

Thalidomide: Helen Davies (2012)

Ruth Blue interviews Helen Davies for the *Thalidomide: An Oral History* project.

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This is Ruth Blue interviewing Helen Davies on the 27 of November at her home in Odiham for Thalidomide: An Oral History.

Helen, have you seen and signed the copyright and consent form?

Yes, I have.

And would you mind telling me your full name, age, date and place of birth?

Right, Helen Mary Davies. My date of birth is 18/07/61, what was the last one?

Place of birth.

Oh yes, in Hampshire.

Just down the road.

Yes, I haven't gone very far [laughs].

So first of all I'd like to ask you a bit about childhood and birth and your family and school life and any early medical interventions you might have had to go through.

Right.

Could you tell me a bit about your family background, who your parents were and what work they did and if you have any brothers and sisters?

Right. Let's see. My dad was an airframe fitter at the Royal Aircraft Research Unit in Farnborough and my mum, she didn't work, she was a housewife really and I've got two older sisters. My eldest sister's got ... well, they didn't actually know until probably about fifteen or twenty years ago but she's got a condition called tuberous sclerosis, I don't know whether you've heard of that?

Yes.

So when she was young she was very hyperactive and had fits and things like that. So my mum had her hands very full with her because she wouldn't sleep. Anyway my other sister came along and then I came along quite shortly after so ...

Do you know ... moving on to think about thalidomide and your parents' decision to use the drug, do you know who prescribed it for your mum?

Yes, I know. My mum had gone to the doctors because she wasn't feeling very well and her period was late and the doctor said, "Oh well, I'll give you this drug which will help you." She didn't know at the time that she was pregnant, she thought she might be, but at that time you had to wait two lots of missed periods, didn't you, before they would say you were pregnant. So anyway she went back and he said, "Well I'll give you these for two weeks" and she said she'd come back in two weeks and she came back in two weeks and he said, "I think you're pregnant." So he said, "Would you like some more of this stuff?" And she said, "No, I won't, I don't think I'll take any more." So I was quite lucky there really [laughs].

Yes. So she took it for morning sickness.

Yes she was being sick and feeling tired but then remember she was ... my eldest sister was ... it could have been that as well. But that's why she went to the doctor because she was feeling sick and sort of unwell.

And so she took it for about ...

It was two weeks she took it for, yes.

And apart from that, did your mum have a good pregnancy?

I think so, yes. I don't recall her saying that she was unwell or anything, yes.

Is it something that your mum's been happy to talk about, her decision to use thalidomide, or has it been difficult for her?

She's always been ... no, I think she's ... I've never ... I mean it's not her fault and I've never sort of put it down to her fault taking it. The doctor prescribed it so there's nothing she could have done about it. We've always sort of ... well, I mean she died sort of about six years ago now but she was always quite willing to talk about it. She said the doctors gave it to her and ... you know ...

She took it in good faith.

Yes. As you do, yes.

Of course, yes. Where were you born?

At a place called Farley House in Farnborough, it was like a sort of maternity home. Everyone in Farnborough was born there I think. All my friends from school were born there [laughs].

Right, yes, so the local birthing centre [laughs].

Yes [laughs].

And do you know if your mum had a good birth?

I think so yes, I think she did, yes. It was quite quick.

And when was she first aware that you'd been born with an impairment?

I think she's told me they took her away ... took me away for quite a bit longer than they should have done and then they wrapped me up, apparently, because it was only really my hands at the time that were a problem. And they said, "There's a bit of a problem," you know and they gave me to her after probably a bit longer than they would have done. But she said, "It doesn't matter to me," she said [laughs].

That's good. And because this is an oral history interview, could you describe your level of impairment?

Well at the time when I was born ... I was born with six fingers on each hand and no thumb. At that time that was all that we knew was the matter with me and then when I was ... I had surgery on that when ... I was only about two or three when I had the first lot of surgery so I don't really remember that. But then when I was about five I had problems with my kidney and I had to have my left kidney removed because it had got hydronephrosis and the urethra apparently was all the wrong shape and everything. I had had a urethral seal in the bladder which had blocked everything off so it had died anyway. The whole thing had gone.

So I had that out when I was five and then sort of when I got to teenage years my hips were sort of getting ... I'd left school and, as you do when you leave school, you don't do as much sport as you probably should do and my hips were getting quite stiff and sore and ... now, where did I get to? I had an x-ray. I can't remember how it worked out now. I had ... I went to see the doctor and he didn't really know ... I had an x-ray then and they found out that I'd got this protrusio ... that's where the acetabulum goes up inside the pelvis and it was the wrong ... instead of being sort of nice and round it was oval shaped. So they sort of ... the hip joint can't move so I got arthritis around the edges of it.

So obviously they didn't want to do anything at the time because I was living a normal life, working normally, my hips just got a bit sore and stiff at times.

And they think that was all thalidomide-related?

Yes because I didn't sort of apply for any compensation until probably about ten years ago because I had to end up with hip replacements and I thought, "If it is due to thalidomide, I suppose I should do something about it really." So yes, and they said that they couldn't say that it wasn't thalidomide that had caused it. It's very rare apparently so they put it down ... it does cause hip problems, they have people with that.

And also kidney problems as well.

Yes, yes. And when I had my first baby they found that I've got a subseptate uterus, sort of partitioned down the middle. So he was lying crossways sort of thing, he used to have his head tucked under here and down here and nobody really spotted it. So I was booked to have a caesarean because of my hips. So when I had it they just discovered it during the caesarean that I had this subseptate uterus.

So various things – some of them were obvious at birth and then some of them have ...

Come out as the years have gone on.

... come out as the years have gone on, yes. Do you know how long you and your mum were in hospital for? Was it long before you came home?

I'm not quite sure actually. I don't think it was very long, I'm not entirely sure but I don't think it was more than a week.

And you came straight home to the family home after that?

Yes.

Do you have any idea how any of your other family members reacted to you being born with the six fingers and the no thumbs?

I don't really know. No actually I don't ... they were all young kids and they just take you as you are really. I don't recall any sort of reaction or anything from anybody.

And so how old were you when you had that operation to change your hands?

I think I was about two or three and I think I had some more when I was about ... I think I'd just started ... about four or something. I vaguely remember something but that was like my first memories. I don't really remember the first ones but ...

What did they do in the operation?

I think they took one of the fingers off and they twist the thumb around so you've got opposing thumbs, they just twist the thumb so that you can get that pincer movement. Otherwise it's like pincers ... you can't pick things up. But this one they just rotated so it went a bit wrong so that's why that one's a bit smaller than the other ones.

That's your left hand.

Yes. It's never stopped me doing anything.

And do you have any recollection of that surgery?

I vaguely remember having my arm in a sling but that was probably about as much as I remember. I don't really remember much of the surgery. I've got photos of me with my arm in a sling so I suppose that's ... I don't really remember the operation.

Or the hospital?

No.

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

I think they always knew because they always told me that it was caused by thalidomide but they always told me I was one of the lucky ones. I should ... not quite count my chickens but, you know, because you didn't ... people didn't sue people in those days, did they? It was very ... it just didn't happen, did it? Obviously the people with really bad impairments, because they needed more, didn't they? I was just always ... you're one of the lucky ones, you know. Which I've always thought that I was because when I think for the length that my mum took it for and some people's mums only took one tablet and they've got no arms and legs so I do think I'm quite ... [laughs].

I believe it's when ...

It's exactly the time, isn't it? It's pretty much down to how many days pregnant you are, isn't it?

Yes. So if your mum took it when your arms were already formed ...

Yes, yes ...

... it wasn't going to do them any damage at that point. So did your parents join the Thalidomide Society do you know?

No. They didn't do anything like that. No.

And you didn't attend any of those events ever?

No. It was only when I sort of ... after I had my hip replacement I thought I would find a bit about it. So I joined the Thalidomide Society then just to find out who to go to to get compensation. That was only like ... 2000, no, when did I have the hip replacement? 1998. So it was probably about then.

But you were aware, when you were growing up that there were other people affected by thalidomide with different levels of disability?

Oh yes, yes.

Any idea how that made you feel, your parents saying you were one of the lucky ones?

I've always thought I've been ... yes, I am quite lucky really. It must be awful ... seeing people going round with no arms and legs so yes, I've always thought that I've been quite lucky although it's not really lucky. But I've never known any different so [laughs].

So were you ever offered any help in the form of prostheses or technical gadgets or anything like that?

No, no, not at all. I never had anything like that, I've always found a way round things.

And because your surgery sounds like it was quite successful.

My mum always used to make me do stuff like ... she made me do knitting and fiddly things and I still do that sort of thing, like cross stitch and really fiddly things and I think it helped quite a bit.

To keep your fingers moving.

Yes.

And did you go to a mainstream primary school?

Yes.

Any problems or anything there with your impairments in your hands?

No, none at all really.

What about friends or siblings? Did anybody notice or comment ever on your hands?

Not really, no. There was sort of a ... I'm still friends with the friends I was at school with now, we still see each other quite often and they've never really, you know, made any comments or anything like that. I don't think you do because I think kids are quite accepting of things, aren't they? I mean obviously you get the ... some of the not so nice people might make comments but I never really had a problem with it at all.

Yes, that's good. And did you have any particular favourite subjects at school?

I always wanted to be a nurse because I used to like biology and I liked sports, I used to like doing cross country running and hockey and I was in the hockey team. I liked art but I was totally rubbish at it [laughs]. And needlework, I used to like doing needlework.

[Laughs]. Yes, needlework's very relaxing, isn't it?

Yes.

And secondary school, you went to a mainstream secondary school as well?

Yes.

And did the school have to make any special changes for you to fit in?

No, not at all, no.

Did you carry on with roughly the same favourite subjects there?

Yes.

So did you go on to be a nurse?

Yes, I did. Yes, I went to ... well, because at that time you didn't need A-levels or anything so I just did a pre-nursing course where we just did some O-levels at the time and then I went up to ... I trained at the Royal Free in London. So then I qualified in about 1982 I think it was.

So in terms of your medical interventions – you had the operation on your hands when you were about two or three and then you had the operation on your kidney ...

When I was five.

Do you remember that one?

The only thing I remember about that is having ... because at that time parents weren't allowed to stay with you in the hospital and I remember I had a ... I always thought it was a plaster cast but it probably was just a bandage around where the scar was on my middle and I remember the lift door shutting, my mum going to the lift and the lift door shutting. I always remember that. And one of the nurses taking me back to my bed.

And you didn't want her to go.

No because I was in hospital for about a month so it was quite a long time.

That is a long time when you're five, yes.

I must have been ... my poor mum must have felt awful as well. Imagine leaving a child ... you just can't imagine it nowadays, can you?

Actually no. I can't imagine leaving a five year old.

Apparently when I was ... I mean I don't remember any of this, but when I was in for my hands, because I was in about a month, I think, for those as well, I wouldn't talk to my mum and dad. I wouldn't let them pick me up or anything when I came home from there. I don't remember any of that but that's what my dad said. He said he tried to pick me up but he couldn't, I was like jelly.

Yes because you were reacting to them ...

Not being there, yes.

It's difficult, isn't it?

It's horrible. I can't imagine doing that to my kids. It must be ...

No, nor me, nor me.

That was normal then, wasn't it?

Yes.

Kids didn't ... you didn't stay with your parents.

Well, babies were taken away from the mother as soon as they were born, weren't they? That was the normal thing. Whereas now they give you the baby straight away. So it was a more detached relationship, wasn't it? But for a child to be away from home must be incredibly hard.

I remember hiding under the sheets as well [laughs]. It was quite scary, it must be very scary for a little one.

Definitely, definitely. Okay, so you ... after school, did you go straight to train to be a nurse?

I went to college for two years, then I went to do my training when I was eighteen.

Did you have any particular branch of nursing you wanted to be involved with?

Not particularly, no.

What did you go into? Where did you start?

Where did I go? I started off on a neurology ward for probably about seven or eight months. Then I worked in an eye ward for about a year. Then I moved back down here again and I worked on an isolation ward which had sort of leukaemia patients and dermatology and all sorts of different specialities. I was there for about eight years I think I was.

Really? On that particular ward?

It was a really nice ward to work on. And then I left there and work on a ... like a treatment room for about a year, then I left and had my children and I haven't been back since [laughs].

Okay. So in total you were nursing for about ... twelve years?

Yes, it must have been that, yes. 1979 to '92.

And during that sort of time when you were ... say like the end of your teenage years and your working career, did people talk to you about thalidomide?

Not really, no. Not many people ... no, as I say, you just don't ... I was quite good at ... as a teenager you're quite conscious of those things so I was quite good at hiding my hands and people never really used to notice. Nobody would ... I worked with somebody for quite a long time and they'd never noticed.

And even with close friends, was it something you felt you could talk about if you wanted to?

I never really used to actually.

And when you were nursing, had you left the family home at that point, were you living independently.

I was when I was in London then I moved back home again. Then I got married any everything so I was only there for ... I came back about 1984 I think and I got married in 1987 so I was only home for about three years, I suppose.

And where did you meet your ... was that your first boyfriend or did you have ...

I had a few boyfriends when I was up in London, nothing sort of serious, you know.

And in any way, did your impairment affect your ability to get a job? Was that something you had to talk about when you went for an interview?

The only thing ... because I had a ... about 1982 I had pyelonephritis and then they ... they sort of looked at my hips again and they said I should be careful about doing any heavy lifting or anything like that. So they said, "Don't work on any orthopaedic ward or anything heavy." So I was advised to do sort of light sort of ... you know, boards, which didn't have much lifting. But that was the only thing really.

How did that come to light? Were you having problems?

Well my hips were getting stiffer and more painful as the years sort of went on. I saw a ... what did I do? I had the pyelonephritis and then they found it was getting worse and then I sort of plodded along for a few years and then it was getting uncomfortable sometimes, not all the time, I mean I could walk around. I was

working ... I mean nurses are quite busy, aren't they? But I'd get the odd ... it was quite uncomfortable sometimes so my doctor referred me to an orthopaedic surgeon up in St Thomas's so I saw him and I had ... he suggested having a femoral osteotomy which I had, which was horrible.

How old were you when ...

That was about 1989, I think, when I had that done. But it didn't really help that much.

Why was it horrible? What was horrible about it?

It was just really painful and it twisted my leg around so it was all sort of ... it wasn't in a natural position so it wasn't very nice. I used to like riding my bike and I couldn't ride my bike because when I twisted my leg round it was poking into the pedals and stuff so it wasn't very nice. I didn't like that one at all.

Do you think it helped with you in the long term though?

Not really, no. They wanted to do the other leg as well but I said, "I don't think it's made much difference." So I had ... the doctor I saw at St Thomas's had left, had retired, so my GP referred me to Dr [Danver 0:24:30], he's a consultant down here and he said, "The only thing I can really do here is a hip replacement." That was back in 1998. And then he said, "Well, I'll have to do the other one as well for you to get any benefit from it."

And did you go through with that, the hip replacement?

Yes. So I had that done.

So you had the two hips ...

Yes, I had one ... sort of about three months apart so that was quite busy. And then I had ... I had to have a revision of my left one in January this year because I had a pseudo tumour and apparently I was very lucky because all the bone behind the prosthesis had dissolved and I actually had a hole in the top of my ... about an inch and a half hole, I was very lucky the whole thing hadn't collapsed through. He said it was quite imminent so that was quite lucky.

So was that painful for you?

No, I couldn't feel anything. It was quite scary actually because I just felt quite how I had done for a few years but I had to have an x-ray and ... hiya. That's my son Matt. Are you all right? Have you got Adam with you?

Shall I just pause?

[Break in audio].

So yes, you were talking about the hip.

Yes, it was quite scary because I couldn't feel anything. It was a bit ... when I went to stand up sometimes I would be a bit, ooh ... but when once I got going I was fine and I didn't think anything of it. Then I had an x-ray and he said the bone ... it doesn't show up very well on the x-ray, the bone behind doesn't look quite right. So I had to have a CT scan and he phoned me up the next day and said, "I think we'd better come and see you." I had a revision and he's had to put a big plate on the top of the hole to plug the hole, so the only thing that was holding me up was the muscle from the abdomen on the other side.

Isn't that amazing that you were getting around like that?

I know. I said, "Well, how come I haven't got any pain?" It was quite scary really. At least if you've got some pain you'd probably go sooner and get something done about it. But that was quite scary.

And when you were having things like those medical interventions, would that be an occasion where you'd talk about your mum having taken thalidomide? Did that come into your medical picture?

Yes, I did sort of ... because I know the protrusio is quite rare and I talked about it with the consultant and he said he had not personally ... he's done an awful lot of hips and he said he hadn't ... the only time he'd seen this particular problem was in a South African tribe or something so it is quite rare. A lot of people have never heard of it.

So you got in touch with the Thalidomide Trust or the Society?

Yes, this was the days before the internet really. I think I went to the Citizen's Advice Bureau and they found this Thalidomide Society contact details and they contacted them and they sent me the information about who to contact.

Yes. What would that have been that you contacted them?

It was just after I had my hip done so it was about '98 / '99, something like that. I just thought, "Well, if it is due to thalidomide, now I've had my hips done, you don't know what's going to happen in the future and you might collapse and be in a wheelchair or something. Maybe you should do something about it."

And how did that work out? You got put in touch with the Thalidomide Trust presumably?

Not at that time. They gave me the number of the solicitors up in Manchester – the Pannone & Partners, is it? And I got in contact with them and then it sort of started ... they arranged for me to see Dr Newman.

Claus Newman?

Yes. So I saw him and then they were umming and arring about my hips for quite a while, I think it took four years in the end, they were umming and arring about whether they were caused ... that was caused by thalidomide or what. But they couldn't disprove it but in the end ... yes, about four years it took and then they agreed that it was probably due to that so much to my husband's relief they agreed to pay up.

So you got compensation through them? And did you get a back payment of compensation as well?

Yes. I got two hundred and eighteen thousand for all what's wrong and I think there was another hundred and thirty eight thousand in the Trust. That's when I got the ... that's when the Trust ... when it's agreed the Trust get in contact with you then, don't they? So that's when I first had contact with the Trust.

And were you surprised to get ...

I wasn't expecting that amount I must admit. First of all when I got the two hundred and eighteen I thought, "That's nice." Then I contacted the Trust and they said, "You've got another hundred and thirty eight thousand here, what would you like to do with that?" "I don't know!" [laughs]. "Pay my house off?" "Yes, okay." And they sort of do it all behind the scenes at that time and the next thing we had the deeds through to the house. Your mortgage has been paid off. Wow.

And how funny to think you might not ever have got in touch about that if you hadn't had the hip ...

No, I probably wouldn't have done anything about it. I didn't know. Somebody mentioned that there was a fund, that she thought there was a fund, but I'd never heard anything about it.

It's very interesting, isn't it? So in terms of other people affected by thalidomide, have you ...

I've never met anyone.

You've never met anyone?

Only when ... yes, I think the first time I went ... I went to the Thalidomide Society, one of their conferences. So that was probably 2000, when I first ... probably 2003 or something like that. That was the first time I sort of saw anybody else with it, which was very strange.

I was going to say, what was that like?

It was very strange.

That sort of environment.

Yes, because nobody is used to seeing people with no arms and legs and I always thought I was lucky. But then again you meet other people with the same hands as you and it's like ... [laughs] it's quite nice. Well, not quite nice but you're not quite so on your own.

And did you ... and have you been regularly since then or did you just go once?

Not that often. I've been ... did I go ... the Trust do something every year so I've been to a couple of those but only about three of those probably.

And did you meet any people there you've stayed in contact with?

Yes. I'm in contact with one girl that ... she's got the same sort of hands as me.

A new friend.

Yes but we don't see each other that often, but we communicate, we're on Facebook and stuff [laughs].

Yes. And so would you say up until the point of finding your partner, that your impairment in any way kind of got in the way of your life or your life plans?

No, not really no. You just carried on as you were really, yes.

So where did you meet your partner?

Well, I'd known him for quite a few years. He used to work in a ... my friend used to work in a motorcycle shop and his mum was the manager there and he used to work on Saturdays and he and my friend were friendly so when we used to go out in the evenings she invited Mark along as well. So that's where I met him. I'd known him for quite a few years sort of before we got married.

And what about ... you must have presumably told him about being affected by thalidomide?

Yes.

Do you remember did he have any reactions to that?

Not really, no. I don't remember anything, any problem.

It was probably quite in the news around then, wasn't it? Or maybe it had gone out of the news by that point. So you stopped working, you said, when you had your first son.

Yes.

So how old would you have been then?

Well, it was '92 so I was thirty one. It was through choice. We were lucky enough that we could afford for me not to go back to work and we wanted ... I wanted to be with the kids. So it wasn't through health reasons or anything. You never get that time back again, do you, when they're young?

And how many kids have you got?

Two. Two boys.

Two boys. And what's the age difference between them?

Well, Chris is twenty and Matt will be eighteen in January.

Wow, so they're grown up.

Too fast. It's scary.

Are they both still living at home with you?

No, Chris is at university down in Winchester although he's got his Saturday job at Tesco's in Hook so he pops back at the weekend.

Yes, I saw Tesco's in Hook. The taxi driver joked to me and said, "This is Hook. Nothing else."

[Laughs] yes.

I was saying, "Isn't there a town centre over the other side?"

Town centre! [Laughs].

No town centre.

There's a street with a few shops on it.

Yes. And did any of your medical problems cause you any worry or concerns about having children?

Not really. As I say, I didn't know anything about my uterus at the time so it wasn't really an issue and I got pregnant quite easily.

And what happened with your uterus? You first became aware of that ...

After I had the caesarean, yes. Nobody sort of spotted it before although I always thought there was something not right because I used to get this head stuck under my ribs on this side. I would imagine ... not being pregnant before I didn't know what it was like but I would imagine you would have it under here, wouldn't you? He was tucked under there. Obviously he couldn't move because of ... [laughs].

He had like sort of half a flat ...

[Laughs] Yes.

Did they do anything about it?

No. They said it's very rare but they didn't sort of say that, you know, they had to do anything special.

And did it cause you any problems when you were giving birth or was it fairly straight forward?

No, I was a planned caesarean so it wasn't a problem.

Why did you have the planned caesarean? Was that just your choice?

Well they said I could try having a normal birth with my hips but I thought, "No, I think I'll have a caesarean." Because I really didn't want to have any problems. You don't want to get the baby stuck or anything. To be honest, I think it's quite a civilised way to have a baby.

Yes.

I knew I was going in on the 30 September to have my baby.

Yes, so you got everything all ready.

It didn't occur to me that I could have gone into labour beforehand or that something could have happened. That didn't come into my head [laughs].

And you didn't have any worries ... because some people were worried that thalidomide was going to pass through genetically from one generation to the next.

Well when Chris was born, one of his feet was pushed upwards and they said it was because of how he was lying. I mean that came down in ... it went back to normal ... I think we kept massaging it, they said, "Keep massaging it down." It did come down and it was fine. I think it was only about two weeks and it was back to normal. So that was never an issue.

And did you think that was ... did you worry possibly that it was related to thalidomide?

Well I knew that it was probably because of the shape of my uterus.

And did you have any problems at all with raising the children or looking after them because of your impairment?

No, not at all, no.

What about health concerns or medical interventions as you're growing older? Has anything happened?

No, obviously the only thing that's on-going is my sort of ... my hips now. I've never had any problems with my kidney, touch wood. But having a hip replacement at such a young age, you're going to have it again, aren't you? And will it be so successful the next time? Although I must admit the revision I had in January is actually better than the first one. He said he had to build up quite a lot of bone at the back so I've got quite a lot more movement than I had with the last one. So I've got to go back in January and have the other one

checked because he doesn't want it to get any worse, he doesn't want it to get quite as bad as the other one. So obviously that's quite an ongoing thing.

And does it cause you any pain or anything like that?

No. Not really. If I do too much ... I don't do a lot of gardening but obviously if you're raking up leaves and bending up and down, it gets a bit sore but it's nothing ... I work now. I mean I only do twenty hours a week but I work as a science technician at school and you have to do quite a lot of walking and it doesn't really give me a lot of problem there.

So you were saying work-wise you stopped nursing when you had the children ...

But then I started as a science technician, when was it? I've been there about five years now. The boys were there, much to their embarrassment [laughs].

So you were at the same school?

[Laughs] yes.

[Laughs] so you can keep an eye on them.

I've never been forgiven. It's only down the road so it suits me and you get the school holidays off.

And that's more like a part time ...

Yes it's only twenty hours a week, mornings really, so it's quite a nice little job actually. When the kids are young it's quite nice being at home but once they're getting a bit older and doing their own thing you're ... you get a bit bored being at home. That's why I went back to work really.

Yes. So how old were they when you went back to work?

It was about five years ago now. So Matt would have been about twelve and Chris about fourteen / fifteen.

So you stayed at home really a good long time.

I was home about sixteen years, yes.

So in terms of things like level of pain and that kind of thing, do you think that's changed as you've got older?

Not really. I mean my hips are all right. I mean I don't take painkillers or anything like that. Sometimes they get a bit achy, probably because I've been in the garden too long but it's not really an issue. I don't take painkillers or anything.

And you've never had pain in your hands at all?

No, no.

And you've never had any trouble with things like typing or anything you've had to do?

No.

It's really good they did an operation for you so early on that just worked.

I know. Some people said they didn't do it until later on, did they? It must be quite tricky actually. Dressing yourself and doing buttons must be tricky if you have to just use your fingers like that.

Yes. Have you got photographs of how your hands looked?

No, I haven't actually. Oh, I've got ... have I?

Because your hands look so good and your thumbs are so much in the right position that it's hard to imagine how there was an extra finger.

Yes. There was another one sort of here. And there, where I've got the scar down there, I think they took one of them off there. I think they took photographs at the hospital.

What are your feelings and thoughts about thalidomide over the years? Have you ever been interested to learn about the origins of thalidomide?

Yes. Reading more about it now because they think it's sort of designed by the Nazi's, don't they? And that's quite a scary thing really, isn't it? I think they're using it for quite a lot of medical things as well, aren't they? If they can get some use out of it, it's not a bad thing really, is it? So long as nobody gets pregnant while they're on it.

When you were younger did you want to know more about thalidomide?

I must admit, no I didn't really.

You just sort of accepted that's just something your mum took.

No, it's only fairly recently since I've been in the Thalidomide Trust and there's been more stuff coming out and it's been more interesting.

And what's your sort of favourite leisure pastime for want of a better word? What do you like to do when you're not working or being a mum?

I like doing cross stitch and knitting and stuff. Going out for nice meals, cinema and theatre and things.

And what does your husband do now?

He's a ... I never know what he does. He's an engineer by trade. But his job at the moment, he's in between sales and engineering so he advises people on what sort of thing they want to buy. He's in the broadcast industry so they sell routers that go in TV studios and advising people on how they set things up and that they've got all the right stuff or if they want to order it.

And has he got interested in the origins of thalidomide? Do you talk to him about that?

Not really. I mean we talk about it but he's only interested in what I tell him really.

What about your sons?

I've always been honest with them. I mean they know about it and know what happened but they never ... they've just accepted it.

Probably because your impairment has so little impact on your daily life that it doesn't really come up in conversation I suppose.

Well, that's the end of my questions but is there anything that you feel like I should have asked you that I haven't said or anything you think is important to say?

I don't know really. I think you've covered most things, haven't you? I don't know what sort of things you're going to ask me.

Did you ... were you aware of the Grünenthal apology? The drug company ... I say apology loosely.

Yes, I've heard about that.

What were your feelings about that?

Well I suppose it's a step in the right direction, yes. It would be nice for somebody to say something about it, wouldn't it?

Yes, yes. Okay, well thank you very much.

Thank you.

And I'll send you the transcript through and if anything else springs to mind that you think, "I should have told her about that" then make a mental note of it and when I send you the transcript we can sort of follow up on that.

Yes, okay. All right. So what do you do, send me the transcript and talk over the phone or ...

Well, probably I'll come back if that's okay with you.

Yes, that's fine. I don't know how you work it.

Thanks ever so much.

Okay.

END OF RECORDING