

Care Leavers' Stories project

Robert Gerrard

Interviewed by Khatija Hafesji

C1597/05

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Social Care Institute for Excellence

Interview Summary Sheet

Title Page

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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

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**Interviewer's
comments:**

Track 1

Hello Robert.

Good morning.

Would you like to tell me, I guess, your name and a little bit about yourself?

I'm Robert. I'm fifty-nine and currently working as a caretaker in an old people's home, 120 flats. And I really enjoy the work and – actually my whole life I've really enjoyed work, all the jobs I've had. I've been very lucky, yeah. That's how it is at the moment. I've got a nice flat in Islington. Very happy.

What do you – sorry, go ahead.

Yeah, so quite settled and quite happy at the moment, yeah. It's really good. Things are – things are okay at the moment.

What do you particularly like about your work?

I don't know, really. Well, I was out of work for a little while when I had a nervous breakdown and – well, a little one, and got this job and ... It's just – I just enjoy working. It's just – I used to do a lot of voluntary work when I was out of work. I really enjoyed that, then the dole centre said, no, you're not allowed to do that, you've got to get a job. And then I started working with the older people and I wasn't – wasn't sure, 'cause I'd never worked with older people before, and it's just really nice, working – I enjoy working with them, and the actual ethos of going to work and getting up and the schedule. It's quite good.

And what do you do on a day to day basis?

Erm, I repair everything that our company own – the housing association owns, lights and water and communal areas. But the only thing about the job is that I work on my

own a lot with no staff two days a week, so I do a lot of the work I shouldn't really do as caring and – and I really enjoy it. And it's just a pleasure to go to work, really. And yeah, so, then I go home – bit boring some nights. But I rarely get bored, so – I've got a lot of good friends and I help a lot of other people. I do a lot of work with the homeless. That's where I spend my Christmases and have done for about thirty years now. That's where I spent Christmas, in the shelters and that. I just love it. Can't wait for Christmas to come sometimes. 'Cause I used to hate it, I just hated Christmas, I just hated it. When I was a little boy I used to dread it. And then one day – oh no, I didn't. I planned to work there when I was eighteen, at a night shelter, and I – I lied and said I was eighteen, I was sixteen. So I started at sixteen and I've worked every Christmas since. So it's thirty-odd years, or forty, so it's been a long time, but I just found – I'm glad I found something to do at Christmas 'cause it's not a nice time. I said that and I don't know now, I've probably changed now, probably settled down a bit and I'd get through Christmas, but I just had some horrible Christmases when I was in the children's homes. I hated it and just wished I went to school – well, no, 'cause I didn't 'cause I got expelled, didn't I, so couldn't go back there, could I? [Laughs] I'd have a job. But I don't know. I think I'm quite happy now.

You said you're quite happy at the moment and now but you've also talked a little bit about your time in a children's home and I wonder whether we can kind of go back a bit –

Yeah.

And think about maybe how you came to be in a children's home. When did that happen?

I don't – I don't really know, to be honest. I don't know anything – I don't know anything from the age of about ten. I can't remember anything. I've always wondered why. I remember a couple of things that happened, but nothing – just nothing, really. It used to worry me. When I used to ask – I asked a lot of people, 'Do you remember?' And they all seem to remember stuff that happened before ten

or – and I don't remember. So I don't know, to be honest. I used to make up stories to – like, when I was at school, kids used to ask and I used to – I used to make things up and sort of believe them myself. But in all honesty I don't know. I really don't know how I landed up in a children's home.

How old were you?

I don't – well, ten. But I just seemed to wake up there at the age of ten because I've got no recollection of why I was there, if I stayed with my mum or – I just didn't know. And I've thought about it a lot since and asked people and I've never worked that one out, never worked it out. So really my life seems to have begun at about ten years of age. I could only assume I was there – no, I don't know. I'd be purely guessing, so ...

Thinking before ten, where did you grow up? Where were you born?

I don't know, don't know anything.

Yeah?

Don't remember – I don't remember going to junior school. I don't remember a thing.

Do you remember, erm, friends that you might have had at a younger age or brothers and sisters or your parents?

No, nothing. I don't remember a single thing from – all I – all I remember – what do I remember? I remember going to a school when I was about ten and that's all I know. And I just don't know. I don't know –

When you say you've –

No recollection at all of what happened up to the age of about ten when I – I remember the school. I remember having a racing car and that was a pretty horrendous – I had a remote control car and that's my first memory and I was ten years of age. And that – and that was given to me by a [laughs] man and woman who came to the children's home. And it's not a nice story but that was my first life's memory is that day when this man and woman came. And they said – and I sat on that lady's lap, didn't even know who she was, and ... you know, so she was a – she was a – it was a man and woman. And we went round the shops in Tunbridge Wells, where I was in this children's home at the time, and we just walked and walked and I absolutely hated it. I just didn't know who they were and I didn't know why I was following them round. And this lady just said to me, 'Come on, Robert. What do you want?' And I didn't know why, what she meant. I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'We've come to buy you something and take you out.' And so I had this racing car and she bought it, it was a beautiful thing. And then we went back to the children's home and I remember sitting on their knee and she said, 'I like – I like you, Robert. You're a lovely little kid and you can come and live with us.' And she said, 'We'll be here next Saturday to pick you up and so make sure you're ready.' And I just went – I went into school that week – and I'd been quite badly bullied because I used to come from the children's home, and the teachers weren't that nice either. And I went in there and I was really happy that week and I just sort of stood up to the bullies and looked them in the face and said, 'Ah yeah, I'm getting – I've got a mum and dad now.' And they – I felt really good for that week. And anyway, the Saturday came and I got up and I packed all my stuff in my little – in the bed. I had a black bag and a teddy bear. That's – I remember – I don't know how I remember these things. And I sat on the bed about five o'clock in the morning, sat, and – and then the – the morning came and I was sitting on the bed and Auntie whatever her name – there was all these aunties. Auntie came in and she said, 'What are you doing?' She said, 'Why are you – what are you doing?' And I said, 'Oh, I'm leaving here today. My mum's –' And I was convinced it was my mum and dad by then, convinced myself. And she said, 'Don't be so stupid.' She said, 'They're not coming now.' She said, 'They've changed their mind and they want a little girl.' And I just went mad, absolutely ballistic. And that was really my first ever memory. I think that's what might have

woken me up, I don't know. And so I just remained – and I had to go back to school on Monday to get bullied, er, again.

What do you mean by woken me up?

I don't know, I've not thought about it before. I just can't ... I don't know. Do you remember things before ten, your young age? I just don't remember a thing and I'd love to. I've had all my records from the time in the children's home but it doesn't answer a lot of the questions. It brings up a lot of questions but it doesn't answer a lot. It's about 100 pages thick, yeah.

[10:22]

Okay. So can you describe – you've described your earliest memory. Can you maybe describe the home that you were in, the children's home, and who ran it, what it looked like?

Yeah. It was – it was in Tunbridge Wells and it was run by the LCC then, which is London County Council, yeah, yeah. So I must have had – I was born in Hackney Hospital, so I must have had connections somewhere, I don't know. And yeah, the children's home was fifty-six children and we all slept in bunk-beds, the boys in one and the girls in another. And I don't know, it was – it was called the Old Days, wasn't it? And that toy I had was – we were only allowed one toy each and you could only play with them on a Saturday morning. You had to get them out of a glass cabinet and play with them Saturday morning. And you could only watch Doctor Who. That was the only programme you were allowed to watch and we all used to rush and watch Doctor Who. And I used to hide behind a chair 'cause it scared me [laughs] so I never even saw that. And er, yeah, so I was there. And I think – I think I was quite happy there, reasonably happy. I was very young and I was going to school. That incident happened. There was a – quite a few incidences but nothing major really happened until I was about thirteen, I think, and I wasn't – I don't know if I caught on quickly or not. I didn't seem to listen to what the teachers said or people. I think it's because I – no, it doesn't matter because – it was pretty smooth

until they closed the children's home very suddenly and I think that's when my temper started. I had a – I think that's when I started to get into quite a lot of trouble, from that age of about thirteen. Because I've got nine brothers and sisters, there's nine of us, and we were all in that children's home and ... and the social services, they – I don't know. I – I couldn't have been listening, because the lady in the children's home, she said to me – she told me, she told me, she said, 'Right, we're closing down tomorrow, Robert, and you're moving to Harlow in Essex.' And I obviously didn't know where – didn't know anywhere existed outside of Kent. Anyway, so I obviously didn't listen. So I got up the next morning, thinking I was going to school, and there was loads and loads of coaches and minibuses outside in the car park. I just assumed I was getting a lift to school. And this woman, a big lady she was, came in and said – she held my hand. And I looked at her and I thought, oh, she's taking me to school, I'm getting a lift to school. I'm all excited 'cause I'm now getting a lift to school as well. Anyway, so the morning went on, it dragged on and school passed and there was all this ... anyway, so I got in this woman's car with all my stuff and my – I had a scruffy teddy bear, I always had it. And I was sitting in this social worker's car, I know now, and my – all my brothers and sisters were in a minibus. And I said to the woman – we pulled out. I said, 'Where are they going?' And then she stopped the car and she said, 'Haven't they told you?' I said, 'I'm going to school.' And she said, 'You're not, Robert. You're going to a children's home in Essex 'cause this one's shutting down.' I said, 'Well, why – why am I not in a minibus then?' And she said, 'Well, that's – your brothers and sisters are all going to Hastings and you're going to Harlow because you're – we can't control you.' And, erm, I just went ballistic. I went mad. I went mad in that car. And my lang [ph] – there's just certain things I don't forget. And I just called her halt [ph] and I was kicking her – I was in the back and I was kicking her seat. And the journey to Harlow was horrendous and that poor lady, poor social worker. We stopped in a cafe and she – I didn't – I was just trying to find out – I was watching the roads, 'cause I wanted to go back and find – I was going to walk back from where I was going and – with all my brothers and sisters. And the journey was just hell on earth for her. But anyway, we finally go to Harlow and I quite liked her after. It was a very short – I only met her for a few – that journey, and she drove off and I cried 'cause I wanted – just wanted her to cuddle me. Anyway, we went to this new children's home and there

was about six kids and the woman was a bit – she looked a bit stern to me. Anyway – tell me if I’m talking too much. The woman – I don’t know, I was thirteen. I went in the children’s home. I won’t mention the names but there were some other children there and they – a couple of them have become really famous since. And – yeah. There was six of us. And I wasn’t staying there. In my mind I knew I wasn’t, I knew I wasn’t, I was going to go – I was going to find this place called Hastings. And ... and anyway, so I – this lady, Auntie Beth, she said, ‘This is your new home,’ and all this rubbish. And I wasn’t listening ‘cause I wasn’t staying and I knew I wasn’t. And this – I said to her, the woman, I said, ‘Can I go out there and play football?’ She said, ‘Yes, don’t wander off though.’ She said, ‘Go.’ ‘Cause they were playing football in the field. And I was playing football with these – these lads and I was alright, I was quite ... and this lad said, ‘Oh, do you want to come round my house and play on the computer?’ I went, ‘Yeah.’ So I went round there. And I wanted a computer. And I said to this boy, ‘Where’s all the other children?’ And he said, ‘Oh, my brother’s out.’ And I said, ‘No, all the children, where’s all the children?’ And he said – and his mum – I didn’t know his mum was behind me. I said, ‘Where’s all the children?’ And he’s going, ‘What children?’ I said, ‘Who’s that lady?’ He said, ‘That’s my mum.’ I said, ‘Well, what’s a mum?’ And I was just getting confused. It was the first house I’d been in. It was just a normal house. And he said, ‘My dad’ll be home soon.’ And I said, ‘Why do you live with your ...?’ And I was asking these – and I heard his mum’s voice and she was really funny, she said, ‘Oh I think you’d better go, mate,’ she must have thought I was a loon. Anyway, I left and it got to about eight o’clock at night and I came out of his house and I thought, I’m going home now ‘cause I wouldn’t never, you know . And I turned right instead of left out of his flat, out of his house, and it was the first time I – and I was lost. And I was lost and I walked. And it got darker and darker and it was – and it just wasn’t fair. And I landed up in the town park about nine o’clock and there was just no one there. And I just thought, this – something was going to get me. And I was thirteen and I just knew something – I don’t even know to this day what it was, it was going to get me. And I have never since or before been so scared. And – and it was horrible and I had a terrible, terrible nightmare and it was all about my mum and dad and I was just in that town park, in this little shed thing, and it was open but it was a shed. And I woke up and I was in cold sweats. And that was my first bad dream, my first – that started

it. That started a teenage life of hell. And – no, it wasn't hell 'cause I was the only one who knew about it. Anyway, so the morning finally came. And in the night the police had been out – and I didn't know they were looking at me, I just – I didn't like the police, and so I avoided them. Anyway, in the morning I went to the town centre. I wanted to get found. So I went into Woolworths then and I was pinching loads of chocolate, filling my pockets up, just to get caught. I wasn't hungry, I didn't want them, but I just wanted somebody to grab me and no one did. And – and then I asked this lady where the children's home was. I don't know who she was. She was just some woman. And she just looked at me. It's like – children's home – she just looked down on me. I just thought, you bitch. Anyway, so I get – I was just – I started to believe that I was invisible. And I went in, sat in the library and I looked out the window and this policeman walked past with his big helmet and he looked in my eyes, and I thought [sighs], I was so relieved. And he carried on walking. And I thought – I convinced myself I was invisible and I was never going to get caught. Anyway, the police stormed the library in the end and they came in from every direction and ... and this policewoman, she saw that I was getting scared and she told all the CID. And they'd all be looking for me, 'cause I was this kid from the children's home so they'd spend extra – but they'd been out looking all night. This policewoman, she was lovely, she was wonderful. She took me for breakfast and then she put me in the police car, put the sirens on and she was lovely. And she cared, you could tell, she cared. And then I got back to the children's home and that was fine. And a bit of time went on and – and it was from that night, I used to cry every night. I used to just – every single night. And I used to wake up in the morning and my pillow was wet and I – I used to think it was a normal thing. I thought it was just normal, every kid done it. And I used to go to school and I was just relentlessly picked on, a kid from the home and that kid from the home, and I just bunked school, never there. I used to go in the woods and ... And then one day this kid – I think I was about fourteen now and this kid, he just – I just – for some unknown reason – he was the hardest kid in the school and we was in the dinner queue and he pushed in. And I was – I don't like to admit it, I was a wimp and I let them all beat me up and I let them all say whatever they wanted to say. But this boy – and I just hit this boy so hard and – in the dinner queue and he just laid there. And I thought, oh. He said, 'I'll see you at the school gates.' Yeah, so I said, 'I'll see you there an'all.' I said, 'You

wait there for me, mate.’ And I don’t know why all this rubbish came out of my mouth ‘cause I was a wimp. Anyway, so three o’clock come and I ran. I was gone over the – over the fence. I weren’t meeting him. Anyway, so the next morning came and this kid came up to me and he went, ‘Did you hit my mate yesterday?’ And he – this John was the hardest kid in the school. I’ll never forget you, John. And he went, ‘Did you hit my mate?’ I went, oh god, another beating. And I went, ‘Yeah, I did.’ And he went – and he grabbed me and he cuddled me and he went, ‘Well done, somebody needed to tell him.’ He said, ‘Are you that kid from the home?’ I went, ‘Yeah.’ He said, ‘Listen mate,’ he said, ‘If anybody says anything in future, come and find me.’ And from that day on school got a little bit easier, so that was quite good. And – not that I condone punching anybody in the face, but he needed it. Anyway, about a few months later, a teacher started and he said to me – he shouted, ‘Gerard’ – I was sitting in class, he said, ‘Gerard, have you done your homework?’ And I went, ‘No sir.’ ‘Cause I couldn’t – I couldn’t do anything at school. I couldn’t – couldn’t concentrate. The only thing I was thinking of was the night before and I’d had no sleep and I had to go back to this bloody children’s home. And my whole life was revolving around – I didn’t know it at the time, that I was going to find my mum and dad and I’d have to do this on my own, ‘cause there was nobody in this poxy world to help me. All these – and I tell you, all these people, social workers, sod ‘em. There’s people there all paid – they’re all paid and they’re all on shift work, they’re not there when you bloody want them. Half of them don’t care. No, no, that’s not true. There were some wonderful ones. But they’re all on shift work, they’re doing a job. They’ve been to college, congratulations. They’ve done their university degree ... I never really found one – I did, I – when you found somebody you trusted and you could talk to, they were gone, they were gone in a week’s time because they got shifted from one department to another. Anyway, this teacher, bless his cotton stocks, he says to me [laughs], he said, ‘Have you done your homework?’ It was French. I couldn’t even barely read and write, let alone do bloody French. And he says – and he went, ‘Have you done your homework, Gerard?’ And I went, ‘No sir.’ I wanted to say in that breath, ‘There’s too – I’ve got too much going on at home, sir.’ And he went, ‘Gerard,’ he said, ‘your mum and dad might have dumped you on the street,’ he said, ‘but that’s no excuse to not do your homework ‘cause you’re a little bastard.’ I went – and what? What did he say? And I got up and punched him in the face. He

hit his head on the blackboard and collapsed on the floor and sent me to the headmaster and I didn't care. And I went and saw the headmaster, Mr Hart his name was, what a wonderful man, and he – he was a wonderful headmaster, but he had to do something, he had to do something [coughs]. And he started shouting so people outside could hear and I just sat there, like, couldn't understand what he was doing. He said, 'Right, well, I've told you off, haven't I?' I went, 'Oh yeah.' He said, 'You behave,' he said, 'And I'll be watching you.' And I went out, I left his – I left that study. 'Oh, what happened?' I was like, 'He just went berserk. I nearly got expelled.' And it all worked out and this headmaster saved me. And then two days later – that teacher never forgot. He never forgot what I did. Two days later he shouted at me in the corridor and he said, 'Home boy.' I remember he shouted it across the thing. You call me a home boy. I ran, I ran at him, grabbed him, and he got me, see he was ready. And I got expelled and I was thirteen. And, erm, and I walked the streets for quite a long while. I – that's when I started getting into trouble and took a lot of drugs, loads, and I loved it, yeah. I did, I did, I, you know, it was a good thing. But I took them for a reason and they sent me crazy for a few years. But I think – all I done then from thirteen, they sent me to – they didn't know what to do with me, they didn't know what to do with me, because I wasn't – I wasn't the politest kid in the world. Social workers were just flying around with all their pens and papers and all these different idiots coming to see me. No one – again – again, there was no one who could sit me down and say, 'Oi,' give me a cuddle and say, 'What's going on, boy?' They never done it.

[28:51]

Do you feel like anybody cared?

I'm ... anybody cared? I'm sure they were there. No – yeah, I'm sure they all did. I'm sure every one of them did, most of them, but – the headmaster did. But no – none of them had the time, or they were so badly trained that a boy of thirteen that's having a temper tantrum – I know a boy now this minute and he has these temper tantrums and kicks the wall and he smashes things, and his mum, she just grabs him ... but she just cuddles him [cries]. She just cuddles him through it, like no [inaud]. I

could just scream and then – yeah, I could just scream. And then I was a naughty boy then, I was just naughty. And I just read they used to – I didn't know, I don't know, they used to lock me in the cupboard and stupid things like that and -No, did anybody care? I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did, but they didn't have the time, the experience or – 'cause, you know, if I see a kid now who has a temper tantrum, you just treat them differently. Perhaps, you know, a temper tantrum and – all these tantrums are obviously different. If I want some sweets and I throw a tantrum and it's – it's that nick [ph] or if you get told. But, you know, this – this lad I know now – actually, I will never talk about this bit. Sorry, yeah. I can't talk about him. It's right happening now, so ... no, I think anybody that's ... a young kid who's having a tantrum, it's just – I've been really – I was a youth worker for fifteen years and I worked with thousands and thousands of teenagers, and I just loved it. I just – couldn't wait to get to work, couldn't wait to fight with those kids and not hurt them, you know, and – and to be close to those kids. And I don't think very many of them – not many but a few were going through life's baddest moments, but it was just a pleasure to be there when they were. And ... it was just strange, I mean, 'cause you see people walking on the street or – or you or anybody in this room, you don't know what they're – what's happened to them. And it was just always a pleasure over those fifteen years to say to those kids – when they ever – when they ever said, 'I've never told anybody, Bob,' or I had to force out of them what needed to be said or whatever the thing they – and it was always a pleasure to work there. And working with those kids, I found over the years, the ones that were, erm, the most problemed were the nicest kids in the world. They had – one lad, his mum was a prostitute and his father was a drug dealer and it was – I went to the house and it was just filthy, him and his two brothers. And he was constantly stealing cars, constantly nicking. And I followed him one night from his house to the youth centre, just to watch him, and he couldn't walk from the youth centre without trying to get into five or six cars. He threw a brick at someone's window for no reason. And he was just a menace. And that was just – he didn't know I was there. And we got to the youth centre and I said to him, 'What did you do on the way here, to the youth centre?' And he was always honest with me, he never – he didn't lie, didn't need to. And he went, 'What do you mean, Bob?' I said, 'Your little journey from here to the ...' 'Well, nothing really, Bob.' 'No,' I said, 'Come on.' And he didn't recall that he'd tried all those car doors

and that he'd smashed someone's window, or – he didn't smash it, he just tried to annoy them, get in his heart [ph]. And I thought, oh god, he just seemed so much like me. And – but as I say, these people that have been – had they been abused or had a really rough time, I found – their heart seemed to be so different to the kids that were, for want of a better word, normal, two family. And I think I'm a nice person and I do try to help people and ... have I got my jacket [ph]? And I just – and my brothers and sisters are all the same. I will go back to them because that day that they moved to Hastings was ... but I have found young people that are – have had a really bad time, they seemed to have got these personalities to die for, yeah.

[34:51]

Were you close to your brothers and sisters?

Yeah, quite close. I was in Harlow and a social worker came and took me to Hastings one day. And they were all there, they were all playing. I don't remember a great deal about it, I remember just wanting to stay there. And ... I ... and as the years went on, all my brothers and sisters moved to Ilford, Newbury Park, all in that area, and I stayed in Harlow. And I used to go and visit once a month. And my oldest sister used to have a beautiful house and every Saturday all my brothers and sisters would go round the house, without fail they used to go and chat, and it was very, very nice. And occasionally we used to – well, we used to escape there, really, because her husband, Peter, was an amazing guy, very patient, very real, and he used to run the London Marathon every year. And the things were fine. And I used to walk into my sister's house. Well, I only went once a month, or once every three months, 'cause I was quite busy. I was a bit older. And that held us all together. And we didn't see a great deal of each other, but we were all growing up. And then my sister's husband died at about forty, forty years of age, and my beautiful sister and her husband and, you know, people think I'm exaggerating, but they never argued. They were so in love. And that was our first stable sort of place and you could always go there and it was – you were always welcome. And you used to sit with your brothers and sisters and they'd say, 'What you been up to?' And 'Mind your own business.' But it was lovely. But that was only a Saturday morning. And he – and as I say, I was ... Peter

died within an hour. He was a fit forty year old and he had a brain tumour or something.

How old were you when this happened?

I was – it was going on now. I was – it was about – twenty-five, I think. And – and it literally just tore us all apart. But that was – that was the reason we stopped seeing – ‘cause we were so used to going to here – it was always there, Saturday mornings we could go there, and it stopped and we all split up a little bit. But the reason we – we did stop talking was I, erm – I went to the Philippines for a year and a half, I got a job out there working with street children, and I absolutely – it’s what I wanted to do when I was about fourteen. I just knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a youth worker, I wanted to be an ambulance driver and I wanted to work with street children, and I’ve done all three in my life and I’m very, very proud of that. But anyway, I was in the Philippines and I went as a volunteer, working with these street children, and it was just an amazing time. And then the organisation I’d gone with, the church I’d gone with, sort of – that had sponsored me and eight other people – something happened back in England – and they were sending us £25 a week to live on and you were quite rich on that money, but it all dried up and they all came home, or most of them came home, but me and two others stayed in the Philippines. And – big mistake. And we carried on doing the work we were doing and – working with these street children and it was just amazing. And ... and then we – even the three of us split up then and I started to wander in the Philippines, and there wasn’t £25 coming in a week then. And I – I had a little bit of money saved up and I should have got on the plane and come home, and I didn’t. And then I became homeless in the Philippines myself for about a month. It was okay and I was phoning friends to sort of bail me out and get me out of trouble. And I was getting deeper and deeper into trouble out there and the British Embassy were useless. And finally I got hold of my sister, who is quite well off, she’s quite well off, and, bless her heart, love her to death, she sent – she sent me £1,200 for a flight ticket. And I came home on the next available British Airways flight and it was amazing. And this is after Peter had died. And my beautiful – and my beautiful family that was – we all – we was all splitting up and we was all getting a bit catty and – that wasn’t twenty-five years that I’ve known, another disaster in the

world. And they were never nasty to me, but I heard some comments that I was a scrounger and – ‘cause their, you know, their ethos is the same as mine, is to work, get your own money and sort yourselves out, but I – I went wrong once and I didn’t like that comment, didn’t like it at all. But – and it was all borne out of Peter’s death, really, because it hit us all really hard and – and I don’t see them now at all. I want to – I want to write to one of them and just send – send them a letter, but I don’t know – don’t know what to do. Because I – you know, they love me and I love them, but ... and I wasn’t always honest when I was there. Because I lived all – I lived all sort of away from them in Harlow and they lived in London, I used to visit, and I used to say, ‘Oh, I’m okay, I’m fine.’ But I wasn’t always fine. And I had some dark times and it was all – and I swear, I swear, I swear, I swear, I swear it’s all their fault, it’s all my mum and dad’s fault. And I just used to think, why? You know, I’m fifty now, fifty-odd now – you lie about your age when you get older. I’m fifty-nine now and I think it’s just not fair that it took me up to the age of fifty – forty – forty years of age that ... I can’t get them out of my mind. It’s horrible. And I – you – really, really, as I say, what it boils down to, I was eighteen and I was taking loads of drugs and I was looking for their grave at eighteen. I should have been out partying and – and, you know, you asked me earlier who cared, that policewoman cared. She found – and she came to the children’s home because my next door neighbours phoned the police because I was screaming and she said they thought I was getting beaten [mobile phone rings] and ... it’s quite a nice tune, isn’t it?

Yeah.

And that policewoman came – is that mine? I’m so sorry.

It’s alright.

Female: It’s underneath your feet.

Oh, it is. It’s them kids, they keep setting my alarm. Sorry about that. We can carry on.

That's okay.

[44:37]

And, yeah, you say who cared. I'll make sure that alarm is switched off. The kids set the alarm for any time they feel like it.

As a joke.

Yeah, they do it all the time [switches phone off]. Yeah, 'cause you said did anybody care. How do you know if they cared? Well, I know if they care, I know if I care. If I care about somebody ... I shut my mouth and I listen. And so that police lady – I was in bed in the children's home and my next door neighbours phoned the police because they thought I was being killed. And I knew the neighbours in the children's home and they were lovely. And I was in bed and I woke up and I looked up and there was a policewoman there in her uniform and I just – I was – 'cause I hated the police, hated them with a vengeance. I hated everybody and I hated the teachers. So I just hated everybody at fourteen, fifteen. Oh, I just wanted to hurt people. And I didn't, I didn't, I didn't, I didn't, 'cause I wasn't made like that, but – and this policewoman, she woke me up and I thought, what is she doing in my room? Why is there a policewoman looking over me? And she said, 'Hello Robert.' And I thought, how does she know my name? And I woke up and I – I looked at her. I said, 'What are you doing?' And she said, 'Robert, you had a terrible – you was having terrible nightmares and the neighbours called us.' She said, 'We came in and' she said, 'The room was rattling with your screaming.' And I just said, 'I just want my mum and dad.' And [cries] she cared, do you know what I mean? And she cared, yeah. That's – you knew who cared, do you know what I mean? Because my sister wrote to me once and she said, 'Oh Robert, I've had a miscarriage and if you don't understand what that means, ask Auntie Beth.' And I laid in bed at night and I thought – I didn't know what a miscarriage was, I just knew the baby wasn't coming, and – and she was in Hastings and – I don't know what her life was like, I never talked about it. They won't talk about it. They won't tell me what's ... Anyway, I showed Auntie Beth the letter the next day and she just – I was crying when I gave it to her 'cause I didn't

understand what – what was going on. And she just slapped me and said, ‘Oh, don’t be so stupid,’ she said, ‘She can have another child. I don’t know what all the fuss is about.’ And did she care? She cared that – she took us to church every Sunday, three days – and she was a religious nutter woman. She wasn’t even a nutter, she just was religious, over the top. So we used to go to church on Sunday. We used to go to set the church up in the morning. [Laughs] Take a fifteen year old boy to church, force him to go to church, love, I would. And I used to go. And my mike’s falling off. And – just put it on ... [Rustling] I’ve forgotten ...

It’s alright.

Female: We’ve just got another ten minutes for [inaud] and we’ve got the hour break.

Good, I’ll shut up then, because I do not stop once I start yapping.

Female: It’s good to talk.

[49:00]

Anyway – sorry. And ... yeah, this lady from the children’s home, she used to be quite religious, very, very strict. Oh, she was strict. And we used to go to church four times on Sunday, once on Wednesday and we used to go to – on holiday to some Christian guesthouse somewhere, oh. But I coped, do you know what I mean, and I used to go to the church and then nip out the back for a fag. And, forgive me, I used to pinch the money out of the collecting box for ten fags. But the church was – it was good. And – but we used to go to church and I used to like singing the hymns but I used to hate being there. And ... oh yeah, you know we was talking about who cares, weren’t we? I think she cared but she didn’t know how to, erm ... yeah, so – and the third time I met this police lady was a few years on now and I was out with a friend of mine, who used to get pills and things, and I was a teenager and it was fun. And one night I took too many pills, because I didn’t – they didn’t work, didn’t make me happy in ten minutes, so I took about fourteen of them.

How old were you?

Fifteen, I think, fourteen, fifteen. And boy, ten o'clock, these tablets worked, and when you were supposed to take one or two and I'd taking fourteen ... I remember we were walking round and – and they just hit me. And my mate – we were really good mates and we used to both get out of the houses at our separate places and crawl down the drainpipe and go out at night, about one o'clock in the morning, and just have a laugh. And we used to go out everywhere and crawl back in the drainpipe at four in the morning so no one knew. And he left me. He said, 'Bob, there's something wrong with you.' And I was seeing spiders and I was seeing everything. And again, it went back to that night that I was sitting in a park at fourteen, twelve, and I had those terrible dreams. And I was walking and I started laughing for no – no reason at all. I couldn't control that laughter. But it was – there was no one there, there was nobody there. And I was walking. And I was trying to walk to London and Harlow to London is nineteen miles and I didn't – still didn't know where London was. I just knew – I just knew my mum and dad were in London and ... And I walked down the road and I was sobbing and I was crying for no reason, and as I walked up this road – I don't know where – probably even walking in the wrong direction. I don't know, never – don't know, but I knew I had to find my mum and dad. And my word, this police car came and they put their blue lights on and I started laughing [laughs]. I was laughing at these blue lights. And ... and I – they – I sat in the back of the police car and I just didn't – and I started laughing. And this woman said, 'Robert.' And I just knew that voice from heaven and it was that same policewoman. And it's the way she spoke to me – and I was high on drugs and I should have been arrested, I should have been put in a cell. Anything should have happened to me. And she said, 'Robert, empty your pockets.' And I just pulled out all these pills and started laughing. And she took them off me and she threw them out the police car window. And this copper who was with her went – said, 'What do you think you're doing?' He said, 'I want him in – I want him in the nick. He's had it.' And she went – I'll never forget that woman. She went – I can't remember what she said but she more or less told him to shut his gob and I was going nowhere. And she cared. And she took me back to – I was in a hostel – no, I was in a – oh, social services give me this flat, they gave me a flat, bless them. I left the children's home – no, I was a bit older then, I was a bit

older, 'cause I got a flat at seventeen. That's when I was doing those drugs. And social services – 'cause you know they have to look after you for a little while and they have to sort of stay with you for a year or so. I think they dumped me, they dumped me, they couldn't get rid of me quick enough. And they gave me a flat, marvellous, they gave me a flat and it was wonderful and I partied for two years. And – and that was my first ever place. I had it for, I don't know, about a year. And did I see them? Did I see them? Did they come round and say, 'How are you, Bob? Are you paying the bills?' I wasn't paying the bills. I didn't know – I didn't know bills had to be paid. The gas bill used to come and I used to put it in the drawer, thinking someone's paying it [laughs]. I never paid the rent. I never paid the electric bill. I didn't – I didn't know. I just knew how to party. And all my mates used to come round and the neighbours used to go berserk. They quite liked me, my neighbours, and – 'cause I used to make my mates climb through the window so they didn't disturb the people at the front, so ...

[55:38]

Anyway, they gave me a flat. And they gave me £60 as well, which was quite nice. And I never saw anyone, I never saw a soul from seventeen to the day the police came and smashed the door down. So why didn't they – oh, I think they would now. Anyway, I got evicted for not paying my rent and I took a massive overdose. And that wasn't drugs, that was – that was ... that was eighty paracetamol or something. I thought, oh [inaud]. And they were taking my precious flat away from me and I was going to be on the streets and there was just no one [cries]. And I was in hospital - and an ambulance come and they took me to hospital and I was sick straight – straight over this poor nurse, and the most embarrassing thing was I knew her. I was just dying in a bed. I thought, how can I get in this state? And they were pumping me for three days. They were putting stuff in me. It was – it was all their fault [cries]. Anyway ... 'cause I loved my flat. It was the first time – it was the first time I was on my own. I remember it, no one shouting at me, no one telling me what to do. And, er ... sorry. Anyway, right, okay. No one was telling me what to do. Anyway, I loved it. I loved that flat. I did party. But I didn't pay the bills. I mean, I just didn't know. I didn't – and today it sounds silly that I didn't know I had to pay a gas bill, electric

bill, I didn't. 'Cause these children's homes, they done everything for you. They done the lot, mate. All you had to do was some chores and wash up. Blimey, hard work, mate. I thought, I'm not washing up. Cor. Anyway, as I say, I was in hospital for three days and it was touch and go if I lived or died, but – and I cared. And two friends of mine came in, you know who you are, and er, Bill and Sue came in and I just felt a flood of guilt that come over me, that I'd done it. And I thought, how can I do that to my friends? And I had some nice friends. I didn't realise that, I suppose you don't. And ... and then I was in – and I was in there – on the third day this lady came, didn't know who she was. I assumed she was from social services or something stupid, but it was that policewoman, that woman. She'd found out from this nurse. And I wish to this day I hadn't been sick on this nurse. I don't know how I knew that nurse but I knew her and she phoned her. And the same policewoman came. She was off duty then. And apparently she'd been told that she must have no more dealings with me. And she told me, she was honest, she was so honest. And she said – she explained. She said, 'I'm a police officer.' And she said, 'I've watched you grow up, Robert.' And she said, 'Look, my sergeant said I mustn't have any more dealings with you.' And she was lovely. I'll never forget her, never forget her as long as I live. And she was – she was honest.

How did you feel when she said that?

Brilliant. I felt – I felt – I loved it because she was honest and none of them – none of them – half – there were people I'd met before that, they weren't dishonest – They just didn't tell me. Why didn't they tell me when I was eleven? You knew – I seen this kid once, I tell you, I seen this boy – and I done some voluntary work in a children's home every Wednesday for years and years. And we weren't allowed in their bedrooms, which is, you know, you always knew rules. You know, you had to go into the room. You weren't allowed in their room. And the boy said to me, 'Can you talk to me in my bedroom?' And I thought, right, I'm either going to talk to this boy in his bedroom and get told I'm not – I'm never allowed to work there again, and I wouldn't have given a shit. So I did and I said to the boy – he said to me – we sat there – and I left the door open, all the usual health and safety – and good luck to them and all that rubbish. But I sat with that boy and he played this Led Zeppelin

record over and over and it was the most horrible sound you can ever imagine. But I done that, I played these records over and over. So I let him and I talked to him. And he said to me, he said, 'Robert,' he said, 'The police came.' He said, 'And they smashed the door down and the police put me and my sister in the police car.' And I was listening to this boy. And he said, 'They put me in the police car and they took us to – they brought us here, they brought us here.' And this bloody Led Zeppelin's going, I couldn't concentrate. And I said, 'Listen, tell me, come on, what's the matter?' He said, 'You've got a car, haven't you?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'Listen, will you do something for me?' He said, 'I know,' he said, 'I know the phone box that they phoned the police on and said they didn't want us anymore and they were to come and take the kids – to come and take us both. I know what phone box my mum phoned from.' So he said, 'If you –if you take me in your car to the phone box,' he said, 'You drive down the motorway and I'll walk down the road and we'll go and find them.' And the little soldier believed – he believed that in all his heart [gets upset]. He believed it. And I just told him straight. I said, 'No mate, no, no, no, they're not there.' And I was just honest with him. And I could have been sacked, anything could have happened to me, you know. But I was just sick to death of the problem those – those – not telling me caused. Half of it could have been solved – I kept saying, 'Where's my mum and dad?' And they kept saying, 'Oh, you're too young to understand.' I'm not too young to ask, am I? And even my sisters – my oldest sister knew, my oldest sister knew. She wouldn't talk about it. Anyway, and that young lad – I just – to think that he would – he was doing the same as I did. And I just told him, I said, 'Nah,' I said, 'They're not there, mate.' And they're the sort of people who care, do you know what – it just goes back to the who cares, you know.

Female: Just – we're just going to have a ten minute break now, if that's okay with you, alright?

Yeah.

Thank you. Thanks a lot.

[Pause for Break]

[1:04:00]

Okay. Thank you very much for kind of contextualising and going through really important stages of your life earlier. And I'm going to try and pick out some of the things you talked about, maybe starting with something that seemed really, really important to you all the way through, which is your relationship with your parents. And it comes up a lot. And I wonder how – from your earliest time, from your earliest memoirs, after the age of ten, how did you think about your parents? How did you relate to them?

Well, there was no relationship because ... I think, and it's still a confusing story to this day, that – other than that man and woman who came to take me out, I thought that was my mum. I just imagined that was my mum, I don't know. There was an incident where me and my brother met my dad and – a few things have happened that I think are utter rubbish and could never have happened but I believe them. And just that incident where I sat on that lady's lap, and I went through my whole life telling all my friends and everyone that I saw my mum once and I sat on her lap. And in my heart that was the truth and that happened. And I think that was a little bit of a ... safety mechanism when I said I hadn't got a mum and dad and I had to say it 'cause it was the truth and I wanted to believe that that was my mum, but it was some woman who wanted to adopt me and dumped me 'cause she wanted a girl, lovely lady. But I went through my life telling everybody that I'd met my mum once and I sat on her lap. That obviously in the back of my mind made me feel better and it got me through some problems. But I got – I was in the pub one night with my mate and we was a bit older then, sort of thirtyish, and we was in the pub and we had two drinks, nothing much. And I was driving – we was driving along and I stopped the car. My mate was in the army and he was a paratrooper, a more gentle geezer you couldn't meet. He was a paratrooper and he was hard. And I needed people – I think now, looking back, I needed people to – I made friends that – I didn't thought about it at the time, I just thought about it this minute, but that would protect me. But anyway, he was my friend. And we were driving back from the pub. I was driving and I stopped at the side of the road for no reason. I wasn't drunk, I'd not – there was no thought in my head. There was no thought process at all. I don't know how it happened. And I stopped the car and I burst into the most horrendous tears. And, erm, I was shouting

at my mate, 'That wasn't my dad. That wasn't my mum.' And my mate, he was almost out the window, he was just petrified that I'd had this – he'd never seen me lose the plot before. And I was screaming, 'I'm a liar. I'm a liar. I've just told lies all my life.' And I'm saying, 'Dave, it wasn't my mum. It wasn't my mum. It wasn't my mum.' And he didn't understand. He had no idea what was going on in the world. He just wanted to get back to whatever war he was in the middle of, but he cared. And, oh, those thirty years of thinking that was my mum. And I don't – I'd love to speak to someone and find out why it came to me within half a minute that that truth that I believed – and this happened a lot, this happened a lot. It was all these flashbacks of – where were my mum and dad? How did I believe that was my mum? And I convinced my little brain that it was the truth. The incident that was most horrendous was my dad wrote to social services and said he wanted to meet us. And it's one of those things in life – again, for me, that – make your own mind up. And I said, 'No, I don't want to meet him. I don't want to effing meet him.' But my brother did. My brother said, 'I want to meet him.' And – and I tried to persuade my – convince my brother, who was a similar age to me then, sort of – ooh dear, I'm going backwards and forwards. We were about sixteen, I think, fourteen, don't know. And the morning came when we were to meet him with the social workers. And he was standing in the arches in London, under an arch, this skinny man, a little bit scruffy. And I stood back and I argued with my brother in the street that he shouldn't go and talk to him and I was going to punch him in the face. But my brother went over and talked to him. The thing about the story is, you don't – you don't go to the arches and meet your dad with no social workers there. How did I get there? How did I know how to meet him? And was the story true? So I've met my mum and dad once and goodness only knows if that incident happened.

Have you asked your brother?

No, we never talk about it. And it's the same with all my brothers and sisters, they don't want to talk about it. They don't want to discuss it. And as I said earlier, my older sister knows what happened. She doesn't want to talk about it. I don't think – now, looking back, I don't think I met my dad or saw him, 'cause I wasn't going to speak to him. So another – it might have been a dream, but I convinced myself both

of those incidents happened. So that was the nearest I got to them in my whole life, other than the abuse I gave them.

[1:11:47]

And did you have, whilst you were in any of these homes, anyone that you could talk to about what had happened, or you could ask any questions to about your parents?

No. Yes, I always asked. I asked everybody. Social workers came quite regularly. Mostly they came 'cause of my behaviour, 'cause I was a little tyke. Most of the social workers came – and they moved me because this home was closing. And the usual old rubbish was they came – they only had ten minutes, you know, they haven't got time. They've got their busy schedule, but we need to talk to you. And after about, I don't know, the sixth social worker, I had no time for them because they had no time for me. I did meet – I met once a male social worker and I knew from the first minute that I could talk to him. I just knew he was – he had a beard, he was a bit of a hippy, and he was such a nice guy. And he didn't mind – he didn't care that I swore at him. And he – actually he just to laugh when I swore at him. And most of them, you used to, like, curl up and die. You just swore, oh so what. And – but this social worker, as I say, he was a bit of a hippy and I just knew I was going to get on with him. And he said, 'Robert,' he said, 'We're moving you.' And I said, 'You're an arsehole.' He said, 'I am.' I remember him, I remember him. He said, 'I am, aren't I?' Like that. And he was the first one. And then he said, and I knew what he was going to say before he said it, 'Oh, I'm moving departments so this is the only time I'll see you.' And I thought, nah, nah, I'm never speaking to another social worker again. And they still came. And this poor lady came and she said the usual baloney. She said, 'Oh,' she said, 'I've got some good news and some bad news.' And they came with the bad news thick and fast. They didn't listen. They didn't have time to listen or ... did they care? I'm sure they did but they didn't have time to sit and listen. They weren't trained well enough. How can they be scared of a fourteen year old boy that swears? Anyway, the social worker came and she said, 'Robert, I've got some good news, some bad news and some news.' And I just thought I don't want to listen to it. And I stood on the chair and I just slapped her round the – I just

slapped her around the face. And I didn't have a conscience about it. How did she react? Oh, she still had her three pieces of news to tell me. And I said, 'I'm not moving. I ain't effing moving from this children's home.' 'Cause I quite liked it there, it was quite a nice place. But they had to move me. I don't know if the funding ran out or I was beyond control or whatever.

Was this your second children's home?

Erm, it was about the fourth, I think, fourth place. And the couple that were going to adopt me I loved, but the social worker said they were thirty and they were too old and they – this couple couldn't control me. They wouldn't be able to control me. What did they know? They knew nothing. Because I know to this day, if I moved in with that family, I'd have been fine because they were lovely. But, you know, it happened. So perhaps all this – all there was to give me was bad news. They bought me a bike actually, quite a nice mountain bike, 'cause I asked for it, but I wanted to get onto the bad news and the news. So the good news was that I'd got the mountain bike – they were quite good at that, buying you stuff. So the second set of news was – oh of course, yeah, you know what it was, 'We've got to move you, Robert.' 'Get on then, just do it.' And the third bit of news was a bit horrendous. It was the first year of secondary school. I'd done the first year [coughs]. She said to me, 'You've been asking for your birth certificate, haven't you?' I went, 'Yeah.' 'Cause I knew my mum and dad's name would be on it. She said, 'Well, we've found your birth certificate, Robert – Raymond, Raymond.' And she said, 'There's been a bit of a mix up.' She said, 'The name's not Raymond, it's Robert. And you're not fourteen, you're thirteen and you've got your birth certificate sent to the wrong place.' And I didn't know the consequences of that. So she said, 'You'll be called Robert from now on. It's your real name. And you're a year younger.' So big deal, I just wanted my mum and dad's name so I could find them. And I went into school the next day and the headmaster saw me and he – he called me Raymond and I said, 'My name's Robert.' And he said, 'I know.' And again, he was a wonderful guy. And he said, 'I think what we'll do, Robert, is we'll do the first year again and that'll get you back into the right year.' And so I went back to school the next term and I was a first year again. Oh, and all hell broke loose. I was a laughing stock then, got a different name,

I live in a children's home and I – some of them beat me up. And – and I knew – and that's when I got expelled from school after the first year because social services messed my date of birth up. I was living in that children's home, I was the oldest one and I had my own room because I was the oldest, and I lost that. I went back with all the other kids that I'd been bullying [laughs], 'cause I was the oldest and I was in charge and I wasn't any more [laughs]. And my life just – from that minute, just went to pieces. And I'm now fourteen and no school, no nothing. And they put me into catering college. First thing, the social workers found me a place in college with all the eighteen year olds, and I quite liked it actually. I quite liked being in college and the freedom it offered, but one of the teachers said to me, 'What are you doing in the corridor?' Me and my mate. And I said, 'Well, we're going to our lesson.' She said, 'Well ...' She looked at the chart and she said, 'Oh, it's flower arranging, isn't it?' 'Cause it was hotel and catering. And I was just – I'm not going to go and arrange flowers [laughs] for two lessons. And me and my mate were messing about in the college – I'd been there a month, I think, and we were messing about in the flower arranging lesson – I mean, in the corridors and I wasn't going, 'cause I was stubborn. And we got a fire extinguisher and I said – we got in the lift and I said to my mate, 'The next person – when the door's open I'm just going to wipe this fire extinguisher and soak the next – the first person that opens the doors.' And it was really funny 'cause it was the head of the college that I got. And she was drenched and she was crying. She was pointing to the door. And I was out of there. And so I had no college then and I'm very, very lucky I didn't go to a young offenders' prison.

[1:20:46]

Why did you do that?

Why did I ...?

Mess around with the fire extinguisher.

Oh, 'cause I wasn't going to go and do flower arranging in any way, shape or form. I wasn't [laughs] – I wasn't doing that lesson. We were just messing about, me and my

mate, in the two hours we had to spare and we thought it was funny to do that. But we soaked the wrong person as the lift doors opened and I was expelled from there. But I was quite enjoying it other than doing the catering and that. I didn't particularly like it. Haven't cooked since. Haven't cooked all my life. I've got – I've been in my flat nine years now and I've only used the cooker once and I completely ruined that dinner. I cooked for some friends. So I've never cooked since ... and I've forgotten what the question was.

And what happened after that? Did you go into education again or ...?

No, no. I worked in a hotel and it was – it was fun. It was working all the hours and for the lowest pay ever, but I loved it. It was like a family. It was quite a big hotel but it was only a one off hotel. There wasn't a group of them, it was just one big hotel. And the managers were wonderful. The directors worked upstairs and they were wonderful. And I had fun for a few years and I just messed about, had an amazing time and ... and as I grew up, I wanted to work in the bar and I knew I did, 'cause you could sit and talk to – I wanted to talk to people then and I knew it was a bar and you could sit and chat to people and they'd have a few drinks and they'd tell you about the world. And I loved it and – but then I got a bit of a drink problem because drink was free and –

How old were you?

Well, whatever age then you could start work in a bar, which must have been eighteen, I would imagine. And I was going to bars when I wasn't working all the hours, I was starting to drink. And I used to wait – 'cause the pubs used to open then at 5:30 and close at 10:30, so I used to be outside the pub at five, waiting for it to be open and drink. But I didn't – I've been very, very lucky in my life. I've never had a – never been an alcoholic or a drug addict. I've taken – I've done both to extremes but I'm very, very lucky that it hasn't affected me. And the people I've worked with since, I look at them and I feel for them. But in a lot of respects, all that I've said and happened, I've been very, very lucky. I've had some wonderful jobs. But I just wish that what we talked about earlier didn't happen and people were more honest and I

wouldn't have got to the age of forty – I was forty and I had a nervous breakdown. And I was sleeping in the Strand. I had quite a good job – I had a – I had a job and I was driving round, delivering car parts, and I quite enjoyed it and I was out on the road on my own [coughs]. And some quite major problems happened with some friends of mine, their children died very, very young, and it just – and I had to look after the dad, get him through it, and it was just a horrendous year. And I was driving and I – I just knew in the back of my mind that – something happened in my mind and I thought, I've got to get this mum and dad thing out of my head and I'm going to do it. I don't care how I do it, I'm going to stop worrying about them and stop looking for – looking for them, that was it, looking for them. And it's going to stop. And I gave up my flat. It was a little flat in Catford, I think it was, London, and I was happy there. The landlord thought I was the best thing since sliced bread 'cause I cleaned the whole house all the time, kept it neat, kept everybody under control and we had a really – this little family place. And I'd paid £1,000 deposit on the flat and I had a nice job and then I ... gave everything up within a week. I planned it, I knew what I was doing, because living on the streets doesn't hold any fear for me, because I done it all my life. I've done it all my life. I slept in garages when I was nine years old. I ran away from home constantly. So no problem to me, I can ... and I – I was on the Strand, I remember it. I got a bag, left my job, left my everything, gave everything up, and I sat down the Strand opposite McDonald's, just sat there the first night. And it says in the Bible something or other, your problems will go. And I sat in the Strand and everything – it was like stuff going – all nasty stuff going out of my body and floating away. I sat there on my own with my little bag, my sleeping bag, and it was one of those wonderful, wonderful feelings. I had nothing and I had nothing. And I slept on the Strand for about three months. I was going from day centre to day centre, and everything was fine. And then I had another terrible dream about them and I was getting ill – not 'cause I wasn't looking – I was washing and I was eating, I was fine, and I was phoning my mate every day. He was worried sick about me. And I just said – I sat there after – and I said, 'Alright, I'm not leaving the streets. I'm not going to leave the Strand until I go away, come back and all those problems have gone.' And there I laid night after night after night and I cried and kept saying, 'Why did they do it to me? Why did they do it to me?' And I'm going from hostel to hostel. And then I – I was in Waterloo and in the day centre, having some breakfast, and ten

minutes later I was in Trafalgar Square and I didn't know how I got there. I didn't know. My mind had completely closed down. And I was in Trafalgar Square and I remember one of my mates said, 'Why were you walking across the road without looking?' He said, 'Cars were swerving.' 'I don't remember.' And I just knew there was something terribly wrong. And I went into the day centre hospital. They've got a – they've got a homeless doctors' place where the homeless people go and it is the most – it's not nice, it's a dirty old place, but the staff are stunning. And they've got awards for their work with homeless people. And I said to the receptionist [gets upset], 'I need to see ... I've got to see someone.' And she said, 'Sorry, we're just closing, Bob.' She said, 'Everyone's going home.' I said, 'I'm not moving.' And I knew the girl, I knew the woman. You know, I'd been in and got a plaster and got some of their pills and all that sort of rubbish, but – and she was just one of those kind people. She said, 'Alright, just wait a minute, Bob.' And this psychiatrist was there and she said, 'Listen, he's got fifteen minutes. He'll see you for fifteen minutes.' And I went in his little room, it was a tiny little room, and I was looking at the a picture on the wall and I was shouting, 'I want my mum and dad. They're bastards.' And I was just – I told him everything within the space of five minutes. And I said, 'I want my mum and dad.' I said, 'Why do they do this?' I remember – I don't remember him and I don't remember – I just kept looking up at this picture. And he said to me, 'Robert,' he said, 'We don't normally – we've got a waiting list but,' he said, 'Come in Thursday. I want you to see someone.' And this someone was called Diane and she was a counsellor. And I said, 'Counsellor?' And I sort of laid into her – the first two hour session, I sort of laid into her and she was wonderful. And she asked me a question and she said, 'Robert?' She said, 'I'm going to ask you a question. I don't want you to be upset or angry, just answer the question.' And she said, 'What would you do if your mum and dad were sitting in the next room? They're not, Robert.' I said, 'What?' I said, 'Are they here?' I said, 'Are they in there? Are they in there?' She said, 'No Robert, they're not. It's a question.' I said, 'I'd go in there and,' I said, 'I'd punch them both in the face and walk out.' And I was convinced then – sort of convinced myself they were – anyway, this – I was seeing this Diane for two hours for about six months and I never missed those appointments ever. And I was on the street and I was still having these terrible thoughts, but they started to wane as the counselling went on. And then it came to an

end after about three months, four months, and she said, 'I'm going to ask you the same question, Rob, that I asked you when I first met you.' And she said, 'What would you do if your parents were next door.' I just said [laughs], 'I'm walking away without them and swear and walk out.' And it was just such a lovely feeling to say that I wasn't angry. And it was – and it was – it was that ... anger inside me that – unfortunately I can't get over it. And it was that day that I – I sort of got over it and I don't cry anymore. Well, I've cried today and – but it's the first time since then.

What was it about the counselling that helped you let go of some of that anger?

Talking, I think. It was just talking and talking and talking and saying a lot of the things I've said today. Because they didn't make any sense then when I was saying it to her, but because I sit here today, four, five, six years later, or whatever it was, they now make sense, but it was only that counselling that done it. I never believed in counselling before; I thought it was for wimps and they should get over it. And I didn't think – I always thought a nervous breakdown was something that – no, I can't say what it – wimps have, basically. And I'm glad I had a nervous breakdown, a mini one albeit, and I was on some tablets that I refused to take but I took them for a year. And it was – it was quite a good year's experience. I done a lot in that year in getting over the horrors that had happened and I don't get those any more, which is nice. But it all goes back to – why didn't those social workers tell me and all those people what really happened? And I wouldn't have – I wouldn't have had to, would I? I wouldn't have had to make stories up about my mum and dad, that they were rich. I was walking past Gerard's Jewellery Store and I just looked up and I thought, oh my word, my dad owns a jewellers, he's rich. And I was – I convinced myself he owned this jeweller's shop and – but previous to that I'd convinced myself he was in prison, they'd moved abroad or – just endless things that I made up to shut the bullies up or to make my heart feel better. And none of them were true but I believed them at the time.

[1:34:51]

So at the time, how many different children's homes did you go through? You've mentioned a couple of them.

Yeah. I was – I think – I was doing soup runs and I've done soup runs for thirty years and that.

What's that, sorry?

Soup runs, you know, feeding the homeless.

Oh yes, soup runs, yep.

And I've done that for about thirty years. And I was driving and there was a young lad and he asked me for a cup of tea. And I said to him, 'It's three in the morning, mate. Go home.' He was a very, very smart lad, he was just immaculate. And I said, 'Go home, son.' And he said, 'I haven't got a home.' And I thought – I still didn't quite click. And I said, 'Where do you sleep then, mate?' And he pointed to his bed in the shop doorway. My heart sunk and I thought – I'd just accused him of having a nice mum and dad and having a nice home and he should go home to it and the poor little sod had been brought up in the children's homes. And I ... And I sat with that boy and all the other team went on. I said, 'I'm going to stay and talk to this lad for ten minutes.' And they went on and done the soup run and I sat with that lad on his sleeping bag in the middle of the – outside the post office in – well, the post office has gone now. And we chatted and I – he said, 'I'm nineteen,' he said, 'I've been in eighteen different children's homes.' And I said – I laughed. I said, 'When I was eighteen, boy, I was in nineteen different children's homes, so I've beat you by one.' And he snapped, he said, 'You're a liar.' I said, 'Don't call me a liar, boy. I don't tell lies.' I said, 'Nineteen, I've been in,' one more than him. And – and we just talked and were talking and he knew everything about me and I knew everything about him and I'd met him five minutes before. And all those things that had happened to him – and I was an adult then so I knew, you know, I wasn't going to tell him all the things that – but all I told him in the end was, 'It gets better. It gets better, you know.' And I told him – I just said a few things that – how he could deal with it. And I thought –

and I knew that I was forty and I didn't want him to reach the age of forty and be sad for the next – for twenty years of his life. And I told him how to deal with things and it was just a stunning, stunning experience. So yeah, it was nineteen-odd, just moving and moving and moving schools and moving – and I met – I had my mate, and I was only young, John his name was. No, it wasn't John Smith, I don't know what his name was. We were mates and we were good mates and I remember we used to fight a lot, for mates to put up with We used to really hurt each other. It was – it was just funny. And if he drew blood it was even funnier [laughs], so – but I had to be back at the children's home by eight and all that rubbish, but he was allowed out later, but we used to be such good friends. And I remember one night he punched me in the face, he punched me on the nose, nosebleed, but I had to get in the children's home [laughs] and it was a laugh. Anyway, the old social worker come a couple of days later, 'We're moving you.' That's the one I said I wasn't moving 'cause I wanted to – I didn't want to lose my mate. And I had a little time –

Female: Sorry to interrupt, Robert. Your mike's just slipped off so is it alright if you put it on? Is that okay?

It's just there.

[1:39:54]

So that's when I slapped the social worker round the face, because I didn't want to lose my mate and they were moving me to a different school and I was going to lose him. And I never made friends, I never – I couldn't make friends, I couldn't.

Why not?

'Cause I kept moving all the time, kept moving. And they moved me to a home in – only for a short while, Basingstoke. I was only there for about three weeks. I don't remember it, but I just knew that was another move, another town. And I remember that – it was alright, the one in Basingstoke. It was very clean. But I never spoke to anybody in the three weeks. I just didn't want to get to know anyone. And I got – I

went through a stage where I didn't want to know anybody when I was older even and I – and I used to get ever so paranoid about my family, my sisters or anyone, if they had an argument – if I saw people arguing, couples or families, I used to think it was, like, a terrible, terrible thing and they were never going to see each other again and I used to be paranoid about it for no good reason. But ... yeah, so I didn't really make any friends and if I did they were gone anyway so what was the point? So yeah, that was everybody. That was the school, friends that you meet day to day. I didn't have any friends, really.

And these were all children's homes, not foster homes or anything like that?

No, there was only one, that one foster home, or – I don't know whether it was foster or adoption or what it was. I don't know what they call it. But I wanted – they wanted me and I wanted them and they were thirty and social services said, 'No, they're too old.'

How did you meet them?

I was in the St John Ambulance then. I was quite young, very young and I was in the St John Ambulance and she was – she was one of the St John's people. And they were a wonderful family. Erm, so no, I didn't get adopted or anything. It was all various children's homes and then up to – and I think it was seventeen. And I had to drag the last – I didn't want to leave. I didn't want to leave the children's home at sixteen. I think it was sixteen they got you out and put you somewhere, but I didn't want to leave and I dragged out of them an extra year 'cause I didn't want to go out in the big wide world.

Why not?

Because I didn't know it. I didn't know what happened outside the children's home because all I'd done was lived in the children's homes with all the problems that had – but you never went out. You didn't – you didn't know what families were, didn't know what your own place was. 'Cause I think now they put them into a little – well,

they do now, they give you a little flat in – in a complex, so you've got your own flat, but I went – I was going from being in a children's home, having all the bills paid and the social workers coming – I didn't know anything else in the world. So I remember dragging it out for a year. And I was in the big wide world and ... and that all went wrong as well. But I – there's been a lot of sad things but I've had an absolutely wonderful life. I've been ever so lucky. I went – when I was about fourteen or fifteen I knew what I wanted. I was going to be that youth worker, I wanted to work with young people. I wanted to be an ambulance driver and I wanted to work with street children. I don't know why. I don't know how I came to those decisions. Because you speak to some teenagers, they've got no idea, but I knew what I wanted and I done all three. The first one, I worked for the London Ambulance Service and I tore around the streets and as soon as I got somewhere, I could help people and I just – I loved tearing round the streets, I used to love it. I used to love it when I got there. And I could help people. There were some horrendous things happened but it didn't bother me, didn't bother me one little bit. I just had to get to them. It sounds paranoid but I loved to get to the next road accident. I liked to get to the kids and calm them down. And I just – and when they used to say when they heard the sirens it was such a relief and I thought ... and I went to a lady once and she'd only fractured her collarbone. And I thought – she fell off a horse. I – I don't know if it's two – two incidents. And that lady come back and she said to me, she said, 'Oh,' she said 'When I fell off, the pain.' She said, 'I was feeling dizzy and sick.' And she said to me, 'So many people around and you were the only one I heard,' she said, 'Because I remember you grabbing my hand and saying it was going to be alright.' And she said, 'I'll never forget you.' And – and we went to this young lad, broken his hip, oh god, it was horrendous. He was playing football. And we couldn't – we couldn't pick him up because he moved his head and it hurt, he moved his arms, and every bit of his body was just hurting. And I held the boy's hand and I said, 'Alright soldier, it's going to be alright.' And his mum – we got him to hospital and it was all very, very horrific. And his mum came up and he said – and she said – I don't like to boast – no, this is not boasting. She said, 'You're a wonderful person.' She said, 'My son doesn't stop talking about you.' I didn't do anything. I just sort of loved him and just knew he had to get better [cries]. Erm, it all stems back to all those times when there was no one there. And the only time – the only person was me. And I was out one

night in the children's home and I was wandering, as I did, and there was this – in the town park they were putting up all these marquees and tents. And I thought, oh – and that was exciting. I thought, I wonder what it is. And this guy came up to me, I don't know who he was, I don't know what he looked like or nothing. I remember he was tall. And he said, 'Hello mate.' I said, 'What's going on here, mate?' And I was quite young and I was in one of those rude stages. And he said, 'Oh, we're putting up marquees for tomorrow.' I said, 'What is it, circus or something mate?' He said, 'No, it's For the Love of God,' or something. I went – 'Oh, not him,' I went. He said, 'Yeah, Jesus loves everyone,' and all this. I went, 'Oh, don't talk wet,' like that. I said, 'You're a fool.' I said, 'How can Jesus love everyone when he does what he does to me?' I said, 'How can he do this to me?' And oh god, I went at the man and I went at him, and he listened. Never met the man in my life. And he listened and he listened. And I was – I reckon I was just about seventeen then. And I just rabbited to him and told him what his god – what I thought of his god. And he was telling me how peaceful God was and how loving. And my words weren't choice, 'cause he didn't love me, he hated me. And anyway, I left and the guy said to me, he said, 'Please come tomorrow.' And I went, 'You've got no chance, mate. I ain't going for that Jesus rubbish.' And I went back to the children's home and I slept well that night and I thought about that guy that listened. And I woke up in the morning and Auntie Beth said, 'There's a letter here for you, Robert.' Didn't know what a letter was actually, just it was a letter. And I thought – she was puzzled, who was writing to me. And this guy had written me two A4 sides letter saying how wonderful I was and how privileged he was to talk to me, and it was a lovely, lovely letter. And I wish I still had it. And I'll never forget that man ever, and erm, he took the time to listen. And I'll never forget him. And when I talk to people now, I think – I make the time, don't care. Haven't got the time, I'll make the time. And sometimes I'm a nutter that wants to listen, don't care, do I? But I could tell quite quickly, you know, if somebody wants to have a chat or whatever, and it all comes from that guy. And that's what I needed when I was twelve, thirteen. And he was really good actually 'cause he didn't actually say that God was – if I believed in God, that everything would be fine and my life would be over the moon and all my problems would go. He was very good. He was a very nice man. But he was the first one I'd ever spoken to and very, very sad that it took seventeen years to find somebody. And I never saw him again and he

never got in touch or anything, and I never went to the church either [laughs]. I'd not been to church for seventeen years so I didn't want to go back on that.

[1:51:00]

You've talked about how you really enjoy helping people and young people in particular. Did you ever have your own children?

Yes, I've got a son. He's twenty now – is it twenty? Erm ... he used to ... God [whispers]. I used to – when he was very young – I was a youth worker then. I was in the youth service and I was very, very busy and I was going round like a lunatic and loving every minute of it. And we were in Germany and I booked a month's holiday for when he was due and – I can't really say to much about her mum 'cause I don't like her, but – hi. But she – I phoned my house from Germany and her mum answered the phone and she said, 'You've got a boy.' And I went, 'Sorry?' I expected – I expected Carol to answer the phone. And she'd gone into – she'd had the baby a month early [coughs]. And I've got – I'm in Germany with the youth service, twenty-five kids. They're all round the phone box, kicking the phone box, just to annoy me [laughs]. And I'm in the phone box and I burst into tears, 'cause I wasn't there when he was born. And these kids just – all of them just stopped kicking the phone box because I was crying. And so I said – and I got into a panic and I wanted – and I was in charge of these – this trip and I wanted to pack it up and go home and their holiday was over, but I couldn't. And it was another five days, the holiday, and I cheered up a bit and just got home eventually and saw Mark and fell in love with him. But I carried on working, I've got to be honest, I carried on my youth work, 'cause I couldn't leave the other kids. And I used to – I used to say to him all the time, 'I'll never leave you, son.' And he didn't even – he couldn't even speak then, he wasn't old enough. And I used to go up to his room and I used to lay there, lay next to him, and I used to go, 'I'll never leave you. I'll never leave you. I'll never leave you.' And I kept saying it. He was getting a bit older and I saw my boss at work and he had two kids and we used to go out together as families and it was quite nice. And I said to my boss, I said, 'I've got a problem.' I said, 'I keep – I keep telling Mark – I can't stop telling him I won't ever leave him. I'll never leave him.'

And he said, 'Bob, you've got to stop it,' he said, 'Because, you know, you've got to stop telling him you'll never leave him.' And I went, 'Yeah, you're right. I'm going to stop.' And anyway, I didn't – I wasn't – I wasn't there really for the first sort of three years of his life. I loved every – every ounce of him, but this need to help the other children was greater, because they were there before him and I'd been at the youth service for about six years then and I couldn't put it down, couldn't put these kids down. I had to be there for them. It wasn't – it was no paranoia and it wasn't over the top. It was – well, it was, it was, but I was there. And I watched myself doing more than all the other youth workers. They were going home to their families and I was at home and the police were phoning, 'This kid's done that, you know, can you come down to the station? Are you on call tonight?' at three in the morning. And I was going and Carol was getting up at three in the morning, making me a cup of coffee, saying, 'Please come straight back. Please come straight back.' And 'I will, I will.' And I turned up at the police station and I begged the police to let this kid out, to let that kid out, it ain't that bad, or – I mean, that was my job and I loved every minute of it. And then one night I got a phone call and it was from the detention centre in – about, I don't know, ten miles away. And the prison guy, the warden, said, 'We've got this' – I won't say his name. I'll call him David. 'We've got David in here and he's going absolutely berserk. He'll only speak to you.' I said, 'David's not in there.' I said, 'I saw David last night and he was fine. What do you mean he's locked up?' He said, 'The police brought him in.' And he was about fifteen, I think, and this was a high security place. And I said, 'I'll be there in ten minutes.' And Carol said to me, 'You're not going.' I said, 'Carol, I've got to go.' She said, 'No, you're supposed to be looking after Mark in the morning.' I said, 'Well, you'll have to do it, love.' And my mind was set on getting to see what this kid had been up to. And this was the lad whose dad was a drug dealer and his mum was a prostitute and I'd dealt with him for years and years, and now he'd finally been arrested and it was big. It was big. It was – something had happened, big. Anyway, so I got to the detention centre and they'd let me into his cell and I looked at him and I said, 'What are you doing in here? What are you doing here?' And what had happened was his mum had cut her wrists in the night and he'd gone out, stolen a car to take the woman to hospital, 'cause he loved his mother - why I don't know, 'cause he did. And taken her to hospital and the police had stopped him. And this was the

first time in that boy's life when he was taking a car back to where he stole it from. The car was full of blood, covered in blood everywhere from the front to the back, and they nicked him and they through him in this detention centre without asking any questions and then the incident happened. And I said – I said to the attending officer, 'I'll be back in the morning. I'm going to take you out.' And I spoke to the warden – I spoke to the guy and I said, 'With all my heart, I've told him I want to take him out for the day.' And he says, 'Yes, with certain rules,' etc, etc. He said, 'That's fine.' I got home and forgot – I'd forgotten I had a life at home and Carol went ballistic. 'You're not going out. You're not going back.' And that started the downhill slide of my marriage and I gave that up for the children. And I didn't – no, it wasn't just that, it was that my whole life had revolved round moving and moving here and moving there and I just carried on in that vein when I was married – happily, very happily married, with a little kid. Any – any other family would have stayed there, the dad would have been there, but not me, not me. I knew it was going to happen in my heart, that I was going to move on. I didn't know it was going to happen, but I knew in my heart that – I've got to move on in five years, 'cause that's what I'd done. That's what I'd done. That's what happened in my life. And so Carol said to me, 'You make a decision, you go and see him or you look after Mark.' It wasn't the end of the world 'cause her mum could have looked after I knew in my heart that – I've got to move on in five years, 'cause that's what I'd done. That's what I'd done. That's what happened in my life. And so Carol said to me, 'You make a decision, you go and see him or you look after Mark.' It wasn't the end of the world 'cause her mum could have looked after Mark, but she was bloody right, I should have said yeah. She was right. And there was another – that incident was forgotten and I took Mark – I took the lad out for the day and it all went fine. He went back in and he got released about three days later. And then the final incident was when I was at the youth centre and the kids wanted to go ice skating and me and Carol, we'd never – she was a youth worker. She'd worked in the Guides and everything. She'd done loads. But she gave it all up and she thought I should have done, but I couldn't, I physically couldn't. Yeah, then we drifted apart. And I don't see him now. I could – I could go there – I could phone him now. But it goes back to when I was a baby and I said I'd never leave him and it's – it has broken my heart that what comes around comes around and what happens to me I've just repeated. But it's different with him 'cause I told him, I

told him all through. I said – I said, ‘I’m horrible, boy.’ I said, ‘I’m a horrible dad.’ I said, ‘What I done.’ But I was always honest with him. And he’s quite happy, he’s a twenty year old happy lad. And I won’t tell you what he calls me when I phone up, but ... he did – I thought he was alright and I spoke to him one night when he was about fifteen and he told me how much he missed me and how could I do it. And I just sat with him, told him. I didn’t lie, I didn’t – and I said, ‘You’ve got the most wonderful mum in the world and your dad’s a prat.’ He said, ‘You are, Dad.’ And I told him – and he knew, he knew why, he knew why, he knew. He knew that I had to care for people and – but I never – I never lied to him and I never – when he asked me questions, I told him honest straight answers, and it worked. And if I see him now he – he always asks me for £10 ‘cause he knows it annoys me [laughs]. He’s got more money than I’ve got. ‘Here, lend us a tenner, Dad.’ ‘Shut up.’ And I – I don’t – I rarely, rarely see him now. And Carol, she’s got a new guy. I don’t like him but he makes her happy. That’s all that matters, yeah.

Female: We’ve got – this is another hour so shall we have a- is it okay for us to break now, just have a short break?

Yeah, indeed, yeah.

Sure.

Female: That’s great.

[Pause for Break]

[2:03:30]

Okay, so during the interview you talked a lot about honesty. It came up quite a lot and you said that it was really important to you. And I was thinking that – a time when a lot of people say that they’ve really seen all the facts as they are is when they get their care records. And was that – what was that experience like for you?

Well, it was ... it was hard, ‘cause I – it took me – it took me two years to get them and it was endless letters. Because I’d moved from this place to that place –

How old were you when you accessed them?

It was about fifteen years ago, not that long ago. And I wrote to London borough of whatever and they wrote back and said that – the letters they wrote back were wonderful, really nice letters, but didn't help me 'cause no one could find them. No one knew who I was and I didn't exist. And I wrote to everybody. I was writing letters and letters. And I finally got a phone call from Dr Barnardo's in Barkingside and – ah, marvellous place. Their head office used to be a children's home and they had little houses. And the lady from there phoned me and she said, 'Hello Robert.' She said, 'I've got your records here.' I said, 'Oh, thanks ever so much.' I said, 'Could you post them for me?' And she said, 'No, we're not allowed to.' She said, 'We have to chat to you. You don't have to talk, but we like to just not hand them over.' And I thought, why, what are they hiding? And I thought they were going to take pages out or something and I couldn't understand this reason why she wouldn't post them to me. And she was very nice and so I arranged to go up there one day. And there was a social worker there and I thought, I'm an adult, I don't need all this rubbish. It's rubbish, I'm an adult, just give me the folder and I'll go. But anyway, I sat there and they gave me this black folder. I've got it at home. That's one thing I have got. Through your life – through your life you lose everything. I've got no photos of when I was a kid. I've got nothing, absolutely nothing. Anyway, they gave me this folder and it was about 100 pages and nothing really happened in that – in that interview. They were wonderful. And I did understand the reasons they wanted to meet me and just have a chat, really. It wasn't a waste of time at all, I thought it was going to be. But nothing really happened. So I got home and I sat down that evening and I read through these pages. And I was getting bored with it because it kept saying, 'Oh, Bob had whooping cough today. Bob's this – Robert.' And I saw my name change. I saw my name changing as the pages turned. And it was pretty horrendous and it was absolute rubbish and I thought, I can't be bothered to read this. And it had every illness that I had. It was only up to the age of twelve, I think. That's the only years I've got. They didn't find after – they couldn't find the rest, but when I was a lot younger. And I didn't read any more that night, I fell asleep. And the next day I woke up and I – I was going to read from the front page to the last. And I – I

was reading it and there were some horrendous things in there in between these pages of my [laughs] whooping cough and ‘Bob fell over.’ And it – one story said, ‘Robert is becoming very violent towards other pupils in the school. We need to get him to a psychologist.’ Get him to a psychologist. ‘Robert is getting more violent and is starting to fight with the children in the children’s home.’ ‘Robert is constantly locking himself in the broom cupboard for hours and hours and hours.’ And I was thinking, this must be my brother’s. They’ve messed this up now. And as I read, I just knew it was me, but I didn’t know I’d done these things. And then the report said – it was saying things I didn’t know. And it said, ‘We’ve taken Robert to the doctors due to his bad temper. The doctor has suggested that he goes into hospital and is tranquilised.’ I thought [laughs] tranquilise me? I said, I don’t think they’ve got enough stuff. But it was just horrendous. They were going to put me into hospital for two weeks and sedate me because I was fighting and locking myself in the cupboard. And – etc, etc. But, you know, that was just par for the course and I hadn’t really – whatever. But then it came to the bits about my dad and it turns out that – they never told me that my dad was an alcoholic and he tried with all his heart to see me and my brother and they wouldn’t let him because he was too drunk all the time. But I found out from those reports that he tried. And he was paying – he was paying maintenance for us as well. But every letter denied, you know, said that – that he became aggressive and when he was – when he was told no, that he couldn’t see us, he became aggressive. So that was quite a nice thing, really. And then there was this – I didn’t know these things. This man and woman who – one was a colonel, [laughs] could have been famous today, that wanted to adopt me, and I was going to their house every weekend. And they were, like – they preferred me to my brother and they wanted – they were going to adopt us both. And I don’t know to this day what happened and why they didn’t. And – but it was like reading – those 100 and so pages, although the information was very minimal, it was like reading about somebody else and not me. But I treasure them now and I’ll never lose them. But it explained a few things not the reasons why I was there, because it appeared to start – the reports seemed to start from the day they found my birth certificate. That’s the first sort of story in it, until I was about – about five years, I think it covered. So it didn’t answer all the questions. Didn’t answer those questions of ten or younger, yeah.

[2:11:56]

Are you the youngest of your brothers and sisters?

No, I'm about in the middle, I think.

And so could your older brothers or sisters fill in any of those gaps?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Only my oldest sister, but she won't.

She won't.

She won't speak about it. And I don't think that's because of anything bad that happened. I think it's 'cause she doesn't want to talk about it. And that's her choice. And I've asked her very nicely a few times but she won't. I was constantly asking social workers though, constantly, every one of them, and they all said I was too young or they didn't know or - I thought, you do know 'cause you've got my notes, you liar [laughs]. But they always avoided the subject.

[2:12:46]

In your – in the first part of the interview you mentioned social workers and how frustrated you got with them because they'd come with their pens and their paper and their university degrees, I think you said. And I kind of sense that you were frustrated or something about this, it kind of jarred with you. And I wonder –

It was hatred more than –

Yeah. Why? What about it?

It ... I've said earlier about the lad that I met in the Strand and I asked him to write me a letter – write me – write down what he was thinking and how his life was. And I thought it was quite a big task for him. He was quite intelligent, this lad who'd been in the children's homes. And so I went home and I – I sort of started a rough copy. I was going to give him this and just say this is – but it got quite deep, this letter I wrote, and – I can't remember the gist of the letter, it was I was in care and all this and all that, blah, blah, blah, moved nineteen times. But right at the end I wrote, 'Not all social workers are bad. I can't blame all social workers for my problems. But I don't feel – I feel that four years in college doesn't – can't teach you when ...' [cries] It can't teach you that when a young kid cries and you cuddle them, that's a different sort of cuddle, because the cuddle that says I understand is different to the one they teach you. They can't teach you that one in college. It's not possible. And I know the difference between a social worker who knows – and it's that word – you asked me earlier if I thought people cared. It's so hard to answer that, but I know if someone cares. I know – I know if my personal friends care. I don't – I don't mix with people in my everyday life – I don't mix with horrible people and people that are nasty. Like all my friends are nice people generally. And I have to call on them sometimes. And one lad that I'm looking after at the moment, we had a problem and we had a shouting match and I text him and said to him, 'I know you're so very loving but sometimes you have to show it or say it.' And sometimes your actions show that – your actions shine through all those problems and you know if someone cares. I can work it out. Yeah, so I'm not sure if that was the question [laughs].

I was thinking when you were saying that, do you think that the other young people who were in the home with you shared your experiences and your points of view? Do you have any recollection of them?

Yes, quite ... [Coughs] This is a bit difficult because, as time went on and I look back on it, and even when I was living it, we were all different. Although we lived in the same house together - going to the smaller children's home, they – kids – I sort of woke up then and I knew what was going on in the world. So we've got the eight

children and – I don't like to use the word but abuse was going on around me. And the lad I shared the room with, which – his name was ... [Laughs] Anyway, the lady in the children's home was abusing him. And he slept in her room and I didn't know at the time what the hell was going on. He'd been a naughty boy so he had to share the room with Auntie. And I just thought, I'm going to behave 'cause I don't want to share her room, so I thought it was a naughty thing. And it wasn't, it was a lot more sinister than that. And this was going on all around me all the time and I didn't know what it – what was going on. But the police kept coming to various children's homes. And I was in the – I was in one children's home and we were down a long drive and all these police cars arrived. They had blue lights on, they had dog vans, they had CID. And I thought it was brilliant [laughs]. I thought it was amazing, all this old bill coming down the children's home, 'cause I thought there'd been a fight and I'd missed it or something. And – and they came down the drive and these vehicles didn't stop and I thought, this is more serious. And they took away the guy that was running it and he ... I thought, why is he in handcuffs? Why are they taking him? And I – and it was abuse, you know. He'd been at it at various places and whatever. And yeah, yeah, yeah, so all kids went through different stages. But I've met a few, very, very few, I'd love to sit – I can't – it's a long time ago so I wouldn't be able to find the people I lived with. Some of them have gone on to do really, you know, really sustained lives and quite famous people. I know a couple of famous people who were in care. You see them on the telly occasionally saying 'I was in care.'

Fatima Whitbread, she was in the children's home with me, and I used to beat her up [laughs]. Anyway, sorry Fatima, bless her, but I used to beat her up. But others are in prison. And I – as I said, I work now with – with homeless people and it's endless. All the people I speak to, twenty-five percent of them were in the army, fifty percent of them were in children's homes at some stage. So we all go different ways. I've been very, very lucky in my life, apart from a few events, you know, that happened. But if I'm honest, how happy am I now, sitting here with my life? Seventy-five percent happy. And I wish – I just wish all these other things hadn't – hadn't have happened. That's being truthful. And twenty-five percent of your life's quite a lot. But again, it's made me who I am. It's made me what I am. It's made me care. And I love that side of me. I absolutely love it. So if I had to go through all that to be the person I am, it was a good thing, yeah. But I feel – I do feel - I met – let's make a

name up. I don't want to mention his name. Andrew. I met Andrew many years after being in the children's home and he – he came up to the flat where I was living. I can't remember how he found me or whatever. And I was sitting there in my ambulance uniform. It was the St John's Ambulance uniform then, I was a little youngster. And he looked at me and he started to punch me. I thought, weirdo [laughs]. I said, 'Stop it. What the hell are you doing?' And he said, 'I hate the police. I hate the police.' And he'd just seen a uniform and gone berserk. But he was constantly in and out of prison. And that is a lad that I shared a room with and had so much fun with and had a laugh with. But that abuse messed his head up, I know it did. And I asked – actually, I did ask somebody once, 'Why? Why did it never happen to me? Why did I never get abused?' And they said [laughs], 'The only reason is, Bob, is you've got too much of a big mouth and you wouldn't have it.' And I thought, 'Thank goodness I've got a big mouth, yeah.' Yeah, so I do feel for those people now that have gone through it. But I don't know any of them now. I don't know any of them. And I'd love to, you know. Yeah.

[2:22:38]

Did you celebrate Christmas with them?

Do I ...?

Did you celebrate Christmas with these other young people in the home?

No.

Or did you go somewhere else?

Oh then?

Yeah.

No. No. I just used to throw tantrums [laughs]. I used to throw them when – I used to hate it. I used to dread – Christmas was ... just the build up to Christmas, I thought, oh, it's – and I used to hate it. 'Cause I wanted to be with my family and that's the only – I hated Christmas, I hated it. And those wonderful people from the Round Table came a couple of days before Christmas and they brought loads of presents and those marvellous volunteers had saved all year, or rich people had given us presents, and I smashed every one of them, everybody's presents. Stamped on the lot. And I hated it. And I ran away and every Christmas I spent in a garage, just get the Christmas out of the way. And then I got a bit older and I went to my friend's house, Keith – he wouldn't mind me – and he was my friend and I knew his family. And I went to their house Christmas Day and I wanted all – I wanted them for one day to be my mum and dad and him to be my brother. And I went to that house with those thoughts, oh, it's only going to last a day, and ... they got the presents out and Keith got eight presents, I got one, and his mother bought me a – I don't know, a Ben Sherman shirt or something, and it was the most wonderful thought out present you could ever think. And I went mad, I went ballistic, 'cause he's got eight and 'You're not my mum and dad.' And I threw a tantrum, and I think I took the shirt with me 'cause I did love it, I stormed out the house and cried and cried. And I walked the streets until New Year and the police were looking for me. And I was looking into people's houses and I was just so hungry and I was too scared to knock, or too proud just to ask for a sandwich. And I hid in the woods and slept in garages, and that was my worst Christmas. Then, as I say, when I was seventeen I knew I had to do something at Christmas and I worked in the shelter. Even when – Christmas at home – I had Mark, but the shelter came first. And I went home Christmas Day absolutely worn out and had Christmas dinner. And I felt asleep at one Christmas dinner, Carol went berserk and said, 'Them homeless people are more important than us' [laughs], that sort of thing. But they were, I had to be there. I was running massive shelters. I was taking on a building this size with 500 homeless people and I was in charge. And I loved every minute of it. And that's where my Christmases went after that. But no, they didn't exist in – when I was a kid. They were just something to dread, completely.

Was Carol right when she said that the people at the shelter were more important?

Yeah, yeah. I – if I could live my life back again and those stages of – where those kids, all those children, all those homeless people, were more important than my family, I wouldn't change it, no. I would – if I could, if it was a perfect world, I'd be a sterling dad and I'd be at home and I wouldn't – I wouldn't go out at eleven o'clock at night 'cause I know this old boy hasn't got a blanket somewhere so I have to get out of my bed and take him a blanket. If it was a perfect world I – I'd be a boring person and not go anywhere, if it was a perfect world, but it's not. Not on my side anyway. I had to do these things. I'm not as bad now. But yeah.

[2:27:34]

Did you watch Mark grow up?

No.

When did you – when did you split from his mum?

When I went to – I was a youth worker for fifteen years and we were on yearly contracts and you didn't – over the fifteen years you didn't – you just signed it, like any other bit of paper, and it got sent to head office and [coughs] there was no problem. And me, Dawn, Ray and the youth workers that I'd worked with over those years, we were happy. We were a good youth centre. And the police arrived regularly and it was fun, fun. And the managers came and went and me and Ray ran the place and Dawn. We ran it while there was a year lapse before they got a new head of department, but we ran it and it just ticked along. And a new manager came from Yorkshire or something, he was from. He got the job and he got the job 'cause he was good at finance. He didn't like teenagers particularly [laughs]. But money was short and the Tories, or whoever, were cutting back on youth services, so they employed him. Didn't like teenagers immensely. Didn't like any of the staff who were there. So our contracts came for renewal and he didn't renew them. And the whole staff – me, Ray, Dawn, I've forgotten the other guy's name, we were all out of work within – well, it was the summer holidays and the youth centre was shut. And –

and it was like somebody had hit me round the head with a brick. And Dawn – Dawn – he wasn't a nice man, let's put it – let's be unkind, shall we? He wasn't a nice man. He wanted to employ people in the centre from where he lived and his mates and all that, and I thought, oh, get on with it, mate, get on with it. And I – we were all forced to lose our jobs and – and that's when I decided that I ... I had a – I didn't like the man and I was going to do something silly. And it was then I decided out of the blue – I saw an advert for volunteers to work in the Philippines with street children. And I looked at the paper and I was out of work – and I could have found work, I could have done, but I was just so very angry at the time. And I'd seen a solicitor and they said, no, Essex County Council have got every right to do it. They're doing it the right way. And I just saw this advert, volunteers needed for a year and a half contract, and I looked at Carol. I said, 'What do you think?' She said, 'You're going to do it anyway, aren't you?' I went, 'Yeah.' And I looked at Mark. And he was about, I don't know, thirteen or something, I can't remember, and he went, 'You're going, Dad?' I remember, 'You're leaving.' I went, 'Yeah. It won't be for too long, boy.' I said, 'Do you mind?' He said, 'No, pleased to get rid of you.' And I went, 'Ah bless.' And he was so – he was so, like – he knew I was going to do it. And – and a week later I was gone. And it was then that I was on my own again, I was used to being. And I'm still in touch and it's quite nice but it's not – not the happy families that you see on television, on the Heinz adverts, whatever adverts.

[2:31:37]

Well, it strikes me then that when you went off to the Philippines and when you were talking about moving and how you couldn't say in one place 'cause you'd always moved around a lot when you were younger, that the experience of being in care kind of stayed with you a lot of the way through. And did you – when you were younger, did you identify with all the names that were being thrown at you, like one of your teachers called you the home kid? Did you strongly identify with being a child in care?

No, I don't think so. I don't think I knew what was going on. I think it was too much of a struggle to survive and not – I think not to cry in front of other kids, which you –

you're a boy, you don't cry in front of other kids. It was too hard a work to live your life and get through one day to the next. And the teacher says to you – I remember my maths teacher and he said, 'Square equals root of eight, what's the answer, Robert?' And I just – he just stared at me, what are you talking about? Because I just couldn't concentrate at school. There was no – I used to think it was a bad memory, but thinking back now, it was – I couldn't concentrate. There was too much going on at home. Sitting in the class, wondering where my mum and dad were, and that was my whole life at that stage. So education was gone away, there was – there was no, erm ... I'm just very lucky I can read and write well and – but it – that has caused me a lot of problems, that lack of education, because – well, I'd still – I'd still be on the ambulance service now, but paramedics came in and you had to learn to spell hypodermic needle and all sorts of long words, and I can't do it. I physically cannot do it. So that's one of the – the education was – the education wasn't lacking. It was someone there that was annoyed and put me in a separate class for something. But no, there was no – and a lot of these – a lot of people I've met and spoken to in care, they can't read and write even, so I think I'm lucky. I'm lucky in that respect, yeah.

[2:34:20]

You said there was too much going on at home. Kind of – can you give me an example of a typical day, what was going on at home that was stopping you from concentrating at school?

Yeah. Well, and at school, it was the bullying at school, so I had to sort of look behind me all the time, look around. To go to the next class, you knew someone was going to trip you up 'cause you're the kid from the – there was other kids that were bullied as well 'cause they had ginger hair or whatever. And there was that constant fear of being at the main gate and there's six kids there that don't even know you, they just worked out, oh, that's the kid from the home, so they – anyway. And then you get home and – yeah, at that sort of time, the woman who was running the home then, she was an alcoholic and she was – she drank two bottles of vodka a day. So you got home and you made your own dinner. She was in her little office, blind drunk, six kids. So we came in and out. But I swear, I just swear, when we had an

inspection, which was once every six months, you knew – you knew the inspection was coming ‘cause you got home from school and the dinner was there. It was on the table. You thought, oh, we’re getting inspected here. And she was sober, so ... and you could remember what she looked like. But I was out at night. You could go out at night. She wouldn’t even know you weren’t there. But she was a crazy woman, and she used to wake us up in the night, at three in the morning, saying – she used to say, ‘Oh, I hate you bloody kids.’ She’d say, ‘I’m working in this place twenty-four hours a day.’ She said, ‘Get in the bath and scrub yourselves. Scrub your filthy dirty none wanted ...’ What was it? ‘Your mum and dads don’t want you. I don’t bloody want you. Keep scrubbing until you come clean and I’ll have an easier life.’ And I thought – I just – I must have thought it was a normal thing at the time. You used to queue up at the bathroom to scrub yourself, because she didn’t want you, you know what I mean? So that was going on at home. And I – so if I – if I look now, all those teachers, all those social workers, the police, all the people I dealt with, none of them – no one stepped in. Perhaps they didn’t know it was happening. So do I think this could happen today? Yeah, it does. It does. The kids are – I’ve spoken to – it was only a couple of years ago I spoke to that lad that moved from nineteen different children’s homes, and he was telling the same story and we just didn’t even – we could have just sat there and thought and we’d have known what each other was thinking. So do I think it’s – I’m sure it’s different today. I applied to – I applied to work voluntarily at the inspections for the children’s homes. You know the inspectors come in and they walk around and they talk to the kids and say, ‘How are you doing, kids? Any problems?’ And I applied for that job, it was voluntary, and I thought, oh, that will be brilliant. And anyway, I applied, filled in the application form, and I got a letter back saying, ‘Oh, thank you for your application.’ This letter was, like, on headed notepaper and it was all, like, very, very official. It said, ‘Thank you for your application. We’ve decided that we won’t be asking you to volunteer.’ And then told me the reasons and it said, ‘We feel you know far too much about the system,’ or something, ‘And you wouldn’t be constructive. And these inspections call for judges and very high, you know, high powered people.’ And I read this letter and I thought, you pathetic, terrible. I was in shock that this – these inspectors are all, you know, I don’t know. I’d like to sit and talk about this. But, you know, I know if I lived in a children’s home and all these judges came and – ‘Oh, you need to find out what a ...’

Oh god, help those kids, you know what I mean? They probably have a laugh. They probably laugh at them [laughs], 'cause kids in care are quite good as well, quite funny at times. But that hurt me quite a lot. And I looked into it, for the reasons why they didn't want the likes of me, and it was clearly because I wasn't intelligent enough. Very, very sad, I thought that was. And I don't know a great deal about what goes on in care now, actually, I don't know a great deal, so I can't judge anything that's going on now. But I don't, you know, I was asked – I asked to come here and I just don't – and one of the reasons I – I applied for this was for the reasons I've talked about earlier. I hope that social workers are more honest and, erm, totally understand how busy there are and – but just get it right, you know. Even get it half right, we'd be laughing. But don't mess with people – kids' lives. It's horrible, yeah.

I'm glad you mentioned the job application 'cause one of the other things that I was thinking about was how you related to society. Did you feel that you were part of it or did you feel like you were kind of beyond it or outside of it? Or did you not think about it at all whilst growing up?

Erm ... I – it goes back to what I said earlier. It's about knowing what friendship is. A friend of mine, my mate who was in the army, he – the time that I knew him – he'd made friends from school and he still knew – and a lot of my friends do now, they – they've got friends from school and they talk to them on Facebook and they've got some relationship with their parents still, at my age or younger. Maybe they've died or their parents have died. But they've all had that and that is a long term relationship with old school friends. And – and all those years of moving and being on my own – that's what it was, that's – I was always on my own, up until quite late on, eighteen or something, I don't know. I had to – yeah, that's right, I had to look after myself. There was no one else who was going to do it. I couldn't rely on my mum and dad. I couldn't rely on my friends that I'd made over the previous seventeen years 'cause I didn't have any. There weren't any, because I'd kept moving. So I learnt a very harsh lesson, look after yourself, Bob, and don't let them grind you down. So no, there isn't anybody I've – since, you know, after that, I've made – I've been friends with people for twenty years, knowing the same people. But it all – even that breaks down eventually 'cause – I was still moving when I was older, up until now. I've

been in my place now nine years and that's the longest I've ever been anywhere and I love it. But previous to that, I was still working here and moving flats. Never ever – well, that's right, up until the last ten years or so, I was still moving, so you don't make friends that way. And if you move and you contact these people that are in the same house, that have been there for twenty-five years and – but I move on so I don't contact them and, you know, life goes on. And you're still alone. It's not – that statement was more prevalent about ten years ago, up until – alone, always on your own, trying to work out everything on your own 'cause those stable relationships never existed. And they still didn't exist up until the last sort of ten years, yeah.

[2:43:53]

Female: It's coming up to a break. You asked me to remind you again, it's fifteen minutes.

Fifteen minutes.

Female: And we've actually got another sixteen and a half minutes.

Okay.

Good.

[2:44:00]

There was something that occurred to me while you were speaking about constantly moving around and when you were younger, did you have any say in whether you moved around or not?

No. I had a say and it was very abusive and it was littered with four letter words, I ain't moving, but even after a short while you just gave in and said, 'Okay, let's go.' But no, no, I had no say at all. There was no conversation. And that annoyed me a little bit because the social worker turned up and told me how it was – where I was

going and they'd planned it all without asking me, without slowly thinking, right, Robert, we've got a problem, we might have to move you. There was none of that. It was blunt. The social worker walked in and said, 'You're moving next week.' And occasionally the reason was, and I understand it, 'You're not settled here, you know. You're obstructing the system, 'cause you're a little git and violent and everything.' And I was. I'm not now. I wouldn't hurt a fly now. But no, there was never any question – as I say, those social workers just moved onto the next case within, you know, they had fifteen minutes to spend with me, and I think that was probably stretching it, because they were off somewhere else, yeah. No, never.

And growing up, did you have any role models or people that you looked up to or aspired to?

Erm ... No. Famous people or ...?

Any.

No ... No. All I had was – as every teenager does, was David Bowie, Queen, Alice Cooper and some quite way out bands, and they were my friends. But nobody – yeah, I always used to listen to music and that would blot out everything, but nobody impressed me - no social worker impressed me, no teacher impressed me. The French teacher did 'cause I liked her, but that was ... no one, there was no one, no, not at all, no one that stood out, be it at school – the police lady did but she was doing her job. These were all people doing their job, weren't they? Yeah, nobody at all.

Does it matter that people are paid to do their job?

No.

No?

No, just ... no. Because that's how the world works, doesn't it? You train hard to be a teacher, you train hard to be a policeman and should be paid. And I'm thinking

now, what right have I got to have expected any of them to have done anything that they didn't do. Yeah. The – those bosses at – those bosses at the LCC or whoever ran that children's home should have known she was an alcoholic and she never came out of that place. I think they knew. I think they knew, they just let it slide because there was no major disasters happening. But, you know, I should have come home from school, she should have been there and said, 'How was your day at school?' But she was too drunk, you know. No, there's no role models at all.

The music used to block things out?

Yeah.

Anything else? Did you have any hobbies? What did you do in your spare time?

I just – I was really doing voluntary work then. I was in the St John Ambulance then and I went on to Crisis at Christmas and the Samaritans, endless homeless charities. That's all I've really ever done is work [talking over each other].

What about younger, when you were younger?

Just the St John Ambulance. And that was good, I liked to go there, and you were just a normal human being there. You weren't a kid from the children's home there. Well, I was only thirteen or something, but you were never that kid from the children's home there, you were just another person, which was nice. And I – I stayed there and I done really well there and I was an officer and I saved a few lives. I'm quite proud of that and ...

Really?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we were – there was a pop concert once and this young girl got crushed and we – I gave her mouth to mouth and she just came around and it was wonderful, and that made it all worth it. And a young boy fell out of a massive, massive slide. He stopped breathing. I was in the local paper, Bob's a hero. It was

like on the front page, a whole page. It was amazing. So that was good. But no, all I ever done was – well yeah, it was all voluntary work, working with – helping people, yeah.

[2:50:25]

Well, I think we're coming to the end of our hour and I want to end by asking you what this experience was like, coming in and reflecting back on your long and colourful life?

Colourful, yeah [laughs]. Erm, it's been ... it's been – it's been good actually, not for a – because – I was saying earlier when we were talking outside that ten – I wouldn't have been able to sit here and say the things I've said. I've had a little wee cry and all that rubbish, but I just – I'm really happy that the interview's finished and I can walk out here and smile and it hasn't crushed me talking about it, as it used to. So it's just proved to me that those days have gone, where the word mum and dad used to send me into floods of tears, just those words that people used at school or my friends and I couldn't stand those words. And not having a mum to run home to, this was the other thing that hurt. Not having a mum and dad when I'm seventeen and I'm trouble with the police and then your mum phones – the police phone your mum. I never had anybody and I missed those things terribly when I was a bit older, 'cause my friends were – 'Oh Mum, I've split up with my girlfriend, can I come back?' 'Yeah, come back,' they'd go. 'Oh Mum, I've got £100 phone bill.' 'Oh, I'm fed up with you running up phone bills.' Mum would pay it. And they hurt me, when I heard those – when those things happened in front of me and I'm thinking, why, why haven't I got anywhere, somebody to just save me for £20 or something? So yeah, I'm really happy that I'm not in floods of tears and I've lasted three hours, 'cause I wouldn't have done a few years ago. It wouldn't have been possible. So that makes me happy. So yeah, I think you've all been very kind and ... [Laughs]

I've asked you loads of questions.

Yeah.

[2:53:00]

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to say or talk about?

Yeah, I think – oh yeah, just that I – I don't know if I said earlier, I just – when I was having phone calls arranging this interview, was ... I got a little bit confused as to what was – it was all about and why and I had to think hard whether I was going to do it or not. And I got quite upset the other night and I thought, oh god, I can't go through with it. And, but generally I – I done it and I'm here because I wanted to be. But only that, erm, I'm very inquisitive to see how it's working nowadays, how the system is nowadays. I hope and pray that ... [sighs] just hope the kids are looked after now. And I was, I was looked after, I had three meals and, erm, a crappy [inaud] and – but generally I got – I've got through life. I wish – I wish things were different but I hope the kids today that are in the children's home and haven't got a mum and dad or whatever, I hope they're made happy. That's one of the really important things in my life, that I feel – I can't do much about things now because, yeah, I've done it and I want to have a rest now [laughs]. But I hope you all all cake it [ph]. Yeah, that was ...

Thank you very much. It's been a real privilege talking to you, it really has.

And yourselves. Thanks for all your time and kindness.

No. That's great.

Female: Okay.

[End of Transcript] [2:54:57]