

# Social Care Institute for Excellence

## Interview Summary Sheet

## Title Page

**Ref no:** C1597/05

**Collection title:** Care Leavers' Stories

**Interviewee's surname:** Gerrard

**Title:** Mr

**Interviewee's forename:** Robert

**Sex:** Male

**Occupation:** Caretaker

**Date of birth:** 1954

**Dates of recording:** 07.05.13

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

**Name of interviewer:** Khatija Hafesji

**Type of recorder:** Canon XF 305

**Recording format :** .mxf

**Total no. of tracks:** 1

**Mono or stereo:**

Stereo

**Total Duration:** 2:54:57

**Additional material:**

**Copyright/Clearance:** Full clearance

**Interviewer's comments:**

## **C1597/05 Robert Gerard**

Track1 [02:54:57] [Session: 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013] [00:00:00] Robert Gerard [RG] Discusses his work as a caretaker in an old people's home and homeless shelters. Shares earliest memories, aged ten. RG cannot remember earlier than this. Discusses care records. [00:10:22] Describes the Old Days children's home in Tunbridge Wells. Remembers watching Dr. Who. [00:12:28] Aged 13, was moved to Harlow by social worker and separated from his nine siblings. First encounter with the police after shoplifting from Woolworths, aided by a friendly police woman. Describes bullying and altercations with students and teachers at school. Was expelled from school, age 13. Began taking drugs in adolescence. [00:28:51] RG answers whether anyone cared. [00:30:05] RG discusses his role as a youth worker later in life. RG enjoyed his role. Narrates an anecdote about young people he worked with, including the son of a prostitute and drug dealer. [00:34:51] Describes a close relationship with his siblings, particularly with his eldest sister. Eldest sister and her husband Peter were critical at keeping siblings in contact, until Peter died at the age of forty due to a brain tumour. RG was twenty-five at the time. [00:38:23] RG moved to the Philippines to work with street children, this placed a strain on RG's relationship with his siblings. RG was sponsored by a Church in his work, but overstayed and became homeless in the Philippines. He took a British Airways flight home. [00:43:19]

Track 1 [cont. from 00:43:19] RG considers the influence of his parents on his life. [00:46:04] Describes intense emotion of hatred, and the second encounter with the police woman who cared. [00:48:08] Describes a carer from the children's home who was very religious and strict. Was forced to attend church four times on Sunday, holidayed at a Christian guesthouse. [00:50:17] Met the same police woman once more at the age of seventeen after taking an excessive amount of drugs whilst searching for his parents. [00:54:34] RG discusses leaving care. Was given a flat by social services but was not well supported. Was evicted for not paying his rent. RG attempted suicide. Took an overdose of paracetamol. Recovered in hospital for three days. [00:59:00] The police woman came to visit a final time to tell RG she was not to see him anymore. RG loved her honesty. [01:00:22] Anecdote about honesty. Narrates a story of a young boy, who enjoys Led Zeppelin records, and wanted to find his parents. [ten minute comfort break] [cont. from 01:03:58] [01:04:15] RG discusses his relationship with his biological parents. Brief encounter with a potential adoptive family is significant to RG. He imagined that he had met his mother once and sat on her lap. RG describes this as a safety mechanism. At the age of thirty RG broke down in tears and shouted that they had not been his parents. [01:00:08]

Track 1 [cont. from 01:00:08] RG believes that he and his brother met his father once in London. RG is not sure whether this truly happened. Unable to speak to members of his family to verify this. Describes the brevity of relationships with social workers and moving children's homes. [01:15:26] RG in his fourth children's home. Almost adopted, but couple too old and could not control him. RG convinced the adoption was in his best interests. RG received his birth certificate during secondary school. His name on the birth certificate was

Robert, not Raymond. And he was a year younger than previously thought. Describes bullying at school as a result of this. Attended college and studied hotel and catering, took flower arranging classes. Was expelled from college. [01:22:10] RG worked in a hotel and a bar. Developed a drinking issue. Was not an alcoholic or drug addict. RG was then homeless on the Strand for three months. Discusses his emotional and psychological feelings at this time. Visited a day centre hospital in Waterloo where RG saw a psychiatrist. RG explored his feelings toward his parents with a counsellor for a year. Felt talking had a positive impact. RG discusses anger towards social workers for not telling him about his parents. RG mistakenly believed his parents owned Gerard's Jewellery store. RG says he has lived in nineteen different children's homes. RG discusses a difficult relationship with social workers. Considers the impact of moving placements on his friendships, and his inability to sustain friendships. Describes paranoia. [01:42:00]

Track 1 [cont. from 01:42:00] RG was close to a family he met whilst working at St. John's Ambulance, he was almost fostered or adopted by them. RG refused to move out of his children's home at the age of sixteen, and only left the home at the age of seventeen. RG worked for the London Ambulance Service after leaving care. Described incidents he had experienced: a woman who had fractured her collarbone after falling off a horse. Another incident where a young boy had broken his hip. [01:47:45] Describes relationship with religion and an incident where he met a man from the church who listened to his views on life and religion. The man later sent RG a long letter. [01:51:02] RG talks about his son, called Mark. His son was born whilst RG was away as a youth worker in Germany. RG cried that he missed his son's birth. Would repeatedly tell his son that he would not leave him. RG was mainly absent for the first three years of his son's life, feeling the needs of the young people at the youth service were greater than his son's needs. Discusses an instance where Carol, RG's ex-wife, gave him an ultimatum between coming home to Mark or going to prison to visit one of his young people who had got into trouble. RG did not come home. RG discusses the demise of his marriage with Carol and how he drifted apart from Mark. [02:03:35] [ten minute comfort break]

Track 1 [cont. from 02:03:35] Stresses the importance of honesty in their relationship. RG discusses accessing care records through Dr. Barnardo's in Barkingside. The records began at the point at which they located his birth certificate and do not describe his early years in depth. The records included mundane medical details – whooping cough – but also violent tendencies, RG may have spent time sedated/tranquilised in hospital. RG's records state that his father was an alcoholic who wanted to see his children but was unable to because of his drink issues. He had paid maintenance for the children. RG states that the records seemed to be describing somebody else. His eldest sister is reluctant to complete the missing gaps in his memory of his family and early life. Social workers also avoided the subject. [02:13:20] RG describes his thoughts toward social workers. He showed a hatred towards his social workers early on in life, but later came to the conclusion that not all social workers are bad. RG wonders who cared. RG describes the other young people in his children's homes. Shared home with well-known personalities, such as Fatima Whitbread. Other residents are now in prison. [02:17:13]

Track 1 [cont. from 02:17:13] Describes abuse in children's homes, and wondered why he was not abused. Notes police involvement and the arrest of the head of the children's home. RG is now seventy-five per cent happy. Discusses Christmases in the children's homes. RG hated Christmas. They were brought presents from Round Table volunteers. RG ran away from the children's home. Describes a volatile New Year with his friend Keith and his family. After leaving care, RG worked at homeless shelters during Christmas. RG acknowledges that his homelessness and youth work was more important to him than his own family, but he would not change this. RG describes not seeing Mark grow up, and his split with Carol. General discussion on the impact of Conservative/Tory budget cuts on youth services, and the closing down of the youth service. RG left his family and moved to the Philippines for a year and a half. Describes his family's reaction. He is still in touch with his family, but it is not the happy family of Heinz adverts. RG states that he did not strongly identify with being a child in care. His main focus was on struggling from one day to the next. RG discusses his lack of education. [02:34:32] RG elaborates on bullying at school, and the alcoholism of his carer at the LCC-run children's home. Mentions inspections. RG applied for a job as a children's home inspector but did not receive an offer. Feels that he was not intelligent enough. [02:39:47]

Track 1 [cont. from 02:39:47] RG says he agreed to be interviewed for the British Library so that social workers may be more honest with young people. [02:40:25] RG discusses his relationship with society as a child. Mentions his lack of friendships and the absence of his parents. Mentions self-reliance and the sense of being alone and always moving around. [02:44:31] RG mentions that he had very little say in decisions made over placements. Was annoyed by this. [ RG enjoyed music and his main role models as a teenager were David Bowie, Alice Cooper, Queen. His main hobby as a teenager was working with St. John's Ambulance. Later RG worked with Crisis at Christmas, and the Samaritans. RG discusses the experience of the oral history interview itself. RG will leave with a positive feeling, but recalls a time when growing up without parents to rely on was hugely upsetting. RG mentions in his final comments that he was nervous about the interview beforehand, and is curious about the care system today and he hopes that young people are better looked after today than they were during his childhood. [02:54:57] [End of interview]