

Thalidomide: Ed Freeman (2012)

Ruth Blue interviews Ed Freeman for the *Thalidomide: An Oral History* project.

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This is Ruth Blue interviewing Ed Freeman on the 10th September 2012 at his home in Swindon for the Thalidomide an Oral History project.

This is our project interview and I'll start with the question, do you have anything in particular that you thought wasn't covered in the first two parts or that you would like to change or you feel you could have said more about?

Yes, there are a few things.

I've got here the transcript, which I've sent you and which was looked through by Claire?

Claire and my mum.

And they made a few points on it which ... just running through ... so, in particular the question where I had asked you in particular what advice your family had been given by medical professionals and you thought they were given no advice at all ...

That's what I was led to believe, yes.

But your mum has annotated the transcript to say that she had help and counselling. One was useless but the other was priceless.

Yes. I think the useless one, she said, had just come out of university and so was academically trained but not in the real world trained, I think that's what she meant.

And so did she ... when she saw that you thought that she didn't have any help, what was her response to that?

My mum's quite straight talking. "Well, you got that wrong." All the things that she's altered, including a big thing about my schooling ... I think you spelled it as Pen Green but it's actually Pin Green, she went, "Well that's wrong," that's the way she talks, yes.

Okay, that's fine. She also put in the words here about ... you were talking about the late '50s and early '60s being different and she's written in: "the sins of the parents fall upon the children."

That was actually said ... again, I got some bits wrong. A couple of quotes I said ... an aunt said I should be ... or I could get a job in a circus, that was my mum's sister and another one, my mum's brother in law said I should be put into a home. And my dad's sister said that the sins of the parents fall upon the children which no doubt cheered my mum and dad up a great deal.

My mum did go on to say that ... I didn't know how much reaction she got but she did get harassed in the street while taking me out. There would be snide remarks like, you know, "It's your own fault. We didn't take tablets and we were ... when we were pregnant and we were sick." Because the media made out that it was only for morning sickness which is a complete fabrication. It was a wonder drug and good for apparently everything. Me mum said that she had morning sickness with both my mum and my sister but didn't take any tablets but, of course, she was now being blamed by the general public and there were a lot of snide remarks said to her which, again, is really hurtful.

Yes, that idea of the sins of the parents being carried out on the children is kind of odd because I mean what sins did your parents do?

Absolutely nothing.

Nothing at all.

But I think that's very much a staunch Catholic attitude which that side of my family are.

And did your mum say whether or not ... I know you said she's a straight talker but did she say whether or not those things got to her or upset her at the time?

Oh yes, they really upset her. As it would because she was already blaming herself and you'd got her peers blaming her as well. So yes, it was very hurtful.

It would be good to speak to your mum at some point.

Oh yes, she's still compos mentis.

Another comment she's written on here was ... you'd said that you were surprised that your siblings weren't more affected by your birth and especially by your mum having to go away but your sister said she was fine with it and your mum's written in that it did affect her ...

She only wrote that in after I really quizzed her. Because my mum and my sister have got this sort of stiff upper lip attitude where no it wasn't a problem and I quizzed my mum and said, "In reality it must have been, I can't see it not being a problem." And after a while she did say, well, on the day visits into hospital it wasn't because she'd gone up to my sister and brother's school and explained the situation and every time I had to go into hospital, or go to hospital, she had my brother and sister out of school so we could all go together. But there were a period of long events when I had to stay in hospital and therefore my sister and brother would have to stay at home with my dad. And it didn't affect my brother apparently, typical boy, didn't care, but my sister did, was deeply affected by it. That took a lot of coaxing to get out of them but, yes, they were very affected ... well, she was very affected by it.

Do you know in what way she was affected?

Basically she just literally didn't want my mum to go away for a long period of time, she was only a little girl at the time and she's very close to my mum and didn't want her to go, simple as that.

Yes, I can understand that.

There was no reprisals from my brother and sister saying ... never, ever did they or have they ever said, "We are like we are because mum gave you all the attention." There was nothing like that at all.

So there was no bitterness.

No, none at all.

Well, that's good.

I mean it must have been difficult for my mum and dad because they had to share everything, the love and the tension. So it must have been very difficult but I think they done a good job, they balanced it.

It sounds like it from everything you've said so far and the fact that your siblings ... your sister didn't like being left by your mum but she's not got any long term, long lasting effects.

No.

There was something else in here ... got the Pin Green School.

Oh yes, corrected spelling. It was probably my pronunciation actually.

Going back to how my parents' family reacted though, one bit my dad told me which I always thought was quite sad was his dad who was always this docker come labourer in London, so he would have been pretty tough ... he died when I was a year old but when he first saw me apparently he broke down in tears and you don't expect that from somebody sort of relatively hard. So obviously there was not all negativity amongst it all. You just get the odd people with the bad comments.

Yes, it's true. Okay, I think that's all of your mum's comments and we've got some other things on the back here which are things you thought of?

Yes.

So you mentioned that a Dr Fagg told your parents that you'd be a vegetable.

Yes.

And this is interesting. Tell me about why you were named Ed?

Right. Well, my full name is Edward Dennis Freeman. I don't think it was going to be my name but because of the situation, rushed into hospital and all that and christened pretty quickly as they do all disabled children because they don't know when they're going to die. I don't think my mum and dad had defined a name for me so my dad literally just used his. So I am Edward Dennis Freeman Junior which was shortened to Eddie and his was shortened to Ted and that was it. And he was also my Godfather as well and the nurse in the hospital was my Godmother. And I was christened as a Protestant, Church of England, because that was the only church they had in the hospital and the rest of my family are Catholics.

And my mum asked if my dad wanted to change me over afterwards to Catholic and what I heard is that he lost a lot of faith due to me being born and he said, "No, just leave him as he is." And so I'm the only ... my mum and myself are the only Protestants in the family. Not that it means a lot because we're all agnostics now anyway.

That was what I was just about to ask you. So there's this strong religious faith running through different parts of your family – what about you?

Agnostic. I won't be an atheist because I think you're putting all your eggs in one basket. So I keep it open. If a great big man comes down I'll say, "No, I didn't say I don't believe in you."

But you don't ... were you ever a church-goer?

No, I done the mucking around ones ... when you go to church ... for my own children when they were being christened. So I had to go to that so they could get Christened and when I was getting married, I done the old turn up for the banns kind of thing. I don't believe in religion, there might be a higher being but I don't believe in religion because it's manipulated by man to suit whatever they want and how can you believe in that?

Did you get married in a church?

I did. Again that was my ex-wife's choice. She comes from a very staunch Catholic family even though she says she's a believer ... but I think she's a weekend believer sort of thing. She asked ... it was asked of me if I would change my faith. I said, "I don't believe in mine, it would be hypocritical to take up yours." So we got married in a mixed Protestant high church which is just no go to the Catholics and that was done, in reality, because the actual Catholic church was a modern one and my ex-wife didn't like it. So she was quite happy to bend the rules a little bit because the one we did get married in was a quaint little old church. So it was all bent to suit.

And your boys, did you bring them up with any religion?

Yes ... well no, they're Christened as Catholic, that was partially to appease their mother's family but from my point of view it was education. Religious schools are always the best and if we couldn't have got them into a good school then we would have gone for a Catholic school. It was sort of really cold thinking.

You said something just a little bit earlier that your father lost some of his faith just after your birth. Can you say a little bit more about that?

Not a great deal. It was more my mum told me that he lost faith just after my birth but having spoken to my dad over the years, he ... the faith was dwindling, let's say, because he fought during the war and basically what he saw there and stuff like that. Then it was a time like ... he grew up with the Latin being spoken in churches and the strict rules and regulations and over a period of years the rules began to change and, as he said, "No-one's come down to alter those rules therefore man's in charge of those rules." I think he was losing faith steadily and I was the nail in the coffin. I just finished it off.

Interesting and difficult as well because I suppose some people see giving birth to a disabled child as a test of their faith or something – it could go either way.

Yes, yes. He was a good man, very kind. He'd do anything for anybody so I don't think he needed the title of good Christian, he was doing it without the title.

You've said here also that altering your Christian name from Eddie to Ed, because I called you Eddie, didn't I, at the start of the interview ...

Initially, yes. Most people do.

Your name often comes up as Eddie Freeman, you see.

Yes, I know. It started from birth and I changed it, I sort of shortened it, after I split up from my ex-wife. It was ... the way I saw it ... around that time I was getting a lot of kind negativity. My mum and dad wanted me to move back into the family home then they suggested I move in with a friend and it was just all sort of ... I could see what I'd learned over the years being wiped away and being cotton-woolled, so I stole a phrase, "onwards and upwards" this was to be my new life, I was going to live on my own, as it happens I picked up with Claire later, but I'd already planned to live on my own, I'd got everything in situ. But I thought it's about time I grew up anyway because I left home from sort of being looked after to getting married and being looked after. So I just thought it's about time I grew up and took responsibility for my own actions. So I thought, Eddie's not really a grown up name, it's still a child's name, so I shortened it to Ed. Even though my mum and my sister, well, basically everybody, still calls me Eddie but I am trying to shorten it to Ed.

So you've been Ed for ...

About eight years.

Eight years.

Not that you'd notice will all the correspondence I still get as Eddie, but there you go.

Whenever I hear you mentioned it's always as Eddie.

Yes. All the other thalidomiders call me Eddie. All of them. I suppose it's my own fault, it's a stupid thing to do to change my name half way through.

It's fine. I think Eddie's good as well though but I can see why you want to make this separation.

Yes, it's just a time in my life when ... as I say, it was onwards and upwards, I wasn't going to let anything beat me down so yes, everything changed. In fact, so much so I had my ... I don't know, I was probably going through a mid-life crisis as well, I had my teeth fixed, I had my eye that was damaged in the car accident ... I had a cataract grow over it prematurely and I virtually went blind in that eye and it was beginning to affect everything. So I thought, "What the hell, I'll go and have that fixed." I had that operated on and removed. I actually went through a phase of dying my hair which I still occasionally do. It was basically a revamp.

What colour did you dye it?

This colour. Dark brown, yes.

So what colour would it be otherwise?

Dark brown. It's grey underneath this, it's quite grey so I just thought I'd revamp.

And a new name would fit with that.

Yes. More of a grown up name.

So does Claire call you Ed?

Yes. Well, she's only known me as that. As her daughters have. So everybody I've met over the last eight years call me Ed and everybody beforehand calls me Eddie.

You could be called Edward.

Yes, I'll probably do that in my later years, when I hit about sixty five or something.

Or if you get a knighthood or something.

[Laughs] That's never going to happen. My mum's name, I forgot to mention, is Beatrice, but she's always called Beat. But I did the same with my son's names, I wanted names that could be altered to fit their social standing. So one son is called Charles, in case he gets that knighthood, but if he's on a building site, he's going to be called Charlie. So I like names that can go with the age. The other one's called Henry but there's no way I could call him Harry and Henry if he ever makes that big role.

Yes. Now I've got ... there's a couple of anecdotal things here which I'm going to come back to because I'm going to ask you about those at the end. I had just a couple of things I wanted to ask you a little bit more about as well.

First of all when you talked about your mum and dad taking you away from Lister Hospital when you'd been left outside to get sunburnt. That's a very poignant picture of them finding you and you not being properly looked after. I wondered if you had any further knowledge of that particular event?

Not that particular one. My mum did mention it at the weekend. She said, "You got that bit right." I said, "Thank you." But she just went in and she just basically said, "He's not being looked after, let's just take him home" and that's it. Her and my dad just picked me up and home I went and I never went away without them again.

Did they encounter any problems with taking you away from hospital that you know of?

I think it was advised that they didn't but the good thing is my parents were quite ... my childhood parents ... my mum was thirty five, my dad was forty when I was born, they had two older children, therefore they weren't like teenager parents that were phased by this type of thing, they were sort of grown up parents for want of a better word and they just said, "This isn't happening and that was done." They just took me out. They had the gumption that only age gives you.

So do you think despite the sunburning that they would have taken you away from there anyway, do you think?

Oh, yes. Absolutely. It was just that my mum said they kept me in, as they did, to find out what was wrong, how much more was wrong than the obvious that you see and mum and dad were quite happy with that, to

get a full picture. But when they found out that I wasn't being looked after properly that's when they just said, "Okay, you've done all your tests, let's just get him home."

Yes. You also talked about being assessed at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. Do you remember that or would you have been too young?

I think ... I have vague memories, very, very vague, of being in what I can only remember as a huge ward with lots of kids, lots of kids, it was like the old-fashioned wards that you see on telly from the 1950s, very long, all metal beds. Lots of kids with various disabilities and that was it, that's all I can remember of it.

The other thing I wanted to ask you about was Sister Mears who you talked about and who obviously seems to be very important to lots of people actually who have encountered her, both staff and patients visiting the hospital.

In fact, my mum actually thanked me for putting her in because my mum adored her, everybody did.

What was so great about her?

She was old school. She was probably about the same age as ... if not a little bit older than my mum, she was probably about early forties, never married. Her life was her job, she absolutely loved kids. Apparently she was head hunted from Westminster Hospital where she was on a children's ward and she was head hunted by Roehampton to come over and deal with us and she was just a natural, an absolute natural.

And children liked her? She wasn't like a strict kind of old school sister?

She was strict but like a parent would be strict because we were mentally normal kids so we'd do things we weren't meant to do but other than that no, she was as good as gold.

So it was consistency as much as anything?

Yes.

You don't happen to know her first name do you?

No off-hand, no.

And whilst in any kind of hospital situation did you have any treatment from staff or other patients that you weren't happy with?

I suppose what my mum told me would come under that. One day I was wearing my artificial legs and my mum had gone home ... not home but to her cousin's house, came back next day to find me ... because my bowel wasn't fully developed at that point, so I had a lot of constipation. I was wearing my artificial legs and I was in a lot of difficulty and the physio who was looking after me didn't even notice this and my mum came up, saw the distress I was in and sorted me out properly. She laid into the physio and that was it.

Other than that, in the hospitals, no, there was no negativity. There was silly things really, not seeing what was happening.

So you don't feel you were treated particularly badly at any point.

No.

I remember you mentioned about the Thalidomide Society holidays and you'd heard that carers weren't always doing their job properly so I wondered whether that was something you've come across personally, if people have always risen to the challenge of what you've needed from them.

There was, I suppose, one example. It was when they started the Trust holidays. They done what I can only describe as a pilot scheme and I was very young, I think I couldn't have been no more than about eight or nine. They set it up in Pinner and a group of us went along. At that point quite a few of use took parents and it was arranged that all these medical students, to give our mothers a break, would deal with all the lifting and carting and all that type of stuff and my social worker came with us as well who'd organised all these medical staff and after about four days these young medical students were all flagging and absolutely worn out. They couldn't get out of bed in the mornings to help the parents and that's when my social worker laid into them and said, "You're young, you're going into the medical profession, you should have the stamina to look after all these kids and yet the mothers are having to do this every day of their lives." And she really ripped into them. That's the only thing I've noticed of hired staff not being able to do the job.

And you haven't had many trips to hospital yourself, have you?

No.

Previously I'd asked you about being represented in the media and you said that because you were one of the first thalidomiders and you were four limb deficient that you'd had some media attention but we didn't talk about that any further. I wondered if you'd carried on having any involvement with the press throughout later life or was it just something connected to when you were very young?

It's just literally from when I was very young. I have been asked time and time again to do stuff but I always decline.

Why?

I live in a normal street in a normal town and I don't think I've done anything that warrants being in the newspapers. I just want to live as normal a life as possible and becoming a pseudo-personality isn't something I want to do. If anything goes on like there happens to be a campaign, then I will then support whenever I can but I still, even then, try and keep out of the media because I find with other thalidomiders it can be positive but it also has a lot of negativity with it – the who do you think you are syndrome.

In terms of the attention you had when you were younger, though, was that mostly newspaper articles?

Newspapers. I done a short documentary and a TV interview.

Do you know what they were called? Have you got copies of them?

No. One was for ... I can't remember. I know one, the documentary I did, because of it I got very much unwanted media ... unwanted attention from the general public. I did it for a show in America because it was done at a time when they hadn't discovered that they had a few thalidomiders and my mum said I'd got to do this one because she got really annoyed at it. And through doing this show I got a letter from this elderly American woman who'd seen the show and was very impressed, the usual stuff they come out with and letters went backwards and forwards a few times and she said, "You must call me your American grandmother." I said, "Okay," I was only young at the time but, "Okay if that's what you want." Then she decided to come over and visit me. Basically, in hindsight, what it turned out to be was the court case was going through, it was spoken of that there was two or three million pounds involved, I don't know where that figure came from, and she assumed that I was getting the two million.

Quite a good person to be the grandmother of then.

Oh, absolutely. And she came over and my mum and dad picked her up and put her up at our house which was only small and not like her ranch life, it was quaint. She just moaned all the time and then the final straw was she said to my mum that I was the result of being bad in a previous life at which point my mum said, "It's time you left." And my dad took her to London where she put herself up into a hotel and fortunately we never saw her again. It's stuff like that that makes me wary of media attention.

Yes, yes. Because you can't guarantee it's all going to be good attention.

No. And it's stuff like that over the years you see stuff like that, you hear stuff like that and it does start to make you a little bit cynical about people's motives.

Yes. So I won't ask you to call me Grandma Ruth then ...

[Laughs] please don't. Nana maybe.

And do you think ... we talked a little bit before about thalidomide and other disability groups and there being problems with compensation and other disability groups not getting that extra money. Do you think that's something that still goes on now or do you think it's died a death?

I think it did die down quite a bit but now there's various campaigns going on now amongst the thalidomide community ... that's a weird dog.

The dog's licking my feet [laughs].

[Laughs] I think it's going to ... the animosity will rear its ugly head again. I think it's understandable, you know. Frank, go away.

I don't mind. So why do you think it will raise its head again right now? Because of all the new ...

Yes, the Grünenthal thing again. We're not talking a pittance here, we're talking big money. And when you're born with a disability and you've had the same hardships as we've had it must be a big gruelling really. So I reckon that will kick off again.

Okay. Your artwork and your choice of using often superheroes and things in your pictures. I was having another look at your pictures after the last interview.

Awww ...

I looked at them before ...

You're going to ask if it makes up for my lack of limbs, aren't you?

Well I was going to ask you about it but not say it in quite such an obvious way. I was more thinking that you said you were very inspired by the comic strip art when you were younger, so you had that in your mind, but I was interested to know whether people who know you online only know you through your art and are quite surprised to find out that you're disabled and using quite different ways of making art to other people. Does that surprise people looking at your art?

Actually because I belong to various online groups that do art and initially I wasn't going to tell anybody that I was disabled because then you get the sympathy vote and I want them to judge me on my own art work. So for a good few years I never mentioned anything. In fact I had ... I think a lot of thalidomiders do this, I had a very nicely clipped portrait of me, head and shoulders type thing, which I doctored a little bit to make it even more normal, just so they wouldn't guess. And then I was talking to a good friend of mine, another thalidomider, Tommy Yendell, who said, "If you want to get out there in the art world you have to get a proper profile, let people know you're disabled."

So I took him up on his advice and I went up on all my sites and said, "This is me" and described my disability and why I like art and initially I did get a couple of sympathetic responses and I thought, "Here we go."

You say that with such a look on your face.

Well, it doesn't mean anything, does it? "I love your art, it's really good," even though you just put one line on the piece of paper and, you know, that doesn't do anything for me but that very quickly disappeared. And I'm very proud to say that I had my first ... the other day somebody actually commented and I got an attack for one of my pieces and I think that's really good because it shows that people are actually looking at it. And if they can attack a piece it means that they've seriously taken in on board.

Which piece did they attack and why? You knew I was going to say that, didn't you?

Well, a lot of people who were friends of mine online said, "Really nicely done but, ooh, subject matter ..." I was just mucking about and I created this large, obese, manic depressive fella who ... heavily bloodstained in a shabby little flat, wearing just his underpants, slashing puppies heads off. I just wanted to see how dark I could get it. and this fellow wrote to me and said, "I am an animal lover ..." which I don't know what that's got to do with it because I didn't do it to real animals and "I wish I hadn't looked at your picture because it still disturbs me and I wish you'd get back to your old style and stop doing this type of thing." So I wrote back to him and I done the typical artist's explanation and I told him a load of old pop as why I did it. I just simply said that the man was suffering from loneliness, he'd been shunned all his life, the usual old artist's explanation – if you need to get out of a tight corner, blame society.

And why did you do it really? Was it literally just to see ... to test how ...

I just wanted to see how dark I could get it.

For reaction or just for you?

Well, all art's a reaction, isn't it? So I wanted to see what I could do. Originally I thought I was going to have a child but I thought that would be a little bit too difficult. So I used puppies. I mean I say used puppies, they're meshes, it's not even real but people get carried away.

I mean I've told my son – he's going into photography, I said if you ever get caught, if anybody attacks your work always say, "It depicts man's inhumanity to man" and as soon as you say that they always back off, even though they can't see it.

Yes, it's one of those things where you can probably explain it away but people don't like things being done to puppies or children.

I've done another one which involved a child. He'd been saved but he'd been pretty much blown to bits and no problem. Put a puppy in and I get outrage. I think that shows you a lot about people.

So are you going to do more like that or are you going to go back to your old style?

Well, I was ... even Claire said to me, "Look it's getting too dark now." And I said, "Yeah, I know." And I was going to do a lighter one anyway but I can't now because it looks like I'm backing down from this fella and it looks like I'm backing down from Claire so I'm going to have to do a dark one.

What's that going to be about?

I'm working on clowns, evil clowns. They usually frighten people.

Nobody likes clowns.

No. It was good though. But the reason why most of my figures are big, stocky blokes is through the comics. I love Superman comics, especially the early ones and even some of the later ones, really, really well drawn. And also Frank Rosetta, he's quite a hero of mine. And yes, everything must be ... if you're drawing people, draw them big, draw them comic-style, you know.

And because you so anticipated my question that I might have said that I didn't say, are you drawing people with limbs to compensate for not having them yourself, do you get that sort of question a lot?

I've had it, yes. And I've thought it myself, what are people going to say? A lot of my mates have said I've got homosexual overtones and that's why I draw them big. Not at all. If you like sci-fi, which is outlandish, comics, Frank Rosetta, I just like that kind of stuff. All the women I do ... I've got a setting on the programme I use and it's called voluptuous. I don't ever do stick figure women, they're all voluptuous, they're all larger than life because they're not meant to be real.

What about that side of it being so fantastical as well? It just struck me when I was listening back to the interview when we were talking about wear and tear on the body and you've never really pushed yourself to get that kind of wear and tear. You said you were lazy but you certainly aren't in lots of other ways but perhaps physically you haven't over-stretched yourself but yet all your figures are super physical and I was interested in that fantasy level of making figures doing what you're avoiding doing with your body.

It's not that deep, it really is quite shallow. I just like comics. I like the look of the comics. That's why they call it POVs online, the point of view, I like it being weird angles, just like a comic strip. I can't bear ... I had to do it at school, this still life stuff, I can't bear it, it's so boring. I mean who would want to hang that up on their wall. Who ... I can't ... I will say this but it will have to be scrubbed out later but the mouth and foot people [16:20], bores the pants off me. How many white cottages do you have to see? How many pretty little robins and white doves? It's little old ladies buy it, not because they like it but because they want to give to charity. I can't stand it.

So you could have really gone to a contemporary art school in a way ...

No, I did try but they wouldn't accept me because of having ... I would have needed too much help and stuff. But on the other side of that, I'm quite pleased because I have done the history of art and stuff and I don't think I like to get too involved with that. Okay, I copy comic style but I also like to have my own style and I think if I learned too much of somebody else's work, would I be me, would I be original then? Or would I be just a clone of the person I'd been studying? So there's that to it as well.

But what I do do, if a friend of mine's done a great piece I'll say, "How did you do that?" And I'll study that and steal ideas that way but I don't do it in a regimented way.

What about other thalidomiders, do they have much to say about your artwork?

They all like it. Overall they like it, yes. I've started doing now, getting ready for Christmas, thalidomide pictures, showing us in ridiculous situations and I'm hoping to sell them, to donate the money to the Thalidomide Society and so far, yes, they've all been liked. I try not to do it in an offensive way, I just show the ludicrous things that happen to us and a lot of ludicrous things happen to disabled people, there really is.

Yes and a lot of ludicrous attitudes as well, isn't there?

Yes.

As somebody who's not a disabled person ...

Well, you are now!

Yes I am for the time being slightly. Some of the cartoons I can't laugh at them at all. I can't use the word 'flid.'

Really?

No, I was brought up to absolutely never say that word. If I say it it sounds really offensive, you know, whereas if you say it to someone it's okay. You feel as though you'd be really disrespectful if you said that word.

[Laughs].

But a lot of your cartoons I find really funny, especially the Cambridge diet one.

Oh yes.

I really like that one.

I was just having a go about ... why do they think we look like that figure? It's nothing near. But the girl in that one is also a friend of mine. So that's what I do – all of my characters are basically people I know.

So who's 'Roboflid' then?

That was me with all my gear on. I'm also the anti-pat hat as well.

That's funny. One thing we didn't talk about at all last time was what you're doing these days for the Thalidomide Society.

Right. Well, I've just taken over the Chairmanship for the Thalidomide Society and in fact I probably work more now than I ever have done. We've coined the phrase around here that 'life begins at fifty' because I'm doing more now than I've ever done. I'm involved with that, I'm really quite passionate about that. I want to re-vamp it and get it twenty-first century, I don't think it's twenty-first century yet. And I'm being a little bit harsh to the other members but I'm taking it a little bit more seriously. I want to get things moving because it's a great organisation. It was set up for very good motives and I don't want it to die away and it will do if it sinks into the apathy that it has been. So I'm trying to jolly them all up a little bit. Plus I'm semi involved with the other campaigns that the Thalidomide Trust are doing so I go to meetings with that, just come back from the House of Commons which was brilliant. I was like a little kid going around there. And then I'm doing my cartoon work for *Disability Now*. So that's what I'm doing now.

Before you took over the Chairmanship of the Thalidomide Society, were you on the board anyway?

Yes, yes. I've been on the board for about a year and a bit. Or maybe coming up for two years and I had been in the past for short periods of time. I never thought of taking over the Chair but it was suggested to me by a number of people and initially I thought I couldn't do it because when you see ... when you're an outsider to it you think, "There's a lot of work going on here" but when you get inside it you realise that there's a lot of talk going on and not a lot of action. That might have to be cut, but it's true.

And what sort of things ... you said about re-vamping it and making things more twenty-first century. In what way? Can you say any more about that without obviously saying anything that you will want to cut later?

No, I've said it to them. I suppose it's coming from an artistic eye. The whole look of the paperwork, what's sent out, the whole look of the paperwork is rather sort of old school. We're now ... like everything is now,

everything is now, for want of a better word, funky. I'm using, in my head, the role model of the dwarf organisation, I think they're called The Little People Organisation. They move with the times and their literature is interesting, the way they portray it is interesting and you know that this is an organisation that's going somewhere. Our one, up until recently, looks like an organisation that had been somewhere. So I want to re-vamp it. It's not easy but I think we'll get there.

And you'll have a lot to do with organising things like the AGMs and that sort of thing in the future?

Yes. Also I think one of my personal skills is not actually doing the stuff but I'm good at delegating. I find people's strengths and their weaknesses and then you play to them so you get the right people doing the right jobs. For a long time, on the Society, the Board of Trustees have turned up to meetings but not done a lot else. I said to my very first meeting a while back that it's all going to change and let it be known from now on that if you go on the Board of Trustees it's not going to be an easy ride. So I'm getting ... there's a lot of skill amongst the thalidomiders. They're quite a diverse mob and they can bring a lot to the Society. So I'm finding out their strengths and trying to get them on board.

Now we can do anecdotes. So you said ... because I really enjoyed your other anecdotes and you've got a couple of other ones here that you've just sort of mentioned. One is about your dad teaching you to swim.

Oh yeah.

Can we hear about that?

Yes. Again, at an early age, my dad didn't treat me any different to anybody else and it was my time to learn to swim and the first experience stopped me swimming for ages because he took me to our local pool and he was carrying me because I was very young. And walking down the steps into the child's pool, he slipped and literally threw me up into the air. He sat down, he fell and sat down on the steps. I was thrown literally into the pool and never having been in a pool before in my life I went straight down and this young girl who must have been about twelve or thirteen saved me and brought me back to my dad and yes, it was quite a while after that before I trusted him to take me into the pool again.

And I was right not to trust him to take me into the pool again because whenever he did, when I learned to swim again, he was always ... he'd be looking around to see how other people were doing and I'd be face down drowning. He used to say to me, "You haven't got any faith in me, have you?" And I used to say, "No, I haven't. No, because I'm not breathing. No I haven't got a lot of faith in you."

As you lay dying.

Yes as I'm being pumped out, "I really don't trust you to do this." But he used to have a lot of ... I used to think I could do more than I could and I couldn't do it. So I was always in a bit of a state and then I got noticed by ... at the local pool they had a thing called The Dolphin Club which was a thing for disabled people and I only wanted to go down there to have fun like other people. But my dad thought it was a good idea that I joined this Dolphin Club with other disabled people and they had special sessions on a Sunday.

So, yeah, you'd go down on a Sunday and you'd have a good time and then it got ... you had to join the team and be competitive.

I mean I'm nicknamed Bob because that's what I do in the water I just bob up and down. I flap around a little bit. I can move in some kind of direction. If there's a wave I'm gone. I couldn't really swim but I floated in style.

Could you move though?

Oh yes, I could move. I done three and five metres and all that lot over a period of time but I was more like driftwood which was okay, I didn't mind that. But they put me into the swimming events which was ridiculous. But it was back in the days when it was like the special Olympics when everyone got a medal. I mean I've got countless medals for swimming, God knows why, I never won anything. There was the turning up medal, there was the coming eighty-seventh medal, you know, and it was my introduction into patronisation. So I just had enough, I said, "I can't do this any more, this is silly." It was ridiculous. I'm not thing like the Olympic swimmers that you see. So after that on holidays I'd swim, or float, and that was it.

And now, do you swim at all now?

No, I haven't been swimming for ages, years.

That side of things, with the patronising, that must get quite wearing after a while.

It does because it means absolutely nothing.

Yes. Yes. And the Cubs.

[Laughs]. Again, that was Mum and Dad not wanting me to be normal, that's the wrong term, but thinking I should have the opportunity to do everything other children do. Bear in mind I come from a family who ... we are not clubbing people, we do not need outsiders to entertain us or to entertain, we're very much sort of insular people. But I joined the Cubs and I think my sister ... I'm not 100% sure about this but I think my sister was coerced to be Akela or something or Rikki Tikki whatever they call them, just so she could be there to look after me. And I went for a couple of sessions, had the little uniform, learnt the Cub Scout law and all that business. Then it was time to go for the badges and I remember to this day I'm sitting on the floor cleaning a man's shoe because this will teach me how to clean shoes in the future even though I will never wear one. And I thought to myself, "This is ridiculous." I must have been about ten. And this is absolutely ridiculous. Plus it was always held on a Thursday night which, I don't know if you remember, it was Tomorrow's World night and Top of the Pops night and I would miss both because it was pre recording days. And I just said, "No, I've had enough."

I think the final straw was my little troop went on a camping trip which was on a village outside the town where I lived and I couldn't go because I had to be cared for. But my dad thought it would be nice to go and see it. Yes, great, so all the little kids were in the tents and I went to see my mates who were in the tents

and it stunk of stale urine where all the little kids had peed themselves. And I thought, "I don't want this, this is not my life." So I quickly pulled out of that.

And then another time ... ah, able-bodied people and their ideas ... they set up a thalidomide disabled musical workshop in my town. That was another night out of my life because I like watching telly. But no, I had to go down and watch this musical workshop and although I like music, I can't read it, I've got no rhythm and there I would be on a glockenspiel – why? I was quite happy to stay home and watch telly.

If you want him down, just push him ...

I don't mind so long as he doesn't pull the wires ...

So that was another useless trip they had me going on.

So how many thalidomiders would you have had going to a musical workshop like that?

Back then in a town like that, I think there was probably about six of us.

And people that you still see now?

One. One I still see, one I'm in contact with through Facebook and the others have disappeared, no idea.

Did your parents want you to go to something like that?

Not that they wanted me to. They thought it would be an outlet for me. Not realising that, you know, not my cup of tea. They gave me the opportunity to do things, see if I liked it more than ... they never forced me to do anything.

Look, I've got a little friend.

I can't believe that. Look at him.

He's happy. And so TV. You mentioned you like TV.

I do.

Favourite TV shows just for the record.

At the moment Doctor Who, without doubt.

Me too.

It has been from the very first one I saw which was the very first episode of Doctor Who. Did I tell you William Hartnell wrote to me?

No.

Yes. It was when I was in the infants and I was a big Doctor Who fan. My teacher, I think it was the teacher, wrote to him. "This little thalidomide boy, a big fan of yours." So he wrote back. He sent me a model Dalek, a signed photograph of himself and a letter. I've still got all that.

[04:00] *Did you see Eva's picture with Matt Smith?*

Who?

My daughter. She met Matt Smith.

Jealous!

Have a look, it's on my Facebook page.

I've got to have a look at that.

It's a cool picture as well. I might have it on my camera if I've got my camera with me. She won a writing competition and it was at the Royal Court Theatre in London and it turns out he's a patron so he came to meet all the kids who'd won the competition and she had her photograph taken with him. She was so thrilled. They kept it secret until the last ... she's a massive Doctor Who fan and, of course, Matt Smith is her era. She wasn't crazy about the guy beforehand, I've forgotten his name now.

Tenant.

Tenant. She didn't really like him very much. But she really liked Matt Smith. We went along that evening and they said, "There's a mystery guest and he's going to come and give you your ..." we thought it was going to be David Walliams or somebody like that who writes kids books. There were five of them, all her age, in a little circle and they were told, "We'll tell you who the mystery guest is now. Does anybody know who Matt Smith is?" And you saw their faces and they were like, "Doctor Who?" Absolutely over the moon. She was thrilled to bits.

[Laughs] Is he as zany as he is as the Doctor?

Really shy.

Really?

Really shy but very good with the kids. They were trying to get him to stand up and make a speech and he was hiding behind his hair and saying, "I can't do this kind of thing." He was standing at the back of the crowd ... I don't know why I'm recording me but when he had to go and talk to the kids he just talked to them all one on one, really comfortable with the kids. A lovely man. I was so impressed with him.

We are so sad here. My boys come and stay with us nearly every weekend so we have Doctor Who weekend. We all sit round watching it and we have to sing the theme tune, when it starts and when it finishes. And last weekend my mum came and we made her do it as well. The blokes do the dum-de-dum bit and the women do the high pitch ooh-e-ooh. Or else they don't get to watch it.

Eva's mad about it and she liked the Sarah-Jane mysteries as well.

I never saw that.

They were really good. They were like Doctor Who for six year olds, a little bit scary in places. But I mean Sarah-Jane was the great Doctor Who sidekick.

That's where I remember her from.

Yes, well she was great as Sarah-Jane as well. So yes, those have always been popular. So is it mostly sci-fi stuff you like to watch then?

I like sci-fi and I love documentaries. I don't like ... I can't stand reality TV, I think that's cheap exploitation. X Factor just makes my flesh crawl, soap operas don't do anything for me. I love comedies. I would prefer to go and see a comedian on a stage than see a show. Not so much a show, but a band. I do like going to the theatre to see a show. That's my kind of TV.

Which comedians do you like?

All of them. I mean you get to see people and you say, "Oh, I don't like that" but there's always one with something there. So I literally like all the comedians.

What about sitcoms as well?

Yeah, I like sitcoms. Not so much now because there's not so much on.

There's been that new one, hasn't there, that everyone's getting insulted about? The one about the Muslim family, I can't think what it's called now.

I haven't seen that one.

It's only been on twice. It really tries to send up the whole faith and everyone's been insulted.

They haven't got a sense of humour. I did watch the ... last week they did a pilot two episodes of A Touch of Cloth on Sky1.

I don't know that one.

Ah, it was just like Naked Gun films, a spoof, but it's British and that was hysterical, I loved that. So I like comedies, documentaries, documentaries about the Second World War a lot, much to the annoyance of my kids.

Why the Second World War in particular? Is it because of your dad?

Partly my dad, partly my mum also. My mum would tell stories of the social aspect of the war and basically I just want to find out if they're right. And it's not just about the battles, that doesn't do a lot for me. It's the social aspect of it. How did people feel, how many lies were told by the government or governments. How did ... things like from your own history like at what stage did the Jewish people realise that they were going away and they weren't coming back. Some of them must have said at some point. And the media doesn't really cover that, they've just got this bland thing whereas if you watch the documentaries, there were pockets of resistance with the Jewish people but it's not ever publicised unless you look into it. Because to me it doesn't sound logical. If you see your neighbours disappearing and not coming back, you've got to go, "Something's happened."

I think that a lot of people thought that they were being made to leave the country, deported basically. I think that's what they thought was happening and that was bad enough. They were all being sent to train stations and they were all being forced across the borders and things like that. But I don't think, from what I know, many people thought they were going to be executed. Some of them thought they might be put in camps, kept as sort of prisoners of war, if you like. But I don't think there was any idea, I don't think, even amongst a lot of the German people they knew exactly what was being done. I think the people that were living out in the countryside quite close to these camps ...

Smelling it.

... must have known and they must have leaked those stories back, how could they not?

Yeah.

But I think there was still, you know, a massive amount of shock when it was realised the extent of what had happened.

Yeah. It's only that you understand it now that it's happened. At the time it must have been unheard of before, unreal. Completely unreal. That's the type of thing I like looking into. Not so much the battles because, as I say, it's well documented. But it's the stuff that isn't documented that I like.

So the human or social side of it.

And again, why the governments lied and this stupid thing, the propaganda that everyone in London was pulling together. And then you watch documentaries where the rich, during an air raid, would go into the basement of the Savoy and be able to eat food that no one could touch because there was a class two-tiered system. They didn't all pull together. Putting it into reality about the black market. One person's gain is somebody else's theft and, you know, putting the reality into it, not the chirpy cockneys as they try to make it out to be. I just like the reality of it.

And some of that, your interest in the governments lying must be related to the thalidomide story.

Oh yes.

With that big cover up going on.

The pay-offs, if not with money then it's like in the first court case that we had back in the mid-sixties, it was an obvious pay-off to the judge. So the whole court case had to be heard again. I mean looking back it's more than obvious. So I like all the stuff like that.

That makes sense. And now you've talked about a hazardous connection with cars.

Oh yes, I was talking to my mum on Saturday and it slowly dawned on me that I had this real bad luck with vehicles. And it started off with Lady Hoare who helped found the Thalidomide Society. It started off with another children's organisation to ours, a brilliant woman, really tried. Back then we didn't have electric wheelchairs and through her insight and her connections, she managed to get a pedal car for me, a yellow TR7 Triumph pedal car and I couldn't pedal it so she got somebody to motorise it for me and it was absolutely brilliant. I could go out into the street and play with all the kids in the street which I did do. I

remember I was out with my dad one day and we were coming down this fairly steep hill called Cuttys Lane, which, I mean when you say lane it conjures up this pretty little lane but it was in town and halfway down this hill my brakes went and I was literally hurtling down this hill which was going to open up into a t-junction on the road and I remember my dad chasing after me, I was feet away from the end. And that was my first experience with brakes going in cars.

And then around about fifteen years later, down Cuttys Lane again, I did it in a real car which was a DAF, also yellow and again my brakes went and that's when I ended up hitting the tree and doing my eye in.

And in between time I had another bespoke car that was made for a lot of us beneficiaries. I call it bespoke because it literally was a one-off even though a lot of us had it, no other disability group had this thing, which I remember playing with the kids and I was reversing on a little slope and turned it over and all the battery acid came out. So that was ruined.

Then I did have another one that I was successful with. I kept it all the way through until I grew out of it and passed it onto somebody else.

Not yellow?

That was yellow actually. Yellow seems to be the theme. And then I've had a nasty one on the motorway. I was driving my van and I was going up north to a meeting and for some reason, although I didn't know it, my handbrake's electronic and in those days it was just a flick up for on, a flick down for off and then it would just stay in the middle, you didn't know if it was on or off. And I was driving up the motorway with it on and, of course, I burnt out my brake discs which I found out because I was in the middle lane and this lorry pulled out in front of me to overtake the lorry in front of him. I went to put my foot on the brake and nothing and ... absolutely nothing. So I turned to my then wife and I've gone ... I won't say all the words but, "Oh dear, my brakes aren't working, I think I'm going to hit the lorry in front." And she shouted back, "Oh dear, that sounds dangerous." And I said, "Yes, I think it could well be." And my mum and dad were in the back because they were coming to the same meeting and they heard us saying this rather loudly thinking we were having an argument. And my mum said, "What you having an argument about?" My then wife said, "We're not arguing, the brake's have gone" and my dad, who was a ... that was his job, he was a driver all his life, came running up to the front and between the two of us, we managed to pull the gears down, get onto the hard shoulder and survived it.

And then my latest one, which was a year and a half ago – Volkswagen van, I had a bit of trouble with the brakes, nothing serious, so I took it to a garage and they looked over it. They said, "Nothing really wrong with it," they cleaned up the pads, brought it back to me. That evening I took it out because we were going to a show in town. We got round two corners then the brakes literally went. I drove it over the top of a raised roundabout into a barrier. And I said to Claire, "Oh my God, I think we're dead." And, fortunately enough, we hit the barrier and it threw me out into the middle of the road where the wheel came off and we all stopped, fortunately enough, because that was because the garage had forgotten to link up my disabled brake.

That's so dangerous a thing to do. So that's five car accidents. That's quite a lot.

Yes.

I just had my first one ever.

Oh, you're an amateur. Oh, I did have another one. But that one was my fault. I'd gone to a ... this was in the days when they didn't have drink driving, by the way. I'd gone out with my mate and his girlfriend in my DAF and we'd gone to this pub which had a very steep car park, narrow and steep. And I thought, being clever, I'd park it at the top of the hill so when I came out I could just drive down and onto the main road rather than getting in one of these little bays where people could lock me in. Went in the pub, did have a couple of drinks, but wasn't that bad, came out, I got in the car, his girlfriend got into the back of the car. I'd done an old trick my dad taught me of putting a brick under the back wheel in case it rolled because it was that steep. So anyway I said to my mate, "I'll start the engine," which then gave me powers of the brakes, "You take the brick away." He said, "Yes," and forgot to wait for me to start the engine. So took the brick away, I've started to roll down the hill, absolutely no steering ... oh, no, I did have steering back then but it wasn't powered. I had steering but no brakes or accelerator. So I rolled down ... he'd left the door open to just pop back in again after he removed the brick and that door got closed on a van that was parked, got to the bottom of the hill, which opened up into a mini roundabout which I went round the wrong way. Got tooted at quite a bit, got onto the other side of the roundabout by which time it was rolling to a stop, started the engine, by which point my mate had come running down the hill, he started the engine and we shot off. That was it.

So basically you've kind of diced with death.

On many occasions. I had this deep theory that I don't think I don't think I'm going to ever die.

Do you think you're indestructible Ed?

I really seriously do. I really do. I've been in so many scrapes and stuff. It's like when I went to have my eye done, they done blood pressure and everything and when they done it, they said, "You're seriously weird." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "Well, your blood pressure, everything is totally normal. Normally when people go for an operation they're worried they're not going to come out." He said, "You're totally normal." So I really don't worry about it.

No, no. How about things like taking blood pressure from you – is that difficult to do? How do they do that?

Very difficult. They do it on my leg. They put a cuff around there. It's more of an idea as to how accurate it is. So they do it like that. Blood tests themselves are awkward because my veins are very small. But, you know, you sit there for about half an hour whilst they're digging away, trying to get a drop of blood. But I'm really, really lucky and ... well, to be honest, I know it's wrong, but since living here, and it's coming up for six years, I still haven't got a GP. I keep meaning to get round to it but I never do.

That's a good sign. So even with things like coughs and colds you don't need to go?

I know it's probably wrong but I have a bit of a low opinion about GPs, they're a little bit witch doctor-ish. They give you a tablet. If I wanted that I could go to Boots. So I keep away from them, they keep away from me. And that's it really.

You're very lucky.

I mean up against other thalidomiders, I'm incredibly lucky. That's just gone down on the book now, wave to Catherine.

Waved.

Recorded. So I'm lucky, I just keep away from them.

I have to go quite a lot because of ... Eva has allergy problems, anaphylactic, so I have to go a lot with her.

Well that's a genuine thing. I find a lot of people go to the doctors just to have someone to chat to.

I don't get it. People go if they've got things like ... you know, they'll go with, like, an earache. What's the point? All they'll do is tell you to take Paracetamol.

I've finished all of my questions that I wanted to ask you. But is there anything else that you would like to say or anything else that you don't think was covered. Shall we pause for a second?

Claire enters the room. Yes, yes sure.

So any last thoughts or comments, Ed?

Yes, a bit off the wall, not really to do with anything. But the way I'd describe myself ... I don't know if I've said this to you before, the only equivalent I can give to you is because I've been brought up in a normal home and a normal school all my life, but I am disabled myself and therefore I am limited as to what I can do and get access to places and everything, I'd describe myself as almost mixed race. Whereas I'm half able-bodied, mentally, but half-disabled physically. So I'm in a bit of a limbo land where I can mix with both worlds relatively comfortably but also where I'm lost in various worlds as well because I'm not fully disabled because of the up-bringing and things. There's some bits that I don't understand. And there's other things that able-bodied people don't understand due to the disability. So I'd describe myself as being sort of mixed race in that respect. And I think probably a lot of people who have been in my situation probably would be like that; they're at home in both worlds but not in both worlds if you know what I mean?

Yes, it's interesting isn't it? You're in a category of your own, in a way, neither one thing or another.

Somebody else I interviewed, and I wonder what you think about this, one of the differences between being affected by thalidomide or another disability group, is almost because of that ... because you're ... other disability groups are defined as, say, a cerebral palsy sufferer will have a specific kind of life. Whereas

people affected by thalidomide, for one thing, you're very different to each other in terms of how much you're affected and in what ways but you've also not been born into that same known medical condition. So is it like a different category, somehow?

Yes, I suppose in that sense it is because we're not pre-defined. There's no history with us so I think the medical profession and psychologists are learning at the same rate as we are. Because, in that respect, we are quite unique.

As an oral history project it's perfect because you're like a perfect sample group of people. It's a small group really, you have these two things in common – being born roughly at the same time and all of you have the fact that your mother took a drug during pregnancy. But outside of that, the group is hugely diverse. Different parts of the country, different upbringings, you know, so it's a great group of people to study.

No doubt you've heard the term the family from many of us. I know it sounds clichéd and a little bit romantic but it's the only word that really describes us. I mean there's loads of squabbles within our own group but anybody who attacks ... unless there's a reason or provocation, we all become defensive. It is quite a close knit community even though we are so diverse. But then I put a lot of that, fortunately, to the Thalidomide Society and the Thalidomide Trust who almost pushed us together from day one. As soon as everything is found out, we were pushed together. And it is like growing up with family.

No, I get a strong sense of that. Everybody calls it a dysfunctional family.

Oh, very dysfunctional, very dysfunctional. But if you've got a family with somebody who's got learning difficulties within it, people gather around that person and protect them. And we've got, let's face it, quite a few people who are a little bit dysfunctional but people cut them a lot of slack because usually they've had very difficult up-bringsings and therefore they're protected amongst the group. And it's great. The ones that are capable take care of those that aren't basically. And it's going on to this day.

Do you think that somebody who was affected by thalidomide but in maybe the most minor way possible, like maybe just a few fingers on one hand, would still feel part of that group or be more likely to just carry on with life outside?

I'm not sure. I mean I know of thalidomiders that aren't within the group. And some say they just don't want to mix. So that's them really. But I don't think they're really in the majority.

No, it will be interesting to see how many just don't mix with other thalidomiders at all or don't get involved in campaigns. That would be interesting to know, wouldn't it?

Every so often, every other year or so in the Thalidomide Society, because we have the AGMs, new thalidomiders to the Society come along. And it's always the same quote. Again, a bit of a cliché, they spend a weekend with us and they say, "It's fantastic, it's like coming home" because they can be who they

want to be. They haven't got to put up with pretence – they can really let their hair down and stupid things like dancing. I mean you've been to the AGMs, it does look a little bit horrific on the dance floor.

I wouldn't call it horrific, it's ...

Odd?

... rather fascinating to me.

Fascinating.

Because you would never ... it's not something that you would be able to imagine before you've seen it.

No. When you see people with no legs dancing on the floor, they look like they're in a pit and the rocking of the wheelchairs ... it's a ...

I remember watching, at the big conference that just happened, Louise dancing, she was just moving her head.

As the film says, inside I'm dancing. It's very much like that. Even though only her head is moving, probably in her subconscious she's getting down and boogying. And that's the freedom of it, you couldn't get that at a normal nightclub because basically you'd be stared at, even if you was brave enough to do that, you'd be stared at. Whereas the newcomers, they do that. They normally throw themselves in 100% because they've suddenly got this freedom. There's no embarrassment that you're at the table with your feet, or having to have raised platforms and stuff like that. Everything is totally in our world of normality. And we don't usually lose the new ones, once they've gone once they're fixed members.

I remember being at the big conference and something really struck me. As I looked around I just saw how many different ways people were managing to use a camera to take photographs of the speaker and it was brilliant. There were all these feet up on the table and these cameras being held by feet and it was just ... it was like we were saying about the Paralympics. It's more interesting to look at different bodies doing the things that you just take for granted and you don't even notice any more.

What always amazes me is that when you see all that type of stuff, where their feet become hands and their hands quite often become feet when they're walking on them, I wonder what it would ... obviously it's an ability that you learn and I wonder how superhuman an able-bodied person would be if they learned to use their hands and their feet to that extent. But I think because you don't have to, you don't develop that skill.

No, it's true. And I know, yes, if I think about what kids can do with their little curly baby feet, they can move them everywhere. Pick things up, stick them in their mouth. And then they become solid and don't bend any more. It's a good point. You should have another child and train it to use its hands and feet.

I think Social Services would have a go at me.

It's just a thought.

[Laughs] And you're on tape saying that. Can I say it was your idea? That works for me. Ruth said ... have plenty of children and train them to do tricks.

Okay, on that note I think we're done for today.

I think so.

Thanks ever so much, Ed, it's been a great pleasure talking to you and if anything comes up, let me know. And I'll send you this new bit of the transcript through, get your mum to go through it.

Typical!

Thank you.

You're welcome.

END OF RECORDING