was quite cruel to me, and what I now understand is grooming, you know, he used to buy me things and then he would take them off me, and he would sort of half let me do things and then take them away and this was all about trying to manipulate me into, you know, whatever he wanted me to do. I was fortunate that I was never sexually abused by my stepfather, they did get married later on so I refer to him as my stepfather. But he

used to do things – I mean they used to go out a lot and they used to leave me on my own in the house and at times he used to deliberately go out and lock the doors when he knew I was coming in from school so I used to have to break into the house to get in otherwise I'd be beaten up by the local kids. And it's the one time that I felt really very much alone, you know, that it was quite a rough neighbourhood in Paddington where we lived for a while and, you know, it was really quite sort of a strange time really. So my mum had worked, I think at that time she'd worked in a taxi company in the office, and he worked at this sort of relief warden and they lived in a little flat, downstairs, with only one bedroom which wasn't very nice as you can imagine for obvious reasons. And you know, it was quite difficult 'cause when they went out a lot he would say things like, 'And don't watch the television, and go to bed at,' you know, whatever time and I was left on my own and I was only about eight or nine year old at the time. I was in that situation up until about eleven or twelve I think it was. And we moved around in different places, we moved to Hammersmith and the relationship between me and stepfather had just completely deteriorated, it was really quite traumatic and he was – he used to give me the occasional slap and, you know, I was quite a strong willed person as you might imagine. One thing I pride myself on is my kind of strength of character, I'm not a sheep, I was – I think I was quite an arrogant young child when I was younger [laughs]. So when we went, you know, through the whole sort of process, you know, of living in a house and getting knocked out, I became very very adept at breaking into my own house [laughs] and I learnt to cook, I learnt to clean, I learnt to sew and to do all the things that I needed to 'cause my mum really didn't do much for me. And in the later years things got so bad that I just, you know, I really needed to get away and I lived with my nan for a while. So, oh sorry, I've skipped a bit out actually. When I was five to eight I actually lived with my nan which is my dad's mum and she was a really positive influence on me, she was a lovely woman, a bit of a matriarch but she was lovely. So going back to me living in London from the age of about eight to sort of twelve, things got so bad that I, you know, one day I ... I basically disappeared and I went to Victoria train station with all my fishing tackle. I took my fishing tackle with me 'cause I knew my stepfather would smash it up after he'd known what would happen, so I was a very strange young lad [laughs], about twelve year old going to a train station with a load of fishing tackle which is a bit odd. And I forget to tell them that I was under fourteen

and they didn't believe me 'cause I looked bigger than, and older than fourteen and they said, 'Well unless you can prove you're fourteen we won't give you a ticket to the north east of England,' which is where I wanted to go. Because for years my stepfather had told me that no one wanted me and no one wanted to have anything to do with me and apart from an occasion letter and a card and things – and my dad did come down once to see me, he took me to Trafalgar Square to feed the pigeons and I've got some pictures of that which I remember with happy memories. But I basically, you know, really didn't want to be there, so I went across to Kings Cross, couldn't get on the train – went to Victoria – that was it, I went to Kings Cross first, then I went to Victoria and I couldn't get a – a bus to go directly to Hartlepool so I went – diverted via York or Darlington or somewhere I think I went, which is all very strange at my age but that's what I did. And I did eventually get to my grandma's house which was my mum's mum, 'cause it was closer to where the train station was and I could walk there from the train rather than my nan's house, my dad's mum's house which was a lot further away. And they were obviously delighted to see me, not, didn't go down well [laughs], 'What the hell are you doing, why have you come back up here?' and promptly sent me back on the train back down to London again, which you know, I wasn't very happy about as you might imagine. And you know, really after a while I did – there was a spell where I lived with my nan for another year between the ages of twelve and thirteen and I was sent back down because my mum and my stepfather were getting married and I was going to go down just for the wedding, little did I know was that everybody had planned behind my back that I was actually going to stay there, and so I'd been stayed – ended up staying down in London. And I stayed there for about another year and things were – at that point were pretty bad, you know, and it was really quite horrendous. And basically my stepfather started – I think he was a bit of a boxer in his day and he'd always – I'd had a few slaps over the years but he started closing his fist, 'cause I was getting much bigger and I was getting much more stroppy and he was getting much more angry. And, you know, all his efforts to groom me into his own behaviour hadn't worked and it was really the case of he started clenching his fist and, you know, throwing the punches and I ducked one day and sort of ... you know, just sort of managed to get out of the way and I thought, no, I need to go, I need to be away from here [laughs]. And I basically asked to – to go into care, and I asked my mum, 'Can I please go into

care, I want to go into care, you don't want me, my family in Hartlepool don't want me so I'll go into care, I'll be better off there, I'll be out of everybody's way, it's not a problem.' And eventually I did manage to persuade, you know, people to get me to go into care. And I ended up going into the Frogmore Assessment Centre in Wandsworth, in I think it was about 1979 I think it was. Do you want me to keep going [laughs], do you want a word in?

[13:33]

Did your mum ever know about what was going on between your stepdad?

I don't know [sighs], what I found out much later on was Fred had a – a son from his first marriage called Paul, and Paul had obviously had quite a traumatic experience with his dad from all accounts 'cause he'd emigrated to Australia and for some reason he got deported and he got sent back to the UK but he'd actually changed his name and he'd had absolutely nothing to do with his dad. I knew Paul 'cause he did have some dealings with him from the time when I lived with them but I think more latterly I think he really, you know, he was so traumatised by the whole experience he just didn't want to have anything to do with his father and I can absolutely understand that. You know, and I really sort of felt sorry for him. So I don't think my mother could have ignored that that happened 'cause I think she must have known that. Erm, I found out after Fred's death that he'd actually – I believe he's abused my half brother as well, I don't know all the circumstances, I don't have a lot of contact with that side of the family, but I think he did abuse my younger half brother, but I didn't find that out until after his death which was a few years ago.

Was there nobody else you could spoken to about what was going on?

At the time it – it's funny, it was a different world, we didn't have mobile phones, telephone access was quite limited, I didn't know a lot of people's phone numbers, Childline didn't exist, you know, there just wasn't the things in place that there are today. And it really heartens me when I see things like, you know, the NSPCC Full Stop campaign and, you know, things like Childline and, you know, Esther Rantzen's

done a fantastic job there. So you know, there's – a lot of those things are in place now that just simply didn't exist, and if you can imagine if you're a young child living in London, you have no family anywhere near you, you haven't got access to a telephone, you don't know anybody's numbers anyway and some of your close family, like my nan, didn't actually have a phone. So there was – the only way I could write to them to get in contact but of course, you know, you needed money for stamps and you needed stationery and stuff like that which wasn't again easily available. So I guess I probably could have told somebody at school but my school life was pretty tempestuous, it was pretty horrendous because I'd get a lot of ironically racial bullying because I was from the north east. So I would get a lot of cockney kids, black and white that would, you know, regularly assault me just 'cause I happened to be from the north east. And I've got a bit of a party trick that I can [changes accent] change my accent straightaway and start talking differently. So that I blend in. So that's basically what I learnt to do, just to basically stop myself getting beaten up. And when I'd lived in London and moved to the north east I'd get the same again for being a cockney, so I had to change my accent back very very quickly and I learned to change my accent within a couple of weeks. So it was a bit strange.

[0:16:48]

Did you ever wish to contact your father and move in with him?

I did try and contact my father, my father's – he's a very proud man and, you know, I have quite a good relationship with my dad now, you know, which has evolved over the years and I think as I've got older and become more successful in my career I think, you know, he's had more respect for me and, you know, we do have quite a good relationship now. But I don't think – it was never that easy because, you know, phone calls, you couldn't have left the message, you know, they're often when you rang a phone number in the '80s or, you know, the '70s it would ring [laughs] and ring and ring and if nobody was there nobody was there. You know, but most people didn't have answer phones, they – you know, it was very difficult to get in touch with people and you felt absolutely isolated. So I did really really feel isolated, and I think it was very difficult for me to contact anyone.

Would you say that growing up you had one person who was there for you and who you could talk to?

I think it was my nan, my dad's mum, she was always a very positive influence on me. She wasn't an educated woman, she was very basic in her emotions but I knew that she loved me and, you know, that for me was all that mattered and, you know, when I used to visit her she would slip me a tenner or slip me a fiver, you know, she would always, you know, be nice. And she used to say, 'Did you get that, you know, five pound that I sent down to you in the post?' and I said, 'What five pound, I didn't get it,' she said, 'Oh bloody hell.' And what I think used to happen was my parcels were intercepted and any money that was in them was taken out and I never got any money, so my nan was always quite annoyed with me that I hadn't wrote and said thank you, you know, or whatever and I never actually got it. And in the end she started [laughs] hiding pound notes in between the pages of a – like she'd sent me a book for Christmas, she'd hide like a pound note in the middle of the pages so I used to occasionally get a pound, you know, which was, wayhay, got a pound, it's fantastic [laughs]. So yeah I mean my nan had a really positive influence on me and I think that was – that was nice to know that whenever I came back to the north east I could always go and see my nan and she'd always be nice to me, you know, which was, you know, one very positive influence. My dad was, he was going through a lot of different issues, you know, he's – he's been married a couple of times, you know, basically he wasn't that approachable to be fair, but I think, you know, I have a much different relationship with him now. But I think that's partly because I've become a self made man as it were. I've got, you know, a fantastic relationship with my wife of thirty years and I've got two grown up kids which, you know, I'm very proud of, you know, both Heather and Mark I'm very proud of them. And in a way that's kind of given me the respect that it's enabled me to have a positive relationship with him I guess.

[19:51]

How would you describe your transition from living at home to being in care?

It was unbelievably traumatic in if I felt alone before living with my mum and my, you know, horrible stepfather, it was even worse. Wandsworth Assessment Centre, if you can imagine is – it was not far from Armoury Way, I don't think it exists anymore now, I've looked it up on Google a couple of times and I haven't seen any reference to it anywhere so I'm presuming it's been levelled, and I'm not surprised that it's been levelled actually, it was a proper den of iniquity. As kids we had no supervision or guidance whatsoever, kids just came and went as they wanted to, it was almost like an open house. And I remember going to see late cinema, I'd go and see kung fu films [laughs] at eleven o'clock on a Saturday night till three in the morning. And that the staff weren't bothered about where you were, what you were doing, and I have it on reliable authority that some of the staff were sleeping with the girls in the home, some of the staff were actually I believe dismissed for doing that, I found that from another member of staff that I'd met later on, some time after I'd left. And I mean I suffered a lot of physical abuse, got beaten up a few times. And I actually shared a room with a guy called Melvyn I think he was called and he had a real problem with glue sniffing and drugs and one thing and another. And I caught hold of him once on the River Wandle on one of the sluice gates, on the River Wandle going into the Thames and there's a massive sluice gate and it just goes straight down into a pit of foaming water and if he'd have gone in there he'd have died but he was high on glue and I pulled him off and managed to stop him killing himself 'cause he was a really mixed up kid. And he was – I think he was from Sunderland, that's why they put us together, 'cause I was from the north as well. And there was other kids there that were really sort of, you know, angry, really mixed up kids, but the staff, most of them seemed to be stoned most of the time, you know, they were, you know, heavy use of marijuana throughout the whole building and, you know, there was just – it just didn't seem like there was any hope [laughs], it was just like a complete dumping ground. And you can imagine the worst most troubled kids seemed to be there. And the only happy memory I have of that place, the only one thing I remember is, like I say I used to go to the late night kung fu films at the Shepherds Bush cinema and even when I come back from that I got beaten up, you know, over some dispute over money I think it was. But the one happy memory I have is there was a girl there, an African girl and we had curried goat, and I'd never eaten goat before and it was fantastic and I

remember for some reason having this dinner with this curried goat. And that's the one thing I remember very very significantly from that. I was there for about three or four months and then I moved to the Lillie Road Centre which was at that time they had two homes, one was based in Isleworth near Osterley and the other one was based in Fulham in the Lillie Road Centre. And that – the Lillie Road Centre at Osterley was like a big – well like a big massive detached house and it was run by a Roman Catholic organisation, I think my mum had, you know, maybes had some influence there 'cause she was a Catholic, I wasn't but she was. And they didn't push religious denominations or anything, but I quite liked it there, it was – it was okay, it was quite strict, it was quite orderly, but it was a lot more organised and it was a lot more – there was more things going on and if you wanted to kind of do like after school activities there'd be things going on that you could kind of get involved with and I quite enjoyed my time there. I wasn't there very long before I was moved to the Fulham site because I was going to school in Shepherds Bush and it was easier for me to get there than from Osterley every day, so it was much easier for me to go there. And when I went to the Fulham site it was run by a Roman Catholic priest by the name of Father McCabe and I know what you're thinking [laughs], you know, Roman Catholic kids and boys' homes, it's – you know, there's been a lot of bad press about childhood abuse, but I never experienced any childhood abuse there. And that for me was a very stable place. The staff did seem to genuinely care; there were Jesuit priests there, there was training social workers, there was people doing CSV, and you know, I found that really quite positive 'cause there were some role models there, people who really seemed to be going places, who had had solid family backgrounds and seemed to share some of the values that I was at that time, you know, developing, you know, of being just nice to people and just caring and just kind of, you know, doing the right thing I guess. So that – that was quite a positive experience, and the other thing was, with him being a Roman Catholic priest every summer we got to go to Ireland, because they would just hire a – yeah a convent which had been closed for a summer holidays or a religious school or something that would be closed and we would have the run of the place for the summer, for a couple of weeks in the summer holidays. So we used to – I used to go fishing and I used to basically, you know, do all sorts of activities, I remember going on a big sailing yacht once and it was great, I used to love those holidays. So slightly unconventional but it seemed to work.

[0:25:35]

How would you describe your relationship with the staff there, and the trainees?

It was quite – it was quite formal, the staff were all – they all seemed to be either trainee social workers or they'd, you know, they'd been, you know, trainee priests or they were community service volunteers from CSV, they all seemed to be quite formal. But they all didn't seem to stay there that long, they were only there for maybes a year or a few weeks or whatever and then they'd move on. But it kind of inspired me to think, well they're a bit like me, you know, there's no reason why I couldn't do that, I'd quite like doing this sort of thing. And one of the staff had suggested to me, well when I leave there, why don't I go and do a CSV, you know, go and do a voluntary placement and you get your board and your food and everything paid for and I'd nowhere to live so I thought, yeah, why not. So I went across to Pentonville Terrace I think it is over in Islington, the CSV headquarters and this guy, I can't even remember his name, he interviewed me and – and he said, 'Right,' he says, 'okay, you've answered all these different questions,' I think you'd be great working with people with learning disabilities,' and I said, 'What's that then, what's a learning disability, what does that mean?' [laughs]. And then he said, 'Well it's about, you know, interacting with impairment and disability and stuff and you'll be working with children, some of them have Downs Syndrome and some of them have physical disabilities,' and I said, 'Well can I be in the north east, you know, can I get a placement up in the north east?' and he said, 'Yeah,' he said, 'the nearest place we have is Ferryhill.' Okay, that's about thirty miles away from Hartlepool but never mind it's near enough, so I went and I did a year's placement based on the advice and guidance of some of the staff there, because I knew I couldn't stay, if I wasn't staying on at school. Sixth form wasn't really working. I mean I did some GCSEs – well CSEs and GCEs at the time they were, I did a few of those and I did a few months of sixth form but it just – it just really wasn't working out, I wasn't getting the kind of emotional support, I'd picked maybes the wrong subjects and I kind of needed to move on I think at that point in time. And I was getting aware that I was growing up I guess so I wanted to be back in the north east and that give me opportunity to do it, so

I did a year's placement in the Clevesferye Children's Home in Ferryhill, children with learning disabilities, and from there then I went on and did my nurse training.

[28:04]

Throughout your time children's homes did you ever wished you'd move into foster care to get a sense of family life?

Do you know my – my ... it is really weird how things happen and I'm not a religious person at all, I have no belief in religion. But I do think that there is a sense of karma, a sense of balance in the world, I don't know what it's all about. But it's interesting my son just recently engaged to be married to his girlfriend and his girlfriend is a social worker in a children's safeguarding team in the north of England and one of the councils there. And we were talking a little bit about my experience of coming down to SCIE and she was asking me, 'Well, you know, what would – what do you think should have happened differently?' [clears throat] Excuse me, just have a drink of water. [pause] And I said, 'I wish I'd gone into foster care as a younger child,' you know, when things were going really badly, you know, maybes at the age of sort of eight, instead of going to go and live with my mother and my stepfather, for me it would have been much much better, I think I'd have had a much better start in life if I'd have actually gone into foster care and just lived a normal life, you know, with people that cared and, you know, that weren't in it just for the money, that people were, you know, doing that because they wanted to do it and I think that that would have been a really positive influence on me. The only thing that wouldn't have happened is that I wouldn't have met my wife which is the only thing I would never want to change, to meet Tracy so –

[29:48]

How would you have described your relationship with your mother, throughout your time living with her?

It was difficult ... there was always that – there was always a kind of attention there, I mean I love my mum, I always have done, but it's – it's a strange sort of bond that you have with your mum. You always feel you should be, you know, loyal and supportive to your mum and stuff but I mean I speak to my mother maybe once or twice a year, she always seems pleased to speak to me on the phone but she never enquires about my family and she's never really been involved with my family throughout their life and growing up. And I think she's missed out on that which is a shame. But I think I've just had to accept things for the way that they were, and although I have tried over the years to rekindle relationships with both my parents, with my dad – I think because I've seen him much more often, he lives only twenty miles away from my house, it's been kind of easier and he's always been quite steady and stable in his life. Whereas my mum's life has always had a sense of turmoil in it because of my stepfather and – and, you know, latterly my half brother now has some mental health issues and one of two other problems. My half sister seems to be okay though, she's got a husband and several kids, but again I don't really have much to do with them, I've always said, 'You know where I am if you need me,' but I feel I've never really been able to get involved in their life baggage, I've always wanted to just say, no, I've got to draw a line under it and live my own life and do my own thing. And I think that's – that's been difficult but I think it's been the right thing to do.

Have you ever wanted to make – like to have a good relationship with them and to have a normal kind of life?

I have but for some families I think you have to accept there's so much water under the bridge, there's so much history, and I'm sure that every time my mother sees me she's constantly reminded of a traumatic and tempestuous past, and I – I now believe that I'm a reminder of a past that she wants to forget, which is okay, that's fine. I'm kind of over that now, it was very difficult for me when I was younger but I really don't think that that's an issue now because, you know, I'm my own man, I've got my own life and my own two kids and, you know, I've got a relationship with some of my other family and that's fine, that's okay for me. And, you know, obviously I have a relationship with some of Tracy's family and things as well, so I don't feel a need for that anymore. It would have been nice but it ain't going to happen.

How would you describe your mother's relationship with your stepfather?

It was very tempestuous, they argued and fought a lot, usually over money, sometimes over me but because he was constantly being cruel to me. He would do things like take the valves out the back of the TV and when they went out so that I couldn't watch the television, he would – you know, have a fish tank and tell me not to touch it or go anywhere near it. He would buy things that he knew I would like and not let me have access to them. And a couple of times he even – when I used to bring friends over to the house he used to tell them that I was gay so that the kids never came back. So there was a lot of – a lot of things that were going on.

Why do you think he'd done all this stuff to you?

Because he wanted to totally dominate me and probably to abuse me in the same way that he'd done his son and he did with his own son after me. I'm way way too strong a character for that. My dad's a very very strong – he's a very strong character, my nan was a matriarch and she was – she was, you know, took no prisoners. But I loved her for it and my dad's a very very strong character and it's funny because my son's got the same strength of character that I've got and that my dad has. So there's a genetic trait there of being really strong minded, strong willed people, and you know, I think he wanted to break me and he never did, which I was always very very pleased about, that I've never suffered the sexual abuse, I'd only had the mental above and physical abuse which some people would say is worse but, you know, for me. It took me a long time to come to term with that, I would say even up until my late '30s, early '40s before I really sort of put a lot of those demons to bed and, you know, it was one of the things where I'd signed up to the – through my work I'd signed up to the SCIE sort of, you know, mailing lists and saw this care leavers project, yeah why not.

[0:34:48]

If your dad had known about your stepfather, what do you think he would have done, do you think he would have helped you?

I don't know, you see at the time I didn't know, I didn't know that's why he was trying to – I didn't know what grooming was, I didn't know what he was trying to do to me at that time, I just thought he was being nasty to me. And my dad, I think he knew that I wasn't an easy child, you know, because I was quite strong willed and I'd like to think that if my dad had known, you know, the true extent of what was going on then he would have, you know, proactively acted about it, but of course at that time you know he had another family, he had stepchildren with another wife, and that I guess was even more difficult for me because he was bringing up someone else's kids yet he wasn't bringing up me. We tried it for a few months but it just didn't – it didn't work, you know, I was – I was probably too [laughs] – too sort of difficult I think by then to be fair.

[0:36:50]

How was your relationship with the other young people living in your second care home?

It was okay, I mean I had a couple of friends, I mean everybody was from a weird background, there was a guy I shared a room with called Carlos whose dad used to beat him up with the coffee table leg. There was other boys that were just basically neglected, we all kind of had something in common and we kind of got on okay, there was a bit of fighting from time to time [laughs] but as you would expect. But I don't think I ever got close to anybody really, you know, I was – I was very much my own man and I wasn't probably there a lot, I was out and about doing a lot, going to school and, you know, so you didn't get that much of an opportunity but I did kind of get on with them okay.

What would you say would be your best memories there?

Probably the Ireland holidays, going fishing with the lads and – because they didn't know how to fish and I did so I'd go somewhere and catch loads of fish which they thought was great and, you know, that was – that was just brilliant because I kind of

got a bit of recognition, I got a bit of credibility and we had some good holidays, so I really enjoyed that.

[37:03]

With regards to your school life, moving around and going into care, how do you think that impacted you?

Horrendously because every time I went to school I was usually fighting the fact that someone was calling me gay because my stepfather had told the last person that went to my house that I was gay. There was one school that I went to and this is real cruelty this, this is real cruelty, I went to a school ... called – I think it was called Esendrine Junior School, I think it still exist actually and I was one of only four white kids in the whole school, it was a very multiracial area and I was bullied [laughs] for being white, which is really really strange, you wouldn't think it happens but it does. And I got a lot of racial bullying because I wasn't in the same clans or groups as everyone else. And I guess in a way that's one of the reasons why I'm not racist now 'cause I really appreciate that from a personal perspective and I think everybody should have the right to live whichever way they want, you know, I really think that's so important. But moving schools, I mean I've been to more schools than you might ever imagine, I mean I think I went to four or five – I think I went to about four or five junior schools, I went to about three secondary schools. So I was always seen to be catching up, I was lucky, I came out of school with five O levels equivalent, and that was just enough for me to go and do my nurse training without taking the entrance exam so I was chuffed so it was worth it. But it wasn't easy. I really think I missed out on a proper education 'cause I think I could have done so much more. Because I've proven to myself since I've left care, I've been to university four times, I've got, you know, I've done my nursing, I've got postgraduate qualifications in a number of subjects, qualified as a teacher and a manager and an equality manager and other things. So that's really been, you know, maybe a missed opportunity, I would have loved to have had somebody really get behind me and support me, you know, with that formal education and gone straight onto university 'cause I think I probably could have had a much better, you know, more focused career perhaps than what I've

had. Not that I'm unhappy with my career or my career choices, but it's sometimes been quite difficult.

[0:39:28

How was your relationship with your social worker?

My social worker, I was trying to remember her name and I think she was called Margaret Clarke, she was a middle aged lady then so I'm – I don't even know if she's still alive now 'cause she must be pretty old. She was a – a larger than life middle class white woman who ... she was – she was like, you know, a typical sort of, you know, middle class quite bolshie social worker. And I quite liked her and I think she quite liked me and I think that was quite important for people to like me at that time, to get on and have a decent relationship 'cause I had lots of abandonment issues as you might expect [laughs], it's been a bit of a recurring theme. But I really feel that she did her best, and you know, she helped me with the CSV application and stuff like that and, you know, she kind of kept an eye on things and she kind of – I think she knew the measure of my stepfather, and she'd – I certainly think, I got the impression she didn't like him. And that was enough for me [laughs] that she didn't like him and she liked me and that was fine. But I mean I think, you know, she was very traditional in her approaches, looking back on it now from what I know of social worker, because of my job, not brilliant, but she was okay, she did what I needed her to do and she, you know, she looked out for me and helped me out with like travel warrants and things to visit family and stuff at times and, you know, I – and I think she gave me a wedding present, I bought some bedding I remember, that was like some kind of care leaving thing. Whereas now you get a full care leaving assessment I understand, you get a whole, you know, host of interventions which wasn't in existence in I think it was 1982 when I left care.

So you saw she was supportive of you and –

I think she was, yeah, I think she was called Margaret Clarke I think she was, yeah.

Would you have wanted her to do anything differently?

Yeah, get involved about ten years sooner and get me into foster care [laughs]. Yeah, I think ... I think that the difficulty was they never really seemed – she never really seemed to have the time to go into depth in a lot of things. What I did appreciate though was – what was very positive was she helped me through the transition when I moved to the north east, she still kind of kept in touch and, you know, sort of came up. I remember, you know, meeting up with her at times and seeing me. And I think that was nice to know that there was somebody who just cared who was, you know, there, and you know, to ask for information and advice and stuff and – and she was quite level headed I think.

[42:27]

How would you describe celebrations of your birthday and Christmas and – whilst you were in care?

Pretty miserable ... I can't remember much about birthdays and Christmases, they obviously weren't that much of an event. I certainly really enjoy my birthdays and Christmases now, not that I'm religious but I enjoy the, you know, the commercialism of it I guess. But I always think your birthday is the one special day, it's the only day of the year that's just for you, it's a celebration, and for me it's almost a celebration of survival, the fact that I'm still here and actually I'm doing okay, you know, that my adult life has been way way more successful than my child life ever was. So that's been really quite positive.

What about mother's days and father's days?

Still send her a card and I still send my dad a card.

How did you take those days when you were in care?

Erm ... I'll be honest I probably didn't – I probably didn't even send a card or something in those times, because again I wouldn't have had access to cards, a lot of money, I wouldn't have had access to stamps and things so I probably didn't bother. And again it's how could you celebrate your mother or your father that had left you in care and I felt abandoned, I felt, you know, totally alone. So for me it was at that point in time I didn't always feel that I had a mother and father because they weren't a part of my life. In the latter stages I did go home for weekends and stuff like that and I did sort of have more involvement with my mum and my stepfather, but it was never positive, it was never a happy experience.

[0:44:27]

Have you ever spoken to your parents about what you went through as a child?

I've tried to on occasions but I only ever get a briefest of conversations because I think it's a very traumatic and very painful experience for them to be reminded of, you know, what they were involved in with me, so I guess it's something they don't want to be reminded about. And I think that's very – I think that's very difficult for all sides 'cause for a long time I wanted to talk about it. I wanted to – to hear myself, to kind of understand people's reasoning, to try and find a positive response to why they did what they did, and the only explanation that I can come to is that they considered their own needs first before mine. They were intrinsically selfish. And you know, the one thing that I've tried to be in my life as an adult is not to be selfish, I try to help other people and I try to be selfless. I think it's a very positive attitude to have and I have a lot of, you know, good friends, you know, and family that I think love me and I think that's enhanced when you can do things for other people, you can have a gift and you can show people things that you can do for them. So I think it's been very difficult to talk to my mum and dad about this, maybes one day I will, maybes you know one day they'll sort of open up 'cause I'm sure I haven't got the full extent of all of the story, but it's just the bits that I know and the bits that I experienced myself.

Did they ever apologise to you?

No, not that I remember.

Would you like them to?

Erm, if they meant it ... but I still think there's a lot of – how can I say, perhaps avoidance, lack of ownership, lack of their recognition of their part. I get little glimpses of it sometimes from my dad, I think my dad does regret what happened in the past but he's a very proud man and I wouldn't expect him to come out with it. My mum, I think, like I said before, I think I'm a painful reminder of her past and I think my mum likes to live in denial because I think the real world is too painful for her so she likes to try and put role coloured glasses around it and move on. Which is difficult.

[47:03]

How did you feel when your stepfather passed away?

It was really strange because I went to see him in hospital before he died, and I'd found out he was ill and I went down into the hospital and because I'm a nurse I looked at his charts and stuff and there was some medication that he shouldn't have been on, it was contraindicated and I'd mentioned it to the nurse and, you know, I kind of saw that he was okay, I wasn't going to replicate cruelty that he did to me. And you know, I saw him as a shadow of his former self, you know, he was an older man, he was dying of prostate cancer, and you know he always liked to think that he'd made me the man that I was, and I – I think that's, you know, I'd said to him before in the past, 'I am who I am in spite of you, not because of you.' And I felt – I felt a bit of pathos really, I felt, you know, a bit sorry for him because I don't know whether he'd been abused as a child, I don't know, I kind of get the impression he probably was, and in a way it's like ... it was almost a stance of saying, here I am, I'm still here, I'm doing well, I'm doing better than any of your children have and I've survived and I've got a very solid relationship with my wife, I've got everything that you never had. So I'm very proud of that, almost to the point that, you know, in a

sense of arrogance of it, but still I'm very proud of what I've achieved. And yeah I just felt a bit sad, I suppose it's the human side of me I guess, you know, that I don't think anybody sets out to be the way that they are, and I don't think people realise how much control they have of their own lives. So it was strange.

And did his son come to visit him at all?

I think Jason did, the younger son, but the older son has nothing to do with him, I think he's, you know, he's changed his name, I absolutely don't blame him, so he's had nothing to do with him. I was going to come down to the funeral but my mum deliberately didn't tell me when the funeral was 'cause she didn't want me there, so, in case I was going to remind any one at the funeral of the past I guess. But I was, you know, it was ... probably too much of a reminder for me to be there as well as everything else going on. I'm a bit of a guilty secret you see, for my mum I think.

[49:44]

How would you describe your transition from being in care to leaving care and –

I was probably better adapted than some, because I'd learnt to cook and I'd learnt to, you know, repair my clothes and I was pretty good with money, you know, I was kind of better prepared with most. But I think I really did feel, you know, isolated and I did forty hours a week split shifts for eleven pound a week expenses which you got with CSV at the time as well. So you're doing a full week's work [laughs] and you're getting like pennies, so that was quite difficult. And when I left to do my nurse training I met my wife there, Tracy, she worked there at the time and we got together and we fell in love and we got married within about ten months, which was pretty quick, but her mum didn't want us to live together and we needed the points for the housing list so we got more points by getting married [laughs] so I thought, why not. And I mean we knew we were going to get married anyway, so you know, and I loved her and she loved – I think she loved me, and we decided to get married and we got a place and moved to Aycliffe. But it was really hard financially because as a student nurse at that point in time you got a really really low wage, and I'd have actually been

better off on unemployment benefit as it was at the time, and we really struggled. Within about the first year we had – Heather was born, and which looking back on it now most people would have said, ‘Well why didn’t you get some money behind you first and both go to work and things,’ but it’s just what we wanted to do. I wanted the stability of a family, you know, I wanted, you know, I just wanted to sort of – to settle down, I didn’t want to, you know, go clubbing and, you know, be reckless, you know, as a lot of young people do, I just didn’t want to do that, I’d had enough turmoil in my life. So for me getting married and having kids was you know brilliant, that’s all I ever wanted to do. So I guess Tracy’s been a really really positive influence on me, my wife, she’s almost like my moral conscious, she’s sort of the – I just have to look at her and I know how I should modify [laughs] my own behaviour or not as the case may be. And I’m very – I think I’m very positive for her as well, we are just literally soul mates and she’s been the most – the best thing that’s ever happened to me.

[52:26]

With regards to friendships when you were younger, did you have any close friends?

I moved around too much, I was never in any one place for very long to build relationships and remember I was always a foreigner, so I was always a Geordie in a Cockney world, or a Cockney in a Geordie world and so it was never easy for me to make friends. I don’t think there was a day when I went to school where I didn’t have a fight, my stepfather picked the hardest school he could think of for me which at the time was Christopher Wren School, it’s now Hammersmith School, it changed its name. It was horrendous, kids were selling drugs all over the place, you know, the teachers were getting beaten up in the classroom, the kids were just constantly fighting and I think I fought nearly every single day that I was in that school. In the end what happened was [laughs] there was one of the guys who was really struggling with his homework and I kind of helped him out a bit and after that day this guy, Augustine D’or they called him, I think he was African guy, and after that day ‘cause he was a really – he was a really, you know, strong sort of guy, he was just like a – he was like an absolute rock solid bloke he was. And he was always the sort of guy that everybody would give a wide birth to, you know, nobody picked on Augustine ‘cause

he would just demolish them. And once I started doing a bit of homework for Augustine I got a much easier ride at school [laughs], I suddenly stopped getting picked on and things started to pick up a little bit, so that was really quite positive. But the school was just – I can only describe it as chaos, you know, it wasn't proper teaching, it wasn't properly structured. I don't know what it's like now as a school but it was horrendous then. And the best school I ever went to was St Marylebone Grammar School which I went to for about a year when I was about eleven and that was a fantastic school, I really wished I'd have stayed there but so much was going on at home I just couldn't. But that was a really really good school, yeah, it was almost like going to private school I guess, you know, so you got loads and loads of support and help with your schooling, but luckily I was bright enough to kind of scrape through with what I got and it was okay, but friends, no I had no friends really.

What made that school better than all the rest would you say?

Because it was – there was a lot of discipline and all the kids wanted to get on, it was like you were with other people that wanted to get on and in – in Christopher Wren, latterly Hammersmith School, you were just there, you were there 'cause you had to be there, you weren't there 'cause you wanted to be there, you weren't there 'cause you wanted to learn anything, you just were there. So St Marylebone Grammar School was a place of learning, people went there to learn and people would make sure that you learned and they would give you support to learn. I mean I remember sixth formers coming along and, you know, helping you after class to, you know, if you didn't know your timetables, you know, there would be kids coming along and giving you a hand, which was like unheard of for me. And I was only there for about a year I think and it was – then it was closed for some reason, I don't know why it was closed. It was called the old philosophical school and it had been around since 1792 or something, it was an ancient building. Just around the corner from Balcome Street when the Iranian Embassy siege was on 'cause we weren't allowed to go out at lunchtime that day [laughs] 'cause the siege was on, the SAS were busy storming the building, I remember that quite distinctly when I was there at school. But it was a good school.

[56:15]

Was there a stigma attached to kids in care whilst you were a child in care?

Yeah, there was ... but you kind of didn't remind people, so you know, there were people that – there were kids there that also had pretty rough backgrounds, so I don't think it made that much of a difference, it did a bit but not significantly because it was so bad anyway, I mean how on earth would that make it any worse.

[56:45]

How were parent's evenings for you?

Parent's evenings? Few and far between, I can't remember many of them where my mother actually went or – I don't ever think I can remember my father going to a parent's evening. I can remember my mother going to one or two ... but I think most of the time they probably didn't go, it was – I didn't get the support with my education from them.

And how were the teachers towards you?

Again I didn't get much of a chance to build relationships with teachers because I changed schools so often and the schools in London were so chaotic, that you couldn't have built up a relationship with the teachers even if you wanted to. I mean I literally, I remember one day there was a supply teacher went into the school and he was a guy from Canada, I remember this distinctly and he was telling the students to behave and they were throwing things around the classroom and throwing pens and rulers and so on and things were just regularly flying across the room. And this teacher must have been having a bad day and he said, 'Just stop doing that, stop doing that,' and he lost it, and within about five or ten minutes he was fighting with one of the kids across the table, physically fighting with the child across the table [laughs] which was unbelievable. And the teacher was then promptly beaten up and then kind of left the room. I don't think he ever came back after that. But it was the most surreal thing

you could imagine, it was like a scene from Grange Hill, you know, it was just unbelievable. And I'd – I'd actually be interested to read the OFSTED report for that school to see what it's doing 'cause it – it must have – it can't possible be the same as what it was when I was there. And it feels like I'm dramatising it but that's how it was for me.

[58:49]

Would you say you missed out on a childhood then?

Very much so, I missed out on having proper friends, on having stability and having long lasting loving relationships with my family growing up, the proximity and the distance was the biggest factor 'cause most of the time I lived miles away from my family so I kind of missed out on that.

Have you ever regretted asking your parents to be moved into care?

No, I think it was ... as bad as it was, living in care was better than living at home, 'cause if you can imagine somebody being constantly cruel to you and trying to manipulate your behaviour, constantly telling you that nobody wants you, nobody's interested in you, you're nothing and you should be grateful for everything that you get from this person, then you'd have to be absolutely robotic or inhuman for that not to get to you. And that's the hardest thing that I have had to deal with is that sense of putting my demons aside and not trying too hard to prove myself, because for a long time the influence that came across was I was constantly trying to prove myself to people. So I would try and tell people how good I was all the time and sometimes when you do that it just sounds naff and it's just not the thing to do so I've really tried to stop doing that [laughs] and hopefully I am who I am, I feel like I'm very happy with who I am right now, you know, I'm in a very very good place and I really do genuinely feel that I've put a lot of my demons behind me, I don't know whether I've put them all behind me, I'd like to think I have, but I do feel very balanced and sort of, you know, set up. I'm a real analyst so I've analysed a lot of these things over a lot of lot of years and you know I really feel quite positive where I am at the moment.

Sorry, you've had an hour now.

Okay.

But it's up to you what you – you know, if you want to continue, normally we'd have a break now if that's a good time.

Shall we have a little break, yeah, is that okay, yeah we'll have a break [all talking at once].

[01:01:22]

Camera rolling.

Throughout your time in care did you ever feel the need to make a complaint, and were you able to pursue this?

I can't explain why but I felt totally disempowered, I just felt that it would have made no difference whatsoever, I really – I don't know why I felt like that but there wasn't – things were so sort of – I'm talking about the Wandsworth experience now at the beginning, things were so off the chart, where do you start, you know, and why would anybody believe an angry young teenager, you know, in terms of you know what was going on around you. I mean I had so many abandonment issues I think my self esteem was at an all time low. And I mean one other thing that was happening in that particular place in Wandsworth was a lot of the kids used to not only sniff glue which seemed to be the trend at the time, I never did, but they used to do a lot of self harming and they used to pass around a bottle of ink and tattooed ink and stuff. And I did actually do a little bit of a design on my own arm and then I did for a while – I'm a bit ashamed to say but I did self harm a little bit, I did try and cut it out with a Stanley knife, which wasn't very nice. But I think it was so obvious that things weren't right you just kind of knew it wouldn't go anywhere. In the – in the later children's home I didn't really feel I had anything to complain about in the Lillie

Road Centre. It was strict, it was disciplined, but no one was beaten, no one was starved, you know, everybody seemed sensible and might have got shouted at before [laughs], you know, but I probably deserved it to be honest. So you know I kind of didn't – I didn't really feel a need to in the latter stages and I was just pleased to be away from Wandsworth.

Did you feel as though you could talk to anybody when you were self harming?

Not really, no I don't think there was anybody there. It was – it was really a difficult – a difficult time because, you know, when you feel so abandoned and so alone you don't think that anybody wants to hear you even if you had something to say, because you feel – the only way I can describe it, you feel very small, very very insignificant, you know, remember my stepfather for years had told me that no one wanted me, no one wanted to even know me or to talk to me, and as a consequence of that I was just an angry young man. You know, I was – I had a big massive chip on my shoulder like you wouldn't believe, I mean I was quite arrogant and, you know, I wasn't an easy person to get close to so it wouldn't have been easy for me to have someone to talk to even if there was someone there, you know, I don't think I would have even listened.

How did you eventually stop, what caused you to stop self harming?

I think when I started – when I started to grow up ... I became ... I became aware in the latter stages that I could actually start to control my environment, my surroundings. I think the time for me was when I was sixteen, 'cause I was sixteen and I thought, right, okay, there are some things now legally that I can do, you know, I'm almost an adult, you know, at sixteen you can have sex, you could have bought cigarettes, not that I ever did, you could get married with your parents' consent, you know, there's a number of things you can do at sixteen that you can't do before that, it's the transition point sixteen to eighteen where you're almost an adult but you're not quite there yet. And I just longed for the day when I was eighteen when I could do everything myself, and I think that for me was looking forward, was saying, no I'm not going to be a victim, I'm going to do something positive, I'm going to be

somebody, I'm going to try and do something. And it was a difficult time because we had very high unemployment, it was Margaret Thatcher's government I think at the time, and I wondered whether I'd ever get a job so for me getting a volunteers job was the one thing for me where suddenly I was looking after people who were kind of worse off than me, they had, you know, children with disabilities and stuff, you know, they – you know, they had difficult challenging backgrounds and they had a learning disability, I didn't. So in a way, you know, it kind of helped me grow up a little bit, and so you know, just looking forward I think was the main thing for me.

[1:06:12]

Could you describe a time where you ever felt safe in care?

I did feel safe when I was at the Lillie Road Centre, I did feel that if I wasn't there somebody would want to know where I was and they would want to know what had happened to me and, you know, that they were quite caring. Perhaps, I don't know whether that was the way that they related to each other as part of the church with the Catholic Church 'cause they were all obviously Catholic and going to church and things and they did have a sense of community, a very strong sense of community. And I think that was quite important ... so yes I think I did feel safe when I was in – not as much in Osterley but certainly in Lillie Road I think I really got to know people there and I think I did feel safe there.

Was there a sense of harmony at Lillie Road?

I think there was yeah, I think there was, it was like a big extended family, it was strange, and ... I'd have liked a little bit more time for me personally as an individual, but you know, at the time, you know, there was so much going on and, you know, there was lots of other things going on with other kids in homes and stuff as well that you kind of were grateful for the moments where you could sit and chat to some of the staff and talk about the future and stuff which was good for me.

[1:07:48]

Have you ever thought of seeking your care records?

I already have, I do have a copy of my care records at home. They've been water damaged and they've blacked out quite a lot of the text, but I kind of have read through quite a lot of them. And it kind of – my wife actually read through them before I did 'cause I kind of got them and then I kind of didn't know what to do with them and I read little bits, I didn't read them all at first, 'cause I was quite angry because a lot of what was written really misjudged me and, you know, maybe they thought it was right at the time but they clearly weren't listening to me as a person. And they drew lots of conclusions about me that I felt were wrong.

Was this your social worker who wrote them?

No, it was just other people that had been involved in the case, I had more than one sort of social worker, I mean the stuff that she wrote was fairly straightforward, but there was just some sort of things that came across in the reviews and things that other – maybe team managers and things had written, you know, that there was obviously other people involved in the case that knew about my case, that kind of misjudged me. And had me tagged as an arrogant, you know, insensitive person which may have been true on the outside but it certainly wasn't true on the inside.

[1:09:18]

What positives would you take from being in care?

What positives? I think it was an opportunity to see other people's lives, to see people going to start a career, so it was people starting out on a social work career or, you know, in terms of community service volunteering, getting some real practical experience to launch a career, to understand that even careers in care and support and social work and these things existed because, you know, previous to that my only experience was my stepfather who was a warden for the elderly, you know, which is bizarre because, you know, despite he had a criminal record as long as your arm for

you know assault and GBH and receiving stolen goods and god knows whatever else and yet he worked for the council, which is bizarre, worked for Hammersmith and Fulham Council.

[1:10:17]

What was the worst thing he ever did to you?

The worst thing that he ever did to me, hmm ... I think probably sitting me down and telling me that nobody wanted me, and that my family weren't interested in me, which you know, to a degree had a ring of truth to it but it wasn't totally true and it was only some family members, and it was an interpretation. So I think that was probably the most damaging thing, to reinforce the fact that you're alone.

[1:10:54]

Throughout your entire time being in care, who would you say was your role model, who you looked up to and inspired to be?

There was a number of people, I can't remember all their names, I've blocked out a lot of it [laughs] as you might imagine over the years, it's going back a long time now for me, I'm forty-seven years old. But I think just some of the trainee social workers that were there, there was a number of people, I can't remember all their names now and I think – and I think, you know, as well as Father McCabe was a – a very strong father figure, he had a sense of calmness and serenity around him, he was a priest but he wasn't easily ruffled and he didn't say a lot but he had an awful lot of influence. So he was a very, you know, a patriarchal figure, but very very steady I guess.

Would you have liked to stay at Lillie Road longer?

I would have done but for some reason if I wasn't staying at school and I think it was probably to do with staffing, that they couldn't have had the staffing for me to be there during the day, but I would have liked to have stayed in there a little bit longer

but I have no regrets in terms of the way that how things worked out because if I hadn't have done the CSV post I would never have met my wife.

Did they support you in your transition?

Erm ... I don't think they did really, I mean they knew what I was doing and they want – they checked out what was happening with me and they kind of knew that I'd be going somewhere where there'd be staff on sit and they could kind of keep an eye on me so it was a bit of a safe scenario really. It was a weird thing because it was moving from one children's home to another children's home [laughs] but I just happened to be one of the staff, kind of in one way I turned from client to staff which was strange.

Did you feel as though there was anything that you could have done as staff that the staff didn't do for you?

You mean in terms of my work as a carer?

Yes.

It was difficult because most of the children had severe learning disabilities so they weren't the sort of people that you could easily have a conversation with, you could in some respects ... I don't think I did anything that I – you know, not that I would be ashamed of or anything or that I would, you know, that I would want to change. I think it was, you know, what it was really.

Were you ever ashamed of being in care?

A little bit because it does have a stigma attached to it, it is ultimately when you end up in care it's because either your family's failed you, or things have deteriorated so much that you can't be with them. And you would think that within most families there would be someone that would think enough to look after someone. But in mine

there wasn't anyone. So I guess it's the abandonment thing I guess is where the shame comes from.

Did you ever feel as though your – you were treated differently because you've been in care?

Not really because I didn't tell many people, it's quite easy to hide that part of your life, because once you become an adult, you get your own address and that's where you live. You apply for a job, no one knows, you know, where you happen to be living at the time when you got your GCSEs or your CSEs or whatever it was, so you can easily hide that bit of your background. You know, whereas as an adult if things happen to you it's a little bit more difficult, but as a child it's quite easy to ignore or forget the fact that you were in care.

[1:14:59]

As an adult now, what positives have you taken from being in care and implemented in your workplace?

I think that it's probably affected me more than I realised. As well as my wife having a very very positive influence on me, you know, who I do love very much, I think my background has reinforced my morality, it's reinforced how your life can be really messed up by having a negative selfish attitude, and if you have a positive attitude and if you take control of your life and have a good sense of moral values, then I think you can achieve really great things. And I'm very very proud of the things that I've achieved in my life and being in care has, it's taught me – if I was going to sum it up I would say to treat people as individuals, not as part of a collective or a group or whatever, to treat people always with respect, and ironically these are the things that have made me successful in the field of learning disabilities. Because they're equally important to people with learning disabilities as they are to normal pe – you know, people that don't have a disability. So I guess respect, you know, individualisation, you know, person centeredness, and you know, that there has to be care and compassion in there as well and I get myself into a lot of – well ... conflict dare I say

it for my compassion because I make no excuses for what I believe in and that does come across quite strongly in terms of what I do [laughs]. But I do get respected for that and I think people appreciate that. Not many people know though where it comes from and it's been a combination of what happened to me as a child and going through my early training when I was working in Aycliffe Hospital which I'm pleased to say has now closed and is a housing estate.

[1:17:13]

How have your children taken your early life?

I've always been honest with my children and I've always told them about my past, and I think they found it quite difficult growing up from what they've told me that they never had their grandparents really involved in their lives, my dad never took my kids out for the day, my mum never did and I would never let my mum, you know, look after my kids because of my stepfather. So you know, in a way they've kind of always been – they've known that. And so I've always protected my children and made sure that they were safe. And, you know, in a way I've always said to them, 'Look, it doesn't matter what your background is, it doesn't mean you have to turn out to be a bad person. You know, just because you've had a bad experience it doesn't mean that you have to, you know, make everyone else have a bad experience.' And I've tried to impress upon my children my sort of, you know, moral values and to be, you know, good, honest and upright people and I'm very proud to say that they are, both of them are very successful in what they've chosen to do and, you know, I'm immensely proud of them and I'm really pleased that I've – I've myself with the assistance of my wife Tracy broken the cycle of abusive, you know, family relationships and my daughter's now expecting her first child and we're going to go across to America to see her very soon. And I'm just delighted that we've, you know, we've made it I guess and we've got a really really positive family.

[1:18:54]

So who would you say supported you with regards to your finances and growing up?

Well my mum used to steal money from me and she was always borrowing money off me and she never had any money ... I think I – because I never had much money what I did was when I – when I was about fourteen, I got a Saturday job, my first one was working in Woolworths as a Saturday job and then I worked in a series of butchers' shops 'cause I was a big big guy, I could carry the big heavy quarter bits of meat and things like that, so I got a job working as a Saturday boy and I got a bit of money for that, I got between ten and fifteen pounds a week, depending on whether I was working during the week or not. And that was quite a lot of money in them days and if I wanted anything, you know, if I wanted to avoid the tidemark trousers where, you know, my mum never bought me any trousers so I'd have to buy my own clothes so I had to very very quickly learn to save up and to buy my own clothes and to manage my own money. And I became very quickly adept at managing my money very well, and it stayed with me to the point that I have no debt, I've got two houses and mortgages are both paid off on both of them, I have no loans, no outgoings, you know, really of any significance, don't have any loans at all. So I'm quite pleased, I've obviously managed my money well [laughs]. So yeah I think it was self taught really.

How did that make you feel having to grow up quickly and miss out on your childhood?

I don't think you think about it too much at the time, it's more on reflection you look back and you look at all the things that could have gone wrong and, you know, I could have got myself into loads of debt, I could have, you know, ended up in bad relationships and, you know, all kinds of different things and it's – it's more astounding that things could have gone wrong and yet they didn't. And I believe that that's partially due to my sort of moral code as it were, that you know, rob or steal from people, you know, I try and be a good person, I try and help other people and I manage my money well and I try to self sufficient as I've always been. I've been, you know, fiercely independent for a lot of years, learnt to cook at the age of about eight year old and, you know, I could sew and take trousers up and stuff 'cause I had to, nobody else was going to do it for me. I don't ever recall my mum doing anything for

me in terms of, you know, stitching a pair of trousers or doing anything like that because she was too busy with herself.

[1:21:49]

Has that – seeing other children with their parents in just – how did that ever have an impact on you personally?

The worst part of that was seeing my dad with my two stepbrothers ... if you can imagine you've had a background with someone telling you that you're worthless and no one wants you and then to see your father with someone else's children that really nails it for you [laughs], that really is tough. So that took a lot of getting used to, of all of the situations it's difficult ... I mean now I'm really pleased that my children have had a complete normal upbringing, I'd like to think that they've had a really happy and healthy childhood, and I think they're absolutely solid and sound individuals because of that and I'm really proud of that. You know, my wife's been a fantastic, you know, partner to me because she's quite different from me, but at the same time together we're better than both of us on our own so we kind of offset each other quite a lot with a lot of, you know, things. I mean I guess I was perhaps a little bit more of a disciplinarian than she was, she always had the softer side but between us we kind of got the balance right and it was okay.

[1:23:18]

Could you sort of describe the relationship your father had with his other children?

Well he brought them up, he had a normal family – they had a normal family upbringing with him and my stepmother at the time. Erm, it was just very odd, you know, and yet he went on to have a child with his second wife who was given everything. And she was sent to private school, she had the very best of everything and that was – was difficult.

Why do you say – why would you think that she had everything and you didn't?

Perhaps because of her mother was ... her mother wanted to live her own life through the eyes of a child, so she wanted her child to have all the things that she didn't have as a child for herself, and I guess my dad wanted an easy life and went along with it. As it happens you know she's ... she's living her own life, doing her own thing, you know, I have some involvement with her and things, but you know, we've had very different upbringings and very different outcomes because of that.

If you had stayed with your dad and not gone to see your mother the day your father asked you to, whether you wanted to, how different do you think your life would have been?

I think it would have still been difficult and tempestuous because remember he was – I was living with my nan at the time, you know, from the ages of five to eight till he found out where she was. Round about the time of eight year old he was getting together with my then stepmother, Kaye, and ... so at that time it was like I was kind of out of the picture, so he was free to develop a second life I guess. And at that time, you know, he was sort of having that second relationship.

Did any of your stepmothers want to get to know you?

Erm, not really, I didn't like them, they didn't like me [laughs]. My – Kaye my stepmother was very clearly for her own children, she didn't want any part of me being around or being involved. She just – I don't know, she just – you know, obviously she was looking out for her own children, I was a difficult child anyway, we did live with them for – I mean I did live with my stepmother and her two sons for a very short while, but I mean we fought, you know, I was never going to be – I was never going to be one of her children, I was always ever going to come third and that was very clear to me. So in a way it was like rubbing my nose in it, so it was understandable why I kind of kicked off a bit and why it probably didn't work. So I guess if I'd have never gone down to London I might have then gone back to live with my nan but by then, you know, all the issues with my dad looking after somebody else's kids and me being a – you know, growing up to become, you know, an angry

child and having a lot of abandonment issues I daresay that would have been doomed. And I probably – either ended up living with another family member or living in care. So – and other family members did try and look after me as well for a while, my Aunt Ev which was my nan’s – my dad’s mum’s daughter, my dad’s sister, did try and look after me for a while with her kids but she had four kids of her own, so – and it was really tough, so that didn’t work either. So it kind of reinforced the abandonment again [laughs] so it’s a – you can get a theme coming here can’t you [laughs], there’s a theme going through it.

[1:27:27]

How did being passed around, how did that affect you as a person and your self esteem?

I think it did affect my self esteem because I did have a big chip on my shoulder, I would have liked to have think that it didn’t affect my self esteem ‘cause I had a real strength of character but it did get to me and I did feel worthless, and abandoned and that’s why for many many years I was always over explaining myself and telling people how good I was, when in fact that often had reverse effect, because people would think that I was overly arrogant or overly ... you know, just bragging basically, but it wasn’t bragging, it was me saying, look, I’m not worthless, this is me. But I don’t think – because people didn’t understand the background they didn’t – they wouldn’t understand that.

[1:28:25]

Did you ever seek any sort of help, any therapy?

There wasn’t any there, it’s – we’re in a different world now, I mean you have to go back, I mean you’re way too young to understand what it was like in them days but we had no mobile phones, we had no internet, we had no – not everybody had a telephone, there was no answer phones, there was no – the digital world wasn’t there, you know, we had film in our cameras, you know, it was [laughs] – it just didn’t exist.

So it kind of enhanced your loneliness and your isolation even more. It's just hard to describe. I mean I'm so chuffed, I love technology and I'm really into, you know, technology and stuff and you know it's so much easier now to seek help and assistance, and to check things out, to you know, speak to people. You know, there's, you know, there'll be survivors of abuse forums and there will be, you know, Childline websites and NSPCC information and you know there's a wealth of information and it's all there, and it's – and it's – there's so much more proactivity about it. You know, so I think that's a really really positive thing now that exists for people and, you know, through the Jimmy Saville, you know, carry on, the tragedy of someone being in public life and going through all of that, because in those days people were isolated and it was easy to cover things up whereas now it isn't. And that's a really really positive thing.

[1:30:08]

Have you gone back to any of your care homes to see people –

I don't think they exist anymore. You can imagine the scenario, it's a home run by Roman Catholic Priests, what's the first thing that comes into your mind; child abuse. So I would imagine, I don't know why it's not there anymore but I can understand why it isn't because people may well have jumped to those conclusions and not wanted to place anyone there. Wandsworth Care Home, the Frogmore Assessment Centre, I'd be surprised if the kids didn't burn it down themselves, I don't think it exists anymore, I looked on the internet to check it out, I don't think it exists either so I think both of those two homes I don't think they exist anymore. I would like to have known what's happened to them and, you know, I don't know how I would check that out, maybes write to OFSTED or something to find out, but as far as I'm aware they're not there anymore. We're going back a long way.

Have you seen any people from your previous schools or?

No.

Would you like to see how they are getting on today?

I'd be scared to know 'cause I think a lot of them will be in jail, I mean I would, you know, if I bumped into somebody in the street and I happened to recognise them I'd be more than happy to have a conversation with them, but I would – I don't know, it's – I guess in a way, not unlike my family, it's a part of your life that you want to move on from, so you don't want to live in the past. I don't ignore my past and I recognise my past and I learn from it but I don't live there, I don't want to go back to it, I don't want to reengage with that kind of life all over again. So for me I've moved on, I've got a new life, I've got a new group of friends who most of them in the most part don't have any idea of my past. They might do if they see this [laughs] in the British Library but ordinarily they won't.

[1:32:18]

Did you ever have any issues with trusting people?

I don't think I did because I'm a very – I'm a very astute judge of character, I seem to very quickly be able to work out what people's motivations are. I don't trust people easily, I'm slightly cynical, probably possibly slightly pessimistic, but I'd like to think that through the balance of being with my wife, and I can't say how much of a positive influence she's had on me, trying to kind of coach me in dare I say it less confrontational behaviour, you know, and being much more sensitive to the people around me, so yeah I think – I don't have any issues with trust and I think that I'm pretty self assured in that respect so I don't need to bore you too much about that.

[1:33:20]

Looking back now what would you tell yourself as that eight year old?

What would I tell myself at eight year old, wow, that's a good question. You're not alone and when you grow up things will get better, it's just a moment in time and don't believe everything people tell you, it won't be true. Not everybody's nasty,

there are nice people in the world, and you will have a future. And in a way it's a bit like grieving, it's a bit like when somebody dies, the pain is intense at the time but over time it gets better and things improve, and that's what I'd say to me. I'd also drop me a few quid as well [both laugh].

[1:34:08]

What are your hopes of the future and can you just give us a bit more information about your new company that you're starting.

Oh right, my company, Inspire Insight CIC is my company that I've set up, as I've said I'm leaving my job as a commissioner in learning disabilities because I really feel it's getting very very stressful, I'm finding it difficult to balance the needs to save money and the needs to deliver services that are appropriate to what people's needs are. I'm being asked to make compromises in service delivery that I really don't agree with. I don't agree with the way that the department's been restructured and what it's – where it's going, what it's about, it's missing the point for me in terms of serving our communities of people. What I really want to do is I want to make a difference and I think that I've been very fortunate in that my career as an adult has been fantastic, I've had some ups and downs, but I think on the whole I've learned an awful lot, you know, from my experiences both as a child and both as an adult. As I said before trained as a nurse, qualified in 1987 and I had a pretty horrendous time training in Aycliffe Hospital which was a den of horrendous dehumanisation. And as time's gone on I've worked in assessment and treatment units, I've worked in councils and I've been involved in a whole host of programmes and I've helped to – one of my proudest achievements is to resettle over 129 people from Northgate and Prudhoe Hospitals, working with about fourteen different local authorities and primary care trusts. And in Durham, my last job for the last seven years I've managed to help increase the numbers of people living in their own accommodation with learning disabilities by over 300, so we now have over 500 people living in Durham, have their own tenancies and we've developed a number of services around there. The one thing in all of that though is that sometimes the services are very variable in their quality and sometimes when you talk to people they don't get what's important

in terms of supporting people with learning disabilities and it's very very simple. If you treat people with respect and you listen to them very carefully in terms of what they want out of life and you make sure that you deliver a sensible and appropriate service inline with what they want you will not have significant challenging behaviour, you will not have issues and problems, you know, you will have people having a healthy and happy life. And what I'd like to do is to get behind some of the providers of care services, the services that I've been commissioning for many years, to get behind them, to get really underneath their skin and to really understand what their motivations are and to try and help them to understand why it's so important to have these core values. Why it's so important to, you know, really help people to be person centred as much as they can be, so really listen to people. And to treat people like equal human beings, and I think it sounds such a simple thing, but there isn't a training tool that currently exists for that kind of way of working, you can't pick up a – a package off the shelf that will, you know, give you all the skills necessary to provide, you know, really high levels of skill and support for people with learning disabilities, so I want to do that. And what I also want to do is to develop an accreditation system which is based on the person but take into account people's care plans and assessments and the structure and the organisation of the companies that give the support, but making sure that every single thing focuses back to the person. Because I think that genuinely is the way to have, you know, healthy and happy successful people with learning disabilities, that will really raise people's expectations and really, you know, push people to push boundaries and to do things that are right for them. And it's something I've dreamt about for a long time and I know it comes back from my childhood, the fact that people didn't listen to me, they didn't respect me, and I saw that again at Aycliffe Hospital, they weren't respected, they weren't looked after, they were abused and they were treat badly and as a consequence of that I don't feel a need to prove myself anymore as a person 'cause I know now who I am and I'm very happy with who I am. But I'm still compassionate to make a difference so that we don't go back into the dark ages or, you know, poor care for people with learning disabilities when they were living, you know, institutionalised in hospital and wards of twenty-five and fifty people and beds – you know, rows on the wards and dormitories, you know, we should never treat people as less than equal, or dehumanise people in any way shape or form. And that's something that I really

think that I can get across and I can work with people and I'm really pleased that a couple of companies have said that they want to work with me in developing some of these things. So that's kind of what I'm going to do and I'm really excited, and scared 'cause I've just given up a very well paid full time job so I'm, you know, a bit scared, but you know, I'm quite optimistic that it's going to be fine.

[1:39:50]

Out of all your family members who would you say you have the closest relationship to?

Well that's obviously my wife Tracy.

Disregarding your wife [laughs].

Disregarding my wife. I'm very close to my kids, to Heather and Mark, you know, I think the world of them and I'd like to think they think the world of me, you know, we're there for each other. I have better relations now with my dad than I used to, you know, he respects me for who I am and doesn't shout me down quite as much as he used to these days, I think he realises now, you know, who I am and what I'm about and I'd like to think he's quite proud of me now. I have only very infrequent communication with my mum who lives probably less than half an hour's drive away from here. But that's just the way things are and I'm quite happy with the way things are at the moment, you know, we have links with some of Tracy's family who are, you know, nice genuine people. And ... you know, that that's enough for me, as long as my wife and my kids are fine and I have occasional contact with my dad that's okay.

How do you think your relationship with your dad came to improve?

There's a little funny story about that actually. My dad was running a nursing home at the time [laughs], ironic isn't it, and he was getting heavily pressured from CSCI

as was at the time, to develop some policies and procedures and I was – at the time I think I was a monitoring and liaison officer for Newcastle City Council developing standards for supported housing, and he had to develop a quality policy and some other bits of documentation and he just really didn't know how to do it. And he was talking to me about it 'cause he said, 'Well you work in the council don't you, what do you do?' and he hadn't realised that I'm actually doing the very thing that he was wanting. And I said, 'Give us it here, I'll do it for you,' 'You can do that?' I said, 'Yeah, I can do that,' so we took the folder away and me and Tracy helped a little bit and I think Heather typed a bit at the time as well, it was a big family event, but we rattled out a load of really good policies and procedures for him and set up a quality framework for him and then gave him it back. And I think he gave it to CSCI who just, you know, were totally happy with it [laughs] and it was like, oh my god, he knows this. And I think from that day onwards my relationship improved with my dad because he finally realised what I did for a living. He knew I was a nurse but he didn't understand that I was actually involved in all these various different things and it was quite amusing, but it was a bit of a wake up call for my dad I think.

Would you say he was a good support system for you as a child?

I don't think he was really there, I think my dad had his own issues. I kind of understand why he did the things that he did and I forgive him for some of his horrendous decisions that he made, erm ... but I think that he – to be fair he wasn't really there for me as a child, I did tell him things that were going wrong and not much seemed to change. But I understand where he was in his life at the time and, you know, to have any involvement with my mum who he was absolutely devoted to was very painful for him and I think that he wanted to kind of put that bit behind him and move on with a new life. But I was the bit that was left over so that was the difficulty, so I think it was always a strained relationship because I was a reminder of what went before I think for both parties, you know. In a sad way if I wasn't around it would have been a lot easier for both of them because they would have had no reminders of what had gone on before, because it was obviously very traumatic for them. But I'm personally quite happy that I am still around [laughs].

[1:44:11]

How was your parents' relationship with Heather?

Erm, quite strained with my dad because I think Heather expects more from him and I think he finds it difficult not to be just who he is, and my kids I brought up to be self reliant, self assured and I think they've missed out on him being their grandfather, he never sort of took them out and about and did things with them, and I think there's a little bit of resentment there from Heather that he never did all those things, that she would have liked that I think. And so it's – I'd say it's a little bit – it's okay but I mean she lives 4,000 miles away so there doesn't really need to be, you know, much of a relationship, but I'd like it to be a bit better than what it is but I understand the way that it is because Heather I think finds it difficult to understand how I was treated as a child and I think a little bit of that is in there as well.

How about with Tracy?

Tracy has quite a good relationship with my dad, I think my dad entirely puts my success down to my wife [laughs], he thinks that I'd be nothing without Tracy, I probably wouldn't be anything without Tracy to be fair, but I – I think he really respects Tracy and I think he thinks a lot of her. I think she's probably the daughter he never had. I mean he's got a daughter obviously but it's, you know, in a different kind of way because she's older and more mature, so I think I'd say very respectful relationship with my wife.

Do they see each other often?

Just when we visit, about, maybes about once a month or so, he pops around to mine from time to time, again about once a month, we don't see that much of each other.

How's your relationship with your nan?

My nan on my dad's side sadly died, she died of a heart attack when she was about seventy-three, she was obviously – I mean my dad's sixty-eight, I'm forty-seven so she obviously would have been a lot older now but she died when she was seventy-three. I was very very – very tragic circumstances how she died because I was due to be visiting her that weekend and she had a heart attack and died, which was sad but kind of meant to be, maybes very distressing if we'd have been there at the time. And my other nan and my grandparents died, my Uncle Bill's died, her husband, so all my grandparents have kind of died, so it kind of happens when you get older I guess.

How did that make you feel, because she was the one person who understood you?

It was ... it was very very sad for me because it was a – it's the one – the one true time when someone's died I guess where I really did genuinely have a feeling of great sadness and loss. Because she was a very simple woman, but she was always there for me and I was just – I guess I was so pleased that she saw Heather born 'cause Heather was a little girl when she died and she died a long long time ago. And I was really pleased that she got to see that. My nan was fantastic with me because she never really placed any demands on me, she wasn't very politically correct which was quite funny when she was talking about me working with people with learning disabilities, and ... you know it was – it was quite sad, but I'm pleased that she saw – she got to meet Tracy and, you know, she got to see Heather at least, I don't think Mark was born when she died so that was – that was quite nice.

[1:48:09]

Looking back on your life now, is there anything that you would change?

Like I said before, the whole thing of me being dropped off outside the London Metropole in London was probably the most poignant and worst thing that happened to me. I don't know how it would have worked out any other way, there would have been trauma and difficulties even if I'd have stayed local but I think the fact that I moved around schools so much, I moved from the north to the south a lot and because of all the trauma and relationship issues and the isolation and abandonment, I think if

I'd have never gone to London that would have been the one thing that I could change, that I would have just – even if I'd have gone into foster care or something locally it would have been better. But one thing that's really really important in all of this is that my family were never forced to be held to account for the fact that they wanted to look after me, no one wanted to look after me but no one had the guts to say so and if they had it would have been easier for social services to actually say, 'Let's put him into foster care then.' But as a sense of embarrassment that someone else is then rearing your child and I think that's important for social workers to understand that they've got to help people through that, they've got to help people to be realistic in terms of what they can and what they can't do. And you hear sometimes, you hear stories where people have been, you know, separated from their birth mother from twenty years, they went to foster – they've actually probably in most cases done a really good thing 'cause if they'd have held onto those children at that time they'd probably have a way way more traumatic past than, you know, actually having placed them into foster care. And I think all too often people think of their own needs but they don't think of the needs of the child. And if you can be really brutally honest and say, you know something, I kind of don't really want to look after this child, I don't really want all this baggage going around, you know something, I love them, but I don't want to look after them, and be honest, as painful as it is, and then make alternative arrangements, that would have been the best thing for me.

[1:50:30]

Do you think social services helped you?

Erm –

And done what was best for you?

No, I don't think they did, I think they screwed it up left right and centre. I think – if I look at social workers today, most of them are overworked, their caseloads are too big, they don't get the right kind of preceptorship, guidance, mentoring advice and support. And they lose sight of what's important and I really think that's – that's a

real shame that even, what, thirty-odd years on from my experiences, yeah okay the environments might be better, the standards might have improved with, you know, with OFSTED and things like that, but fundamentally we are still making and I still see people making the same mistakes and, you know, trying desperately to keep kids at home with families that quite frankly don't want them. Or you know, want them for the wrong reasons, want them for the benefits that they're on or, you know, the child family allowance or, you know, whatever it is, you know, that there are still lots of mistakes and things being made and you must put the child first which is as I understand it the centre of a lot of the, you know, legal documentation, the white papers around children's care, it is about putting the child first. But, you know, inevitably care packages and supports, you know, still think about budgets and, you know, for me what's been interesting is I've been an advocate for keeping children with disabilities in county, keeping them close to home, close to their family so that they don't get isolated by being sent off to residential schools which for people with disabilities is a massive massive issue. We must develop local services and listen to the words of people like, you know, Jim Mansell and, you know, the Valuing People white paper was about, you know, children as well as it was adults with learning disabilities and I think, you know, even with normal children we're still making some of the same mistakes, so you know, for me I feel very passionately about developing local good quality services that are accountable to the person, child or adult.

Would you say social services considered you in decision making?

I remember having a meeting in the house, just before I went into care, and they were really really reluctant for me to go into care and ... I almost had to put the fear of god into the social worker by telling them my stepfather was going to kill me or something [laughs] 'cause he probably would have done to be honest, sooner or later he'd have took my head off my shoulders. And I said, 'I want to go into care,' 'Well why do you want to go into care?' 'Cause I don't want to be here, I want to go into care,' I remember having the discussion, 'I don't want to be here anymore, I'm going to get really badly hurt, I want to go into care,' and eventually they reluctantly agreed and that's what it was all about, but it was like, it was crazy, you know, in terms of how that whole process worked. They'd have been quite happy for me to stay within that

family and that would have been the worst thing in the world for me. I mean, you know, they didn't even know that he'd abused, you know, his first son, they certainly didn't look into it, certainly didn't seem to be aware of it because why else would you keep a child there?

Why do you think your mother didn't do anything to stop him?

In a weird kind of way my stepfather was a very – he was a very strong man, he was a bit of a gangster, he had lots of contacts with a lot of shady people and he had a bit of a local reputation and he was unbelievably possessive of my mother. My mother was, you know, in her day she was a really attractive woman, she was very pretty and, you know, he was besotted with her and very very possessive over her. And she did try and run away once or twice and I think took me with me at least once I can remember, which was an improvement on the first time. But basically she would have never let – he would have never let her go, even though they were the worst two people to be together, they had all of the attributes that were wrong and yet they were, you know, she – he was obsessed with her and to a degree for my mother he offered a degree of stability, he was – you know, he was a bit of a bad boy but she kind of quite liked that I think, and he provided money, you know, he was a good earner. You know, he had loads of little business ideas and things and always seemed to be bringing in money from somewhere, so he allowed my mum to live the lifestyle that she was afforded. But I think from the very early days of the betting shop one thing that I didn't mention which is very important is that my mum has a massive gambling problem, and she has spent thousands and thousands of pounds on slot machines and bingo. And even now I understand she goes to bingo virtually every day when she can afford and that, I guess my stepfather had the money and feeding the habit, was this reciprocal arrangement between them. So I think that had something to do with it as well.

Did you ever get a sense of love from your mother, and comfort?

Erm, she kind of made the right noises, but I never really felt it. She said the right things but I don't really think that she felt them.

[1:56:25]

How was your mother's relationship with your stepfather, was he ... more kinder towards her than you?

Well he was, he was kinder to her but I do remember some quite vicious fights that they had between themselves. I remember once – I mean the names they used to call each other and the fights were just unbelievable, I've never even heard names like that before and I won't repeat them but [laughs] I mean some very very horrendous fighting, physical fighting going on where she would just launch herself at him and hit him and screaming at the top of her voice and, you know, me as a young child it was really quite traumatic just to see that. And I remember on one occasion where she had an aftershave bottle in the shape of a rhinoceros and it had a – the head was the top of the bottle and she hit him with this – it must have been on the sideboard or something and she hit him with this rhinoceros bottle and the point of the rhinos horn embedded itself in his elbow and I think he had to go to hospital to get it took out. 'Cause it – you know, it was – certainly broke off in his – in his elbow, but they would just fight and scream at each other on a regular basis, so that was – that was another reason why – one thing I never really mentioned was when I was living with my mother and my stepfather I was often on my own in the house at a very young age abandoned sort of on my own there, but on a weekend what I used to do is to just disappear, I used to like go to museums or just jump on a bus, you know, like it was relatively cheap to get on a bus and I used to say, 'Mam, can I have some bus fair?' and I used to, you know, try and get some bus fare any way I could and then I'd just jump on the bus and go and drive to a museum – get on a bus and go to a museum or go to a park or go and feed the squirrels at Kensington Gardens, you know, somewhere like that. And I would just do whatever and later in my life I used to go fishing and I loved going fishing, I used to go all over the place fishing so it was a really nice peaceful, you know, thing that I could do and actually achieve something 'cause I could catch fish and I wasn't bad at it. And one of the things I've chosen to do in my later life now I'm currently undergoing – doing my level two coaching in fishing, and I'm going to be hopefully in the long run, where this is all going to is I'd like to teach people how to fish, people with learning disabilities, you know, other things – other groups of

people. I've been ironically teaching a friend of mine's child to fish, and he's about nine year old so he's about the age when I started to go fishing and it really really took me back, you know, about all the happy times that I had was when I was fishing, you know, my childhood, you know, they're all the times when I can remember that I was, you know, when I'd caught a big fish or done something. So that was quite a positive thing but I kept out of the house as much as I could.

How did –

[1:59:32]

FS: Sorry, can I let you know that it's coming up to the two hour – we've been going for an hour so if you wanted to have a break down we could do.

Yeah, do you want to take a little break?

It's entirely up to you.

Let's keep going for a bit then, if that's okay with you?

Yeah, that's fine.

'Cause I haven't got much more I can say I don't think. Definitely.

How did you come to become so passionate about fishing?

Because – because it was my escape, it was – it was peaceful, it was – I always had a love of nature and going fishing was the one thing I could do completely on my own, it didn't cost a lot to do and it was an escape. So when I was fishing it was nice, it was peaceful, the birds were singing, you know, catching fish, doing me thing – [recording jumps back by approximately one minute] I wasn't being mentally abused, I wasn't being hit, I wasn't being terrorised by the neighbours, you know, so for me it was complete escapism. And even now, I mean I'm quite active, I'm also the chair of

the North East Fishing Forum for the Angling Trust and one or two other things I do in my own spare time. I'm also a director of the Wear Rivers Trust as well, that's involved in conservation activities and things. And it's escapism, it's giving something back to the community, you know, it's helping other people to do the things that were so important for me as a child, you know, so you know, I just – I just think that's really important for me and I think as you get older I think you get more philosophical and you have choices and either you can give something – give a little something back or you can, you know, you can do whatever. I mean I can remember when I was about – I must have been about maybe eleven or twelve year old, I remember getting on a bus, a forty-four seater bus of middle aged men at about five thirty in the morning and driven to the Hampshire Avon and for me it was like the most fantastic experience, because it was one of the best fishing rivers in the country and it was just an amazing experience and I just remember going there and I have so many happy memories of fishing. So that's kind of why I want to continue to be involved in it.

[02:02:56]

Did your mother and your stepfather, did they ever take you out on any day trips or anything?

There were one or two, not very frequent, I remember a charity once knocking on the door [laughs] saying, 'Do you want me to take your son away on holiday?' and my mother turning away point blank and I was gutted, I was absolutely devastated that I couldn't go away with them. I did do something I think with the Youth Hostel Association and I went to Houghton Mill when it was still being used a youth hostel with a group of kids some kind of exploratory thing, I really enjoyed that. But they never really took me anywhere, you know, I used to just entertain myself really just sort of going fishing, that's all I ever seemed to do but they were just too wrapped in in themselves.

[02:03:46]

How was the neighbourhood that you grew up in?

Rough, very very rough. There was a drug house over the road covered in newspapers on the floor and needles and things everywhere, there was a – there was a ... a family that lived around the corner called the Theothanes and they were just horrendous, they used to just – whenever they saw me they'd just jump over the fence and beat the hell out of me. And even when I went to the shops, you know, I should have to run past there straight just in case they saw me, I don't know why they took an instant dislike to me but they did [laughs]. And so I could never be left in the garden on my own, it was just like a very open plan garden with a wall and they always – these lads were always roaming the streets and there was others as well and I used to have to hide 'cause it was in the basement where we lived and I used to have to hide behind the wall and what used to happen was that sometimes my stepfather would forget and he'd leave the bathroom window open a little bit and I would knock the latches off and I would do a handstand on the sink and break into the house [laughs], that's how I'd have to get it to save myself getting beaten up. And then because he would go out deliberately knowing I'd be home then, hoping I'd been left in the garden to get beaten up, so if I'd actually finally managed to get into the house then I was – I'd open a tin of beans and do myself beans on toast for my tea or something and I would just make myself something, I was only eight, nine, ten year old at the time.

So your mother and stepfather knew about the neighbour's children and –

Yeah.

They did nothing?

No.

Did you want them to do something?

Well yeah, but he never did. They used to say I was just making it up, I'm not making it up, you know, I used to get bullied and people throw stones at me and all sorts, and it was just one of those things, you had to be there to understand it, it was just a rough environment, everything was rough, you know, it was just difficult. I mean ... he used to keep budgies in one of the cellars in one of the houses that we used to live and ... and that was another one of his grooming things, he would only let me in to see the budgies at the time when he was wanting me to see the budgies, and he would keep tropical fish and I like fish 'cause obviously I like fishing, 'Don't you look at the fish tank.' And it was quite funny 'cause I used to, you know, feed the fish when he was out [laughs] and when he used to take the valves out of the back of the television so I couldn't watch the TV I knew where he kept the valves so I'd put them back in and I'd worked out how to fix the telly, I was very young when I did this, and then he used to feel the heat off the back of the television, 'You've have that television, how can you?' and he used to say, 'How can I possibly have the television on, you took all the valves out,' he used to take the fuse out of the pull so I put the fuse back in. I'd take the fuse out, that's something else, like I'd have another telly in another room and I would just take the fuse out and put it in the other fuse and put it all back together again and plug it in. I mean I was very young, I mean I could have been electrocuted or anything, I could have really got myself into trouble, but fortunately I didn't and I got around things. But I learned to be very adaptable and I learned to do a lot of things.

[2:07:02]

And how would you compare the neighbourhood that you grew up in with your mother and her husband and the neighbourhood you grew up in in your children's home?

Erm ... with the Lillie Road one it was – it wasn't like a – it was on a main road opposite the West Centre Hotel, so it was on a busy main road so there wasn't much of a community there. And in the later stages when they lived at Sycamore Gardens which was a sheltered housing estate for the elderly, they used to like run lots of like little businesses and things, they used to like do pirate videos and hire them from the

house, even though it was a sheltered housing estate from the elderly and one day they got robbed with a shotgun and somebody blew a couple of holes in the wall. But they just carried on, they just did various different things. I mean the amount of stories and things I could tell, you'd be here till Christmas. But you know there was lots of things – lots of things going on in the neighbourhood, but with that being in its own grounds you were sort of isolated from the neighbourhood so actually that was better for me. I didn't want to be a part of the neighbourhood.

Did you ever play outside with the children inside the home?

And get beaten up, no. No, just didn't really get involved, I didn't have many friends, I wasn't a very sociable person to be honest.

What did you spend your time doing?

I used to read a lot of encyclopaedias, I used to read a lot of fishing books, and when I could get out when it wasn't horrendous bad weather I'd be fishing, so I used to fish a lot and read a lot.

Who did you go fishing with?

Always on my own.

Did you ever want any company?

I tried to avoid company because a couple of times when I was fishing on the canal I had a couple of men expose themselves to me and stuff so I kind of avoided company really. So I kind of [laughs] very quickly packed up and went home [laughs], it was a lesser of two evils. But yeah, I mean it would have been nice to have company when I was going fishing but I didn't really have any friends that fished and I didn't really stay in one place long enough to kind of have friends to go fishing with.

[2:09:25]

One of the happy – really really happy memories I have living with my nan and which got me into fishing was they lived over the road from a park which had a fishing pond in it and Bill my – my step grandfather, used to call him Uncle Bill, used to take me around the park from a very very young age, with a net and catch sticklebacks and put them in a jar and take them home. And later on I started using a fishing rod and stuff and caught fish and that was kind of how I got into it, but I'll always be grateful to him for kind of showing me that 'cause we used to spend time talking to the fishermen and find out what they're up to and watching them catch fish and things and it was just nice, it was just a really positive thing. So I guess every time I was fishing I was always thinking about my nan and thinking about Uncle Bill and going fishing and stuff and it was a – it was a place I could escape to in my mind which was important, 'cause like I said you always have to have something that is just one, either one person or one place that's positive for you and for me that was my nan's place, near Rossmere Park in Hartlepool.

[2:10:36]

As a child how did you see your life turning out to be?

I didn't know, it's very hard to visualise life as an adult when you're growing up but I was determined I was going to make something of myself, I just didn't know what it was going to be.

Did you have any aspirations that you wanted to achieve?

Well I applied to be a policeman but I was overweight, I applied to be in the RAF [laughs] but I picked the wrong options, I didn't get through the entrance exam and I applied to be a fireman but I think I was too overweight for that as well at the time. And then I lost the weight and reapplied and then I was too late to go to Hendon and at that time point in time I'd then already decided I was going to go and do a CSV so this was when I was sixteen, so I then decided to go and do my CSV and go and do some care work with kids with disabilities.

[2:11:34]

How ... how – what do you think could have been improved throughout your time in care?

I was always very critical of Connexions, when my son was growing up particularly, I think my daughter was a little bit more focused in terms of what she wanted to do ... and I don't know, things seemed a bit easier for Heather in terms of – 'cause she was always – she always worked harder at school and always, it was more obvious what she liked and what she didn't like and what she was good at and what she didn't look like – what she didn't like and therefore it was easier for us to kind of, you know, guide her and influence her. But Mark was, 'I don't know what I want to do.' And we really looked towards, you know, the school education, you know, employment sort of service and it was rubbish. So he – he got a job working in a supermarket and he's now managed to work his way up to be a manager of the opticians there so he's done really really well just, you know, working like that. He didn't take the best use of his education but then he didn't really want to so, you know, he's done it the hard way but he's worked his way up and he's now a manager for Tesco's in the opticians which he's really enjoying, so that's good.

[2:12:53]

Just looking through – back on this whole interview, how do you think things have gone, how do you feel about it?

Erm ... I'm surprised that what kind of depth I've gone into and the fact that I've talked for quite so long [laughs] but I have found the whole experience quite cathartic and I hope – I hope other people find this, you know, expression of my experiences useful and I hope that you know it helps to inform what's really important in services for the future.

Thank you [laughs].

Thank you very much.

That's alright. Anything else you'd like to talk about?

I don't think so, no, I think we've covered just about everything. I mean you know, I've found the – the whole experience, it is quite cathartic, you know, and like I say I hope people benefit from it, it's fine.

Well thank you very much.

Thank you.

[2:13:55]

MS: Camera rolling.

Could you tell me again about your experience at Wandsworth?

At the Frogmore Assessment Centre, yeah. I really found it was – it was quite a disorganised place and there didn't seem to be many controls on the children there, they were allowed to kind of roam freely in and out of the building, I did think that some of the staff may have been using things like marijuana and other drugs because you could smell it on one or two of the staff that were there and they didn't seem totally ... alert and seemed a bit spaced out, some of the staff did. And I'd heard once from one of the members of staff, I happened to be on a bus going somewhere and one of the staff recognised me and asked me how I was and everything, I said I was fine and I was then living at the Lillie Road Centre and they said, 'Oh well,' I said, you know, 'How's everyone else, you know, how's the staff?' and I mentioned some of the names of the staff and he'd said that one of the – well he told me that one of the staff had been dismissed for being caught in the bedroom with one of the girls, so you can take from that what you want but that's what I was told. And that wouldn't surprise me because, you know, the rules and boundaries were quite lax and you know

I really felt that you know they didn't really know a lot of what was going on. Is that okay?

Yeah, that's fine.

[2:15:21]

FS: I think so, do you want to maybe just mention that you didn't know the person's name?

Yeah, would you – do you know the person's name or?

I can't remember – I mean we're going back now, I mean I'm forty-seven, this is when I was fourteen so it's going back thirty-three years [laughs] so I'm sorry I can't actually remember anybody's name. I probably could if you'd mentioned some names of the people who worked there at the time, I'd probably say, 'Oh yes it was him,' or, you know, it was someone else, but I honestly can't recall them at the moment. I have tried to check out what happened to the home but I don't believe it's in existence anymore, I certainly couldn't find it on Google. So I haven't been able to find out any more information about staff that did or did not work there.

Okay.

Is that okay? Thanks.

[End of Track 1]