

Care Leavers' Stories project

Colin Thompson

Interviewed by Tamisan Joe

C1597/01

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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: Thompson

Title: Mr

**Interviewee's
forename:** Colin

Sex: Male

Occupation: After School Club
Manager/ Specialist
Intervention Worker

Date of birth: 1971

Dates of recording: 19.03.13

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**Interviewer's
comments:**

So could you tell me about your life before you came into care?

My life before I came into care, I lived in central London in a place called Somers Town, which is literally close to the British Library and Euston Station. I lived with my maternal mother and a sibling, yeah, until I was about eight years old. So yeah, I had quite a rough early years with – with my family. My brother was taken into care when I was about four, so went to primary school and, you know, yeah.

Could you explain a bit more about – you mentioned your family was a bit –

Yeah, my biological mum wasn't really capable of looking after children. She'd been in a Barnardo's home herself when she was younger. She had epilepsy and she was dependent on medication so we kind of suffered neglect. So a lot of my childhood before I come into care was kind of feeling different than other people. You know, I can remember being taken into school and the teachers taking me into the staff room and giving me clean clothes and things like that. So I was bullied quite a lot but I also kind of felt responsible for my maternal mother from quite a young age. So I suppose I – you know, my childhood was stunted by all of those things really.

So do you remember your first night you went in to care?

Absolutely, yeah, 100 percent, yeah. I can remember it like it was yesterday. Basically because I'd been on at the at risk register from a very young age and my brother had been in care for quite a long time before I came into care, the social services were always a big part of my life. So you know, I can always remember going to social work offices, social workers coming in to primary school, you know, the kind of interaction between school and social workers and other professionals. So I can remember it like yesterday really to be honest. I can remember the social worker coming into the school and the rest of the school left, they went home and it felt so odd 'cause I went to the caretaker's house after school and stayed with the caretaker and had dinner in their house, which felt quite strange. And I kind of remember being told, [coughs] excuse me, I remember being told that you know, I

was going to stay somewhere for the night because my mum wasn't very well, you know. I now understand that as a child, you know, we perceive things differently but as I recall it I was just going somewhere to stay 'cause my mum was ill so – and I'd had occurrences where I'd been into care short term or stayed with paternal family in the past, so I'd kind of been shifted around. And my mum would be taken into hospital quite a lot so yeah, I – it's – I can remember it like it was yesterday.

[03:30]

Do you remember any smells, any sights?

Erm, the first thing I can really remember is the dog at the foster home, if you're asking me what I can remember about when I first went to the foster home, I can remember the dogs, they were scary. You know, they had an Alsatian and a little sausage dog and one of them was quite vicious, the sausage dog believe it or not was quite vicious but the Alsatian barked all the time and yeah, I can kind of just remember sitting in the kitchen kind of thinking what's going on? This – this is a bit odd, you know. And you know, I can remember visual rather than smells specifically, you know. But yeah, yeah, but it was very odd, you know, when I look back now it still feels odd going to the caretaker's house for dinner. You know, I know nowadays these things probably wouldn't happen, the duty social worker would come and pick you up and take you to the foster carer's, and obviously when I went to the foster carer's, you know, it was like meeting the foster parents and all the siblings. It was a large family so it was very odd to me, you know. So – and I can remember being taken into the bedroom on the first night and looking at the bedroom and the bed and you know, it all seemed a bit alien to me.

Do you remember how it made you feel?

I think I was scared to be honest, really, I think I was a bit scared, probably a little bit excited. I always knew that you know, my upbringing wasn't right, so I always knew something was wrong, you know. I always kind of used to look at other families and think I want to be part of a family, even from a young age. You know, probably at six

years old, you know, I felt responsible for my mum. So I kind of always had this feeling of the family unit and how it should be, you know, and I carried that through my whole life really, you know, so –

[05:29]

So you mentioned you always wanted a family.

Yeah, yeah.

Or always seen a family from different point – point of view.

Yeah, well I think I always knew I was different, you know, ‘cause other children had their parents there and they were, you know, fed properly and they were dressed properly and you know, there wasn’t all these professionals running around and you know, the headmaster of my school – my primary school was like a haven for me, you know, I loved going to primary school, it was like a haven ‘cause the teachers were caring and took care of me. My headmaster knew my situation, you know, he even came – my headmaster came with me to visit my second foster carers all the way in Somerset, you know, he came with me, he was that kind of – you know, I don’t suppose that would happen now but – what was the question? I’ve lost myself.

The question was, how did you view yourself at the time of wanting to be part of a family?

I think there was an element of kind of, this is exciting ‘cause it’s a family kind of thing and probably relief from being away from my situation. I kind of always knew that I wasn’t looked after properly so I kind of viewed myself completely different to other children, you know. And was bullied quite a lot as well really, you know, so I always had this awareness that goes back as far as I can remember of being different or less than, or not normal. So – and a kind of yearning to want to be that [laughs], whatever that was and in my head that was kind of a family unit. So I suppose in a

confused way I was probably scared and happy at the same time, and relieved but, yeah.

[07:36]

You mentioned you was bullied. What was you bullied about?

I was bullied how my mum looked, you know, and she kind of had learning difficulties and stuff like that so I was bullied about how my mum looked. I was bullied about how I looked, how I was dressed, hygiene, things like that. So yeah, I – you know, I can remember being bullied as much as I can remember growing up, you know. So it was a big part of being a child so I suppose there was a bit of relief around being somewhere else in – where, you know, people wasn't going to associate me with my mum and you know, it sounds awful really doesn't it? But when you think about it, you're a child, you just want to – you know, you don't want to be bullied and you want to be accepted so I suppose there was an element of kind of irrational relief around, you know, being put in, in inverted commas, a normal family, you know, inverted commas is very relevant [laughs].

[08:43]

Could you talk me through a daily routine of being in care?

[Sighs] I mean for me it was completely different really because of the diversity and the type of carers I had, you know, they were like chalk and cheese, you know.

[Sighs] My first carers were experienced foster carers, they had quite a large family themselves so I'd kind of, you know, just wake up. I never had breakfast when I lived with my real mum so you know, it was breakfast and I would scoff it down and kind of felt – always kind of felt a bit odd, like you were being judged. You know, 'cause obviously their children were used to having breakfast so it was like, 'Oh don't scoff your dinner down Colin,' and stuff like that. It wasn't anything malicious or nasty, you know, but little things that imprinted on you. And then I would walk about half a mile to school, I used to have – I used to often pass by a friend's house on the way to

school and they used to live in Drummond Street, which was is literally about five minutes away from Euston Station and I used to walk to school in Somers Town. And I used to go to their house in the morning and I used to steal cakes from their fridge. And I kind of look back on it now and it seems really – really crazy, you know, I used to kind of steal – they had French fancies in a box in their fridge and I used to go there and steal a couple of cakes on the way to school, you know, and then – and then there was kind of, when I first, you know, it was nice to go to school in fresh clothes and nice clothes and you know, probably my most amazing childhood memory is when I went to my first foster carers, you know, and you're given a clothing grant. They got me a Tottenham away kit, which was yellow and I still look back of walking into school in a brand new yellow Tottenham away kit with the socks and the shorts and the smell of the acrylic, you know, I still can remember that like it was yesterday and just you know, proud, look at me, I've got a Tottenham kit. And all my friends used to, you know, what they took for granted, it was like a big day for me. I can remember it like it was yesterday, I can remember what the socks smelt like when I took them out the packet, you know, it was absolutely astounding. And I always had this awareness that there was always other people involved in my life, that there was always other people that were perhaps making decisions about my life. But it felt like I didn't have an idea what was going on and that it was being kept away from you, and being so young you wouldn't really be asking questions, you know, and if you did you probably wouldn't get an honest answer. It would more be an answer about kind of them trying for you not to be hurt or for them not allowed to actually tell you stuff because it's in due process, it was in the process of being arranged or being done, you know. So there was always that feeling. I mean I still feel a relief 'cause, you know, some of my earliest childhood memories before I came into care were quite horrific really, so it was kind of weird. It was a push me, pull me type of thing, you know. In one hand you didn't want to be locked in a bedroom, you know, my earliest childhood memory is being locked in a bedroom with my sibling and banging the door and crying. I must have been three or four years old so you know, on one hand it was nice to escape that and find normality but on another hand, you know, it felt like an adventure almost, and then suddenly the kind of – the consequences of the adventure start dawning of you as time goes on. You know, a week, a month, a year, you know, and so yeah, it's –

[13:01]

You mentioned about having traumatic memories, could you elaborate on that?

Yeah I mean as I say, just around being locked in a bedroom from a young age. My mum left us in the house and the neighbours complained and we were on the at risk register from quite a young age. So my earliest childhood memory is that, of you know, being locked in a bedroom and banging the door and my little brother must have only been about two or two and a half. And that's like kind of the type of – it wasn't always like that, I don't want people to think that it was always like that but the traumatic experiences, you know, I don't have positive memories of my childhood. I don't believe that I had a childhood, you know. For me it was about growing up quickly and I was left to roam the streets. So ironically, the British Library where it's stood now, where this film's going to be stored, is where I first ever went on a child exciting adventure of walking around derelict buildings. So where the British Library stands now, I have memories of it when it wasn't there, and being there on my own and walking round a derelict building and doing things that you shouldn't be doing. And you know, you're talking about a six or seven year old child roaming the streets, it just wouldn't happen nowadays. You know, but that was what I did and if it was – you know, one of my childhood memories is the Shaw Theatre is next to the British Library and where I was on the streets it would be freezing cold and you had a grate at the back of the Shaw Theatre and the heat, you know when the heat comes out of the grate, and I used to go there and stand there. Or there'd be a laundry on Charlton Street where the market is, it's still there now, and I used to go in the laundry to get warm. And my favourite childhood smell was tar because when I used to stand by the wall and grate at the thing they were tarring the roads, so whenever I stop in the street now and I smell the tar being put down it's like I love it, you know. I have to stop and [inhales], it's like a warm memory. But those, you know, I don't have warm memories of growing up in a family or anything like that so – and constantly my mum would be taken into hospital so I have a lot of memories of childhood of her having an epileptic fit and being taken in an ambulance somewhere and being left with someone, you know, so – and obviously my brother being taken

into care would have been traumatic for me, even though I was four years old I still kind of have – I don't really remember it that well, I just remember him being there and then he wasn't there, so yeah.

You mentioned roaming the streets at a young age.

Yeah.

[16:00]

What were your coping strategies?

Not to be bullied [laughs]. Yeah, that was absolutely, 'cause I knew the kind of people that would bully me, you know, the certain alleyways I wouldn't go down. There was a bakery as well in – it's quite strange 'cause if you go to Charlton Street it's like a time capsule, it hasn't changed and you've got the British Library one side and Euston Station, King's Cross, but in the middle there's this place that hasn't changed for forty years. And there was a bakery there and the people in the bakery knew me and I suppose they felt sorry for me, and they use to give me cakes. So I kind of used to go and hang around like and, 'Hello, how are you?' And then like, you know, they would give us a couple of cakes and I would kind of roam around and – I don't remember spending an awful lot of time with other children really or other kids, you know. And I'd spend time in the laundry and I remember once somebody locked my in the dryer – one of the bullies locked me in the dryer, you know in the laundry they have a big dryer? They locked me in the dryer and put it on, and an adult came in straight away and like scolded them and let me out. It was terrifying, absolutely terrifying. I must have been about six or seven years old, I laugh about it now but it was terrifying, absolutely terrifying. But my clothes were dry afterwards [laughs].

[17:20]

So what were your most memorable incidents as a child?

My most memorable incidents are the ones that I've spoken about already. Also I went to live with paternal aunts and uncles for a while, I don't know what had happened to my mum but I kind of remember that maybe they were going to adopt me. And I can remember getting a drum kit, I must have been five or six, getting a drum kit. And I just remember things like going to school, you know, being dropped off at school, and that's the type of thing, I can remember going to see my family and stuff like that, my granddad I felt close to. But really it was about primary school, for me it was – excuse me, I suppose when I went to primary school I became a child again and someone was caring for me, so I felt that element of care. And it was about kind of worrying about people seeing my mum, you know, and bullying and stuff like that, so they would be my overwhelming child – and I remember eating chocolate, I used to eat lots and lots of chocolate and I went to the dentist, I seemed to live in the dentist. So I have a lot of memories around the dentist and I'm petrified of the dentist now [laughs] from my childhood, but I suppose that's, you know, a lot of children are petrified of the dentist anyway, so – but you know, I don't really remember being told to brush my teeth, you know, I don't remember having breakfast, you know. I can remember having baths, I don't ever remember going out and buying clothes with my mum. You know, the things that people do, which are normal, I don't really remember doing them. And like as I say, you know, as a child obviously when you grow up things become a little bit obscure, you know, and we kind of change our memories to fit in what the missing links. But I kind of know overwhelmingly, you know, most of what I remember is correct, even if some of it's not correct. You know, even if some of it's there to protect me or to fill the gaps. But my, you know, my childhood for me would have been going to primary school, that was it, that's all I can remember as a nice thing, you know. Someone was going to take care of me, you know, there were people there that were going to take care of me and look after me, even if it meant I was also going to be bullied, you know, so yeah.

[20:00]

So would you say that you are proud or ashamed of coming in – going into care?

Erm, am I proud or ashamed? Er, I'm certainly not ashamed, you know, I had not control over what happened to me as a childhood. I look back now and realise that it was the best thing for me, for my life and for the way that I was living, you know. Am I proud of coming into care? I'm not proud of coming into care, I'm proud of how I've dealt with the experiences in adult life. You know, the kind of things that I've dealt with in my life and having my own children. I'm proud of – that I work with children, I'm proud that I've got children, you know. And there are things that I kind of look back on as an adult now and realise that, you know, being in care and the lack of nurture, being nurtured and cared for properly has affected me as an adult, you know. And it has imprinted on my adult life and I've – I don't like to say regrets but certain things in my adult life I – I don't attribute to being completely in care because you know, that's – I don't like to push the blame 'cause I have to be held accountable for my own decisions and the way that I live my life, but there are certainly things that imprinted on my personality that played a big part in my later life, you know, that I'm sad about, ashamed about. But at the same time I'm proud about, so you know, it's – yeah, that kind of hit me that question, so – so I don't think I'm proud that I came into care, I look back and think it was the best thing that people could have done. You know, there was people trying to do the right thing by me. But some of the experiences that I had in care – the people who made those decisions couldn't have conceived they would have happened and how they would have affected me, so –

Could you elaborate on that?

Erm, just the level of neglect of some of the carers, certain levels of abuse, yeah, you know, that a child shouldn't have to go through when they're placed in a place of care. So – and the mad thing was even though you wanted to be a family, part of a family, you always knew that you weren't part of the family, which was quite odd, you know. You'd always note – you'd always have this kind of little diary in your head and you'd be noting that even though their children were younger than you they were allowed to stay up later. Just little things like that, that people wouldn't even think. But as someone in care, you know, wanting to fit in you're kind of noting these things. And at Christmas you're noting your presents, even though I probably didn't get many presents before, you know, just little things like that. But yeah, you know,

the – in the end I was lucky I found decent foster carers, like in a foster home, a foster family, a maternal and paternal foster parent and their family. So I got lucky really, you know, if I hadn't I don't honestly think I would be sat in this chair now, you know, I don't think I would be sat here now, I'm almost certain I wouldn't be sat in this chair now. So as much as there was lots of bad experiences I was lucky at the end.

[23:50]

So what impact do you think that has had on your life?

Numerous impacts really. Firstly around relationships, you know, trusting people, especially the opposite sex. You know, fear of failure, erm, you know, always needing to be accepted, wanting people to like me, you know, fear of people leaving me. And you know, I kind of escaped – I did some self destructive things in my earlier life, you know, became dependent on alcohol and other things, which impacted my life, you know. I kind of met a lady, had children, got married and you know, so it absolutely impacted my life but as I say I'm accountable – you can – it wouldn't be right to sit here and blame this all on being in care, there's no way I'd do that, but certainly key things and feelings and emotions that come up, I would try and hide from, you know. So you know, I'm happily divorced [laughs], I've got two children and I've got a baby so I'm not going to – there's elements of my childhood that have impacted on my later life definitely. And you know, trying to be settled and structured, you know, getting a career and sticking at things and lots of – lots of different things, lots of different things.

[25:36]

So could you walk me through what was different about the foster carers that changed your life?

Yeah, well I look back and I just thank God for them really because I left the children's home, I lived in a children's home for a year. And the crazy thing was, was

that even though it was quite horrible I felt accepted there. So I didn't want to leave this children's home, I was there for a year, you know, and got to learn about quite a lot of naughty things. I kind of was a little bit of a naive child 'cause I'd been fostered in Somerset and I came back and I was in a children's home, you know, I kind of got involved in crime and just getting in trouble and stuff like that. And when I was – I think I'd just turned fourteen and I met these foster carers, and the irony was, was that when I was in the children's home and they were asking me what type of foster carer you want, 'What type of foster carer did you want?' a friend of mine who was in the children's home with me had got this male, single foster carer and I thought that would be great, you know, 'cause they'd have to spend all their time with you. So I put this down in my request and I ended up getting this family that were just massive, you know. They had three of their own children, three adopted children, the house was like an open door policy and it was just wonderful, you know, it was wonderful. And I kind of went in there and I kind of fought myself into the family, you know, I fought myself – I noticed because there was children adopted, well then that made it easier to feel part of the family because these children had been accepted into their family. So you know, it was just – and they had children my age, so I was fourteen, so I look back and think thank God I had that part of my childhood. 'Cause they had a caravan and we used to go to the caravan, and I just look back and thank God that I had that 'cause otherwise I would feel probably a bit bitter I think, and a little bit regretful. But you know, that was the light at the end of the tunnel for me for childhood. There was a couple of years, a year and a half, maybe, two years of kind of being probably quite an immature teenager but doing the things that their children did. You always felt different still, you were always judging, you know, you were always looking. Are they treating me different than them? But you know, and – kind of the – and I did this other foster – I suppose I must have had a yearning to want to be part of a family 'cause I can remember calling foster parents Mum and Dad, and sitting in my bedroom feared up, you know [speaks fast], 'Goodnight Mum.' You know, like that, and they'd go, 'Huh?' Then you'd talk about it later, but I had bad experiences around that as well, you know. So at the same time it kind of took me a long time to build up with one carer to do that and then within about two weeks I was out of there [laughs]. So you know, I had experiences like that as well in care.

You mentioned you fought your way in there. Could you elaborate on that?

Yeah, well I kind of – I kind of went in there and I suppose in a mad way, because there were so many children and I'd been in a children's home it probably felt quite comfortable for me. And I kind of forced my way into the family, you know. I kind of went in there and became part of the family and forced my way in and like kind of thought, hold on a minute. And I remember asking – I wanted to get adopted by then 'cause there was suddenly this – this was new to me, do you know what I mean? 'You've adopted three children, will you adopt me?' You know, and – excuse me, this was quite early when I'd been there so obviously it wasn't the right thing to be done at that particular time. But I think they kind of, you know, that kind of – they felt nice about that, that I felt like that. And I just kind of forced my way into the family and started calling them Mum and Dad and – and there was loads of us, and my foster brother was called Colin so there was just like an identity crisis, two Colins in one house, same age, you know. So then I got my nickname, which has stuck with me for life, which is CP. So only – in my work life people know me as Colin, but any of my friends don't even know – some of my friends don't know my name's Colin, they know me as CP 'cause it's just carried with me from my – from being fourteen to now really. So yeah, nice experiences, still trauma and painful and stuff like that and, you know, fighting emotion, so when I felt more accepted –

- in the family I then wanted to isolate myself from my real family, so I had this kind of internal fight going on, which I suppose I've carried with me my whole life really, you know.

Who did you – who did you think you could talk to?

[Phew], I think – I think my foster mum. I kind of saw something in her and I realised that she – she kind of listened and she kind of had a way with professionals where she could get my point across. So I kind of, you know, I felt kind of she would listen to me and then when we sat in meetings and stuff like that she would kind of get my point across and I kind of felt she was fighting my corner. But I would talk to – I don't think I really, at that time, talked to a lot of people to tell them how I felt but I was such a good communicator and good with words that I could spiel off my life

experience to people in a way. And I think I did it for affirmation, for people to say, 'Oh God, you've had it hard,' [laughs] you know. And I carried that, it became a bit of a defect of character for me to be honest in later life. I didn't realise it, but I got to the point in adult life where I'd talk about my experiences as a child, not as we are now, I'm talking about maybe six, seven, eight years ago where I'd talk about my experience of being in care. And it would come out and I might as well be talking about you because there was no emotional – well, it was as if I was talking about someone else, it just became spiel, it just came out, 'Yeah yeah, I'm in care, yeah I've fostered somebody, yeah this happened, that happened to me.' But I wasn't processing, you know, or acknowledging how it made me feel as an adult, which I do do now, you know, that's a battle in itself 'cause you know, we tend to grow up and we find defence mechanisms to deal with the stuff that's uncomfortable, you know, so –

[32:40]

So what was your definition of trust at the age of fourteen?

At the age of?

Fourteen.

Oh my gosh, [sighs], I don't think I – at fourteen. I don't think I really had a definition of trust at that age, I really don't. I think maybe my definition of trust then would have been based around a friend – maybe a couple of friends at school and some of my foster siblings, but I still don't think I completely trusted anyone really then, you know, not even foster carers 'cause I'd been let down a lot and had quite a lot of bad experiences, so you know – after a while I totally did trust my foster mum and dad, you know, and thankfully I did 'cause I got to have that bit of nurture that I needed, a bit of maternal guidance and paternal guidance, so – 'cause my dad had never been in my life as a child. My dad was an alcoholic and he kind of fluctuated, I have about three or four memories of him. And my biological brother who I see a lot of now, he got unfortunately impacted by it a little bit more, being in care. He stayed

in contact with my dad, so I've actually got like half siblings that I don't know through my father's side. So you know, I've veered off the question, the original question now haven't I [laughs]?

[34:22]

It's fine. So if you could just tell me a bit more about the relationship between you and your dad.

My real dad?

Yeah, biological.

I don't – there wasn't a relationship. My relationship with my real dad was I remember – my earliest, earliest memories, and it's quite strange, when I got my foster care files later in life I retraced all these steps. He lived in Camberwell and I just have this one memory or two memories of this block of flats in Camberwell. And then I have memories of seeing him now and then and he must have had me on specific days 'cause I can remember being really young and going to a flat with him. And that's it, and I think after four or five he wasn't there and I didn't see him until I bumped into him when I lived in the children's home ironically. And then that was – he was an alcoholic, so I can remember the smell of his flat the first – I remember the first time I saw him, which must have been the first time in nine, ten years, and I was fourteen and I bumped into him in the street. He was so proud to meet me, he was like, 'Wow,' and he took me to this café, we sat in this café. And he obviously knew people and he was like, 'This is my son Colin.' And I remember, like, 'Oh this is a bit odd,' [laughs], you know. But to be quite honest, I'm going to tell the truth you know, for me then it was just about, you know, what can I get out of you? So I'd go and see him, he was an alcoholic and I'd get money off him, you know, I lived in a children's home, but yeah. I got into quite a lot of trouble when I lived in the children's home, you know. I got into quite a lot of trouble, I kind of – you could say I got an apprenticeship in petty crime, from being a naive child coming back – 'cause kind of, I left for Somerset when I was being fostered and it was kind of like the era of

break dancing in the early '80s. And in Somerset it was completely different, people weren't break dancing, they were like two or three years behind. So I kind of came back to London and I was like two or three years behind in what was going on. So yeah –

Going back to what you said earlier about getting money off your dad –

Yeah.

Did you ever feel like you wanted to build a relationship with him?

I think there was that one moment where I met him in the street and went to the café with him, and suddenly the reality of who he was and what he had and hadn't done and how that had impacted my life. And going to his house, realising he was an alcoholic, that disappeared, it was a split moment, you know, a split moment, you know. And I only spoke to him once in my adult life when I was sectioned when I was about twenty. And I saw him once 'cause my brother used to – and I was with an ex girlfriend and he walked past my window with a walking stick, and that was it, and then he died. And now I suppose in hindsight, I suppose having children myself, I would have liked to have known him a bit better and I'm kind of interested in finding a bit out about my past for my kids' sake. 'Cause that's where it becomes difficult, you know, as an adult to explain to your children, even though my ten year old daughter has – she has such an understanding of my childhood and empathy towards it, just mind blowing, absolutely mind blowing. I mean just amazing how she kind of – she once said – she once said to me, she once said to me – yeah, she once said to me, 'Daddy, if your mum could have looked after you she would have,' you know, she's ten years old, you know. So yeah [laughs]. I think I need to go to the toilet, it's not 'cause I've got tears in my eyes, I have got tears in my eyes but I just need to – I do actually.

If you just –

Yeah, no, I do actually –

[Pause in recording]

[39:04]

Could you tell me about the relationship between you and your parents?

Erm, yeah, erm, as I say, my dad I didn't really know, you know, he was just kind of – he just feels like an uncle that we met now and then as a child. But I do remember childhood memories of him being drunk and smashing windows and things like that, but I don't really remember spending – I can only – I only have one memory as a child of spending time with him on his own. Excuse me, which was in a little flat in Kentish Town, a dingy little room and so I have that one memory. I mean my mum, I wouldn't really call it a relationship, it sounds quite odd really doesn't it? I do remember, you know, her trying to look after me but from a young age, and probably my brother being taken into care made me have an awareness around her parenting abilities. Well I was constantly being reminded of them, so I can remember doing things, like having fish – steak and kidney pie and chips on a Friday and screaming at her to have chocolate bars, and she must have just given in to me all the time with chocolate 'cause as I say, I spent a lot of time in the dentist chair and that sugar addiction's carried me through life, you know, I eat sweets like they're going out of fashion. But I don't really – it seems weird but I don't really remember having a relationship with her, you know, I remember worrying about her and I remember being concerned for her and being concerned how other people thought of her and how I fitted in to that. But I don't really remember having a relationship with her. I do as I got older when – I'm talking about pre coming into care, I don't really remember it that much. I do remember when I came into care and she used to come and see me and visit me in foster carers homes and the meetings with social workers and her telling me she wanted to have me back and all this stuff. I do remember it but I always felt uncomfortable around her, you know, I felt ashamed. I'm ashamed to say that now but I actually felt ashamed. But given the situation that I lived in and the consequences of my – my circumstances as a child, I suppose it's a natural response, you know.

So what was your perceptions of your parents as a child?

Just that they were different and, as I say, I didn't have a perception of a father really, there was no perception of a father. There was perceptions of people, my mum, men coming in and out of my mum's life, some of them I liked, some of them I didn't like. Erm, yeah, I don't – I think really – I just felt different. It's hard to explain, it's really hard to explain 'cause I can't – sitting here now trying to find words for it, I can't find words for it because it seems irrational to me, being a father myself, having three children, it just doesn't seem right. But I don't – I don't – my perceptions were that something was wrong, you know. And my perception of – I suppose I loved my mum, you know, but my perception was that something was wrong and something was different. So I carried that with me from an early age. I mean my defence mechanisms around my circumstances kicked in from a very early age and I suppose looking back now, I suppose the impact of my brother being taken into care when I was four must have had a massive impact on me 'cause I, you know, I just look back and remember him there and then he was gone. So – but it's odd, I don't remember really having a proper relationship with my mum. I remember her putting me in the bath and it being too hot. I can remember her making excuses for things. But I do remember things, like I can remember watching Doctor Who on TV. I can remember we had an album, a record and it was the James – the music from all the James Bond themes, you know what I mean? Like, being James Bond, jumping on the settee, yeah. I remember, you know, I had an accident happen to me when I was a kid and I still don't know what happened to me. I think – I think I had something thrown at me or something, or I fell and I got a really bad scar on my knee, I still to this day don't know what it was. I can remember the trauma of it, yeah, yeah, it's odd.

[44:36]

Going back to what you said earlier, about having defence mechanisms from early, could you elaborate on what those were?

Erm, my defence mechanisms were – are you talking about when I was in early years?

When you was a child.

Yeah, my defence mechanism there was to keep myself away from people who bullied me and to kind of – I wanted to be around people who cared for me, and it didn't matter if it was a primary school teacher, you know, a holiday play scheme play worker, you know, that's what I wanted. And I would – yeah, that was my defence mechanisms I think, was just to kind of avoid confrontation, avoid being bullied, avoid the feeling different, you know. But I mean I would, you know, I would start fights, like in primary school. I would kind of like instigate something where someone would say something about my mum. It was almost like I wanted to let go of the anger so I actually instigated fights in primary school. 'Yeah, and your mum's a retard,' and I would instigate it you know, and then I would just start fighting. So I suppose there was a lot of anger inside me. And then the lovely headmaster, I'll never forget him, you know, probably my primary school teachers, my headmaster, they feel like angels in my childhood, you know. And I'd have to be marched up to Mr Bradshaw's office and we'd get the ruler across our knuckles. But I liked it in a way, I liked to be in his office and getting in trouble and you know, all – it gave me I suppose a bit of an identity, whereas I suppose I didn't feel like I had a normal identity, so I suppose I created one for myself in a way. But I was very – I was very malnourished, you know, I was very frail, very insecure, you know, very scared, I was scared, very scared. I was also, you know, I had personality, I've always kind of been a Londoner, so even at a young age I was a – out trying to do things and, you know, even at a young age money was still kind of like, wow, you know. I can remember the British Library, one time when I went there with my friend and we found these crates and crates of Corona bottles. And basically Corona bottles were – you used to get them in fish and chip shops, they were glass bottles, and I think you used to get 2p or 5p back when you took a bottle back. And I must have only been about seven, and me and my friend were in the British Library and we found like about – crates and crates of them, you know, stacked bigger than us. And you know, we kind of like, we went to every fish and chip shop for probably three square miles to take these bottles back so we could get money. But it was like an adventure, you know. You know, that's the type of kid I was from quite a young age. In a way I suppose as much as I

was insecure, in other ways I was really confident, you know, so it's kind of quite mad really.

What are Corona bottles?

They were lemonade bottles basically, cream soda predominantly they made. They made cream soda and lemonade, and you bought them in the fish and chip shop like you would a litre bottle of coke now, and they were glass bottles and you used to get a refund when you took the bottle back. Anyone above thirty-five will remember them, I bet you're too young to remember them [both laugh].

[48:31]

Could you tell me about the type of friends that you socialised with?

It's a bit –

And what age you were.

In primary school I had probably two friends, one was really kind of introverted, Terry, he – when I look back now he was having similar family experiences, not in foster care but he was having family experiences. And ironically one of my best friend's now, another guy called Jason, and ironically we both work with children and are managers in after school clubs now. So kind of – he – it's ironic really because in my life at this very particular moment, he's known me more than anyone else, 'cause even though my biological mum's alive and other relatives are alive, I don't see an awful lot of her. So you know, this kind of friend's been the one continuation in my life even though we kind of had years when we were separated. But I can remember it like yesterday when I left for Somerset and I kept a book for years, the primary school book. All the children wrote in it, good luck Colin, and I can remember Jason waving at me like it was yesterday, you know, it was kind of 1981. You know, I can remember those things. I hate goodbyes, I don't like goodbyes, I really don't. My whole life, I've found it really difficult. Endings, I hate them. You know, I like to be

in control of endings, so that's sort of relative to my experiences of being in care as a child. But I didn't have lots of friends, I mean I was more of a kind of feral kid, I was out on the streets on my own really a lot of the time. And I kind of like – I learnt to interact with adults from a young age, you know, and kind of carried that through with me to my teenage years, you know. I kind of learnt to adapt, I learnt to manipulate adults really from a young age. Not manipulate, it sounds like a nasty word but I manipulated them into caring for me or showing me attention, you know. I knew how to get that, I always needed that.

[51:18]

Would you say that care has affected your relationships in general?

Yeah.

And how?

Hundred percent. Just that fear of being left alone, people walking away, getting close to people and then thinking this is scary 'cause they can hurt me and then destruct – self, you know, being destructive. Trust issues, you know, and because of my experiences I didn't really trust women for a long time. You know, I had experiences around females, plus I had experiences in care that made me be not very trusting of females. So I kind of got intimate with people and – and do you know what? I was really scared of the opposite sex, I don't – you know, I was a nervous wreck, when I was eighteen, seventeen, I'd go on dates and I'd be this nervous wreck and you know, I'd be picturing myself married after thirty minutes. Even at eighteen years old I was like, 'I want to get married and have children,' you know. And then I'd be on the phone all the time, you know, and there was this anxiety; anxiety that I could be rejected, you know, the fear of rejection overriding – absolute overriding part of my life, you know, absolutely. Still to this day, it's something I deal with on a daily basis. It doesn't have to be in relationships, it can just be in anything. It can be in the silliest thing, but you know, I've kind of adapted as I've got older. So –

[53:02]

And what have your coping strategies been in order to adapt?

What, now? Now my coping strategies are based around looking at myself, you know, I've spent a lot of time in therapy, I've spent a lot of time looking at myself, looking at my past, trying to make sense of it. I've kind of – I've written a book about my childhood and my experiences as an adult, so I've done a lot of self help stuff. And to be honest, to be honest, that's my real coping strategy now, is to be honest. Not to spiel off the experience but to actually talk about it to people and to be honest about how it makes me feel. And if they kind of, you know, the standard one is, 'Oh, didn't you do well, look where you've come from.' It's like, 'P off,' you know, I don't need that anymore. Whereas maybe fifteen, twenty years ago that's exactly what I would have been looking for, you know, a bit of affirmation, a bit of like, 'Oh wow,' you know, arm round the shoulder, 'Look at you.' You know, but honesty, being honest now is probably my biggest coping mechanism, yeah. And it sounds crazy really but it's – yeah.

You use the word crazy a lot.

Yeah.

What is your definition of crazy?

I suppose it's – it's quite weird really isn't it? 'Cause I suppose it's irrational or not normal [laughs], you know, it fits in with the jigsaw puzzle of my life. Yeah, yeah, just slightly irrational and not normal or, you know, kind of an outrageous way to deal with certain things. But at the same time like I now realise that like it was normal for me to deal with certain things in a certain way 'cause I'm a human being like everybody else. You know, I feel pain, I don't want to feel pain, I have things that I do not to feel pain. You know, alcohol's great, alcohol's a great number from hiding from pain. You know, people take drugs, gambling, you know, I've done lots of things in my life to try and numb the pain and hide, but I've also done a lot of things

to kind of get myself back on the straight and narrow and to kind of really – not let go of the past but to process it and understand it and get an acceptance around it where, you know, I'm comfortable with it, you know. I still respond to feelings and emotions by just having a weirdness around it now, and I don't kind of respond self destructively or negatively. The pain's still there if I have a specific memory or something, you know, it's still painful but I kind of have things in place to deal with it, you know. But my life is not all pain and turmoil and horror, you know, I've got a lot of beautiful things in my life so I should express that as well, you know. So I'm grateful for where I've come from and what I've got, you know, so it's not all about, you know, turmoil and pain, you know, mistreatment and neglect. It's not all – it's not all about that [laughs].

[56:25]

So as we discussed you went into care at eight?

Yeah.

And how long were you in care for?

I actually – my case was quite unusual 'cause I got an extended care warrant, which was quite unusual then and still is unusual now. Well it's not so unusual now because the law's changed but it was very unusual then. I got an extended care warrant until I was about nineteen or twenty.

What was the limit at the time?

I have no idea but most people it was sixteen you were out of care, you know, I never really heard about people staying in until eighteen, you're talking about in the mid '80s, slightly late '80s. But because I had – I got sectioned, you know, I had a psychotic episode so I got an extended care warrant.

Until what age?

Just nineteen, twenty, I think it was. You know, I kind of got a little bit of extra support when I came out. I actually came out and went back to my foster carers and stayed with them for a little while, even though I had a flat. Excuse me.

So how long was you in care?

In total – I mean I was in care on and off before I actually came in to care, I had short stints of care, excuse me, on and off for a few months here and there. But I mean for – you know, I suppose from four or five years old I suppose I would have come in and out of care. But at the same time the length of care really was – the block was from eight till sixteen and then from eighteen till nineteen I kind of – they brought me back in the fold as such [laughs].

[58:13]

So how did that affect such days as birthdays?

As in?

Your birthday.

Yeah, what do you mean by that?

Being in care, how would – how would you celebrate your birthday or – what did it mean to you?

Yeah, in the early years it was odd. I never knew what Christmas was, you know, it was very odd, like Christmas, and it's still kind of – I love Christmas now, I mean I've gone the other way. My defence mechanism now is to like go mental at Christmas but only because I've got kids, but I've still got a certain amount of discomfort around Christmas. But I never – I never had Christmas so you know, this was all weird, you know. And I can remember the first foster parents I went to, the

first Christmas, you know, there – and I sneaked downstairs and I ripped the present to see what it was. It was Battleships, and I remember feeling disappointed on Christmas day ‘cause I’d opened it, you know, I knew what it was. And there’s this awareness still of, wow, look at - they’re getting a lot more than me, you know. There was always kind of, they’re getting a lot more than me. But Christmas was very odd, very odd, very odd. It was only till I went to my last foster carers that I really started appreciating Christmas and birthdays. You know, I can remember birthdays and I can remember Easter but there’s not anything – you know, not ever – I don’t remember any specific – I can’t actually remember any of my birthdays before I went to my last foster carers, I don’t remember any of them. I do in school, in primary school, you know, I remember mum – my mum used to bring in a cake, still do it now. And I don’t know why but she always brought in cream cakes for the school and I hated cream cakes. You know like you’d get a big – and it was full of cream and I still look back and think, huh, maybe I didn’t tell her that I didn’t like cream or maybe that was the cheapest cake to buy. But I still look back and you know, I can remember in the primary school class and the teachers, and I remember just hating this cake, and I still – you know, every year it was the same cake, it was always a cream cake. I don’t – you know, yeah – but I don’t really remember birthdays that much, they didn’t really have any – I suppose they didn’t really have any meaning to me other than you were growing up [laughs], you know.

[1:00:47]

What about Mothers and Fathers Day?

Didn’t really mean anything to me whatsoever. You know, I suppose when I was in foster care I would get them cards, you know, and I suppose I wanted them to be my mums or my dads really. I’d get them cards but it didn’t really, you know. I don’t remember sending my mum Mothers Day cards when I lived in Somerset, fostered in Somerset, I didn’t really – I suppose I would have – ‘cause most of the – all the foster carers I went to had children, so I would have felt inclined to get the foster parents a Fathers Day card or a Mothers Day card.

[1:01:36]

What – being in care, did it affect your culture and belief systems?

Did it affect my culture? Erm, I suppose when I look back in a way, I mean culture – it's not the right word but I mean in a way it did affect my kind of identity because I was a Londoner, you know, and I was a really, really proud Londoner, you know. I used to walk round singing, 'Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner,' you know. I remember being with my granddad and the national anthem would come on and I'd stand up and salute the, you know, the national anthem, you know. So I was really proud to be a Londoner, you know, it was in my genes. So when I went to Somerset, you know, I was in the rural countryside in the middle of nowhere and I was a Londoner. So I went from being – I ended up being bullied in Somerset for being a Londoner [laughs]. The biggest mistake I made was playing the Artful Dodger in a theatre production, so that was it then, I was persecuted for being a Londoner. But I kind of lost my identity as a Londoner I think going to Somerset, so when I came back I fought for it, you know, I was a – I've had market stalls, I was a barrow boy, two for £1, that was kind of like my, you know – up from a young age I was doing things like that. I had my first market stall when I was fifteen years old, you know, get expelled from school, so what? I can go and make money [laughs], you know. So my identity was affected by being in care. And you are still something else as well as culture and – what was the other question?

Belief systems.

Belief system, erm, I mean my belief systems from a young age were affected, from being in care, from not being in care, you know. Just of how a family unit should be, you know, what's love? You know, how do you show love, how do you – are you pretending to show love? All these things, how do you quantify these things? It's very difficult, so my belief systems were definitely affected by being in care.

[1:04:00]

What was your self image, identity?

From what age are we talking about?

From fourteen.

Just a proper Cockney, you know, confident Cockney barrow boy type, you know, market trader, loved being a Londoner. And I suppose at that point I'd just moved to my foster carers' so I did start feeling part of a family, which was – and it felt real, you know, it started to feel real rather than something that I wanted and that might have been – looked like it was happening but it wasn't. It actually started to feel real, so I started to feel – I don't know what I actually felt but I felt probably a sense of relief and confusion, you know, suddenly I spent my whole life wanting to feel part of something and suddenly I did. I think it was a little bit confusing, I didn't know where to go with it when I actually got that bit of nurture and a bit of care and love and a bit of acceptance and their own children. It was like a – it was odd, you know, it was like – I suppose it was like trying to find myself all over again, it was like I'd craved for something so much and then I had it, and it was like odd, you know, it felt strange. It was kind of like a – finding a new belief system as such, you know what I mean?

[1:05:35]

How did you get treated because you were in care?

By who are we talking about?

By the world.

By the world, okay. I got treated by children my own age pretty horribly, so when I moved to Somerset I got – I was not only a Londoner, I was also fostered so I got mistreated there, bullied. I don't think I was completely treated fairly or nicely by some of the supposed people who were – had a duty to care for me and were supposed

to be foster carers. You know, I don't think they treated me right. I was treated wonderfully by everybody in the school and play – after school clubs and play service, and teachers and headmasters, wonderfully, you know, absolutely wonderfully. Erm, you know, I got in quite a bit of trouble with the law and I think looking back now I was probably treated with a lot of – I probably got off with a lot more than I should have 'cause I was in care, you know. So there were times when it went in favour, you know, I got in a lot of trouble as a child with the police and I think I got off with a lot of stuff because you know, it was probably the only time being a care leaver or being in care, the tag of it actually helped you I suppose, when I look back now. I don't suppose I look back and think there was any other time where being in care actually benefited me in a wider context. You know, and as you get older – 'cause I've been in this sector for quite a long time so I'm constantly around care leavers and professionals, and sometimes it can be patronising, you know. But that's why I'm always honest, you know, I try to be honest. So I think the problem is we're all individuals, you know, people in care, care leavers, we're all individuals and we – we – you know, in some way or other we're absolutely shaped by that experience so at certain points in our life the way we deal with things seem right and the way that people deal with us feel right. And maybe at some point in my life I did want a bit of pity and a bit of, 'Poor you,' you know. And then now it's not like that, I kind of – I don't like to be patronised because there's people out there who've had a lot worse experience than me in life, you know, and I am proud of how I've come out the other end and how it's shaped my life. I've made many mistakes along the way, some of them due to being in care and some of them nothing to do with it whatsoever, but I'm very proud of where I am now, you know, and what I've been through, so you know. But this is something that I live with for my whole life, you know. There's not a day that goes past that I wake up and don't think of being in care or being a child, you know, a child in care. My biggest fight in life is that I've always gone searching for that lost childhood, I now realise that I was never going to find, you know. That was my holy grail in life and I tried to find it in other ways. So yeah, this will live with me for the rest of my life, you know. My children understand it, my partners – anyone who knows me well knows about who I am and how this stuff's affected me, so – and it's not always negative, it's not always negative these experiences, you know. I've had a lot of positive experiences in life and I've been in situations that I

can do – help others, you know, and make a difference because of my experience in life. So you know, there's a lot of positives to be taken from it, you know, and I can't discredit who I am, I don't want to discredit who I am, because the thing is, when I grew up, as I was growing up I felt guilty and I felt ashamed and I felt sad. And somewhere along the line a confused little child thinks they're something to do with it, it's their fault, you know. And I think growing up and processing this stuff is like letting go of that and going, 'Hey, actually that wasn't my fault, I didn't deserve to be treated like that.' So yeah.

[1:10:30]

You mentioned the positive effects it's had on your life.

Absolutely.

Who were your positive role models?

Ah, I – one of the most – probably the most positive relationship I had in my life was when I was fostered in Somerset. And I was – I was very, like I say, I was very in tuned with adults and this one day I walked passed this lady's house and she was having a garage sale and she was an old age pensioner maybe in her – I suppose at the time she was in her sixties and she just kind of – I've gone up to her and I just wanted to help people, you know, 'Can I help you set up?' And so she got to know me and she was like – her ex husband was like a strict headmaster in a private school and she loved antiques and going to jumble sales and all this. And she must have seen this straggly little kid, and she understood that I wasn't being treated right by the foster parents, so she kind of became my surrogate nan, you know, and it was beautiful. And she was a big part of my life until she passed away, you know, six, seven years ago. So she almost became my surrogate nan, you know, and I used to go to jumble sales with her. I mean I've got a love for antiques, you know, I collect plates now and she used to take me to jumble sales and car boot sales and every Sunday I'd go – I wanted to escape the foster carer's house so I was just looking for another haven. And so I'd go to her house on a Sunday, she used to get a packet of digestive biscuits

and I'd have my cup of tea and watch Antiques Roadshow with her. And yeah, it was lovely, she was a very good, positive role model. And then I suppose after that my next positive role models would have been my – my foster siblings, you know, kind of looking at them and thinking wow, you know, you're going out there and meeting girls and getting drunk at fifteen and things like that, you should be doing as a teenager or not doing as a teenager. And then unfortunately, you know, as I got older some of my role models were not the – people from quite rough backgrounds and doing stupid things and I tried to kind of create a negative identity. So I had role models like that, and if I were to say around this stuff now, I mean that we're doing now, probably – as I'm a trustee of a charity, I've been a trustee for seven years for Voice and they give advocacy for young people in care, their ex Chairman, Chief Exec probably became quite a positive role model for me. He kind of allowed me that it was okay to be a care leaver, it was okay to own my experience and that my experience could make a difference to others, and that if someone was academic they weren't better than me, and that my opinion was just as important as those people. And he kind of gave me this sense of belief around myself, which enables me to get into this stuff. You know, I've kind of done academic stuff around care leavers and been involved with quite a lot of projects and I'm passionate about it, and tried to do as much as I can, you know. 'Cause it's kind of an irony that I feel a duty to do as much as I can to help others, and that's probably one of my defence mechanisms. You know, it's not a bad thing to want to try and make a difference and I'm no – I'm not, you know, Mother Teresa, but if my experience of life and my communication and me partaking and getting involved can help others then, you know, that's a good thing, it's a very good thing, you know. And it's nice to do something that's not selfish, that's not just all about me, it's about other people who are probably having similar problems to what I had as a child, if not worse. 'Cause when I hear stories of how many foster care placements children have now it's just unbelievable. I look back on the turmoil of the amount of foster placements I had, and I only had four. And when I speak to some of the young people, like your age, that I do at Voice and stuff like that I'm blown away, I'm like, oh my gosh. And the black bag culture, you know, leave a foster carer with a black bag, the impact that has on you as an adult is unbelievable. You remember that forever.

It's been –

Excellent.

*Thirty-six minutes actually now it's been, so shall we have a break now? If you stay there Colin and we'll unplug you –
brek*

[1:15:45]

You was telling me about – you were in a foster home. Could you tell me more?

Well I was actually in four foster homes. Yeah, the first foster home I went to, they had two dogs [laughs]. There was a – I feel uncomfortable saying foster mum and dad with them actually, but there was a lady and a man. The lady I didn't really get on very well with, although I mean she wasn't horrid but a few specific things happened. They had I think four children as well, so it was kind of, you know, one night I was with my mum in a flat, just the two of us, and the next night I was kind of in this environment with a family and I stayed there for I think over a year, just over a year. But it was meant to be a short term placement, which means you know, they find you somewhere more positive for the long term 'cause it was always the case that I was going to be in care on a long term foster care placement as such. So yeah, I was there for a yeah, yeah.

You mentioned you was at four foster homes, could you describe what age you were?

I was moved to Somerset from there. How old would I have been? About ten. I moved to Somerset. The conception around foster care at that time was in some cases they kind of wanted to separate the children from the families, you know, it was different to kind of how it is now. And as I've come to realise that they didn't have any foster carers in the borough or there was a shortfall of foster carers, as there is now still, and so they moved me to Somerset. So as I explained earlier my headmaster came with me and my social worker and we went to near Glastonbury, went to this foster home and stayed there for a couple of weekends, two, three

weekends and then moved there. And you know, I think because I was away from London and my family and the bullying I probably like, you know, was doing quite well in school and hygiene, you know. I'd never – nobody told me how – I always remember foster carers making me brush my teeth or standing over me having a bath, you know, 'cause nobody had taught me how to do those things, you know. So you know, it was that kind of stuff that – and I've got all my foster care files, which I've read through from all the times, you know, and it's quite interested, seeing people's opinions and their words and their interpretations of things, you know, when you look back, you know. But yeah, so it was okay for a little while.

And what about the second placement?

That was – I mean the first foster placement was – impacted me the most.

What age were you?

Eight. And although they weren't horrible, you know, I suffered certain acts of abuse, which you know, affected me growing up. And the second foster carer was okay, I was there for two years. And as I explained earlier I just built up the courage to call them Mum and Dad, you know.

And how old were you then?

I would have been probably eleven, twelve. And then literally for whatever reason they didn't want me anymore. I think my behaviour had deteriorated, kind of I'd had very limited contact with my real family, out of choice in an ironic way, but also it suited the social services and the foster carers because my behaviour was better when I wasn't in contact with my real family. So I think I kind of decided I wasn't going to have too much contact and then I kind of got in contact again. But I think, you know, sometimes there's this ideology around having a good child as such, and for a while I was a good child 'cause I was quite happy. I was in – living in the countryside and you know, I couldn't be further away from London, even though I felt isolated and alone 'cause no one I knew, my friends and my family weren't near me, it was still

like a little adventure almost, you know? And so it felt okay, that lasted for about two years. I'd had another foster placement that didn't really happen before that. I went and stayed with these foster carers in Enfield, I was going to go and stay with them and blah, blah, blah and I kind of built my hopes up and then suddenly they didn't want me, so –

What age were you?

This was – this would have been round about eight.

Okay.

Before I moved to Somerset. And then that foster placement failed. So I mean what we're talking about here is I went from primary school to primary school, then to secondary school. Then when that foster placement failed again I ended up going to another secondary school. But it was an adventure. I mean I look back now, it was an amazing adventure really. I got fostered with – they were gamekeepers, so they – you know, they bred birds to be shot and it was like a farm and there was animals everywhere and guns and motorbikes and it was in the middle of nowhere. I mean this is real isolation you're talking about. And at first it was great but the problem was, when I look back now, they were first time foster carers so they weren't – they didn't have the tools to deal with a child who was, you know, going to be difficult at times, kind of little rough neck from London really, who was going to get into fights and get into trouble and – and so they weren't adapted to it. And my hygiene deteriorated a little bit and they couldn't cope with things like that. And eventually the – I mean this is not an over exaggeration either, it's actually fact. The foster mother, because I was clumsy and stuff like that, eventually the foster mother just really didn't talk to me and I got in trouble quite a lot at school and I created a big fuss. And I suppose they weren't supported that well, they were in Somerset, their social worker was in London, you know, it was visits every couple of months or whatever. So you know, and eventually basically they wouldn't allow me in their living room, you know, I wasn't allowed to go in their living room because I was clumsy. So what I actually did was, I sat in the bedroom in isolation typing letters to

people in London and living in a little fantasy world, you know. But the – the guy was okay, you know, I can remember when he used to stand over me. So you can imagine when you're twelve, thirteen years old, you've still got someone watching over you while you're having a bath, you know. But we used to have nice chats, you know, he was like a proper gamekeeper guy and he liked his glass of whiskey and that, and he was quite a nice guy. But the mum, I think basically what had happened, they'd had a daughter, they couldn't have any more children, and they had this pre conceived idea that getting a foster child, like a boy, would make their two point four family, you know, their family be complete. Whereas the reality was that they were getting a child with emotional behaviour difficulties, you know, so – but it was great, I'd go out on motorbikes shooting shot guns, shooting rabbits at night on the back of pick up trucks and you know, like experiences – I kind of – they bred birds so there were times when the incubators were full of hundreds of – well, thousands of eggs and we spent the night like letting chicks out of an egg and going lambing and stuff like that, I mean amazing – and when gamekeepers, when they shoot the birds they have these people they call beaters, they go with sticks to beat the birds out so that people – just like an adventure, you know. But in the end it became very – you know, the isolation was unbelievable. And to that day, from that day onwards I really do not like being alone too much, and that definitely stems from there.

[1:24:50]

So what about your fourth foster placement?

Well before I went to my fourth foster placement I – when this foster placement failed I came back to London and I was in a children's home for a year. And I kind of – to start off with I was in a unit, so I wasn't in secondary school education, by which time my education had been absolutely capitulated, you know, I'd gone from school to school. When I was with the gamekeepers I'd actually been put up two years in English and history, you know. Kind of I went there and I was thirteen or fourteen and I'd actually been put up two years in English and history, so my schooling then was – you know, I was – when you look back it was pretty amazing really. I was quite an intelligent kid and I loved learning things, you know, I was like a sponge.

But by the time I'd come back to London, you know, things weren't really put into place or, you know, in hindsight I work with children now so I understand how certain professionals work and the law. I don't think it was – they tried to get me into school and it was complicated, you know, but by which time my education was ruined and I got into crime, you know, I got into a lot of trouble with the police when I was in the children's home. But there was a camaraderie around it you know, it was kind of like we did all accept each other 'cause we kind of knew – it was different than being with foster carers, 'cause they were staff, you know, you knew they were staff. They weren't foster carers and as much as we were all on equal footing, we were all still looking for those differences, we couldn't help it. You know, I still had this big issue about children younger than me going to bed after me, I hated it, you know. But it represented something, it represented inequality or lack of acceptance. But there was like a camaraderie about it. But I did get into a lot of trouble with the police and I kind of had – that's probably around the time when I started to have – coming towards the end of my contact with my maternal mum, I used to go and see her quite a lot. And this is probably when all this started coming to an end where, you know, whatever reasons I stopped seeing her. So – and then I went to my foster carers, which as I explained – which really, you know, a haven, just to feel blessed that I had that experience in my late, you know, in my teens. To feel part of a childhood, to feel, you know, the kind of things children do, you know, girls and drinking and going to the caravan and speed boats and, you know, kind of – you know, it was just wonderful to look back and think thank God I had that, thank God I had that. And the fact that I started to feel accepted and I started trusting people and feeling part of, you know – and to this day they're my family, you know. They're my family; my children have got their surname, that's how much they impacted on my life, you know, I was on the phone to my mum last night, I call her Mum and Dad, you know. So they basically impacted on my life massively, you know. So yeah, and they had loads of children and they had foster children coming and going and as I say, it was like an open door policy, everyone's friends came in and you know, it was good times, good times.

[1:28:28]

Could you explain to me about the good memories you have from your past?

The good memories. As I say, predominantly they would definitely rank up there, I just look back with really – it's what I call somewhere over the rainbow kind of, you know, the yellow brick road. I love the Wizard of Oz, it's my favourite film and for me this kind of represents that, you know, the yellow brick road, having that bit of childhood, you know, it's beautiful, absolutely beautiful and even though when I got my Tottenham kit, the carers I was with were not great, that was a great memory, really great memory, great childhood memory. And most of my childhood memories that were good, early childhood had been in school, you know, just teachers, friends, feeling part of – yeah, yeah, yeah.

You did mention something about holidays.

Yeah, that's – also the holidays, we – 'cause the holiday play schemes where you normally have after school club and in the holidays you have play schemes. And I used to go to Coram's Fields which is, you know, a stone's throw away from the British Library in Somers Town, and other play – and I used to feel nurtured and cared for. And I had a very weird experience because I now work – I run an after school club myself and I work with children as well one to one. And I got transferred to this school in Holborn and I'm walking in and I see this guy and I'm suddenly filled up with warmth and I couldn't – you know, this is two years ago, I'm forty years old. And I just see this face and I felt warmth, and I couldn't – and I started chatting to this guy and it turned out that he'd been my play – like play worker for me when I was six, seven years old. And I ended up being his boss, and he'd been my play worker when I was six, seven years old. But the impact that had on me of that warmth and you know, that I do that job – now as well, and it's just kind of irony, or maybe it's destiny, you know. I don't know but how these kind of positive relationships when you're young, when you're going through turmoil, just like my Aunt Thelm, the old lady, you know, I look back and feel blessed that I had that relationship and I did have some sense of ... normality? I don't think – some sense of care, you know, I don't think love, maybe love, I don't know. I didn't know what love was, but something that somebody cared and you know, I look back and thank –

I thank God that I had them people, those experiences in my life to kind of – you know, otherwise it would have all felt bad. It wasn't all bad, you know, so –

[1:31:38]

What types of smells do you remember?

As I say, tar, you know, the smell of burning tar is probably my favourite smell. Yeah, burning tar. And the heat from the grills of the heater, I can remember those. Even though it's not really a smell, it's kind of musky, I can remember them. The launderette in Somers Town, which is still there, I can remember the smell of the launderette, the kind of moisture. I remember alcohol, erm, I can remember like the kind of, the school, you know, it was an old Victorian building but the smell in the hallways and the corridors and the staircases. And as I've said, you know, the Tottenham, that – I can still smell it now, that Tottenham kit, I can still smell that now. I can think about it and smell it, it's almost there. And I'm a mad Tottenham fan you know, so it's like very iconic, an iconic moment for me it was [laughs]. I remember the smell of dogs as well and animals because living on a game keeping farm and the dogs at the first foster parents, I can remember those smells as well. And food, you know, when you're a bit malnutrition and under nourished and not being fed properly, the smell of food almost has a poetic – you know, like the Pied Piper, you know, you follow the smell almost, especially the bakers, the bakers just, yeah.

[1:33:28]

When you was younger what were your visions of the future?

[Sighs] Wowie, cor, what type of young are we speaking about really?

From the age of eight till – from eight till nineteen.

[Sighs] Wow, that's an amazing length of time really. I think my visions of the future at eight would have – would have been just based around a family unit. There was

always this kind of yearning really, you know, that would have been what I would have been looking for. Although probably the experiences of the care system would have began to, you know, shatter that fantasy at some point, you know. In later life, you know, I can remember being fourteen, fifteen, and I'd see my foster brothers with girlfriends and that. And when I had a girlfriend I felt like something, not just 'cause it was the thing to do as a teenager but I think it still kind of represented that sense of hey, I'm normal, you know. But always family, it was always about family, even when I was sixteen, seventeen, I always kind of thought about – I was always thinking about getting married, having children, you know, that kind of stayed with me really for a long time. And when I kind of got into my twenties and became a little bit self destructive I felt so inadequate, you know, 'cause everyone else was in relationships and I couldn't hold down a relationship and I didn't trust anyone and I didn't know how to act in relationships. And I felt almost inadequate, you know, it really affected my self esteem. But I got over it [both laugh], hence the three children.

[1:35:35]

What were your financial support systems?

Oh God.

And what types of preparations did you have before you left care?

To be quite honest, you know, the system – even though the system now is not brilliant, compared to what it was like in my day, you know, it – there was not such a thing as after care, you know, you didn't get a leaving care team, in those days there was not such a thing. Basically my mum and my dad were great, my family were great, but I was never ready to go into a flat on my own. I mean firstly I didn't have the tools to deal with it, to do it and secondly the fear of being alone was overwhelming. Although I couldn't voice that, you know, I was just walking around like confident, you know, 'I've got a flat, wowee!' You know what I mean? And you know, I got a grant, a very small grant to get stuff for the flat and that was it, that was as far as my leaving care support was. There was no other support apart from, as I

say, when I had a breakdown, which was probably a year after I got a flat I think, and they came back on board but there was no financial support. No, but they kind of – I think they took responsibility for me because I was a danger to myself. So they came back and it was extended, the social workers were back in my life again. But I didn't actually mind that time, you know, so – but there was no such thing as leaving care teams and you know, it was kind of like a tick box, are they ready to move? La, la, la, you know, it's very similar now, reviews, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, are they independent, la, la, la, let's do that, let's tick that off, bye. But my foster mum and dad, they wasn't like that, you know, they were in my life, I was half a mile away from them. I took my washing – to do my washing there. I was there eating dinner all the time, you know, I was still part of the family. But being on my own was not, you know, it's kind of like not nice. I felt isolation, it was horrible. I can do it now, I'm okay now, I still have moments where it frazzles me but I'm quite comfortable, you know, I'm surrounded by kids that I work with who are screaming, or my kids are screaming so that little hour of peace and quiet now doesn't take me into kind of a negative thought process. But it do do for – for many moons.

[1:38:08]

You mentioned that you accessed your records.

Yes I did.

How simple was it?

Erm, it's quite a – it was quite a complicated procedure and not the greatest of experiences. Basically it was close to the time that the Data Protection Act changed, which meant that you were entitled legally to see – because before you weren't entitled to see this stuff. So I remember I went to see a social worker a couple of times, 'Are you sure you want to do this?' Blah, blah, blah, and then you know, I kind of got the stuff and it was like woah! And at the time I'd started writing a book, so the whole experience was quite intense. I suppose I was on a journey trying to find some unanswered questions but there were so many blanked out words in it. Because

of the Data Protection Act they tend to blank out, so there'd be stuff about your parents and your brothers and sisters that was just blanked out as if it wasn't relevant to you. So it's about you, and what was very painful was the interpretation of people, you know, being called a manipulative eight year old child who has a – you know, they put an advert for me in *The Times* newspaper, that's what they used to do with foster children. I think it was in *The Times*, and it was like, Colin has a good understanding of self and he's quite a manipulative – and it was like – I nearly swore then. I'm an eight year old child, you know, I kind of look and I feel – how can you say that about a child? And some of the – you know, the way that they interpret, it's very, you know, I wouldn't choose to use that language for the children that I work with now, you know, and I found it quite uncomfortable. And I had an ongoing issue with the council that I was looking into around my time in care, specifically with my first carers. And what happened is, amazingly – amazingly lots of stuff that would have backed up my story as such, I don't want to go into it too deeply, but would have backed up things that I was saying, disappeared. So I found that very uncomfortable. I did kind of take it to the council, I took a complaint to the council when I was thirty-five and it went some way to being rectified but ... a bit complicated [laughs]. And the irony was, my borough that ended up being my foster carer was the borough that I ended up working for [laughs]. Yeah, so –

[1:41:08]

What would you say you have gained from being in care that others haven't?

For me, and I can only speak for myself, I've kind of learnt to be honest with myself and embrace feelings and emotions, you know, and kind of – I have quite a good understanding of the processes of looking at stuff and dealing with stuff and sitting with pain and growing with painful situations, you know. Kind of the stuff that used to make me respond negatively to, now I can just embrace it and it's kind of given me an identity, it's quite ironic really because it's almost like becoming full circle, because at first you're searching for this identity and for me personally because I do a lot of stuff around people in care and care leavers, in a way it's kind of given me a sense of identity. And plus, I mean you know, the fact that I'm a good dad, given

everything that affected me, that's the most overwhelming need I had in my life, was to be a good parent. You know, 'cause of my experiences around parenting and the fact I'm a good dad is, you know, to me if I die if I walk out of here now it would be the most precious thing in my life, you know, and just being able to help others. I've kind of got a lot of compassion inside me and a lot of empathy and I kind of work with a lot of children, young people who have experienced things like I experienced, and to be able to kind of show them a bit of empathy and to – for them to be able to realise, hey this guy's not just a person who talks and tells me what to do, this guy, he's felt some of this stuff, he understands it, you know. And I've worked with plenty of children one on one who are in care and you know, they're – it's like a mirror for me. And I go home at night and they don't realise I'm carrying that stuff with me. But as much as it's painful for me 'cause I look at them and it takes me back, or I might be frustrated or angry at the system, 'cause I still get angry at the system even though in an ironic way I'm kind of part of the system, you know, it's a pleasure to be able to give them a positive – some positivity, some understanding, you know. And I'll carry on – to me that's a lifetime's journey, I feel that I have a duty to do that and I don't know why. And that's probably how my childhood's imprinted on me, I have the need to help others or to try, you know. And maybe sometimes it may be self – it might be a self defence mechanism or it may come at some personal cost to myself but you know, I'm a big boy [laughs].

[1:44:15]

What would you say – how would you say you were supported academically?

[Laughs] Zero, how does that sound? You know, not, no, nada, not supported, not encouraged to go to college. It was accepted that you got in trouble at school, you know, you didn't have virtual headteachers like you have now and OFSTED checking the outcomes for children in care, that didn't exist. In them days it was like children in care, trouble makers, take them out, put them in a unit, you know. And I had – I was – I loved learning and I had a lot of potential as a young person, you know, as I kind of got into businesses from a young age, started my own little enterprises and businesses. You know, and I look back with regret in all honesty. [pause –

background noise] I look back with regret and kind of wonder what would have been, you know, had I been given the opportunities that, you know, people that in care – weren't in care at the time when I was in care were given. And it still makes me angry today because I've kind of done a lot of research and the statistics and outcomes for young people in care around education are disgusting, absolutely disgusting. So it kind of – it saddens me to think that twenty-five years later the improvement is slight.

[1:46:13]

How did that affect your choice and voice?

My choice and my voice? Well it affected my choice, you know, as I say I kind of got into trouble with the police and kind of hung around with the wrong group of people, did the wrong types of things. It definitely affected my choices because I got involved with alcohol and drugs, you know, my – my role models became, you know, they weren't kind of academic people, you know, they were people with money doing bad things. And my voice – did it affect my voice? I've always been a good communicator but I'm just not sure in the past when I was communicating, what was really going on or what I thought other people thought they wanted to hear. So it definitely affected my voice. You know, I had thirty-five jobs before I became a play worker, and numerous businesses, so I kind of went from one job to the next, to the next, to the next. I could talk myself into a job, you know what I mean? That's one of the skills I learned, to manipulate people from a young age, kind of going to an interview intuition and tell them what they wanted to hear, you know. I got some crazy jobs and I had thirty-five jobs, maybe about four, five, six businesses. But I never stuck at it, I never really kind of stuck it. I never really knew what I wanted, never really knew what I liked. I loved the esteem of walking and saying, 'Hey look, I'm an estate agent,' or, 'I'm a milkman.' [Laughs] 'I'm a film extra,' you know, that's some of the jobs I've done. And – but then you know, probably the biggest impact on my later life was separating from my ex wife and I kind of looked at my life, where it was going, drinking and drugs and stuff like that, and made a decision then that I didn't want to carry on on this path. And then I kind of knew I always liked children and then I fell into working with young people at the same time as stopping drinking

and facing my divorce and kind of seven years later, you know, I haven't had a drink and, you know, I'm still divorced [laughs]. But I've got a lovely new partner and a six month old baby, you know, and people trust me with their children, I'm a very privileged person, you know, people trust me with their children and I love kids. And I think in a way I live my childhood through my children and the children I work with, you know. And probably that's okay 'cause that's as good as it's going to get really and you know, that's okay, I'm happy with that [laughs].

[1:49:28]

In your childhood, who would you say played the role of the parent?

I mean, well, ironically I suppose when I lived with my biological mum it would have been me really. I'm sure she did in one way or other but I just felt responsible, so I would imagine – it looked – looking back I felt like I was the parent. It probably wasn't like that, you know, I'm sure my mum made me have a bath and tried to feed me and look after me but there was always lacking, there was always, you know, there was something missing. So therefore I felt like I was always responsible for her, you know. I was worried that she would get hurt or someone would be rude to her or she'd have an epileptic fit or whether she'd go out for the night and not come back or, [pause in recording] you know, whether one of the men she was with, whatever. So yeah, you know, I don't think I had a parental model, role model. I didn't have a maternal or paternal – I'd love to think I did but I don't think I really did, you know. Both negative father and mother, you know, although I can look back in hindsight and realise they tried, you know. I can have sympathy – try and have a bit of sympathy for their circumstances, you know, kind of spent a long time kind of hating my mum for my life experience and the outcomes of my life when I kind of looked in my foster care file and realised this lady had lived in a Barnardo's home, you know [laughs]. So yeah, it's hard to explain really, yeah. But you know, obviously coming into foster care there was parental figures as such, but I don't really think they were ever really – as much as I wanted them to be there was always an understanding that they really weren't, you know, until my last foster family, you know. And at first that was still a battle, and sometimes I still go through these processes in my head when I'm forty

two, you know. But I talk to my mum and dad about these things, I don't hide it from them, I explain it to them, how I tick and how I work, you know, and I how I think sometimes. How something can make me feel insecure or feel rejected. The silliest thing can make me feel rejected, really silly things, and it doesn't have to be – it can be a workmate, it can be a friend, it could be any – someone not picking up the phone [laughs]. You know, but I'm objective about it, I understand how it works now, you know. And that really interests me, not interests me but you know, there's a lot of care leavers my age and older than me, you know, that are still getting affected by being in care now in some small way or other, so –

[1:52:30]

How much freedom did you feel you had as a child?

Did I have as a child?

Yeah, how much freedom?

I had freedom beyond what you could possibly imagine, you know, as I say you know, my children are eight and ten and my baby's six months old but my eight and ten year old, they don't even walk to the shop on their own, you know. I was just left to run the streets of Somers Town [laughs] probably you're talking from four or five years old, you know, I was on the streets at four or five years old roaming the streets, you know. So from four or five to eight you know, just absolute freedom really, too much freedom, you know. But then my mum would be out a lot, that's how it was, and I don't know if that's what it was like in the '70s, you know, I think that was partly because that's the way it was for my mum and for me but I think there was an element of, you know, it was a different time. I think the '70s was a bit different, you know, people played out more and the doors were open, you know, and your neighbours were your neighbours and the community meant more. So I think there's an element of that but also an element of bad parenting, you know.

[1:53:54]

Did you feel safe?

Did I feel safe? No, I never felt safe really, not on the streets or not really with my mum. I never felt safe 'cause at any given time I could be bullied, at any given time I could be taken to live with someone for a week, a month, a weekend, a day. At any given time my – my mum could have had an epileptic fit or found a new man, at any time a social worker or a headmaster or a teacher would be make – you know, I never felt safe. I mean I did feel safe in primary school, that's it, nowhere else. In primary school and in clubs, like holiday play schemes, nowhere else, nowhere else. Unless – maybe when I went to visit my granddad, when I went to see my granddad, I felt close to my granddad, he was probably the most positive maternal relative I had, but I didn't see a lot of him really and he died when I was fourteen, so, yeah.

[1:55:02]

What does trust mean to you?

Trust, what does trust mean to me? Trust means feeling safe enough to be myself and to know that nobody's going to hurt me or reject me for it. Being safe is being able to tell the people that I love what I really think and what I really feel. Being safe is ... my daughter on my knee smiling at me making, you know, that's what being safe for me it. I feel happiest around my children, I feel safest around my children, you know, yeah.

[1:56:11]

Have you ever been to counselling and did it help?

[Laughs] It's funny, we had this conversation already. Yes, I have been to counselling, I've spent probably in and out of counselling maybe ten years, in and out of counselling. It kind of – as I say, it started in a strange way, this journey for the holy grail of finding my past started because I went to college to get a counselling

degree, and whilst doing my counselling degree I had to have therapy. And it was only then that I started really talking about the stuff that had happened to me as a child and thinking about it. And it was from that that I decided to approach the local authority about some of the treatment that I'd had in care when I was younger. And that's how it all came about and they funded me to go to some counselling. But this is what I was saying about endings, I always kind of ended the counselling sessions so that I was in control and I could manipulate the sessions, up until recently. And ironically I've been in counselling for four years, I've got my last counselling session next Thursday, which is great because it's a positive ending for me and I've been in group therapy for four years at Tavistock Clinic, which is you know, based around psychoanalysis and the impact of what your childhood has on you. So for me it's been great, and plus you know, when I read counselling, when I read Freud and when I read this guy called John Bowlby and he talks about attachment theory, and even though I was on the course I read this theory about attachment and it impacted me massively. It was like, wowee, I understand some of this stuff now! You know, I could understand where some of my feelings were coming from and why I felt certain ways and how not being nurtured as a young child, how that had impacted me. And it was like kind of mind blowing, it was like a eureka moment. But as I say, I've had counselling but it's only been in the last four years where I've probably been ready for it 'cause I wasn't looking for something this time round. Whereas before I always had this expectation that I was going to find something or was looking for something to make sense, whereas this time it was just more about accepting, you know. So –

[1:58:56]

What advice would you give to people going into care?

Oooh [sighs], to make sure that they're listened to. To make sure that they have someone that they can confide in. [Pause] And to try and – I think it's difficult, you know, I work with children who are in and out of the care system, you know, and I think the main thing is to make sure you're listened and that you have your say. And that if ever you're upset or feel unsupported, that you find someone who can support you, you know. And I'm a – I'm a major believer that people in care should have

mentors that are non professional, as in a sense of they're not people making decisions for them but are people that listen to them. So you know, I think it's a bit of a difficult question really in all honesty 'cause of – given the difference in age of children coming in care and – but yeah, make sure - you're listened to and don't – don't blame yourself, don't feel guilty for something that's not in your control, you know. But perhaps I'd be saying that to them as adults rather than children.

[2:00:39]

If you could go back in time, what would you tell yourself?

[Laughs] If I could go back in time [sighs]. That it was okay [laughs], it was okay to be me, you know, it was okay, it wasn't my fault. And to learn by your mistakes a bit bloody quicker [laughs], you know, to learn from my mistakes quicker because you know, kind of repeat patterns. I would rather have learnt quicker, but – and to find yourself, you know, so kind of find who you really are, you know, to be true to yourself and to be content in who you are as a person, where you've been, where you're going, and don't worry about other people. Forget about – forget about other people's – what they think of you or what you think is normal or what they perceive to be normal. Be an individual, you're unique [laughs].

[2:02:01]

Who would you say cared for you and had your best interests?

Who cared for me and had my best interests? It would have to be – do you know what? I've got to be fair here because there was a lot of professionals and a lot of social workers and a lot of teachers and therapists and people that had my best interests at heart. And as much as some of the decisions they made, given where we were and the time that we lived in and the era that we lived in, may well have impacted on my life positively and negatively, predominantly negatively in younger years. The fact of the matter is, they still were people that were trying to make decisions that were going to help me. Erm, can you ask me the question again please?

Who did you feel cared for you and had your best interests?

The odd thing is the haven of primary school again, just always go back to primary school, always. And maybe my granddad but I think my maternal mum had issues with my – the rest of the family so it was never quite as clear as that. But I think predominantly it would be primary school. Then there was little flickers of hope with the foster carers, little flickers of hope. And they did – some of them did care for me but it just wasn't meant to be. And then it was definitely my surrogate nan, my Aunt Thelm, the old lady with the jumble sales. And then 100 percent without a shadow of a doubt my mum and dad now, my family now, you know, they have been my stalwarts. You know, my mum and dad are my rocks, you know, my rock in the sea. And you know, my partner, my ex wife, you know, they all cared for me. They all played a massive part on me becoming who I am and learning by some of the mistakes and trying to better myself. And yeah, I mean I couldn't sit here and say I was uncared for, you know, 'cause I was always cared for by someone or some – somebody or some professional, it was just the level of care, you know, and the lack of nurture at such a young age, you know, kind of – you know, how do you define love? You know, how do you quantify it? You know, it's – I'm sure in a hundred years time people will be – you know, you can't, it's impossible. I can quantify it when my daughter's sitting on my lap and I'm looking in her eyes and she's smiling at me, I can quantify it but I can't put words to it. But I can't quantify it as me – what it was for me then. You know, I can't quantify – for me caring was just about a lot of people making a lot of decisions, a lot of upheaval. So there wasn't ... I can't really relate it to something positive in – if you're talking before, you know, thirteen years old. I can't relate it to really an awful lot of positive stuff. But you know, it is what it is. I'm having a ramble aren't I? I'm rambling now, I'm going to start a poem in a minute, yeah? [Both laugh]

What's your thought on this statement?

On this tape?

On this statement.

Go on.

Can I repeat the question?

Yeah.

[2:05:57]

What's your thought on this statement? No one can change their past but they can shape their future.

Absolutely, absolutely. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery and today is but a gift. So yes, absolutely. But our past, our – we have to live in the here and the now, today, and accept our past to truly reach that goal of a future that perhaps we think we might want, or the one that we'll get that we didn't think that we wanted but we really wanted it [laughs].

FS?: We've got ten more minutes before we have to round it up.

Oh, finish?

FS?: Yeah, 'cause Colin has to leave at quarter past.

Okay.

Well I mean I can stretch it – I can stretch it probably to one-thirty.

Yeah, thank you. 'Cause we haven't covered his adult life, I was going to do it now.

[Laughs] Have you got another three days?

[Laughs] Okay, thank you.

I mean if need be I can – I can probably push to quarter to two and then I'll have to be out of the door.

Okay.

Well in that case then, we'll carry on another ten minutes and then we'll have a break.

Okay, no problem.

Is that okay?

Yeah, absolutely.

Okay, great.

[2:07:33]

Could you talk me through your transition to independence after you left care?

Yeah, see I kind of don't see it as transition to independence, I kind of see it as getting thrown into a flat and not knowing anything about looking after yourself. So transition is in between, and kind of you're in between, where I wasn't actually ready for it. So it was never a transition for me, it was a scary experience, you know, I was never ready to have my own flat. I was very immature, excuse me, didn't have the knowledge or the skills to run a flat, to look after a flat. Yeah, it wasn't a great experience at all, you know, it was pretty much a – very much isolated – I don't think I was isolated, you know, I was surrounded by friends and drinking and going out and all that, but you know, it was that kind of being on my own, I hated it. And financially I got into debt, I didn't pay my rent, I didn't do this, you know, I kind of lived on the bread line. And you know, I tried to get jobs and work but I kind of think

I – similar to nowadays, I was kind of stuck in the poverty trap but I always was a working person, I always kind of like believed in the ethic of work and you know, it's part of my identity. But yeah, it wasn't very nice. You know, my foster carers really tried to support me as in, you know, if I was short of money they'd buy me furniture and they'd get me stuff, you know. So it wasn't that they weren't supportive but there was never kind of anything in place that your foster carer was trained to train you to be a, you know, independent young person who's running their own flat, it wasn't like that. There wasn't a leaving care team, so no one came to your flat and checked if you were paying your bills or, you know, if your flat was dirty or if you had food in the cupboard or anything like that. So yeah, it wasn't – it wasn't really a transition. I mean, to be quite honest I don't think I became really responsible until much later in life to be honest, you know. Kind of, it was a negative spiral of kind of a flat on my own or a relationship that didn't work out. So I never kind of managed to get that independence and I was always kind of looking for someone to care for me as well, you know, be it a partner or a girlfriend or, you know. So it was kind of – I kind of disenabled myself in a way as well.

[2:10:18]

Could you describe your first night in your accommodation?

[Sighs – pause] Yeah I can kind of remember the furniture and the stuff around the flat. I can remember the kitchen, I had a nice balcony, which was quite nice. I always felt quite safe though 'cause I was literally across the road from a police station, so that was nice, until my friends came round [laughs]. Erm, but yeah, I can remember kind of being scared, you know, I couldn't – I had to have the radio on, I had to sleep with the radio on. I did quite a lot of sleep with the radio on, and the irony now is I'm the lightest sleeper and I hate any noise when I sleep, but I had to have – like noise around me to sleep, you know, I couldn't kind of – it wasn't – it was quite scary really. It was okay when I met a girl 'cause it was like, wow, you know, I'm eighteen, I've got a flat, come and look at my flat, you know. And that was nice 'cause it was all about ego and feeling a bit of self esteem, you know. But yeah, no, it was – it wasn't – I lost the flat in the end really, I didn't manage. I mean I probably stayed in

the flat for around a year and lost it due to getting in rent arrears. I – you know, as I say, I had a – got sectioned and then I basically lost the flat really. Which is sad because if I had managed to look after that flat and kind of push on – if there was someone other than my foster carers giving me support I believe, as with my education, that I may well have been able to manage that situation and, you know, the difficulties with it. And the same if I was supported around education, you know, I would have gone on and achieved something. Not to detract from what I've achieved but you know, I always kind of – there wasn't that support, it was, you know – you may well find that people tell you it was, you know, but I can tell you categorically there wasn't. So you know.

[2:12:50]

Could you tell me about your adult life and what opportunities have been open or closed by being in care?

That's a very interesting question. I mean it's such a generalistic question, you know, I could kind of be talking about something there and then here, you know, it's like chalk and cheese. I mean my adult life, okay. My adult life probably pretty much up until I was about thirty was based around, erm, [sighs], er, stopping my self defence mechanism from kicking in, so I'm trying to think – think the answer through properly. It would have been based around predominantly trying to fit in and feel normal and feel accepted. It's very similar to my childhood. At the same time very chaotic, you know, not holding jobs down, getting involved in drinks, drugs, gambling, negative – negative things. Quite self destructive personality, you know. I kind of had a what the hell attitude, you know, I think I was quite scarred really when I look back, and I felt so inadequate, you know, I felt kind of – I still felt inadequate. It's like my friends were having relationships and I couldn't hold a relationship down 'cause I was too clingy, you know, I was so clingy. And so it was pretty much self destructive really, you know, kind of – and then when I was twenty-four I got into a long term relationship, that was pretty self destructive as well. But you know, the positives – I mean that's not to say that it was all negative, I met some wonderful people on the way, you know. I've had a lot of love in my life, a lot of people who've

supported me and you know, fortunately had the opportunity and the awareness and the support to be able to turn that around. You know, to be able to eventually at last learn from my experiences, you know. At the same time, you know, the – I mean the fact that I'm sat here now is an experience because I've been in care, it's a positive experience, to hopefully – to be able to help other people. For somebody to be able to watch this and maybe say, 'Ah, I feel like that, oh my God, I thought it was just me.' You know, 'I feel like that.' You know, I've kind of sat on committees for two years with a room full of academics, heads of social services, heads of therapy, and I've sat there and been part of decision making processes about children in care. And those people have listened to me, you know, they've actually listened to my life experience. It wasn't tokenistic, they didn't just do it because, hey, you're a person who's a care leaver, we're going to listen to your experience. They actually listened to it and they took it in. And there's some stuff that I've spoke about that was on these documents that went to the government, I mean that's amazing, you know. I've facilitated stuff for the Prince's Trust, I've – you know, I've been filmed on TV on Care Leavers Week. I've had some amazing experiences from being in care, you know, I've been to the House of Parliament, I've been to Buckingham Palace, you know, just absolutely amazing experiences really. And – and there is a little bit of my ego saying, 'Look, I told you, look where I came from.' There is a little bit of that, 'Look where I've come from, I have achieved.' But you know, when I'm objective about it, it's about how it's lovely that I can be myself and that's enough to help other people, you know, what more – how wonderful is that? That your life experience and by being true to yourself and you're honest – by being honest actually helps people. You know, that's quite amazing really isn't it, when I stop to think about it? You know, I'm not trying to be me, I'm not trying to go out of my way to help other people because I feel inadequate. I'm not trying to go out of my way because I feel less than, you know. And that's amazing, that's really amazing when I stop and think about it. That's a gift, it's a gift and you know, the ups and downs of being in care, you know, the quality that I have – of relationship that I have with my children, you know, it's like amazing. And that's – that's due to the negatives – there's probably things that I do with my children and conversations I have with my children that people who are in their forties have never had – never had that level with their children. And that's because of the negative and the positive impact of being in care and you know, the

ups and downs of my adult life, some impacted by being in care, some completely not. Some just because, you know, I was one of those people who looked for the high life, you know, I was looking for the high life, you know, I kind of thought my identity was in a pair of Gucci loafers and a Rolex watch and that people would like me as opposed to just being yourself, so. But being a dad, the most important thing. You know, if my children and my grandchildren are looking at this in years to come, you know, then they'll understand that being a dad and being an honest dad, you know, that's the most important thing to me, really. So if you're watching in twenty years time, hi [laughs]. Sorry.

That's all right, shall we break now?

Yeah.

[2:19:31]

What are you doing now?

I – well first and foremost I'm a father, always. I've got three children, two with my ex wife, one's eight years old, one's ten. I've got a beautiful six month old baby, so yeah, that's my predominant thing in life. But I'm also – I run an after school club for children, I'm a manager so I manage team staff. I've got about fifty-five children I work with ranging from ages four to eleven, and I also do one to one work – intervention work with children with behavioural difficulties, you know, from suffering from different things. Some of them have difficulties in school, some of them are having issues at home, some of them are in care, some of them are going into care, coming out of care, going into care, coming out of care. And you know, try to kind of be a positive influence on them in some small way or another. Yeah, it's something I've become very passionate about. I'm very privileged to get paid to do a job that I enjoy, you know, it's a very fulfilling thing to be part of children's life or in the vicinity of, as such. So yeah, I'm a very privileged person, so yeah.

How does that make you feel about where you are now?

Yeah, I mean absolutely, I mean in a way it's kind of ironic isn't it. It's full circle for me really and ironically I mean up until September last year I got made redundant and I was working for the borough that I was actually fostered by, and as I've mentioned before I've sat in case conferences with children as a professional with the person who was my social worker, you know. And I've sat with academics and I work with children, and parents trust me with their children, you know, and given where I've come from you know, I do feel an awful sense of pride and relief as well, you know, to be doing something I enjoy and to kind of eventually be on the right path. And to be content, that's all I want, to be content in work and home life and relationships. I don't succumb to this perception of happiness, you know, happiness is kind of like clouds, they come and come. I'm just happy to be content [laughs], so –

[2:22:10]

How have you accomplished to create a new family?

How have I –?

Been able to create a new family?

I suppose – I was going to say trial and error but that's not absolutely the case. Well I mean I suppose in a way it is. I've kind of had to spend a big part of my adult life learning about relationships, intimacy, love and expectations and how that all fits in to me as a person. And how other people also have that stuff and you know, eventually along the line I mean I kind of – yeah, it's difficult really 'cause is being divorced a failure or is it just part of life experience? I suppose at first it felt like a failure but I've got two beautiful children and I get on with my ex wife and I have a very good relationship with her, you know, I've got a new partner I love dearly, she loves me. I've got a beautiful daughter, she's got two children so I suppose it's like a good wine, you kind of mature into it, you know. So you know, it's kind of life experience and lots of ups and downs along the way and lots of soul searching and lots of – you know, I've done a lot of reading around kind of human behaviour. I've had lots of

counselling, I became a qualified counsellor, you know, I've kind of done anger management courses, I've done cognitive behavioural therapy. I've gone on Buddhist retreats to find myself and you know, sat around bonfires all night smoking and drinking, you know, trying to find – you know, I've kind of done it all and it's kind of got me to where I am. I think a lot of – I think processing the past and accepting it has allowed me to eventually, you know, kind of find a family and – but there's still fear around that, there's still fear of failure and making repeat mistakes and - the overwhelming thing when my children was born was that you know, they're never going to have a life like me. And that was very, very powerful, you know, and that was a life changing moment where I started looking into my past. And the truth was that it couldn't have been further from the truth, you know, 'cause they were never going to have a life like me because kind of me as a parent and my ex wife and my partner now are not like what my parents were like. But my immediate response was to protect them, you know, it was irrational, it was an irrational thought process due to my life experience. You know, when I had the chance to be objective I could see that it couldn't have been further from the truth, you know. So yeah, it's the most fulfilling – you know, I've kind of spent my whole life wanting a family and the mad thing was, it was probably the need and the yearning to have that and to fit in probably stopped me from having it earlier in life. But that doesn't mean to say that the quality of it later in life is lessened any, so I'm privileged, I'm a very, very lucky person, you know. My children put a smile on my face and you know, I wake up in the morning and I see my little daughter, she's six month old and she's smiling. And she's normally screaming by bedtime but in between I get to see my own children at my ex wife's house and work with, you know, forty or fifty children. You know, my whole day is surrounded by children and young people, so you know, it's – it's a privilege really, you know, and I'm a very lucky person. But I kind of still have this thing, without a family I'm nothing. Without a – that's my identity, is based around my children, so kind of, you know, I still have an identity without them, but without them I feel nothing [laughs]. So yeah.

[2:26:28]

Do you have contact with your parents now?

[Laughs] That's quite a – well not my dad, my dad died in the mid – I think it was the mid '90s or around that time. My biological mother's been a bit of a journey in itself really. From about fourteen I didn't speak to her until about a year ago, so we're talking twenty-six years I didn't speak to her. Erm, I saw her twice last year and just recently I've been to visit her a couple of times, she's in an old people's home, she's blind, she's bedridden. I went to see her Christmas Eve just gone. It's difficult because the feelings and emotions that should be there aren't there. But at the same time I kind of still have compassion, you know, and the fact that I can still have that compassion shows that I've progressed in my life, you know, 'cause you know, resentment and stuff like that, it can be a weight to carry. And letting go of that stuff can be very freeing, you know. But I still battle with myself, you know, I constantly go – tell myself I'm going to go and see her in the home even though it's only about half a mile from where I work. So I tell myself I'm going to go and then I don't go, so I still have this kind of dialogue going on. But I mean yeah, I do have contact of a sort but she – my biological mother's very incoherent, you know, as I say like you know, she's bedridden and blind and in a wheelchair, so you know. There's – there's contact as such, but as I say, in twenty-five years I've probably seen her four times.

[2:28:38]

What impact do you think you will have on the next generation?

Impact, of care leavers or people in care?

People in care, yeah.

Well, erm, I'd like to think that my experience [sighs] – my unselfishness of being able to talk about these experiences, even though they can be painful to me, might help people like yourself. That's what I'd like to think, and I think because I have a voice and because I have an experience and I've put myself into situations where I can kind of make a difference. So I'd like to think that if – if my experience could help one person in care then it would be worthwhile, you know, or one care leaver then it

would be worthwhile. But I've been privileged enough to kind of like meet quite a few people, including yourself, it's been a real privilege, so yeah, you know. It's some – it's kind of a nice end to the story really.

[2:30:11]

Have you had a reunion with people that you knew in residential home- or foster homes?

That's a bit of an odd one really. I haven't really in all honesty. There was one guy I was close to and he kind of just disappeared and I haven't no, I haven't, no. I've bumped into one girl that was in the children's home – ironically I bump into the staff all the time, in the supermarkets you know, I bump into the lady who was the night staff and she come over and see my baby and one of the other night staff, her daughter was in my class at school so I bump into them. I often bump into the staff but not the children, you know. And you kind of often wonder – because I know the outcomes for some of them, you know. Some of them unfortunately ain't here today, you know, they died, their life experience and their paths – and some of them I often wonder where they – how they got on and where did they – where did they go? Where did their lives take them, you know? So yeah, I thought about contacting them on Facebook but I hate – I hate Facebook and modern technology, so [laughs] – but yeah, I often wonder how they – how their lives panned out.

Do you have any contact with old foster carers or old care home staff?

Yeah as I say, the care home staff, the children's home, I bump into quite regularly. Foster carers, I mean my last foster family are my family, so obviously I kind of see them as my family, I don't see them as a foster family. My children have got their surname, so you know, they're my family. But ex foster carers, I mean when I went on this journey of discovery or whatever you want to call it when I got my foster care files, I revisited everywhere I'd lived within my whole life. I kind of – my daughter, she's ten now, she was only just born and so I took her everywhere, to Somerset, to all these places I lived, to where I lived with my mum, to where I lived in Camberwell.

And during that process I did kind of revisit, I went back to the farm but the family didn't live there anymore. Ironically they'd – I found out later that they'd split up and got divorced. But yeah, the ones – the first foster carers in Somerset I've kind of revisited. The first foster carers ever, I bump into some of their children sometimes but I've never gone back there. I did once or twice but I, you know, kind of had reasons for not going back.

[2:33:04]

Why was you keen to tell your story?

Yeah, that's – yeah – I suppose that's very relevant isn't it really? Erm, two reasons really, first and foremost 'cause I hoped that it would make a difference and it might help some people. And secondly 'cause I kind of had – have these conversations with my kids, they kind of understand that I was fostered and in children's homes and they kind of understand that their nan is not their biological nan and stuff like that. So I kind of thought it was a way of, at some point in the future maybe – maybe I'll be here, maybe I wouldn't be here but they'd be able to kind of look and maybe understand their dad's childhood a little bit more and understand why their dad's the way he is, you know, or – even though we do talk a lot about this stuff, you know, even though they're only eight and ten, they kind of – you know, my daughter's kind of understood that nanny has lots of children coming and going all the time and that that was me as well. So yeah, you know, there's two big reasons. And plus I thought I was going to become a film star [laughs]. Sorry, crap jokes when I'm nervous, I can't help it.

[2:34:45]

Is there anything that you would like to say that we have not covered?

Not that I – not really, I don't think so. I think I've – cut [laughs].

We're going to end now.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

C'est la vie.

[END OF RECORDING – 2:35:07]