

Thalidomide: Mandy Masters (2012)

Ruth Blue interviews Mandy Masters for the *Thalidomide: An Oral History* project.

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This is Ruth Blue interviewing Mandy Masters on the 30 November 2012 at her home in Greys in Essex for Thalidomide: An Oral History project. Mandy, have you seen and signed the copyright and consent forms?

Yes, I have.

And could you start off by telling me your full name, age, date and place of birth?

Okay, my name is Mandy Lorraine Masters. What else was it you wanted to know? Was it my date of birth?

Yes, date and place of birth.

Okay, my date of birth is 20 September 1961 and I was born at Orsett at Greys in Essex.

First of all the first few questions are about your childhood, your birth, your family and school life and any early medical interventions. So could you start off by saying a little bit about your family background? Who your parents were, what sort of work they did and if you have any siblings.

Okay. My mum and dad are Len Hornsby and June Hornsby. I do have siblings. I have three brothers and two sisters but one recently died so I've only got one sister now. My dad was ... he used to build concrete garages for Brysons and obviously my mum spent time at home with us.

So she was a stay at home mum?

Yes, yes. Until she got older and then she started to train to be a staff nurse and then when my nephew got murdered it all went wrong and she gave it up.

Okay, we'll go back to that one. And moving onto your parents' decision to use thalidomide, do you know who prescribed the drug for your mum?

Yeah, what was the doctor's name? Dr Sanderland.

And do you know what it was prescribed for?

Yes, she couldn't sleep, it was the sleeping. Some took it because of sickness but she took it because of not sleeping.

Okay, so insomnia. And do you know how long she took it for?

No.

Is it something she was happy to talk about, the fact that she'd taken the drug or was it something that she felt was a difficult subject for her to talk about?

I've never actually ... I must admit we've never really spoken about it, we've never really ... all I know is my dad was saying that it's a good job they kept a prescription because first of all the doctor was saying they didn't give it to her and they had a prescription.

That's interesting, so the doctor said she was never prescribed it but she'd kept hold of a ...

Yes, yes. So that was good. But yes, I've never really had an in depth conversation with my mum about it because ... I don't know, I think I was always worried in case it would be sad for her. One thing she always was worried about was if ever I blamed her, which is one thing I would never do. So she was worried in case there were times in my life in which I would blame her.

Why did you fall into the ... you mentioned your siblings, where did you fall in the line of your siblings?

I came on the fifth.

You were the fifth child?

Yes, yes. And the reason my mum had another one after me is she kind of got it into her head that she would never be able to have another normal baby and the doctor said the only way she would get this out of her head was if she had another child. So that's where my younger sister came in.

Okay, so after you.

Yes. But I was a twin actually.

Really?

Yes. My mum lost the first ... she thought she'd lost the whole baby but they said no there was me. So I was a twin.

That's interesting, isn't it?

Mm. She always felt with the other pregnancies she was always fine and she did say to me ... she used to say to her mum, "There's something the matter with this baby." And her mum used to say, "Don't be silly." And my mum kept thinking I was going to be a Down's Syndrome and she kept saying, "Something's the matter." Obviously they were not expecting me to be born without arms.

And I did ... because I'm now writing my own book, I'm having to ask things about me when I was born and I find more that my dad tells me more because obviously I see a lot more of my dad. And he said ... when my mum got taken into hospital my dad was at work and he'd got a phone call saying that it was the hospital and a baby daughter had been born but there's a problem. My dad said, "What do you mean there's a problem?" And they said, "Well, your baby's got some deformities and we need you to come over." And when he got over there he said, "Has my wife seen the baby?" And they said, "No." So he was livid at the fact that they'd straight away took me from my mum without even saying why they'd took me and I think they wanted my dad to go in and tell my mum and, you know, my dad said, "You're going to have to go in there and say what's the matter." So they did and obviously they then brought me in and showed my parents my deformities but my mum and dad said straight away that it doesn't matter, you know. They loved me straight from day one.

But they were given the option, "You don't have to take her home. We can take her away now and you can have her put in a home" because a lot got put away and that's one thing they didn't want. And then obviously my dad went home to tell my sister then and my three brothers, because they were obviously dying to find out what their mum had had. So he went home and he sat them down and he said, "You've got a baby sister," he said, "But there is something wrong with her." And he told them that I had no arms and one of my brothers, when I was just chatting with him about it, he said, "Oh, when Dad came home and told us we were dying to see what you looked like because we couldn't imagine what somebody looked like without arms." So they day that they brought me home, my mum placed me on the floor, she took my shawl off and took my clothes off so they could see, you know. And then once they'd seen they just got on with going and playing, it didn't bother them. And from that day I was brought up a very, very normal child.

And my mum said at six months old I was laying in pram and she was busy washing up and there was a newspaper at the bottom of the pram and she could hear rustling and when she came in to have a look she said my feet were rustling this paper. So then she kind of thought, "Maybe I should get her to start using her toes." So she said she had the plastic rollers, you know the old fashioned plastic rollers and she said she put them on my toes and I used to wriggle them about and then from doing that, then it was other things. And at nine months old I was standing.

Wow.

You see, when the doctors were talking to my parents about me and my life, they did say, "She may not survive, she may only reach nineteen. She basically won't do much, be a cabbage I suppose." They said, "She probably won't have children" and, you know, as time's gone on, I've kind of conquered it all, done it all.

And proved them totally wrong.

Yes, yes. And the best thing, obviously, getting married, you know, because it was a worry. I can't remember much of being fourteen, there was a big blank to my life then and my mum said I was going through such a depression and I can only think that it was a time when girls ... you know, you're fourteen, I was probably worried I wasn't going to get a boyfriend, you know. So that little bit of my life went blank. But

yes, to get married and to have children. The best bit was the grandchildren because that was ... like I say, that was the cherry on the cake, to have the grandchildren.

So I ... I can remember being really young and not wanting to pull my knickers up. I can remember shouting from the toilet, "I've finished!" And my mum would say, "Well, you pull your knickers up." "I don't want to!" And then she said, "Well then you stay there." And I said to her once, "I thought you were so cruel" and she said, "Yes, but you didn't see me cry. I used to break my heart when I made you do things, I broke my heart," she said, "But if we had molly coddled you and done everything for you I wouldn't be what I am now." So great parents.

I think that makes all the difference actually from what I've understood so far. Because this is an oral history interview and it's not a visual interview, could you describe for anybody listening to it what your level of impairment is?

What do you mean?

How were you born.

Oh right, yeah. I have one finger on my right side, I have nothing on the left and that's it. I always said I could have done with another little finger on the other side to keep me coat on because when it was windy it was handy having a little finger.

To hook things over.

Yes. So it would have been handy to have one the other side.

And do you know ... so your parents were aware that you'd been born with an impairment right from the start and they said, "We want her anyway..."

Yes.

Do you know if they were given any help or advice or support by medical professionals at that time?

Not straight away.

Okay and you went straight home from hospital and you mentioned you were automatically brought into the family and brought into the sibling environment.

Yes.

So would you say, in general, you had a reasonably happy childhood?

Yes, definitely. Oh, definitely, definitely. Even going to school, I mean my mum had to really fight to get me into a normal school because some of the local schools wouldn't take me and then she went to this one particular school, spoke to the headmistress and she said, "Well, we can give it a go." And what I find ... it's lovely now, my grandson's actually going to the school that I went to, you know, and I think that's lovely.

Yes, I had such a happy childhood, I couldn't say that I was unhappy at all because they'd brought me up to be as everyone else. I mean I hate the word normal ...

I know, it's so difficult isn't it?

... because we are all normal.

What alternative word is there? I never know, I'm always going, "So compared to normal people" and you're kind of ...

I know, yeah, yeah.

Who is the normal person?

But I was always determined to do things my way. If somebody said, "She can't do that" then I would want to. I would always want to try everything. And, of course, when my mum and dad got put in touch with Roehampton about artificial arms, I remember seeing a picture of me in what they called 'dolly arms' and I must have only been about one, one or two. And obviously they were just for show really but my mum said one thing that she never wanted was for me to stop using my feet because it was important that I still had something to fall back on if I didn't adapt to the arms. And, you know, I have tried many times to wear them but, you know, giving them up and then going back to them, it was just like being a robot really, you know.

And they were very heavy as well, weren't they?

Yes, they were ridiculously heavy. The gas cylinders, we used to have to wear a belt around the waist and have cylinders on each hip and then they developed where the cylinder went into the arm but it was still ... they still wasn't right.

Do you know at what point your parents knew your impairment had been caused by thalidomide?

I don't know. I don't know.

Because at the point a lot of children were born, parents didn't know at that time why the impairment had happened and it was only later that knowledge of thalidomide sort of came in.

I don't know. Like I said, I've never gone into depth with it with them.

Okay, that's fair enough. Do you know if your parents were involved with the Thalidomide Society or any of the other groups that were going on?

Yes, I remember my parents did, they went to lots and lots of meetings because I've recently seen old clips of papers and they said, "Does anybody know who these parents are?" And I think, "Oh my God, they're mine!" Yes, they went to many, many meetings to fight for compensation. I know my dad said the first time it was ridiculous the offer of compensation. They really did fight but I don't know how many they went to but I know they met other thalidomide parents with children that had the same sort of disability. But yes, it was a frustrating time, a frustrating time for them, you know.

And there was also Lady Hoare.

Yes, the Lady Hoare Trust.

Yes, yes.

Did you ever meet her that you remember?

I can't remember but I think I must have because one vivid ... we went somewhere ... vivid in my mind, I remember getting on this horse coach, this carriage. We went to meet the Hollies and this was all to do with Lady Hoare. We went to this big place and the Hollies were there and Sandy Shaw. But I can remember the big coach and going on that with the horses but I can't remember Lady Hoare. But I think we must have.

She did a lot really at that point in time.

Yes.

And what about meeting other families and children that were affected by thalidomide?

I obviously don't remember when I was younger but my parents obviously did. The first time I ever, ever met another thalidomider ... my mum kept trying to get me to go on these holidays that the Thalidomide Trust had set up and I kept refusing all the time. And then, at sixteen, she said there was this holiday going to Switzerland and she said, "You can go and there will be other thalidomiders there" and obviously I said, "Okay." And we'd gone to Heathrow Airport, no, not the airport, the hotel and in the bar ... I'll never forget because there was all these ... I shouldn't say odd people because I'm one of them!

But they would still have been odd to you at that time.

Yes, yes because I'd never seen anybody else ... I was shocked because I'd never seen anybody with no arms and legs and little hands and all different shapes and sizes and they were drinking and smoking and at that time I wouldn't even swear, do you know what I mean? So I must have lived a little bit of a shallow life and they were, like ... I was just shocked and I'm thinking, "Oh my God, I don't want to stay." And I knew my mum and dad were going to be leaving me there. So yes, that was quite a scary time actually.

And then as the holiday went and we were getting to become friends, I thought ... do you know what? There were some worse off than me. "Oh my God, I'm not as bad because I can do lots of things then," you know, I could completely dress myself, do everything. So yes, it was an eye opener. And then I got to decide to go to Haigh Moor in Jersey, you see, and that's where I met more of them. So yes, it was a very strange experience.

Did you find it useful for you though to be in that kind of environment with other people affected by thalidomide in the same way?

Sometimes but sometimes a bit depressing because some of them, obviously the ones that hadn't had a home, could be quite depressing. There were some that expected people to do things for them, their helpers, do you know what I mean? Where most of the time I did everything for myself so I didn't want to be around them all the time. Again, the word normal is going to come up here because I had a normal life with normal friends so it wasn't going to be my cup of tea to always be with them.

No, that makes sense. And so you went to a ... going back to the prosthetic thing. So you went to Roehampton for a while and they tried to get you to use prosthetic arms but you weren't happy with those.

No and my dad was saying there was one time he specifically said to them, "You are not to put shoes on her. You are not to put shoes." And when they came to pick me up, my dad said that he'd noticed that I'd got really tight strap marks on my feet so he obviously pulled one of the nurses up and said, you know, "These are shoe marks." And they said, "We had to put her shoes on because she was refusing to use the hands so we had to make her wear her shoes" and he wasn't happy with that at all.

That's very restricting, isn't it?

Yes. And as I got to know more, as I started to get older, going to Roehampton, I hated it. I was only talking to my dad about a month ago when I started my book and I was having to type my memories, the thought of Roehampton is awful. I said I can't go to a hospital now and hear lockers, I know it sounds really silly but when I hear somebody undo locker, that little click and seeing lockers brings back memories of when they used to leave me and my mum used to put all the stuff in the locker and that's a sad memory for me. And tiny blue lights, that's a sad memory of Roehampton, lying in the hospital bed and when the tiny lights came on and we knew it was bedtime and it was horrible feelings. And because my dad said to me a month ago, he said, "I hope you don't hold that against us though. We thought we were doing that for your good." And I said the day they got me out of that hospital, I'd had a little bit to do with ... I think I must have been about thirteen, I might have been a little bit younger, and I was in the schoolroom at Roehampton and somebody

had spilt some paint. We were painting things on their glass windows and paint had got spilt and somebody had said I'd done it and I'd refused to clean it up. So I'd had a real sort of ding-dong with the Sister Mears ...

Oh yes, Sister Mears.

I can't even stand the thought of her.

Okay, so you have bad memories of Sister Mears.

Yes. Yes. A lot of people love Sister Mears.

I have to say I've only heard everybody loves her.

Not me. No. Not as I got older. I got locked in my bedroom. They phoned my parents up because I got uncontrollable and they said, "She's really ... you need to come up." And, you know, when my parents came up they said, "She's never coming back here." I said to my dad, "You don't realise that was a big, big weight lifted from me for you to say she's never coming back." And I couldn't wait to get out of that hospital. The only ... there was a little midget nurse called Murphy and whenever my mum and dad had to drop me off and leave me there, I always knew they were going to go because Murphy would come along and she'd go to me, "Come on, let's go to watch telly." So I knew Mum and Dad were going. So the only good memory I had was little Murphy. I see a picture of Sister Mears on Facebook and I cringed. I thought, that woman.

That's so interesting to hear you say that because you are the first person who's ever said anything negative about her at all.

No, me and her certainly ...

Didn't click.

No, no. I guess as a child I was quite outspoken, I still am now, I wouldn't ... I don't let anybody bully me, even as a child I wouldn't. I suppose it's because I've been brought up with a big family and maybe I was too outspoken.

And she reacted against that.

Yes.

It's a possibility, you never know do you?

No.

And so primary school education, you went to a mainstream primary school?

Yes.

Did the school make any special provisions for you while you were there?

My first memory of the infants, which I didn't like, lunchtime I got put on ... there was like a little window ledge and they wouldn't let me sit at the table with the children, I had to sit on this window ledge and I hated it. And obviously I must have kicked up some sort of stink when I was little because the next thing I know my sister, the one that's gone now, she used to come and get me and we used to have our dinners in the classroom. Yes, we used to go and have dinners in the classroom. But as I got older and obviously she left, I wanted to eat the same, I wanted to be up at the table with the children and my dad came up with this great invention. At work he said to the welder, "Could you not put a ring around a fork and a spoon and weld it so it could go around my finger?" And I'll never forget, he came home with this fork and this spoon and he said, "Try this." And I put it on my finger and I could eat at the table.

Wow, yes.

And I don't think he realised that I'm thinking, "Wow ..." and I couldn't wait to go to school and get up to that table the same as everybody else and eat the same as them. Not having to take my shoes and my socks off, it was wonderful. So that's what I did in the end.

And how did people react towards you, other children?

See again I can't ever ... I had a conversation with another thalidomide girl who's the same as me and she said, "Did the kids never get hold of your sleeves and tie them round posts and that?" And I was saying, "No, no never." I mean there might have been a few who said, "Oh you've got no arms" and that. And I can remember the time when the school was saying, "We're going swimming," and I thought, "Oh my God, I've got to have a costume on now." So that was a very hard thing. But I had really good friends, they used to help me like anything, my friends. But I still was very conscious of my ... the top part of me and I can remember queuing up and there was other schools and I used to try and hide behind my friends so they wouldn't see me. And once they went it was fine, I wanted to get in that water.

The only thing, again, I didn't like, they didn't want me to get straight into the water. They wanted me to do something where I'd have armbands. So what they done, they got these bandages, they looked like floaters tied to me and one of the teachers, it was a man teacher, he could see I wasn't happy because, again, I looked different, you see. And he said, "Do you know what? I don't think Mandy will need them, let's take them off her," which, again, I think, "Thank God." And they did and he encouraged me to swim and I did. I just never wanted to have anything different, you know. It's like with the house, I never really wanted lots of adaptations, like a low kitchen, I just wanted to spend my life trying to do things 'normally' like everybody else.

But yes, my infants and junior school I loved. I done everything. I wanted to play rounders, I could never play netball and I really did hate that. I wanted to play netball and I couldn't do that.

I couldn't do it either and I've got arms.

[Laughs]. Tennis, I had a go at tennis. I used to put the tennis racket under my chin. But then when it came to going to the big school, the senior school, that's when things changed because I can remember thinking there's other schools that don't know me. I then didn't want to get my finger out to eat so I started to go home for lunch. That's when my finger went away, I kind of got conscious and I didn't want to wear short ... I started to go into ponchos and when I think back now I used to wear ponchos all the time. That was me hiding, that was just me hiding. I don't now, I'm so changed now.

But when I think back I always ... and, of course, ponchos weren't always fashionable and so finding ponchos was very hard. So for two years I stuck it at the big school and I went back to wearing me arms because I thought, "I want to wear the arms, I don't want to use my feet." But it got tiring because, you know, the big school had stairs, the arms were heavy and I was getting very, very tired and I wasn't enjoying being at the big school so my mum and dad could see that I wasn't happy. So they found a school ... I called it a special school because they was all disabled. But there were people who had bad asthma, there was people there that was in wheelchairs. I wasn't happy, I remember going there and thinking, "This is all disabled." But my mum said to me, "You've got to go to school, you can't just stay at home." So I gave it a go but when I hit fourteen I just didn't want school.

So how long ... that school was like the equivalent years of a secondary school?

No, they started from ... Brandwood was from ... they had young children there to older.

So from about maybe three ...

No I didn't see them about three. I would say about five upwards. But yes I gave it a go but I then became a bit of a rebel and from thirteen started really playing up with the school and at fourteen I thought, "I'm not going to go. I don't want school" and my mum and dad had a lot of trouble getting me to go. And I think in the end, I think the school just gave up and let me ... I didn't want to go to school any more so I left at an early age.

And did you have any subjects at school that you were particularly drawn towards or were interested in?

Yes, you see I loved ... I wanted to type. I had a thing, I wanted to type so my parents bought me an electric typewriter that we had taken to the school and they did get somebody in because I wanted to do shorthand as well. But everything I do, it's best that I do it my way so even typing I did it my way. So yes, I was really interested in the typing. I did love cooking there actually as well. I was very good at doing cakes and cake decorating and I can always remember if the headmaster had special people coming round to look at the school he seemed to always do it at a time I was in cookery because he was very proud of the way I used to use my feet. And he used to always say, "Come and see what she can do."

But when I did leave school and there was obviously what am I going to do for work, my dad went to his work and asked the boss whether he would give me some sort of job in the office and, you know, he did. He gave me a go. I was really pleased.

And how did it work out?

How did it work out?

Yes.

Well, I mean obviously I was just doing bits in the office, a little bit of typing, and the lady that was in the office, Margaret, would get me to do filing. Yes, it was really good actually. And then I always ... I wanted to be a telephonist so before I got that job I did actually go for an interview to be a telephonist and I went for the interview and I did everything ... at that time you had to pull the plugs out and they were saying to me, "I don't know if you'll be able to do this." But, again, great determination I said, "I can" so they let me do that. I passed that and then they said, "The only thing is you will have to carry papers to one person to another but that will be easy because we could put one of the big clips" ... like they have on a clipboard, that could go round my neck on a chain and the people could clip the paper. So they had no problem with that. The only thing that let me down was my spelling because when I had to do the phone and write down things my spelling let me down. And all the people there, they were waiting to see whether or not I'd got the job and when they said, "We can't give it to you because your spelling's not up to standard," everyone in the place was really disappointed because they really wanted me to work with them. And the actual boss said to me, "If you go to college and learn more spelling, come back and we'll give you the job." But, again, I didn't. I kind of thought, "No." And that's when my dad when to his work and they said, "Yes."

Then they were getting a new switchboard at this place and I thought, "I'd love to be on that switchboard" and John [? Spurge 0:05:07] said to me, "It's all yours." So I loved it. And you didn't have to pull the chords, it was like little switch buttons. So I worked doing that and I loved that. But what ended up me not wanting to work is I got told I could have a car, you see, and I never ever thought I would be able to drive.

How old were you now? Roughly what age were you now?

You're looking at just coming up to being seventeen.

Well a car at seventeen, yes ...

So when I got a letter from the Trust saying would I like to go to somewhere in London to see whether I am able to drive, I first of all thought at the time ... you had the little blue disabled cars and I thought, "I don't want one."

Oh yes, I remember those, yes. They're not cool, are they?

No. But no, they said, “No, it’s like a normal car.” So I remember going to London and I had to sit in this dummy car to see how my reflections were on brakes, would I be able to brake quickly. Then they said, “You’ve passed that” and you’ve definitely got strength in your legs. And I’m thinking, “How am I going to steer?” I was thinking I’d have to put my feet up on the steering wheel and they said, “No” and told me how the car would be adapted.

How would it be adapted?

It’s a plate on the floor, all the ... my indicator is on my accelerator. It’s all down on the floor, it’s amazing. Then they said I could have a Mini Clubman or a Mini Clubman estate. So I chose the car, the colour and, you know, I couldn’t want to get my car. And obviously the day we went to pick it up, I then had to get booked in with a driving school and I got booked in with BSM I think it was. But the first guy ... when I got in the car, he was so nervous and he said to me, “I’ve never taught anybody with no arms,” he said, “I’ve got to tell you this and I’m quite nervous.” And I was thinking, “My God, you’re nervous!” He was only with me a few weeks, he must have been really scared and then they gave me somebody else and it was fine.

So obviously once I passed my test ... I failed it the first time, I think I was just too confident. So when I passed my test I then didn’t want to go to work, I wanted to go out and this is when I became a very big rebel. This is when my mum and dad noticed me change.

Freedom.

Yes. Because one I could never go on buses, well, I did give a bus a try one day because I was thinking, “It’s so unfair, why can’t the bus people let me have something ... that I haven’t got to carry money, like a badge or something” because I wanted to go on buses and trains like everybody else. But this particular day I thought, “Do you know what? I’m going to put money in my shoe and I’m going to try a bus.” I didn’t tell my mum or dad and I did. But, again, having to take the money out of my shoe and lift it up ... but I did, I done it.

So having a car was freedom.

Absolutely, yes. Mobility in a different way, isn’t it?

Yes, yes. I can remember asking ... “I would like blackout windows” because, again, being conscious of me I didn’t want people to see me driving without arms. I didn’t get the blackout windows but I just looked normal in a car. Do you know what I mean?

Yes, you’re just sitting there like everybody else.

Yes. And, of course, you know, I started to have days off work, going out with friends and in the end it wasn’t fair on my dad really because my dad worked there. And in the end I said, “I don’t want to work, I just want to go out.” And I can remember taking a bunch of girls in the car up to Liverpool to meet another thalidomider. I’d got friendly with another Mandy and me and her ... when we first went to Switzerland,

when we got home we decided to go there on our own again and we went back to Switzerland on our own, just me and her.

So ... because my mum said that first time I went there on that holiday I went there such an angel and when I came home I'd changed. I'd even stated swearing. And my mum said, "You have changed." But then getting the car, I really did change because I became a free person and I'd started to go out more. I started going up to Liverpool every weekend, going into clubs and I became me.

Yes, you found your own personality and your own ...

Yes.

That's a fantastic story, thank you so much. And so you're naturally answering all of the questions I've got through your stories. I'm just running back making sure there's nothing I've missed out along the way here. So things about first career and things like that you've already talked about and contact with other people affected by thalidomide. And you gained independence really when you got your car. What about things like relationships? Did you find it easy to make relationships?

Yes, I did actually.

You didn't find your impairment got in the way?

No. I started to make friends and have boyfriends and, obviously, I met Wayne.

Is Wayne your partner now?

Yes. We've been together thirty one years now.

Wow. That's pretty impressive.

I mean obviously when Wayne's mum and dad knew about me I think they were really worried that, you know, I wouldn't be able to do anything. And it was a worry, some people didn't think we'd last, they gave us two years.

How did you meet?

It was weird because, again, when I got my car my mum said to me, she said, "Oh, don't ever go down Shaky Jakes." Well, Shaky Jakes was a place that my brothers used to go down. It was like a big field where they'd light a bonfire and I had a thing about hippies at that time, I loved hippies, and they would play

guitars and have a good drink and obviously smoke pot. So my mum said to me, "Don't ever go there. Don't go down there." So what's the first thing I do? I get all my friends and say, "Come on, let's go down there."

If you've been told not to, you know there's going to be something exciting, don't you?

Yes. So I went down and of course my brother's there with all his mates, playing guitars and all that and then Wayne and his mates turned up and I can remember him with a big bottle of cider in his hand and I thought, "Oh these are nice, these are nice boys." And we started to go down there quite a lot. But, do you know what? I couldn't wait to go home and say to my mum, "I've been there." It's like the rebel in me is like, you know, just to let them know I don't want to be told what to do any more. I'm me.

Yes and then we started going out and obviously when our first daughter arrived ... I fell pregnant and I remember my dad saying, "Is he going to marry you?"

So you were living at home at that time?

Yes, yes. And ... but before Wayne I also ... I wanted to be around older men. I didn't want silly little boys so I did date an older man and my parents were absolutely appalled by it. But when I look back I think I probably did that to annoy them really, being with an older man.

How much older was he?

Oh God, I was seventeen and he would have been about ... what was he then? Thirty one.

That's a lot older, isn't it? I mean now thirty one seems young but when you're seventeen thirty one seems very old.

Yes, yes. And I think my parents ... I think they were always worried if people were with me because of money. And my mum ... when I very first knew about the Trust, I was about eleven ...

That was one of the other questions – when did you get your compensation through and that kind of thing.

Yes. It was 1974. And I didn't really know nothing about the Trust. My mum just explained to me that I'm going to start getting a bit of pocket money and she said it would be ... "You've got this Trust money and you can have a bit of this and you can have that." And, you know, I thought it was really quite good because we were quite a poor family. My dad really worked hard and he was such a proud man and he wouldn't take nothing. And stories that I've heard from other thalidomiders where their parents have fleeced all their money, I used to say to my dad, when I knew about my money, "Dad, why don't we get a new car?" He wouldn't have it, he wouldn't have a penny. Even when I got my car and I couldn't drive it I used to say, "You can use that Dad." He wouldn't. So there's one thing I can always say is that my mum and dad never touched my money, never.

So your money was for you.

Yes and, you know, I think why I like a nice home now ... my mum and dad's home was never posh, do you know what I mean? And I said to her one day, "Why don't you have some new carpets?" "No." She wouldn't. So he was a hard worker and he was never going to touch my money.

I think that's fantastic to be honest with you. That's just the attitude that so many children needed their children to take because you're going to need it later in life, aren't you? And it doesn't matter how supportive your family are, you're going to need that money.

Yes, that's right. And when you hear of other people and what their parents had spent their money on and I think, "Oh God, my parents didn't touch mine." So I was really proud of them.

Yes I think that's fantastic, really very good. And did you ... so going back to your ... so you met Wayne and you got pregnant with your first daughter ...

Yes. And then we got married.

And so how old would you have been then?

Nineteen.

That's really young.

Yes, nineteen.

So age nineteen you're with Wayne and you're pregnant.

Yes.

And you presumably left your family home at that point?

No, not ... no, no. I was still at home and obviously my mum and dad let Wayne more or less really move in and he spent more time with us and then obviously we got our own place.

After your daughter was born or before?

No. We got it before Nicola was born. But, do you know, I never ever worried that I would carry a normal child, it never entered my mind.

You're reading my mind here because that was my next question.

[Laughs].

Did you ever worry that thalidomide would pass across?

No, never. The only time I worried was when Nicola, when she grew up, she fell pregnant at fifteen and I was mega-shocked and at that time Freddie Astbury was saying ... it was coming out that children were being born the same as us, that thalidomiders were having children born the same as them. And I'll never forget, he phoned me up and said, and this was about a week before Nicola's baby was due, he said to me, "You need to be prepared that this could go through to a grandchild." And I said to him, "No it's not" because I can remember going to the scan with Nicola and I didn't tell Nicola this but all I wanted to see was arms on that baby because I'd heard rumours that there was some being born. So the first time I went and saw the scan it was like the baby flew the arms up in the air because the woman said to me, "Oh look, there's the arms" because we didn't know whether it was a boy or a girl. And I'm thinking, "Thank God."

So a week before she was due to have her baby Freddie had spoken to me and I was livid, I've never got on with him after that. And he said to me, you know, because I was the first thalidomide grandmother he wanted to get it all publicised and, "Let me deal with this but you've got to be prepared that even though you've seen the scan ..." somebody else had ... I'm sure he said Glen Harrison had had a daughter and she was the same and they'd seen scans. So he said, "You want to prepare yourself." So I was so upset thinking, "My God, what if ..." But, you know, I don't think Freddie realised what stress he caused me because I would never have forgiven myself if Callum, my grandson, had been born like that.

So I did say to Nicola, I sat her down and I said ... something came up on the news about how thalidomide could be passed down. And I said to her, "How would feel?" And I said to both of the girls, "How would you feel if you had a baby the same as your mum?" And both of my girls said, "It wouldn't bother us because you're normal to us. You've brought us up normal."

So I had this conversation with my dad and my mum but my dad really got a bit upset because he said to me, "Well, what would you have done if you had carried ..." and I said, "I wouldn't have gone ahead, I wouldn't have gone ahead with the pregnancy." So my dad got a bit ... he said, "That's upset me, that's upset me girl." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because have you had a hard life then?" I said, "Not really because I'm strong. I'm a strong person." It hasn't been easy, do you know what I mean? But it was a good job I was strong. But I certainly would not want to bring another child like me into the world and I'd say that now. But my girls are totally different. Totally different and they said it wouldn't bother them in the least because of how I was brought up and how I coped, you know.

I think it's different when a generation is different, isn't it? So my daughter ... I've got a ten year old daughter and she's met a lot of people affected by thalidomide. She would say exactly the same as your daughters even though she's only met people. She'll say things to me like, "Why would somebody not want a baby? It wouldn't bother me if I had a baby born ... I would want my baby. I would want them." But perhaps it's different when it's something that's happened to you rather than ... because you're obviously

so capable and successful that it seems as though it's not a struggle but that doesn't mean to say it hasn't been a struggle.

No, no. And it's getting a struggle now for me. I always worried about getting older. I worried about when I would hit sixty but it's not good now.

Is that because of physical wear and tear?

I think where I've put on a lot of weight as well I'm restricted and my legs really, really play up and my knee ... I mean I had a terrible fall and this is why Wayne ended up giving up work and retiring because it was about eight years ago now. And this was very strange, very strange. His work, he was a builder. He used to go out of the house by half past five in the morning and we never used to see him until about six or seven at night but this particular Friday he didn't go to work. And I used to get up of a morning and my workroom used to be outside and I used to go and unlock the room about eight o'clock in the morning and put the heating on. It was a frosty morning and we'd got decking out in the garden and I would never wear shoes, I'd wear flip flops.

And this particular Friday morning, Wayne was in bed, I'd gone out in my nighty in my flip flops not realising the decking gets very dangerous and I slipped and my head hit the patio, my ribs went into a plant pot. Now, my brother lives next door and I could hear him in the garden but I was so winded ... I hadn't realised I'd broken my ribs as well and I don't know how I managed to get up. I always say this is fate, that somebody lifted me because I could not breathe. I managed to get in and call Wayne but I was in such a state. We called an ambulance but where I'd put my right leg out to save me, it had obviously really damaged my knee.

So I said to Wayne, you know, I know my work will be good. I know that what I do ... I can go self-employed, really it would be better for you to give up work and take over doing a lot more so that my legs don't have to do loads any more. And that's what we done, you know. But he does have to help me more. And you kind of think ... when we first met he didn't do nothing for me, I was an independent ... even with my girls I would not let them have to do anything. I didn't want them to go to school and say, "I can't come out, I've got to do this for my mum," never. I made a rod for my own back because they didn't want to do nothing.

But now I'm getting older I do need a lot more help. Wayne does everything. I don't cook. My legs just don't hold up to much any more. So I do worry because the day that I can't feed myself it's going to be awful because I put my leg up like this [MM demonstrates] but after ten or fifteen minutes that kills. That really kills.

And that's a big change.

Yes. And another thing, you see, I used to be a beautician before I did what I do now. So I was well into make up and hair and cutting as well. When I gave up being a telephonist I got into make up and hair and then I started getting asked if I would do demonstrations which I loved. So always my appearance with make up and that was very important to me. So now it's getting very hard because my bones ... my legs are not moving like they ... and I just feel that Wayne's going to have to do more and more and it's not fair.

My eldest daughter, she's a carer for older people now and I know she would help. I don't want to rely on the girls just yet. My youngest one that you just met, she just lives across the road, which is strange, she's across the road. But I know as I'm getting older it's ... and I've got diabetes now so that's not good. My blood pressure is sky high. Nobody can take my blood at the moment so we're having problems there.

Is that because of problems with taking blood from veins?

Well, I've had ... for years my local hospital have been taking blood from my feet, no problem whatsoever and on the eighth of October I needed my yearly blood test done and Gina at the hospital phoned me up and said, "Mandy, we've been told we're not to do feet any more." So my doctors ...

Why?

There was nothing ... she didn't tell me ...

No explanation.

No. So I'm still waiting from the eighth of October. And I went to the doctors last week because I started getting really violent headaches and the headaches are when I know my blood pressure is up. And when he done my blood pressure he said, "It is sky high." And I said to him waiting around for these bloods is making me stressed because it shouldn't be allowed.

Exactly and if you have a blood test when you're stressed it's obviously going to be higher.

But they've still not got back to me. So when I spoke to ... what's her name? On the Trust on the health link.

From the Thalidomide Trust?

Yes, she contacted me and she said really I ought to look at finding another doctors. So I phoned one the other day and spoke to them about everything and they've not got back to me and I thought, "Oh, my God." So that stresses me to think this is really bad. Nothing comes easy.

It's like when I couldn't get Motability when I was first driving. I wasn't entitled to Motability and you think, "My God, do they not know that my legs are my arms." It took years before they ... well, it was my MP that got it for me in the end and you kind of think you shouldn't have to keep fighting. And it's just the same with this Grünenthal thing, if only they lived like me for one day ... this is, that's why I said I'd like to meet them and say, "Look, you do this with your feet for one day and then tell us that we don't need that extra money." Because you know what's worrying? We are all deteriorating pretty bad and quickly and really we could do with the money now, to enjoy it now, because what are we going to be like when we're sixty?

And are you going to keep fighting for it when you're sixty?

Yes.

My worry is that they're waiting for people to stop fighting, they're going to wait until people don't care any more.

Yes. It's awful.

It's very bad, isn't it? I'm going to pause for a second there.

Okay.

[Break in audio].

Mandy, I'd really like to ask you what you do now in terms of your career and your work because I believe it's very interesting.

Yes. I suppose you would call me a clairvoyant medium. I like to be called a spirit connector really and it is strange that ... how I work now with the spirit world. I've known from an early age that there was something different. Not because of having no arms but strange things, from the age of six, having really strange experiences and as I got older there was always this voice. And if ever I felt insecure or unsafe somewhere I'd hear this voice saying, "You'll be all right, we're here." And, of course, I never ever said anything to my mum or my dad because they'll think I'm a bit cuckoo and it was when I was fourteen I went to Lourdes and, again, it was the fourteen age when my mum just didn't know what was the matter with me. They even went and got me a horse because I loved horses so they thought, "We'll get her her own horse" and when I got this horse I came out in this dreadful, dreadful rash and went to the doctors. They were worried it was me being allergic to the horse so I went and had all these little skin tests done to see what it was. Nothing, they didn't know. And my mum happened to bump into this lady one day who had set up ... it was called the Jumbulance Across and what it was, it was like a big ...

Called what, sorry?

Jumbulance. The Across Trust.

Okay, yes.

And what it was, there was these coaches that were adapted to take people on pilgrimages to France, to Lourdes, and they would adapt these big buses, these coaches, all kitted out with all special stuff. And my mum happened to talk to this Maureen about ... she didn't know what to do because I was going through this depression and now I've got this rash and they don't know what to do there. And she said, "Why don't

you send Mandy to Lourdes because they've got holy water there." We're not Catholics but the Across were Catholics and my mum said, like, we're Church of England. They said, "It doesn't matter, let her go." And all I can remember my mum saying about going on this journey was that she said, "Your sister will go with you" and at the time I must have been fourteen and Jane's three years younger than me and she said, "Jane will go with you and she'll help" because I wouldn't let anybody help me. So Jane came with me. She loved it, she loved all the holy stuff.

And the strange thing is, the job that I do now, when I was younger I wasn't a holy person, I would not even sing in assembly and I used to get told off, I used to get told to get out of assembly because I wouldn't sing, I wouldn't pray. And then going with all these people ... and there was a nun there as well, I remember thinking, "What has my mum done? What has she done putting me with these holy people?"

So we go to this Across place in France and this chalet, this chateau or whatever you call them and me and my sister was put up in an attic room and we all went down to the grotto, you see. And it was all to do with Saint Bernadette finding the holy water and of course the group we went with were quite churchy people and I was told we were going to go to the holy water. I could see all these sick people queuing and some of them were in beds as well and I was really cursing my mum thinking, "This is awful, this is absolutely awful." We go into this room and I can remember all these big ladies undressing and I'm thinking, "I'm not going to take my clothes off." So I'm saying to the nun that was with us ... she said, like, "You have to take your clothes off and when you go into that room there is a cold stone bath. It's all made out of stone and you're going to be dipped in water." And I said, "Well I don't want my head going under water." So they went and explained to these ... there was two nuns there, I don't know whether they could speak English and I could see ... what happened was they were wrapping people up in this sheet and then you'd step down into this bath.

Like a very small pool.

Yes, it was weird. I can remember being wrapped up, going down to the water but do you know what? It wasn't cold, I can't explain it, it didn't even feel like water. And they were trying to say to me I'm not to dry, I'm to get dressed straight away and not to dry. So I didn't like that, thinking that I've got to now have clothes back on. But the unbelievable thing was, we get out and that night my rash had gone completely. Completely.

But the next day I did do something naughty. I ... didn't escape from the chalet but I crept out and I found myself on my own at the grotto and I didn't realise everybody was panicking and thinking where had I gone? How I found myself there I don't know. But the most strangest experience in my life. I felt different. I don't know, it just felt different.

And then I started seeing things. That night when we went to bed ... I'm lying in bed and we had like French doors that led out onto a little balcony. And I seen them open and it was strange, it looked like a nun had floated in, you could see no face, see a nun. So I've now said to my sister, "Put the light on! Put the light on!" I was so scared. "Someone's got in our room." So she put the light on, there was nothing and, you know, I didn't tell my mum until I was about sixteen, that was so scary. And then I started to hear more. So something happened. I obviously was, at fourteen, in that darkest cloud and that had gone and then obviously the spiritual stuff started coming in but I didn't want to accept that.

And another thing there though, at fourteen ...

So you felt a real change.

Yes, yes. But I also met a boy at that ... Ben, his dad owned the chatea, he owned that and he was painting. And every day we started to talk and he said to me ... and I'd never, ever kissed a boy, never. And he was ... how old was Ben? I was fourteen, I think Ben was eighteen and we went out. He said, "I'll take you and show you a little bit of the scenery and all that" and it was beautiful because he took me where lots were singing Ave Maria, all the candles. And he actually kissed me, it was my first kiss. I must admit I didn't like being kissed but I got to think, "Oh, my God, he really does like me." So my whole life changed then.

So that was another change then.

Yes. I think the spirit world was saying, "You have nothing to fear. People will see you because of who you are not because ... they're not going to see your disability."

And if they do see your disability they're not worth knowing ...

Yes. So that was my first. First kiss. We used to write to each other but nothing really come of that. So yes, that's when my first spiritual stuff started happening.

That's interesting. So that's a lot longer ago than I thought, I wouldn't have known that you see if I hadn't asked you.

No, that was a very big thing.

And now it's something you're doing every day.

Yes, yes. I decided ... I wanted always just to be a mum. I wanted to be a wife and a mum and that was it. But obviously as the girls started getting older I'd always been fascinated with Tarot readings ...

You haven't said about the other girl. You talked about your first daughter and then after that ... just to sort of fill in the picture ...

Oh yes, of course. Then I wanted ... yes, when Nicola was about three I wanted another child and obviously Marie came along. And, you know, another thing with having the children I never wanted no fuss. They were saying when Nicola was ... when I was going to give birth to Nicola, the doctors were saying it was going to have to be a caesarean. And I was so upset, I said to my mum, "But if I have a caesarean I'm not going to be able to use my feet." And my mum went to the hospital with me and said, "Why are you saying she's got to have a caesarean? Why can she not, you know, have a normal birth?" And they said, "Well, she's not going to be able to hold her legs up." And I said, "I can hold my legs up myself anyway!"

You can probably hold them up more than most people actually.

So they said, "Well, you know, your pelvis might not be right." So I had to have all the tests to make sure I could have a normal birth, which I did. And then obviously they were shocked that I was going to breast feed and I used to get up early to get Nicola out of that what we called a little fish tank, I used to get up early and get her out and get her all ready before they came in and they used to say, "But who's done her bows up? Who's dressed her?" I used to say, "Me." So I wanted everything done before they come in because they wanted to put my bed on the floor, they wanted to put my mattress on the floor. And I said to them, "Just let me do it myself."

So obviously when Marie ... they were more prepared because they knew that I'd coped with Nicola. And then with Marie they let me bring my pram and put the pram on the stand. Instead of having the fish tank thing they let me have that because they knew that was easier for me to get her out and ...

So it's a slight improvement.

Yes. I had both normal births and breast fed and yes.

It's lovely isn't it, breast feeding?

Yes.

Okay, so going back again now to the spiritual work.

So obviously I used to have my cards read, starting from the age of fifteen I used to go and have cards read and there was one particular woman that my mum used to go and see and obviously when I got older I used to want to go and see her. And she'd read for me a few times and this particular day, I was out on my own driving and I see her walking and I stopped and pulled over and I said, "Oh, I haven't seen you for a long time. Are you still doing your readings?" And she said, "Yes." So I said to her, "I'd love to do that." So she said, "Well, why don't you?" And I said, "Because I think everybody has to have a gift." And she said, "Everybody's got it, it's knowing how to ... and I actually do teach." So I said, "Oh ..." She said, "I'll teach you the cards. I'll come to your home and within six weeks I'll get you reading the Tarot." So I thought, "This is quite exciting."

So she came round and I'll never forget, she put this pack of Tarot cards ... I said, "Oh, are you going to leave me the book?" She went, "No, no, them cards will talk to you." So she said, "I'm only going to give you one suite first of all." There's like the Coins, the Wands, there's like four suits in a pack of Tarot cards. You've got your swords. Anyway, she left me the Hearts, Cups of Love, she said, "Study them all week and I'll come back the next week and I'll see how you've got on." So she's gone away and I'm looking at these cards and I'm thinking, "They're saying nothing. Nothing." So she came back that week and I said, "They're saying nothing." She said, "You're not persevering. I'm going to leave you another pack, another suit now."

So she went and all of a sudden ... again, it was like hearing a little voice saying, "That means that. That means that." And she come back and she said, "Read for me." So I done this little reading and I said, "I don't know whether this is right because it's not always ... I'm not hearing a voice, it's not like always a voice, it's like a thought." And she said, "Yes, that's what you'll hear." So as time went on, sort of four weeks

down the line I got woken up one night ... it was really scary because my bedroom door around the frame was shining mauve and there was these flashes of mauve. So I was really scared.

When was that roughly? How old were you?

That was sort of four weeks down the line of me learning with her. You know, she'd been to me sort of ... so I phoned her up and I told her, "This is really scary. It was a beautiful mauve," I said, "And it was all right glowing round my door but then when I got these ... it looked like arrows ..." So she said, "Do you know what that is? That's spirits saying they've arrived and they're going to keep you safe. That's your safe door." So I said, "What do you mean spirits?" And she said, "They will come and talk to you now, you might even see them." So she said, "We want you to read for other people now."

So she got her friends and I'd gone to her house. I was so nervous. She'd got me two ladies to read for, I didn't know them and I went up into her room and these women had their readings and they came down and said to her, "Oh, she's quite good." So then she said to me, "You are ready to be a reader and other things will happen. If you want the other things it will happen." So she said, "What you need to do is ask your friends if they've got people you can read for that you don't know." So obviously I read for my friends and one of my friends said, "Oh, can you read for my aunt?" So I did that and that's how it escalated because they went and told ... so, you know, one thing led to another and the next thing I know I'm now becoming a reader.

So Adele Rose said to me, "Why don't you have a go at platform?" I went, "I don't know if I could do that." She went, "You can if you want to you can." So I used to ... because I loved karaoke and I used to go to karaokes quite a bit and the guy that owned the pub, he'd got a little hall. And I said to him, talking about doing a little clairvoyant evening, "I wouldn't want to do a big one," I said, "But could we use your hall?" And he said, "Yes, of course you can." So Adele Rose said to me, "I'll sit with you," she said, "I'm not going to do nothing though because I think you'll manage."

And I'll never forget, it was about fifty people and I'm sitting at the table and I'm saying to her, "I don't think I'm going to get anything, I'm not hearing nothing." She said, "You will!"

It's the pressure, isn't it?

Yes, I was really scared. And when she said it was time to start she introduced me and I got drawn to this woman and so when she stood up I started hearing things and I went, "Oh my God." So it just went on and on. But the strange thing was I then got told, "When you're going to do your shows we're going to tell you about the people before you go." And I thought, "I've never seen that, I've never seen any medium where you go to a show and you've got all your messages." So I got told ... this was before I had a computer so I got told, "Get a pen and paper" and I got told to write things down and I got told ... say, for instance, it was a David in spirit, he wanted to talk to his mum in the audience and there would be a message. So I wrote all this down that I heard.

I goes to another show and I said to people ... now, I'd had these messages months before the show. So, of course, I'm really doubting myself thinking, "This can't be. How do they know who's going to go to the shows? So I started reading it out and people started going, "That's for me." So I thought, "Oh, my God." So then I got told to do it at another show.

And the one that really amazed me was at a theatre and I'd got the name Sue and I was told that this lady ... it was her dad and I'd got this message for her. And anyway a few Sues put their hand up but I always got shown like a glowing light to who it would be. So I gave her her message and in the break she came up to me and she said, "I'm confused. I've got to ask you this, I didn't buy a ticket for your show, a neighbour knocked tonight and said her friend had let her down, did I want the ticket." She said, "So how did you know I was going to be here if I hadn't bought the ticket? How did you know?" I said, "I don't know."

How did you prepare the answer?

I said I was just told months ago that a Sue was going to be here. She said, "That's really confused me because then that must be they know then." I said, "Well, they must do." So that's how it started going and it amazed people.

But the next thing was the trance which is something else. I always felt spirit put me into something straight away. Don't muck about, this is what we want you to do, you can do it, you see. So this with the trance, I'd heard about trance mediums and I'd heard how their voices change and faces and, actually, I was thinking, "Oh, I don't know, I don't think that's true." And as time went on people used to come here for readings, I used to get told to hold their little finger.

Why?

It was the vibrations, it was information so I started to hold people's fingers but this particular day a young girl came with her sister and I was holding her finger and I didn't feel my tongue was my own. I felt really strange, my tongue. I felt ... this girl ... they'd both lost their mum ...

How old were you then?

Oh God, that's going back ... that was going back, what, eighteen years ago and I'm fifty one now.

Okay. I'll do the maths later.

So I said to her, "I have this strange feeling, I feel your mum wants to talk to you," I said, "But this is quite scary." I said, "I'm going to leave the room for a little while because this is ..." I didn't know. My body, my body and my tongue, nothing felt like me. So when I came back in I said, "Oh, I don't know about this. I know she wants to tell you herself she loves you but I can't do that." So I left it at that and thought, "Ooh, no." And as time went on, they kept saying to me, the spirit world kept saying, "You can do this. You can do this." Then I thought, "Do you know what? I would like to be a trance medium, I would like to do this."

And we was at Cornwall doing a show and my brother next door came with his wife and we was in this bungalow, in beautiful countryside and my brother ... Wayne and me brother and his wife, were watching England play football. I can't stand football so I'm sitting out in the garden and there was this rocking chair. So I'm sitting out in the rocking chair looking at the sheep and the lambs and I could hear the cows and I thought, "This is lovely." So I'm in this rocking chair and I must have dozed off. The next thing, Wayne said, I'm calling out, "Susan!" Well, my sister in law, I only ever call her Sue. So he's come out and he said, "Oh

my God," he said, "It wasn't even you. As you've looked up, your voice ..." he said it was really scary. He said, "You was this old woman saying I want my Susan." So he's gone into my sister and said, "You better get out there because I don't know what she's on about but it ain't her." And when she come out, it was her nan.

So all I can remember is coming out of it and I could see Wayne, Kev and Sue looking down at me like this, like shock. And I said, "Are you all right?" And they went, "Oh God," she says, "You were my nan and you even sounded like my nan," and she wanted Freddie which is Sue's dad." I went, "No ..." and Wayne said, "Well, that wasn't you," he said, "And I don't like that." I thought, "Oh," and left it at that, didn't want no more.

Then I had an evening round a friend's and we were all sitting round the table, about ten of us, and I went into trance. We were all sitting talking and I went into trance.

And what does that feel like when that happens?

Well, I don't ... I just go.

Do you suddenly ... you're just sitting there and the next minute you're ...

I just go. Yes. And I became my friend's mum and dad. Talking one minute like her mum, the next minute like her dad but I told her something that nobody knew. So I then realised that it's time I did gatherings. And I started going round to people's houses but then I found it quite tiring if we got caught in traffic, then coming home. I thought, "No, I need to do this at home." So Wayne built me a room out in the garden, we had a room out there and I started having gatherings and that's how it started.

Then obviously the Mag heard of me, that was eight years ago, they heard of me and they've been so impressed and they must love me because I've been there eight years.

Amazing. And so what does your week consist of with that kind of work? What sort of things do you generally tend to do?

Well, first of all I do ... because I've now stopped the phone reading. I've got a few more to do until after Christmas and then I've finished because the phone readings I've done for so many years now. What it is ... because that was another thing, I just used to have people come to me but with the Magazine I had to work over the phone. And being a diabetic, when people used to come to have readings, if they were unwell I'd be picking up all their illnesses and then if somebody got caught in traffic the other person went in to have a reading, it was all friction and I thought, I can do this over the phone, I don't need people.

You don't need the physical body.

Yes and to me that gives people more proof if I can give them a good read over the phone. So yes, I started to do the phone readings. I mean I've done them all over the world – the woman in Australia, when I first got asked could I do a phone reading in Australia, I thought, "Okay ..." and she was amazed because her husband ... it was like we were in the same room. Her husband was talking to me and he was telling me

that she wanted to change her home and she said to me, "My God, it's like you're in my home but I'm in Australia, you're in Essex," you know. So I just ... word got about about me.

So the phone readings really did take off. And what I did worry about was all these premier lines, they're not all good. They're not all good so people might have been thinking, "You're just one of these ..." and what I would say to people is, "If I was rubbish you'd be able to get in with me tomorrow." Now these were going months ahead, these readings. But it's come to a time that I don't want to keep doing the readings. The gatherings I love but I'm now doing body readings and they're something else, something different.

But my day to day, what I do, I maybe do a reading in the morning and a reading in the afternoon and then a gathering at night. But next year I want to slow down. I just really would like to do two gatherings and just do my shows because as I'm getting older I feel ...

That's a heck of a lot.

Yes, I do ... I am getting tired. My bones, of a morning, really hurt and I don't feel on top of the world until about twelve. Twelve o'clock / one o'clock I'm fine. But then come eight o'clock at night my ankles swell. So next year I need to slow down a bit. I mean if we did get more money I might not need to work because I do need to work. If I don't work then Wayne would have to go back to work then I'd definitely need somebody here twenty four seven. And I said to him, "I'm really am getting exhausted now."

Well it must take a lot out of you because people are asking you ...

Yes and so many people are ...

Yes, they're pulling something aren't they?

Yes. And you get some people ... I'm not a miracle worker and I can only give people what I hear, you know, I don't make out that I'm ... I just give people what I'm hearing. But so many people are demanding. On my Facebook you get some that are ... they want so much. People say, "I'd love to do your job" but you wouldn't because my work phone, that goes off three o'clock in the morning. You might get somebody that's had a good drink and they're missing their mum or their dad and you kind of think, God, thank God I've got a separate phone. It's not always a good job to be in.

And, of course, there are so many sceptics out there that knock you down that are not believers and it is sad the ones that are in it for the money you see. I do do a lot for charity and I do give a lot of money away but there are a lot of mediums out there that don't, you know what I mean? So it can be good and it can be bad. But I certainly know that there are so many people that love me and they all class me as their earth angel.

They do. They do and I can honestly vouch for that because almost every interview I've done somebody has said to me, "Are you going to interview Mandy? You've got to interview her."

[Laughs].

So I can completely vouch for that. That's fantastic and really great to hear about all of that. I've just got a couple more questions for today – I want to come back and ask you some more once I've transcribed this. But just going back slightly to what you were saying ... you started to talk about it naturally, your feelings about thalidomide and Grünenthal in particular and that ridiculous 'apology' that was made. Is there anything in particular that you would like to say about how you feel about that, the recently published Grünenthal apology in which they said, "We've been in shock for fifty years." You said a few things already ...

Yes. I don't think ... I don't know what's made them come out like that. I don't look into lots like that, I just hear it on the grapevine of what's going on. There are a lot more thalidomiders that are a lot more into it than I am.

The campaigning side of things.

Yes. I just kind of think ... I was appalled when the government made their apology, I was actually really upset. The fact that we should have all been asked to go there, with our parents, the ones that are alive and let them say it to us, not over the television. I felt for my mum and dad having to do that because the person that read it ... I can't remember who read it out, he didn't even look straight at the camera. So I can't understand why we didn't get a chance to actually go and meet them for them to say that. So I was appalled with the government for that. Also to put it on a pilot scheme, the government, you're kind of thinking ... and we're still waiting now, aren't we, to see whether we're going to get it? That's cruel. That is a cruel ... why do we have to think, "Right, for three years we've got this extra money. In three years time now ... oh my God, are they going to take it off us now?" If they took it off us they ought to be ashamed of themselves. It has helped having that extra money, it's still not enough though, I mean I've still got a mortgage.

With Grünenthal I don't know ... like I say, I would love to meet one of them and I'd love to say, "Come and be me, come and do what I try to do." And I am struggling now and I know that ... you know, I have to go in the wheelchair sometimes because I can't walk. I can walk five minutes. And, do you know what? I hate being in a wheelchair. When we go on holiday, if it's just Wayne, he won't drink and drive and I can't walk so we have to get a wheelchair. So we go to our place and I have to get in a wheelchair because he can't go out of a night, have a good drink, and then drive me back. And do you know what? To sit in a wheelchair is awful.

Well, looking at you, you're so completely and utterly able to ...

And then when I get in that wheelchair, I then feel sad for the others that have to be in the wheelchair because you do get stared at more. It's weird.

Yes definitely, it changes your status all round, doesn't it?

Yes. And I've always ... my dream is I've always wanted to have my own chat show. It's like my magazine where I do Mandy's World, I would definitely make a good chat show host about life, not just about being a medium, but my Mandy's World is about everything. But, you know, you don't get many disabled people on telly and this makes me so cross because I'm thinking, you know, if people knew more of disability ... this is

why I used to do talks at the schools. I used to go to the schools and see I've done that. When my girls were little I didn't want my girls being bullied, I didn't want them, you know, because kids can be cruel. So I made sure that my girls were okay about it and I said to them, "Would you mind if mummy goes and talks ..." and they both were fine. And I started off at their school and talked about what I do with my feet. Then obviously other schools got to hear about it and I started to do other schools and I had to do it differently with the young ones to the older ones. And do you know what I done? I got two twin dollies, I took the arms off one and left the arms on the other and then covered them up. And said to the little ones, "Is there anything the matter with these babies?" And they'd look at them and go, "No!" Then we'd take the covering off and I'd say, "Is there something the matter now?" And they'd go, 'Yes" and then I'd explain that although that baby hasn't got arms, they're not that different.

Then I had to work with teenagers. But do you know what? I always say to them, "Ask me what you want. If I don't like it, I won't answer it." But they are brilliant. I found the older ... when I used to go and do women's ... when women used to get together in groups and that, I found the older people are stupid, do you know what I mean? I used to love doing that, going around doing talks. And then I got to think, "You know, if I had my own chat show, people would see." We're not stupid.

Absolutely. Without question.

But I know ... the way I run my Facebook now I have loads, loads on there that are watching what I'm doing.

Absolutely. I agree with you. I agree with you, people cluster around you like a magnet.

It would be lovely for you to ... if ever you could come to see a show and see me in action.

I would love to come and see a show. When's the next one?

I've got ... because the tenth has sold out, but the seventeenth ...

Of December?

Yes. That's my Christmas show and you'd actually see me do trance as well.

I'd love to come and see that. Where do you do that?

Just up the road. Just up the road here. But if you want to come, let me know. You can bring someone if you want, save you coming on your own and I'll reserve you a couple of seats.

I'd love to come, could we definitely do that?

Yes, I'd love you to see how I work.

And then if I do the follow up interview with you after that, then I could ask you some questions more specifically to do with that. It would be great ... amazing lights [laughs].

[Laughs].

Okay, thank you so much, you've covered all of my questions ...

Yes. It's just that I couldn't cover when I was younger about my medical things and that.

Well I mean, is your mum still living?

Yes. I can ask them.

To be honest, in your case, a lot of what you're doing now is sort of of more interest but if you did see your mum and you wanted to ask her some of those questions like, you know, how long she took ...

Yes, I'll ask her.

That would be great but I would love to speak to you again after your show. Oh yes please. Could I reserve two tickets?

Yes. It starts ... you have to be there for seven, you get shown to your seat and it doesn't finish until about half ten.

Okay. Well it's very easy to get from London to here.

And then you can see me in action.

I'd love to see you in action. I've seen you in action already today. I've hardly had to say a word, you've made my life very easy. Thank you very much, thank you.

That's fine.

END OF RECORDING