

# Thalidomide: David Bickers (2012)

Ruth Blue interviews David Bickers for the *Thalidomide: An Oral History* project.

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*This is Ruth Blue interviewing David Bickers – do you like to be called Dave or David?*

Don't mind.

*Okay. At his home in Romford on the third of November 2012 for Thalidomide: An Oral History. David, are you happy to confirm that you've seen and signed the copyright and consent form?*

I am.

*And just to confirm, we're doing this interview over Skype.*

We are.

*So the first interview is about childhood, birth, family and school life. So could you start off by telling me about your family background, who your parents are, what kind of work they did and if you've got any siblings?*

I haven't got no siblings. My parents were engineers. I went to Dunningford Infants and Juniors School, Highlands Senior School, then Bush Elms ... well, it changed name to Bush Elms when they both joined. Then I went to Redbridge Technical College and that's it basically, yes. So that's it basically for schools.

*And you said no siblings, right? So what about your parents' decision to use thalidomide, do you know who prescribed it for your mum?*

I think the doctor but that's a question I'm going to have to ask her and come back to you on that. So can you make a note of the questions I don't know and email it to me?

*Yes, I will do that.*

And I can get the answers to them.

*So the next questions are about what it was prescribed for and how long did your mum take it for so I think you probably need to ask her?*

Yes, I can come back with those questions.

*Okay, so we'll do those next time. What about your birth? Do you know where you were born?*

Old Church Hospital.

*What was that again?*

Oldchurch Hospital, all one word.

*Okay and where about is that?*

Romford. It's now demolished, it's been replaced by the Queen's Hospital, I'm sure you've seen that on the news. So it's now been replaced by the Queen's Hospital, yes.

*And do you know how the birth was for your mum?*

I think she had high blood pressure, very high blood pressure. But, again, if you put that question in I can get more information on that.

*Okay so I'll put a question mark next to a few of them. And do you know when your parents were first aware that you'd been born with an impairment?*

Not long after birth. But, again, I can get the exact information for you if you put that question through.

*Okay, I'll do that one. For the interview, because it's just an audio interview, can you describe your level of impairment?*

Four limb deficient.

*Okay. Do you know if your parents were given any advice by medical professionals following your birth?*

Yes.

*Do you know much about that?*

My mother was told to go home, forget about me, he'll never be any good, he'll be a deaf / blind vegetable.

*And how did she feel about that?*

Shocked.

*And what about your father?*

What do you mean what about my father?

*Do you know how he responded to that?*

I can't ask him because he died in 2007 and he was supportive, he was a great dad.

*And do you know how long your mum was in hospital for after your birth?*

No, again, it's a question you'll have to email me and I'll find out for you.

*Okay, I'll put that one down with a question mark. And were you ever aware of your parents' feelings following your birth?*

Not as a kid, no. I had a happy childhood, great childhood.

*So let's go on to talk about that, your early life. Were you taken home from hospital or did you go to an institution?*

Home.

*What sort of home environment did your parents have at the time of your birth?*

I think we were in a flat above the shops.

*Do you know what impact your impairment had on your family's life at the time, did it make a big impact on them?*

Yes. Well, yes, it would have done, yes, yes. Everything centred around me at the time, it had quite a big impact.

*Do you know if your mum and dad received any kind of social services or home support when you were first brought home?*

No, no. No, no.

*They didn't receive any help?*

No.

*I was going to say would you describe yourself as having had a happy childhood?*

Yes.

*Can you say what was good about it?*

Lots of fun, parties, laughter, good fun, lots of friends, just the usual things of being a kid, really. Being spoilt rotten I suppose.

*And you don't think your impairment made any difference to any of those things?*

Not to enjoyment, no, no.

*Do you think your parents were slightly more protective of you?*

Yes although my mum's always made me independent so yes, a little bit, not a lot, I've always been made to be independent.

*Do you have any idea at which point your parents knew your impairment had been caused by thalidomide?*

Probably 1965 but I'll check on that if you can put that as a question to ask.

*Do you have any idea how they felt when they realised your impairment had been caused by thalidomide?*

No. But I can ask that as well. It's another one to ask.

*Okay. Do you know if your parents were involved in any of the campaigns for compensation?*

Yes, my mum was involved in setting up the Trust.

*Was she?*

Yes.

*Could you say a bit more about what you know about that?*

That's it, it was all happening when I was a kid so she was just involved in the whole lot really, setting it up, making sure it was operating properly, gave her advice.

*Was it the Trust or the Thalidomide Society?*

Thalidomide Trust. Yes.

*That's interesting. Perhaps that's something you could ask your mum a bit more about.*

Yes, I'm quite happy to do that.

*I'll put that one down as well. Do you know if your parents were ever approached by the media to discuss thalidomide or to discuss you?*

Yes, no doubt. Yes, I'm sure they were, yes, yes. To do interviews and appear in press interviews and television. My mum did *24 Hours*, the documentary that used to be on television called *24 Hours*. And *Horizon*, have you heard of *Horizon*?

Oh yes.

Well before that it was known as *24 Hours*.

*And have you any idea what that was called, the episode you were in?*

No but it was ... one of the interviewers was Phillip Tibenham, he's no longer living I don't think. I can remember they brought the cameras around to my house and all the lighting equipment and he had to stop the recording because he'd burnt his head because the lights were so low. I can remember that bit because I can remember laughing as a kid, thinking it was funny. Smoke was coming off the top of his head! [Laughs].

*Wouldn't have been funny if it was you! [Laughs].*

You don't appreciate that when you're five, do you?

*No, you don't. So you do remember that happening?*

Down the road in the living room, yes.

*Okay. Do you know how old you were when you knew that your impairment was caused by thalidomide and you started to have an understanding of thalidomide?*

Five / six.

*Five or six. Any idea about how you felt about that?*

Well you don't, you just live, don't you? Do you know what I mean? You don't think, it's only later on in life that you think.

*Yes. And do you know how old you were when you got your compensation through.*

1970, so I'd have been about eleven.

*Do you know if that made much of an impact on your family's life?*

My parents didn't gain from it but it was there for me. Yes, it made a big difference to me.

*So did they put it into a trust for you?*

It's in the Thalidomide Trust, isn't it? It's a discretionary trust fund. So you're only given an annual allocation that you can call on when you need it. You're not given any money, if you know what I mean? I don't physically receive a cheque.

*So when you say it made a big difference to you ...*

All the things ... it got me a car and things like that. I got my Mini and now I drive a Vito van, without which I couldn't have done it.

*That would have been when you were a bit older.*

Yes. As a kid it got me wheelchairs, I suppose, that sort of thing, general stuff.

*Did your parents attend any of the events that were organised by the Thalidomide Society or any other groups?*

A few. My mum's gone to meetings, yes. I can ask that. Just put a clean list of questions in there with gaps between them and I'll write the answers down, just to jog me memory and then we can get on the web cam as many times as you want, I'm quite happy.

*Okay, good. And what about the Thalidomide Trust funded holidays?*

Yes, we did Jersey.

*Do you remember that?*

Yes, yes. I've been quite a few times to Jersey. It was good fun.

*Tell me some of your memories from that.*

Going out drinking, clubs, the usual stuff you do when you're young, touring the island, holiday type stuff, just the same as everybody else really, coming home at 3 o'clock in the morning, getting ready for the next night. Yes it was a good time. I think I can remember them! [Laughs].

*And what did you find it like ... did you find it helpful being round other people that were affected by thalidomide? Was that a good environment to be in.*

It didn't bother me. Didn't notice them.

*So in your normal home life, were you surrounded by kids that were able bodied for want of a better word?*

Yes, yes.

*Have you ever been offered help in the form of prostheses or other technological devices?*



Yes, yes. Artificial limbs and arms and I turned them down because they make you feel trapped.

*Do you know which hospital you went to for that?*

Roehampton.

*So you were offered artificial legs and arms?*

For a while.

*Did you use them?*

For a while but they were cumbersome.

*Did you fall?*

Yes, I've fallen a couple of times. The earlier ones were not so bad because they had rockers on the feet so you couldn't really fall but the other ones ... I didn't like them.

*Did you have to spend much time at Roehampton?*

A few weeks, I suppose, yes. On and off.

*Do you remember what the limb fitting sessions were like at all?*

Yes, you had plaster casts made of your bottom half, to make a mould, that sort of thing. I didn't like it, I'd rather it didn't happen.

*What about education, where did you get your primary school education?*

Dunningford.

*Is that a special school?*

No, mainstream.

*And how did they ... so at that point were you using a wheelchair or prosthetic legs?*

A wheelchair or moving around on the floor.

*How did they accommodate you?*

Yes, fine.

*Did they make any special changes to help you?*

No, it was a primary school, it's always on one level. So yes, it was all right in the primary school and the junior school.

*How did you fit into school? What were the other kids like?*

Great. Yes, nice. Good time.

*So what were your favourite subjects when you were there? Did you have anything in particular you liked?*

Every subject, it was all one thing, isn't it, in infants and primary. Maths, English, I liked it all!

*So you generally had a happy school life with no ...*

Yes, had a good time.

*That's good to hear. Secondary school.*

Yes, that was mainstream, Highlands. Again, had a good time. Friends, plenty of friends. Toughens you up, doesn't it, secondary school?

*I believe so. Especially for boys it can be quite hard sometimes, can't it?*

Yes, it's harder for boys, yes. But it was all right, I toughened up, resilient.

*Did you ever in any of your schools encounter any kind of disability prejudice against you or any bullying?*

I got a bit of piss taking but that's just boys, isn't it? I gave as good as I got so ... I can answer back. [Phone rings] sorry my phone's going ...

*That's all right, I'll just pause for a second.*

*Okay so we were just talking about secondary school. And at secondary school did they have to make any special changes to accommodate you in any way?*

Yes, some of the lessons were inaccessible. Science, I couldn't do science because it was upstairs, which I would have liked to have done.

*What sort of wheelchair were you in then?*

I had an Epic wheelchair, it was like a moving armchair and it was slow, it would take you ages to get to a lesson. It wasn't like modern wheelchairs, it was really slow, cumbersome, heavy. It was like an armchair, it was oblong with a seat, it looked like I was driving on a box. It had a seat on top. Slow as anything, you'd never believe how slow it was and to change speed you'd turn a knob. It wasn't like my wheelchair now that can do ten kilometres an hour and I can nip and spin and do things when I go out. Slow old chair, the Epic, blimey.

*So what did you do if there was a classroom you couldn't access? Did they give you lessons elsewhere?*

No you just had to go into the library and lose half an hour. But that wasn't often. Most of the lessons were downstairs, it was only the science labs that were upstairs.

*Did you have any ideas at that point in your life about any of the things you wanted to do when you were older?*

Yes, science, anything gadgety. Photography. Computers.

*And were those things you were quite good at as well?*

They didn't do it at school. I had to do it privately. They didn't do computers at my school.

*No, I suppose they would have come in a bit later, wouldn't they? What about health problems or medical interventions? Did you have to spend much time in hospital?*

No, only at birth when I was born. That was it. No time in hospital through illness.

*That's good. But you spent a bit of time in hospital at Roehampton for limb fittings?*

Yes, yes, yes. But not medical illnesses if you know what I mean?

*So you weren't having to go back and forth for check ups and things like that?*

They'd check the limbs out but, as I said, I gave up in the end. I thought, "Sod it."

*Okay [squeaking sound in background].*

It sounds like your kids have just killed someone and they're moving the body [laughs].

*[Laughs] No that's the sound of the Chinese takeaway opposite lifting the shutter up across the street.*

Gawd, it sounds awful.

*I know. It's really loud, isn't it?*

*Okay, so moving on to talk about early adulthood. Did you have any worries or concerns about your impairment as you were approaching adulthood? Were you worried it was going to hold you back in any way?*

No, I never worried about things like that. I still don't. No, not really.

*And did you continue on to further education?*

Yes, college. Redbridge Tech.

*What did you do?*

Computer science.

*Ah, so you did get to do computing then?*

I did. Well, I got my way, yes. I did it.

*And did you have a better wheelchair at that point?*

Oh, yes, yes, yes. I had a proper outdoor wheelchair. I had a Meyri – M-E-Y-R-I, a German chair.

*Okay. So did the college have to do any kind of ...*

Yes they had to bring some of the computer lessons downstairs.

*So they did accommodate you there then?*

I couldn't use the college computers. I had to use my own. I had to buy one.

*And were you still at that point hoping to have a career within computing?*

I have done all my life, yes, worked within technology / gadgets.

*Okay, we'll move onto your career in a minute. What about independence? When did you leave home?*

I've not left home, this is my house. Mum lives with me, I bought this place.

*Okay. So you've continued to live with your mum?*

Yes, I bought the place so mum lives with me. Other than that, yes, a few years ago she said ... when I was about twenty one she offered to move out and I said, "Why?" No point, we got on. They never got in my way, I never got in theirs, so it worked out fine.

*So you still live in the family home that you lived in from what age?*

I was ... been here since I was eleven. Before that we lived in a shop and before that we lived in Dymoke Road. Do you want me to spell that for you?

*Go on then.*

D-Y-M-O-K-E.

*That's an unusual word, isn't it?*

Dymoke, yes. I saw it today on a company – Dymoke Limited. I haven't seen the word ...

*No, I've never heard of that before.*

Apparently the engineering factory next door was owned by [?Saba 0:20:12]. We had the house beside the factory.

*Okay. And did you ... what sort of support did you receive in early adulthood? You had family support because you were still living with your mum, but financial support, was that primarily from the Trust?*

Yes.

*And what about close friendships – did you have the support of friends or anything like that?*

Yes, a lot of good friends. Big time, yes.

*Did you have other thalidomider friends?*

No. Only when I was a kid – Tony who used to live in Hornchurch, Tony Ashton. I used to go round and play but no, mostly all my friends were able bodied. But you'll find that with disabled people. If you have friends who are disabled they can't help you! [Laughs].

*No, we have some ...*

Being ruthless about it, what's the point of them? [Laughs].

*Yes, yes. We've got some film of Tony Ashton.*

Oh yeah?

*Yes, from when he was at school when he was a very small boy – he must have been maybe eight or nine.*

I don't know where he lives now, I've lost touch with him.

*Is it you that appears in a film One of Them is Brett? Has it got a little bit of you in it?*

No. That's ... Brett was his ...

*I know there's Brett, but there's another boy who appears in it who's at Roehampton. They don't actually name him in the film but I wondered if it might be you because you said you spent some time in Roehampton.*

They might have used footage.

*I'll see if I can find out.*

There's a programme next year on BBC4, an update.

*Do you know what that's going to be called?*

No, haven't been told. We'll be told nearer the time when it's on.

*So that's like one of those Thalidomide at 50 / Thalidomide 40 Years On ...*

Yes, they do it ...

*Yes. Did you have any ongoing health concerns or medical interventions at the time when you were finishing further education?*

No. I've never suffered any ill-health.

*Have you ever had any since then in life?*

No. I don't even have aches and pains.

*Lucky you. What about your early career – did your impairment affect in any way your ability to get a job?*

Probably. But I worked around it. I did a bit of broadcasting for BBC / Radio 4. I did a lot of hospital radio, talking newspaper for the blind. I was in the Red Cross for three years. What else?

*What was your first job? What was the very first job you did?*

Tape winder, making pancake tapes for cassette tapes. Are you going to write this up into a dossier then?

*Yes, I'll transcribe everything you've said, yes.*

I'll have a read and any changes I can make that are not right ...

*Exactly, yes. And what about after that, the tape winding, what did you do then?*

College. I went to college after that.

*And career-wise after that, what was your first real job that you really wanted to do?*

Self-employed, running my own business.

*Tell me a bit about that. What were you self-employed doing?*

Type-setting for publications and magazines.

*And where did you do that? Did you run that from home?*

I did do that from home because it was the cheapest place to do it. When I looked at premises costs. Best place to be.

*And was there anything you might have wanted to do career-wise that you felt you couldn't do because of your disability?*

No, no. I worked around it. I'm in a good that ... technology is quite good for me because it's adaptable, isn't it, computers? Just happened to be something I liked doing. [Phone bleeps].

*Are you okay there?*

Yes, fine. Just checking me phone, me phone went off, sorry.



*I heard a little noise there. In terms of contact with other people affected by thalidomide, did you, at that point, go to any Society events?*

I went to a couple, I think, in London. But no, I tend to stay out of it really.

*So you've never been particularly part of that social world?*

No, no. No, I haven't.

*Did you not keep in touch with any of the people you met at Roehampton?*

No. No. Anti-social git.

*[Laughs]. Okay. Relationships.*

Yes.

*Did your impairment affect in any way your ability to find a partner?*

No. I've had quite a few women in me life. I've got one now that's nagging me on the phone.

*Who was your first romantic relationship with?*

God ... I'm not going to mention names but eight years. When or who?

*How old would you have been?*

Twenty two I think. Twenty two / twenty three, something like that.

*And how did you meet her?*

CB radio.

*And was she disabled in any way?*

Well she was blonde but apart from that, no. Does that count? [Laughs].

*[Laughs] not necessarily, no.*

Funnily enough I met her the other day, she was sitting in Starbucks, she's now high up in the St John's Ambulance.

*Have all of your female partners all been able bodied women?*

[Nods].

Yes.

[Yawns] sorry, late night. Yes, yes.

*Okay and you went out with her for eight years. And are you married or in a long-term relationship now?*

Yes I'm in a relationship now but not married.

*Have you been married?*

I'm happy. No! I don't do that, I'm an atheist [laughs].

*Never been married.*

No, I don't do churches and weddings.

*But have you mostly tended to have quite long-term relationships?*

No, the shorter the better [laughs]. Sorry, a bit of a bad boy.

*So the current relationship, how long have you been in that one for?*

Four months / five months.

*So that's fairly new.*

Yes. It's a miracle, I don't know about fairly new. It's a long time, isn't it, four months?

*And how did you meet her?*

Starbucks. She works in Starbucks. She got me not the other way round this time. The shoe was on the other foot.

*So she chased after you.*

Yes, literally, yes. I wish I could say I was bragging but I'm not. I'm telling the truth, yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah, she chased after me. Incredible. I still can't believe it meself. All these aggressive women with their careers, they're quite frightening [laughs]. No, I never ran the play, she did.

*And have any of your partners ever had any kind of problems or concerns about your impairment?*

No, no, no, no, no.

*Have you ever had any children?*

No [laughs]!

*Okay so you look a bit shocked about that. You don't fancy having any children?*

Might do.

*Maybe one day.*

I don't really want any ties or commitments really.

*Have any of your partners ever moved in with you or have you always lived separately?*

[Laughs] I've managed to successfully avoid that because they'd know where I am, it would be too close to home.

*So you've mostly been quite independent then? You've had relationships but you've kept your own independence, your own space.*

Yes, yes, yes. Definitely. Yes, I must have me own space. I'd go mad, I couldn't stand that. My girlfriend now wants to move in next year and I'm saying, "Yes, but you've got to keep your job." Because it means she's out of the house all day. I've got to have me freedom. It's nice to have the time with the women but it's also nice to have your time on your own with your mates, your male friends. They'd drive me nuts. I work with two women all day long in the office, drives me ... the conversation's completely different, we're on a different planet [laughs].

*So what about ... so male friends, who are they?*

Colin Cobb, Mark Renner. They're all drinking mates and buddies and things like that.

*So is that something you like to do socially, you like to go out and have a drink?*

Yes, occasionally. And theatre; I go to the Queen's Theatre. Drama. What else? All kinds things ... Red Cross. Hospice, I worked at the hospice for seven years. St Francis' Hospice.

*Was that as a volunteer?*

Well, I was a driver. It's ... you get paid but you don't get paid much. They call it voluntary to get round the tax laws but yes, you're paid a token sum.

*So what did you do?*

The first few years I was a shopper and then the next five years I used to pick up the controlled drugs every day, five days a week.

*So that was like a full time driving job?*

No, no, no. I only did it on my way ... I was a repper at the time, a travelling rep. So I could do it on the way home which meant that I could get that money for the petrol. As far as I was concerned it was buttons money. As I was driving through I could pick them up and take them to the hospice so it was great. Get them signed in.

*What was your job as a sales rep?*

Just selling, doing my own stuff, self-employed. Computer systems. I just went out to see customers, I wasn't actually a travelling rep because I'd have gone nuts all day long if all I had to do was drive.

*Yes, yes. Okay, so no children and ...*

Hence the youthful look, sorry ...

*[Laughs]. I don't know ...*

It's done you well. It seems to make women look younger when they have kids. It makes men look older or something.

*Yes, I'm actually seventy but I look quite young.*

You do. You're wearing well.

*So no other health concerns or medical interventions as you've grown older?*

Not at the minute, no. Hang on, can you hit the pause button?

*Yes, sure.*

*All right. So no changing health concerns or any increase in pain or anything like that?*

None whatsoever, no. I'll be dead next week probably [laughs]. Famous last words. No, no, I'm fine.

*[Laughs]. And have your feelings about your impairment or thalidomide changed over the years? Is there anything you've learned about the origins of the drug that's been interesting to you?*

It's become a wonder drug, hasn't it? It's helped treat cancer, leprosy. I've just learned there's no point in fighting it. There ain't a lot you can do about it, it's not going to change the situation, is it? You've just got to get on with it?

*Were you aware of that apology from Grünenthal? I'm saying apology in the broadest sense of the word.*

Read out by a junior minister because Gordon Brown couldn't even be bothered to come out and read it.

*What did you feel about that?*

I thought it was insensitive, a bit of a piss take really.

*Do you use anything like Facebook in terms of keeping touch with other people?*

I'm on Facebook, yes and Louise Medus keeps me informed every now and again.

*Okay.*

No, I'd rather go out and talk to three-dimensional people rather than Facebook.

*Yes. And what's your current job?*

I'm still in IT, Apple computers, selling computers and computer systems. I've got another business which is a model agency and I'm trying to start a theatre company.

*A model agency?*

Yes, so people go out and do modelling jobs, like jobbing modelling. And also trying to build a theatre, a bit theatre, but that's another story.

*How the heck are you going to do that, build a theatre?*

Raise money, charitable donations. It's a big job.

*Where are you thinking of doing that? In Romford?*

It will be in Romford but I don't know where. I have no idea yet, we've got to get the land but such is life.

*Are there any particular kinds of theatre productions that you want to do that for?*

Yes, I'd like to put on *Return to the Forbidden Planet*, some Shakespeare stuff. *Noises Off*, have you seen that play *Noises Off*?

Yes.

It's funny, isn't it?

*Yes. And what made you decide to build a theatre?*

I was asked by a mate of mine if I wanted to join the project. He was interested and he got talking to me and we did it between the two of us and it sort of snowballed from there.

*Wow. So they're very diverse things you're doing.*

They are diverse, yes.

*Computing, model agency and theatre.*

Yes, well they're all sort of related.

*I'm trying to find the link.*

Modelling agency and theatre are related, aren't they? Sort of production, theatre, broadcasting, it's all that sort of general ego stuff isn't it, really?

*What sort of modelling agency?*

Just general jobbing modelling. You know, catalogues, posters, general stuff.

*And do you get a lot of work through that?*

No because I don't put enough time into it so it's quite quiet at the minute.

*So how much of your daily life do you spend working, do you think?*

As and when it comes in on the website. As soon as the orders come through the site, I then go into action really.

*Is it full time hours or would you say it's less than that?*

Yes, full time and longer. Yes, a long time. I put a lot into it.

*And what about your leisure time, what do you like doing?*

Theatre, cinema, me charity projects.

*Do you read?*

Yes, I'm an avid reader. I like reading.

*What kind of things do you like to read?*

General stuff – mysteries, science, technical manuals, that kind of thing.

*So do you like detective stories like Sherlock Holmes?*

Yes, Sherlock Holmes, anything. Horror. I like films, cinema theatre, yes, all of it. I do all the theatres every year, I do four or five trips to the theatre every year.

*Did you like that new Sherlock Holmes that was on TV very recently?*

Yes, with Benedict Cumberbatch. I loved it.

*So did I.*

Martin Freeman. Well-written.

*I love Martin Freeman.*

I think he's brilliant.

*He's a fantastic actor.*



Yes, he's good. I love Benedict Cumberbatch, I think he'd have made an excellent Doctor in Doctor Who but he couldn't do both franchises so that's why Matt Smith got Doctor Who. I'm a huge fan of Benedict Cumberbatch, I think he's very good. He's blonde! I didn't realise he's blonde.

*No!*

He is, he's dark-haired. He dyed his hair specifically for Sherlock Holmes.

*I can't imagine him with blonde hair.*

He is blonde. He was presenting on *Have I Got News For You*, he's as blonde as blonde can be, it's his natural colour.

*Well he doesn't look like he would be.*

I remember seeing Benedict Cumberbatch, he had dark hair, he had dark brown hair and I was just stunned when I saw him with blonde hair and I just thought, "Oh, he's dyed his hair" then I realised it was his natural colour. It's not dyed, he is a blonde.

*That's really odd. I never would have thought he was blonde.*

Really fair-haired, lightly coloured hair, Swedish-looking. Apparently it's a throw back, someone in the past, they've got a Swedish link.

*He's got quite fair skin, hasn't he?*

Yes, he's got that golden, yellowy colour. You wouldn't believe it, it looked really odd on him but it's his natural colour.

*He would have made a good Doctor Who actually. I like Matt Smith though.*

I like Matt Smith and Matt Smith's a good actor. I liked David Tennant as the Doctor.

*I like Matt Smith more.*

I liked Christopher Eccleston as the Doctor.

*Yes, he was quite good.*

They were all good, I haven't seen a bad one yet.

*Tom Baker was the best.*

Is that your era, Tom Baker? Is that when you joined Doctor Who?

*Yes, I was quite young then but yes, he's my first doctor.*

I go back to the very first Doctor, William Hartnell.

*Really?*

Yes. He was rather scary, William Hartnell. It was much more violent in those days, Doctor Who. Then it was Patrick Troughton and his son, David Troughton, is still acting on the TV now.

*I don't know, I've never heard of him.*

He's a classical actor. You'll recognise him when you see him, he's in lots of things. David Troughton, he's still acting. Patrick Troughton then John Pertwee.

*I remember him through my brother mostly. My brother really liked him.*

Doctor Who ... then after John Pertwee it was Tom Baker. Then it was Peter Davidson.

*Now, he wasn't very good, was he, to be honest?*

No. And then it started going downhill. Then it was Colin Baker after that.

*No, I lost interest around then.*

And then Sylvester McCoy who was just awful.

*I stopped watching it, I just didn't watch it any more then.*

No ... Sylvester McCoy took over and then they reinvented it and brought it back with American money, didn't they?

*And that was with Christopher Eccleston?*

No, that was with Paul McGann. They did a one-off special.

*I don't remember that.*

You know the McGann brothers? Five of them. Paul McGann played him. *A Man With Two Hearts*, it was an episode like that and that didn't do me any favours. And then they eventually wrote it and based it in Cardiff and Wales and brought it back with Christopher Eccleston.

*And they put lots of money into it, didn't they? And the special effects just got really good.*

I thought it was brilliant.

*It was brilliant, it was like a new thing all together when they did that.*

They reinvented it. I think it's really good and Matt Smith's good.

*Okay. What about hopes and wishes for the future from now on? Well, you've got this theatre project ...*

Yes, the theatre project to succeed, continue good health, just carry on and see what tomorrow brings. I like to work and ricochet off what's around me really.

*Yes. Anything else that you'd like to say that you think we haven't talked about that we should have done, that you think is important so far? [Screen freezes].*

Did you ask me about the future? Yes, just to continue with the theatre project, my businesses, just to carry on. Maintain health and carry on. Hopefully have a good time with my girlfriend, Anna, and just take it from there.

*What I'd actually just asked you when you 'froze' was there anything that you'd like to talk about or you think we should have talked about that I didn't ask you or you think we didn't cover in the interview that's important?*

No, you've covered everything.

*But we need to get a few answers from your mum, don't we?*

Yes, there are lots of things I can't answer but if you whack them over to me by email I'll be only too happy to answer them.

*Okay, I'll put all of those in an email to you now and then I can ... we can fill in those gaps maybe next Saturday?*

Yes, I can email them to you and you can video interview me in the week when you get a minute, I don't mind.

*Yes, okay. Well Saturday morning is quite good for me if it's okay for you? Is this time okay or is it not so good?*

Depends on what I'm doing. I never know what I'm doing from one day to the next. Let me have a look. Yes, let's do it next Saturday the tenth. If I'm busy, I'm busy, let's play it by ear.

*All right then. I'll email the other questions through to you anyway.*

And then we'll take it from there. Have I answered everything satisfactorily?

*You have. Thank you very much. Thank you for giving up some of your time on a Saturday morning.*

You need a photo of me, don't you?

*I'd like to get a photograph, yes, for the website but perhaps that's something that ... because I'm not seeing you in person, perhaps that's something that you could send me ...*

Yes, yes, I'll get that. I haven't got a full length shot. I'll get my girlfriend to take a shot of me on my phone.

*Okay and then you can put that in an email.*

Put that in the email to me, "Don't forget the photo."

*Okay, I'll do that.*

All right.

*Thanks for your time on a Saturday morning, David.*

Get the children out from the lock and key.

*Thank you ever so much.*

[End of recording].

Following the interview, David emailed me the following answers to some of the questions he missed out earlier. He didn't want to do a follow up interview on Skype:

1. Who prescribed thalidomide?

Dr. Steen.

2. What was it prescribed for?

Sickness.

3. How long did your mum take the drug for?

Two prescriptions.

4. How was your mum's pregnancy in general?

Sickly but straightforward.

5. How was your birth for your mum?

Difficult with forceps delivery.

6. When was your mum first told you had been born with an impairment?

Thirteen days approximately.

7. How did your mum feel following your birth?

Angry that David was taken to Great Ormond Street Hospital without me seeing him or being told. Mum heard someone shout, "Ambulance for baby Bickers!" When mum questioned it they denied it saying I was still on the ward.

8. How long was your mum in hospital following your birth?

Thirteen days approximately then I discharged myself even though I was still unwell. I still hadn't seen David. Just before I left a doctor came in and told me, "Your baby had been born with very short arms and legs." I said, "How short?" He said, "quite short but if you take my advice you'll go home and forget you ever had him." Two days later I received a call from Oldchurch Hospital asking us to see the doctors. We were taken into a room, David was brought in, and we were told, "That's your baby"

9. Were your parents offered any follow up care after you left hospital?

No.

10. What was your dad's reaction to your birth?

Very upset, but still determined to be a good dad.

11. How did your parents feel about having a disabled child at home?

No different to any other child. He was our child and that's where he belonged.

12. When did your parents know that your impairment had been caused by thalidomide?

1962.

13. How did your parents feel when they knew that thalidomide had caused your impairment?

Shattered.

14. Could your mum remember any of the work she did in campaigning for compensation?

Attended meetings which led to the setting up of the Trust.

15. Were your parents involved with any other families with children affected by thalidomide?

Yes, we became friends with other families.

**END OF RECORDING**