27. James Jones

(1) Tell me about your background.

I was born in 1919. My father, he worked upon the gallops - a racehorse training establishment near Lambourne - and he worked there from the end of the First World War, right to the end of the Second World War. And my mother, well, she just used to do the household things and used to keep us supplied with food, which was lovely food that we used to have. But when we were going to school, we always had to report back home immediately after leaving school, so that we had to do our little chores, jobs.

What sort of little jobs did you have to do?

Oh, sawing wood. My eldest brother - he was older than me - we used to have to do that together with a large crosscut saw, and he used to leave the chopping the blocks to me, because he knew I loved doing that!

Did you have any other brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had three other brothers and four sisters. I was the third eldest in the family, but now I'm the eldest; I've lost my other brothers and sisters.

What did your father do on the gallops?

Well, he used to keep the grounds under good repair, so that there was no obstacles or little holes, because there used to be a lot of wild rabbits around on the downs and they were all scratching holes, and they've made it very dangerous for the horses if they got their hoofs in them. They could even break their footlock, sort of thing - fetlock, they used to call them. Other thing - the starting gate, where they used to have to train the horses to start on the races, with... like a flag went across a certain length of ground, and they used to all line up. And my father used to operate this: pull this lever, and it's on large rubbers and it acted as a spring to them, and they just went up in the air and the horses went like that. I was... after I left school, that's where I went, until such times... I was waiting to go into the apprenticeship within the engineering works, but there were so many youngsters there then that I had to wait my turn till there was a vacancy. But that vacancy didn't come soon enough, so that I could have gone there before the war started. But the war came first, so that's what I did: I went and joined the Royal Air Force.

Before we get onto you joining the Royal Air Force, just tell me a little bit about your schooling.

Well, I can't say as I liked school very much! But, I suppose some days were quite nice - it depended on what kind of lessons you were doing. I used to like geography, history, and things like that, but as far as... what was it? What's the new name for arithmetic?

Maths.

Maths, I used to hate that!

(2) How long did you spend working at the gallops after you left school?

I was there for... up till the beginning of the war, and as soon as the war came, well, I just went off and went and joined the Royal Air Force. And I was accepted for the Royal Air Force in Reading - at the RAF recruiting place in Reading. And then, after that, I waited for a number of weeks, and then I was called up, and I had to go to report to Cardington, which was the RAF recruiting station where the old airships were based years ago. And after four or five days there, we got part of our uniform, and we were told how to salute and who not to salute - who to salute and who not to, before we was allowed to go! And we were sent, then, to Morecambe, where we did our training - about six weeks training: the disciplinary and the drill training, and all things like that. And, of course, the... when the Germans... Dunkirk - when that came - we had to get away from our training place. They wanted to get another group of people through, so we were released from there about three weeks premature, so. And I was sent, then, to the first RAF station, which was in North Wales. And that's where I then... where we had to do our training - had trade training, whatever it was we wanted to be in the RAF - and that's where I... went from there down to Melksham, in Wiltshire, to do my gunnery and armoury training. That's what I was during the war - an armourer, and I did a lot of air-gunnery as well. And that was quite... I really enjoyed that. And I was posted... we was given the chance to put down... name one station or one county that we could get posted to, if you were lucky. Well, when mine came out, I was lucky - I had Harwell. And Harwell was my parent station, although we did our flying from Hampstead Norris, which was a satellite to Harwell. They had all new concrete runways there for the heavy bombers and things. And I stayed... I was there on the September 1941 - from September '41 till March '44 I was there. We were screened

(3) from posting, because it was like an operational training unit. And they'd got a nice... everyone was happy in what they were doing, and we all knew what our job was and without any bothers and that, so they kept them all there and they didn't post anyone; not till the end, so. And that's... we had to get out of there to let the airborne people come in, ready for the invasion when they reinvaded. And I was posted, then, back into Lincolnshire - Hemswell in Lincolnshire - and I was there for just over a year. And then I went out to India. I was posted to India for the last few...?... in my career. I came back from India in March '46, and by the time we got back home - it took us about six weeks to get back home by boat - and I was actually released in April '46, and that's...

When you joined the RAF, was that the first time you'd left home?

Yes, it was; it was the very first time that I'd left home. I didn't feel very happy to start with, for about, well, about six or seven weeks, but after I got my training done, the first initial training - the drill and the disciplinary things and all that - it was, well, like being back home, really. You knew what your job was, and as long as you'd done it and made a good job of it, no one ever

bothered you; no trouble or anything like that. But a lot of chaps, they didn't like the discipline!

I suppose when you were at Harwell it was quite easy to see your family.

Oh yes, it was one good thing about it, because I could... I used to think how lucky I was to have had that opportunity. But if I hadn't have gone to... well, I was sent for one day by the armoury officer, a man named Squadron Leader Jimmy Mountain - I always remember his name. And I walked to his office, and he says - I knocked on the door, and he could see me standing - he says "come in, young man". I thought "god, that sounds different to what they normally call you"! They used to say "oi, airman, come here"! He says "well, come here, young man". I thought "oh, he sounds all right"! And he sat down and he was talking to me. He said "well", he said "I'm having a bit of spot of a bother", he said "I'm short of armourers at Hampstead Norris", and he says "I was looking through the list of armourers I've got and I saw you, and I thought, well, I'll ask that young man, and that's why I sent for you".

(4) "I want to know if you would go up to Hampstead Norris". He said "we've only got two armourers up there and we've got twenty four aircraft", he said "and it's rather hard work for them to get all the daily inspections done on the aircraft". And I said "yes", I said "I'll go". He said "it's not a very bright sort of place to go to", he says "you're up to your knees in mud!". He said "and around this time of the year", he said "it gets very foggy". He says "some of the time, you'll go off, leave your squadron office", he said "you'll get lost; you won't know where you are. You've just got to stand and listen to where the sounds are coming from". He said "but I think you'll enjoy it there" he says, which I did; I did go and I did enjoy it. It was... well, everybody was so friendly with each other, and we got some good teams together. And, I say, we remained together up till 1940, when we had to move out for the invasion.

And how did you meet your wife?

Ah, well, I knew my wife. She was five and I was eight, and her father's home was in Kingston Lisle, the same as mine was. And his mother was still alive - she was ninety something when I knew her. And when he came out of the Navy in the First World War, he got released up in the north of England, near Grimsby. And with that, he... someone suggested he go and try joining the police, and that's what he did, and he was a policeman in Grimsby. And when he got married - found his girlfriend and got married - and then they had children, when they were old enough to travel, he used to bring them down on these, what they call, on concessions that they used to have. And he used to bring his family down to see his mother, and that was when she was a little toddler. I used to go round and see where they were and we used to play with each other. Her mother... they used to bring them to our school in Kingston Lisle, and I used to rub - put my hand through the railings near the playground, as they were outside in the main street - I used to rub their heads when I was a little boy.

But she was just visiting from Grimsby then?

That's right, and that happened every year after that. And, of course, every year that went past, she was a year older, a year bigger, and I really got to like her; we got to like each other. And

(5) when the war started, she was then seventeen, and I thought well... when they came to the last time, that was when... the same, 1939, I was just already gone into the Royal Air Force then, and I didn't see her then for four years. And I came home on leave one day and, well, I barely got in the house when my mother said "you won't guess who I've seen today and been talking to. This afternoon, I've been for a walk along..." - because there's an avenue of trees at Kingston Lisle, and my mother used to love going along under there - and I says "that you know". I said "well, who were they then?", and she said "well", she said "have a guess". I mentioned several people, and she said "no, that's not them", she said "you know them quite well, very well". In the end she had to tell me. I said "there's so many strangers around here now, mother, that I don't know half of them", and she said "well, it's Harry Evans and his family". I said "was Mary there?", and she said "they're all there". Of course, with that, she said "and I told them that I was expecting you home later today for seven days leave". Of course, she said "well, Mary", she said "she jumped for joy when she...". And I got in the house, I got in and freshened myself up, and I walked round the other side of the street - the other end of the street - just to see them, and they were there.

Were you in your RAF uniform?

Yeah. Yes, I was still in my uniform, and I walked past the house where she was. Then, I went into the - because there's a public house up there - they call it the Blowing Stone now - and I went in there. I didn't drink - I just had a sort of half a pint of something, just to say I'd had something in there. And it wasn't many minutes before she came across the street to come into the pub for something to do - her father wanted some cigarettes or somet', I think it was - and that's when we met, and it remained that way. When they went back after their week's holiday, her mother said "well, why not come up to us on your next birthday?", she says "you're more than welcome", which I did. And my next leave was in September - about every three months we had a seven day leave. I think "well, I hope I don't get posted or anything like that before then and now". But I did - I went up, and we got engaged. Although we knew each other that well, well, we just felt cemented together, you know - that was it, sort of thing. And I... well, I came back from that, and I felt quite proud to think I was engaged. And when I went up again in the September - that's what happened, we got engaged - and then we made arrangements to get married, and we were married in the December, so all in the space of six months. People said "well, you were quick, weren't you?". I said "well", I says "it's not as though we didn't know each other", I said "we've known each other ever since we were children". And that's how we went and got married, and it was a lovely marriage. And I

came back to Hampstead Norris then, and when I got back, I found that the whole camp had got four days' holiday. Of course, I tried to get a pass so that I could go back up for those couple or four days, but they wouldn't. "No", they said "we try to keep the servicemen out of the trains and that during the holiday period to let the civilians go", and that's what happened. But I felt as miserable as sin then, when I couldn't go back to see my wife. And we had a week short of fifty two years' marriage. She died just a week before our... the date, so was on the thirteenth of December; she died on the sixth of December. That will be nine years ago this coming December.

(6) What did you do after the war?

Well, I went to this firm in Challow, which was Nalder & Nalder & Son - Nalder & Nalder, sorry, 'cause he had no family - and it was all making machinery for the cocoa industry and coffee industry in Nairobi. We're making these machines for a man named John Gordon, who lived in London, and he used to come down occasionally to see how we were progressing on these machines that we were making for him. And when you were given a job to do, you had all the drawings from the stores, and you started working on these machines. And it was you; just you alone. Once you'd started that machine, you went right through it all, and when you'd finished it, that was your creation. And it was really, really interesting, that was. Then you used to have to run them - start these machines up to make sure that they would run. They was test run for, oh, about half a day, to make sure that they were okay, and then they were dismantled and packed and sent on out to Nairobi, like that. And also we was involved with the brewery industry a lot - Ansells Brewery in Birmingham. We used to do lots and lots for them, like grading conveyors, where the barley and the malt was all made, and malt machines - we used to do all those kind of things. And even threshing machines for the farms, with the old portable steam engine that used to drive them. They were made and sent to Poland, Russia, all over, because when the war started, there was a number of men that were stranded there - they couldn't get home because the war. But they did eventually get home in the end. They weren't interned or anything like that, but they thought they would be. And then, with all these different machines, you could be working on one of these machines perhaps for a number of weeks before you'd finish them all. And that - well, it was a big feat in itself. And we had these machines all going - perhaps you might have two or three going inside the large erection shop. It was such a noise as well.

But it must have been satisfying seeing it through from start to finish?

Yes, it was a very satisfactory thing. You used

(7) to think, well, it was going, and when it was making all this noise, you think "oh, to think I've created that"! It was wonderful. You used to start from scratch. You used to order all your - from your drawings - your pieces of metal that you wanted. That's all cut. Another person cut it for you, but you gave them a list of stuff to... a list of pieces of metal that you had

to have. And the heavier part - the angle iron and pieces of H-iron and things like that made the frames up - and that was all your responsibility to do that. But it was a very satisfying job.

And when did you have your children?

My eldest daughter, she was born whilst I was serving in India. She was born in June, the same year as the war ended; that was 19... what was it? '45, wasn't it? June '45; yeah, she was born just after the war ended, sort of thing. And then my second eldest, she was born four years after that - exactly four years after that, so what that - '45... '49, wasn't it? Then the next one, the third one, was four years after that! And that was the same year when something... I think it was something to do with Princess Anne, I think, yeah. Yes... I was then, sort of, I was still at work when she was born. And when I got home, there were people in the street waiting to greet me with, telling me I'd got another daughter. Yeah, I remember going upstairs, going to the bedroom and seeing her. My younger brother - he was already there. He had her in his lap or in his arms, and he was ... "Gosh", he said "I didn't think that little babies were so pretty as what she is"! 'Cause he would barely wouldn't touch one or see one before that, but he had to say how pretty she was. I've got a photograph - I'll show you, if I remember it, before you go, of that - the same one. That was when we was all at Kingston Lisle then. We were all born at... apart from Kathleen, the eldest. She was born in Lincolnshire, when I first came home, because that was where my wife's home was, you see. I don't know...

(8) And when were you diagnosed with diabetes?

Well, that was in 19... about 1968 - February 1968. And I was in the garden on a Sunday morning; it was on a Sunday morning. I went into the garden to do some clearing up, clear the garden up and that. I just came over so strange that... although I'd had these little feelings before, and I used to go the doctor. I used to get sort of a rather strange feeling in my tummy, and the answer they always gave me was "well, that's dyspepsia". I said "well", I said, "I've had it so long. It keeps coming backwards and forwards". They said "well, that's what it is", so I just carried on. And while I was in the garden, in the back side of the house this Sunday morning, I just went strange, and I couldn't remember any more. And they must have... well, my wife's told me that they sent out the girls to try and find me. They didn't go far enough round the back to see where I was. I was lying on my face in the back where I'd collapsed. Of course, they got the next door neighbour to help get me in the house and got me to bed, but I can't even remember anything about that at all. And they sent for the doctor. He came and he ordered me to hospital. Instead of going to the hospital that deals with the diabetes, I had to go to the Warneford, which was something to do with nerve people, I thought. My wife said "I wonder what they'd got him in there for?". And the man that helped to get me inside the house, he was an ambulance driver, and he knew quite a lot about these kind of things. And he said "well, it's just a preliminary thing, just going to see what they can find out before they get him settled in a proper place". And that's what happened. It

was about three days before I realised where I was. And after that, I saw this lady doctor. She examined me thoroughly, and I had to go and give samples of blood and urine and things like that. And she came back within about two or three hours, and said - asked me - she said "are you a diabetic, Mr Jones?". I said "not to my knowledge - why do you ask?". She said "well, we found high traces of sugar in your blood and urine this morning". They said - well, they'd given me a shot of... electrical shock on my face... clamps on my head before that - and she said "if you are a diabetic", she said "we can't

(9) give you any more electrical treatment, 'cause we could kill you if we did that".

Why had they given you electric shock treatment?

Because they thought it was something to do... it was somet' in my head that was caused this. They always say the loony bin, sort of thing, you know. I thought "well, I'm not going silly". Once I'd come round, I knew everything, but I couldn't understand why I'd come and got like that, and...

So, you were taken to a mental hospital and given electric shock treatment?

Yeah, well, that's what it was, yeah. The doctor's name was a Dr Spence - always remember it. And I used to have to go in every day and sit with him, and he used to ask me all sorts of silly - well, I thought were silly - questions! I kept saying to him, I said "why are you asking me all these silly questions?". That was when I came to; you know, I was getting over it then. He said "well, we've got to", he said "we want to get at the bottom of your problem". I told him all that I knew, but I didn't seem to be giving him what he wanted to know. I said "well, I still don't know as to what you're trying to get out of me. I've told you everything I know". And he said "well, you'll have to come back tomorrow". And that went on like that... all told, that went on for... right through to August that year, that following year.

What, after they'd tested your urine and blood?

Yeah. I was doing fine in there. I was doing this... what they call it? Re-something or other, re...

Rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation, yeah. Making things and all things like that. There was things I was given to do that was, well, rather silly, and I used to complain about it. I said, you know, "I can't do that - I'm not going to do that". I said "if I'd have done things like that while I was at work, I'd have got thrown out on my ears"! "Oh, you're one of those, are you? One of those - what they call them - perfectionist?". I said "well, I don't know about that, but I do like to make a good job of something when I'm doing it".

How long were you in the Warneford for?

Well, I was attached to it. I had to go there... they started by allowing me to

come home for weekends, to start with. That went on. I thought "well, I can't have this. I can't get away from this place now. I hope I'm not going to have a tag on me all the rest of my life". I used to come home on the bus, and I had to go back on Sundays, so as to go back in the hospital for the next week. And that went on till August of that

(10) year. That's 1940... '68, '69, wouldn't it? '68, yes, '68.

But you were diagnosed as diabetic while you were in the Warneford?

Oh yeah, but they still kept doing tests on me - I don't know why. But they said "we can't understand why you wasn't diagnosed before". I said "because I don't recollect having any tests for diabetes", I said "I was never tested like I have been now with the... coming to the doctors and been tested". They said "it's probably been missed". I said "I've probably been suffering with diabetes for years, because I used to feel rather strange at times". I used to feel, you know, well, a lack of energy and always feeling tired. Then, perhaps, for a few days I would feel on top of the world - then it used to come back worse than ever. But I'd never once had a test for diabetes - not until they did that in the hospital did that happen to me. And that did shake me a bit, when I realised what had happened - I was in the hospital and not at home. And that was in the - I can remember it now - it was in the room where I came to, I knew where I was. My wife was sat there as well, then. She came in; my son-in-law brought her in. Well, I was still sort of coming round, I was still in a daze when she was there, but that's when it was I came round.

But, it does seem extraordinary - you were diagnosed with diabetes a few days after you came round, and yet they still thought that you'd collapsed because of mental problems.

Well, this is what I could never understand. I used to say to them, I said "well, what do you keep asking me these questions for?", I says "you've asked me umpteen times already"! I thought "well, I will, I'll say something one day that... well, I'll tell 'em that I know what I'm talking about". I said "you're trying to... Oh, you're trying to make out that I'm something or someone that I'm not", so I said "I'm not silly". This is what I told them in this here rehabilitation thing, when they started taking the mickey out of me then, because I was trying to be such a perfectionist. I said "well, that's the way I live, the way I was taught to do jobs; it's just one of those things".

And what treatment were you given for your diabetes?

It was about a week before they actually put me on something permanently. I had to go from the

(11) Warneford down to the John Radcliffe, you know, in Oxford - the old Radcliffe - and saw this Dr Hockaday. And he was the one that I saw, and he confirmed that it was diabetes that I'd got. And they started me on a little pill - a little pink thing. I forget the name of it - it was somet' like Dindi something. That didn't last very long, and then they put me on

Chloropropamide. That was the first proper thing I had, and that was a two hundred and fifty milligram tablet. Well, when I started taking that, I felt much different altogether. And they said "well", he said - 'cause I sat and was talking to him for quite a long while - I said "I feel tons better now, doctor, since I've been on those tablets". He said "yeah", he said "I expect you will", he says "there's no telling... we can't tell how long you have been like that - you have been a diabetic". I said "well, I know I used to feel very poorly, and I used to see my doctor, and they all used to say, oh well, it was..." - I said the word just now. Yeah, they told me I'd got these stomach problems, and I couldn't understand why they couldn't detect the other part of it - whether it was sugar diabetes or not. And that's how I came to be stuck in the Warneford for so long. And they put me, then, into a ward for diabetics at the... on the same site, isn't it? There on the Churchill, that was. I was there and that's where I stayed. I had to keep going every day to see this Mr Spencer. He used to tell me not to call him Dr Spencer; it's Mr Spencer!

And on the diabetes ward, did they train you in anyway to test your sugar levels?

Well, yes, they did that. They showed me what to do, and if I had any problems - just let them know. But they put me in a good place, out the way. I was up and about getting all the meals ready! It was all very tempting. They used to say "you can't have that. We'll sort something out for you". Well, they used to do; it used to be very nice!

What guidance did you get about diet?

They were very strict. You had to weigh it all out; weigh everything. I think "well, this is going to be the hard part of it for me" - I'd never had to do anything like that before, myself.

Were you given a diet sheet?

Oh yes, yes, a diet sheet. Well, my wife, she used to make sure that I didn't go over the mark with anything. And she used to come into the hospital, and she had sort of instructions as well, on what to do. And they eventually, over the years, they had me going... that's when they released me from the Warneford and the other place that I was attached to in the Churchill. And I was then sent over to the old Radcliffe for a while. And then...

Was that to outpatients at the old Radcliffe?

Yes. And she used to get these instructions on what to do. And then I had to go in there for a week. They tested different diets on me to see which one was more suitable, 'cause there's lots of things they gave me, there was no stay in them. I used to feel... an hour and a half after I'd had one lot, I was looking round for another

(12) one, so they wanted something more staying. They put me on these pulse... a pulse diet - beans - all sorts of beans: red kidney beans, butter beans,

mung beans; all those kinds of things, and I really enjoyed them. And they said "well, that's good", he said "because", he says "you're the only one that's ever said they liked them", he says "no-one else liked them". I said "well, I do". And that's what I was on for... ooh, right to the time my wife died. She used to prepare them, and used to pack them all in these sort of little, well, like margarine Flora boxes and things like that. Used to fill them up in there and put them in the fridge, and all I had to do was weigh it out to the right measurements and put them in and make a casserole with them. And that's what I've lived on, and I'm sure it's that that brought me round anyway. There's no danger or damage done to you by having these beans. I had double lot if I wanted.

Did you have meat and fish as well?

Yes, all in this casserole there was little bits of meat. And fish - well, I do love fish anyway, so I used to have portions of fish. And usually I'd know... each day we knew what I was going to have, sort of thing, and it went along quite fine. We had a lady come all the way from London to - a reporter with the Evening Standard, in London, it was the Evening Standard - came out to see how my wife was doing all these beans and that. She had the stove going in there and saucepans going, cooking all these different kinds of beans, and putting them in the... to freeze them, and she was there all day long. She was really enjoying herself! Because she had some of it - she said "I love it", she said "I don't know about you".

What about your daughters? Did they have to eat lots of beans?

No, no - they wouldn't touch them! No. Well, after that, anyway, they were married; towards the latter part, anyway.

How did you manage for lunch when you were at work?

Well, I had just a couple of little sandwich things then. But when I had had those, I used to still feel hungry, but I used enjoy it when I got home and I had the hot dish of beans and pulses and things; they were lovely.

And how did you test your sugar levels?

I've got a... well, to start off with, I had a little thing with a

(13) pricker, and I just had to go like that to prick my finger with it. And anyway, you had to squeeze this - whatever you drew this blood off with - then you squeeze it onto a little slip of... well, it looks like cellophane thing. And when you dropped at a certain place, the globule of blood changed colour. And that's... and there was, down this strip, telling you what percentage of sugar there was in it. And after a while... well, I've got a machine, now, that registers it with quite a simple way. You just press on it and... Do you want to see it? Well, what I've got it in my hand now is what they call a little instrument called a Soft Test, where I get the blood from my finger. I just sort of press it - like that. And then I've

got another little item in here - this is a little thing called a Glucotrend. When... the little slip that I put the blood on, I have to push it inside this machine. That's a code, that is, there, and I push this little thing up inside there, then it works on its own. After it's been in there three or four seconds, it shuts off, and it tells you the reading of the blood sugar - it comes out on the little dial up there.

And have you always tested your blood sugar quite often?

I do it... I used to do it every day, and then they told me "oh, you needn't do it every day. You can only do it about three times a week, if you wish", but I do it every other day. And also, they like you to test it before a meal - in between your main meals, sort of things - just to pick up any traces of sugar that may be there. This is very efficient.

When you went back to your old job, after you were diagnosed in '68, how did people react?

Well, they were quite good towards me, really. I don't think they really understand the severity of diabetes anyway, most people. And when I used to tell them, they used to be... some used to be interested and ask me further questions about it, but they always seemed to be very understandable. And any time that I did come over rather strange, which used to happen quite frequently when I first... just after I was first diagnosed as having diabetes, they used to... we had like a little... well, I can't say a hospital, but it was like a room; a first aid room. And I used to sit in there or lie down - there was a bed in there to lie on and that - until this feeling wore off. And that's how I used to get through my days, often.

But was it dangerous working with machinery when you felt odd?

It would have been, yes. That's what they told you to do - they used to tell me to "whenever you feel strange", they said "don't try and fight it. Just say right, that's it". And you just let someone know - your charge hand people - where you were, so that they knew where to find you, and everything went quite well like that. I didn't used to go - I used to feel embarrassed; that was it, it's the embarrassment it caused. But otherwise it... even the people that were your bosses, they were all kind of sympathetic towards you as well. That meant a lot. After that, in a little while, it wore off, and I used to go back to work and think nothing of it again.

(14) How long were you in that engineering job?

It was about twenty three years, and some of the work that we were doing then was getting very, very heavy - heavy kind of lifting and things like that - although it all meant the same thing. But it was getting as though - where before we had assistance to do lots of things - it was a sort of one man affair, and it did pull me down a wee bit. And I thought, well... well, I got to this stage where I thought, "well, perhaps if I got away from it and got another job that's more suitable for me..."; well I did, and this is what I did. I went to this... the

car industry - BMC, BM something... was it BMC something? The man that was the boss, he'd come up from the shop floor - he was a fitter on the floor; I forget his name now. And that's where I went. I applied for the job, and, of course, they had to get references and things like that. And while I was in the office being interviewed with the boss at Pressed Steel, he wanted this reference, and they rang through to my old boss! And they said "well, what do you want that for?". He said ''cause', he said "well, he's trying to get a job here", he said "because he's left your company". "Oh", he says "you can't have him", he says "we want him back"!!! "We want him back, you can't have him". And he says... well, I heard him saying, he says "I think you've had it now for him. He's more or less got the job now, and", he says "he's come to earn more money than what you gave him"!

What year was that?

That was about the same year as that - would that be right? '69? In 1969, yeah, that's right.

And what did the new job involve?

Well, I was a production line inspector then. It was quite an easy job, but it was a bit nerve-racking sometimes, because you used to get so many problems with the item that I was inspecting. There were so many snags with it, you couldn't let it go through to the finishing line of the production line. And I used to snag so many that it used to stop production till they got it all sorted out. And there

(15) was almost a fight in there one day with the inspectors and the boss. The production manager, he wanted the things to go through - he said "they'll put that right on the line". And the inspector said "no, they won't", and he says "yes they will", "no, they won't"! I used to have to write on the item - if there was enough room to get it on there - what the snag was,, and they all had to go back. And they came from Llanelli, I think, in Wales - they used to make parts of 'em down there, and...

And was that job more suitable for someone with diabetes?

Well, there wasn't the heavy lifting and things like that. It was just a matter of you... your word... what you saw. You wore gloves and you felt everything. Any slightest little unevenness in the panels of the doors and things like that, that would show, you could tell that. And if you saw little bumps and areas where some of the steel had like little - I forget the name they used for it now - it's like slivers of metal sticking to the outside, which hadn't been made correctly, and especially with Belgian steel that they bought in. And I used to have to send all those back, because you couldn't put them on a car. And some of the doors, they used to have these stiffeners inside. And they weren't... they were only fixed at one side; they used to flap about. Oh, it was terrible. We sent them back, and they'd say "well, what are all these for?", they says "they're all US" - unserviceable. I said "I know they are", I said "I wouldn't have put them there if they'd been all right". Anyway, he went down the shop scratching his

head. He said "I'll have to go and see someone else about this". And he did, and, of course, the production line had to stop, and all the doors that they'd made me send down - they'd said the fitters would do that - they brought them all back! I said "I'm not going to pack all those up again", I says "you chaps better do that while you're doing it", and that's what happened. Because, whatever we said, they shouldn't go over your head and carry on doing it, because it was you that they were relying on to send out a good bit of product, but...

And how did your new workmates in the car industry react to your having diabetes?

Well, they were all right, because there was more than me in there - there was always someone that had that kind of thing. That was about the time when there were so many people going down with this - well, being discovered that they'd got diabetes.

Had anyone in your own family got diabetes?

I was the first one that it showed in, but since I've been diagnosed as having it, there was five others of us in our family. I had three brothers... two brothers rather - two brothers, they had it - and three sisters. Well, one of my brothers - next one to me - he's still alive, but he's in a worse condition than what I am, and he's been on insulin for all the time he's been a diabetic.

Have you thought about why you've got diabetes?

Well, I've been told by the doctors it's all to do for the female... yeah, the female genes - something to do with the female genes - and he said it comes out in the male side of the family. It's through the female that it comes from; it's sort of bred in the female.

So, nothing to do with the kind of diet you had when you were growing up?

No, not like that, no.

(16) And how long were you in the car industry?

About five and a half years, until 1975. Then I went on then to Greenham's Medical Supplies, from there until I retired in 1983.

And what did you do at Greenham's Medical Supplies?

Sheet metal, making electrical machines which treats arthritis, wax baths for people to soak their feet in - that's got arthritis, is it? - things like that; all those kind of things. And others - treating heart problems in babies and things like that. It was a very interesting thing, that was, because you knew you was doing something to help someone else. I know the Radcliffe Hospital used to buy a lot of our equipment. Where I go now for physiotherapy, they're using machines there that I probably made with my own hands, some of them in there, for arthritis.

And what did you do after you retired?

Oh, I always found lots to do. I used to have... very keen on my gardening at one time. And I used to have a little - what we used to call a little - workshop, and I used to make things in there, like toys for children. Anything mechanical, I was in there. And I used to do woodturning as well; I bought a wood turning lathe. And I used to make all sorts of things. There's a fruit bowl underneath there - I made that. It was a large lathe, it was. Standard lamps: I made, I think, about five of those for different people in this village. I think they've still got them.

(17) Yes, and another thing I did was, I joined the Swindon Gliding Club. And we used to go down every weekend to... well, usually you'd have to go down and take your part in manhandling the aircraft when they're coming in to land and bringing them back to the take-off points, so, of course, that's the only way you could get it done, is by everyone doing their little piece. And, yeah, the last time... well, I'm still a member of it now. Then also, I went to Hinton-in-the-Hedges, near Brackley, where I used to fly microlights, and that was even more interesting, 'cause that had an engine on it!

Did you do that before you were retired as well?

Yes... no, no - the gliding I did, but not the microlights. I made up my mind, I thought - well, they used to fly over here a lot - I thought "oh, I'd love to have a go at that". I did, and...

Do you still do it?

I haven't been there for quite a while. There's a man with a family in Woolstone - that's a little village just along the road - her name Betty Patford. Her son-in-law, he lives in Northampton, which wasn't far from this place where the microlights were. And I was just walking up to the Whitehorse Hill one Sunday afternoon and met this person. I thought "well, I've seen that man before - I know him". Been talking to him and his wife, and after I got talking to him, I thought... well, I asked him - I said "excuse me asking you", I said, but asked him what his name was. I can't... his name's gone now. But I said "you used to come to Hinton-in-the-Hedges, the microlight club, didn't you?". "Yes" he said. He said "well, that's strange, 'cause", he said "well, I said to my wife, I says that man there, he's looking..." - meaning me - he said "I've seen him somewhere around before". Of course, we got talking, and he'd come over here to take his mother-in-law over to take her up for a flight in this microlight, but she wouldn't go! So, she said "no, it looks too flimsy for me".

So, you don't actually fly any more?

Well, when I go to the gliding club I do. I go down and just have a... if it's just to go up for a ride, you know, with someone else. But I used to fly myself, sort of thing, but now I would have to have another qualified pilot with me. I can still do it, as long as I've got

(18) someone else like that with me; they don't stop you from doing it entirely.

And yes, and this microlight, he came just in the field along the road there, not far from here. So, I was walking up the street another Sunday afternoon, and it was him, come brought this microlight on a trailer, and he went into the field and assembled it. I thought "oh, I reckon that's that man come back again". I forget what is name is... no, I can't think of it. Anyway, instead of going to the Whitehorse Hill, I cut across the field and followed them across and watched what they were doing. And it was him again, and they took me up. He says "well", he says "you care for a trip up now?". I says "well", I says "no", I says "you've just come back" - from taking his, well, it's his brother-in-law, I suppose, up for a little ride round. He said "well", he says "that's all right", he said "we've got plenty of time". I said "well, I would love to", so they took me up. They went off all up the Whitehorse Hill, right round there, and they come back in over Kingston Lisle. I pointed out to them where I used to live, and we glided right over the house that I lived in in Kingston Lisle; it was lovely. And went round and circled round on the top of the hill there, the white horse and the manger. You could hear the people calling up to us, it was that low! It was wonderful, yes.

And do you still drive a car?

Yes. I don't go out so much, but I do. I've threatened to pack it in, but people say "well", they say "if you do that", they says "how are you going to get out to do shopping and things?". I said "well, I'd have to rely on some other means - bus", but the bus service is not very convenient. They're all middle of the day, kind of thing, and I don't like that. I like to get up and get my jobs done like in the morning, or get it out the way, sort of thing.

Apart from that first engineering job, which you found too heavy - has diabetes actually stopped you from doing anything else you wanted to do?

No, I've always soldiered on and tried to keep going, irrespective of what I'd got. It's just to keep going and keep active, and I find it's a good way of forgetting all about it. I do know what I have to do when I... at mealtimes and things like that; I just have to be careful and...

You mentioned that you'd been on a healthy bean diet until your wife died. What happened after that?

Well, I still do it occasionally now, but not quite so much. When she was alive, she had it all there ready for me. And, you know, when I've been doing things

(19) outside, I've been interested in it, and I've left it so long, then I think "well, it's too late to go and make those beans ready now", and so I don't have them. But I do get them quite often: red kidney beans and the butter beans, things like that. That's the main ones.

Have you had any complications as a result of your diabetes?

I've had several times when I have collapsed in the garden - I've been gardening

and I've suddenly took a nosedive. And I've managed to crawl on my hands and knees to get inside the house and lay on me back for a little while. It goes off that way.

Do you take anything?

No, not anything like that, no. You can't sort of fight that - just to have, well, they tell me to have a bar of... a Mars Bar, and have pieces of that, and perhaps a cup of tea with sugar in; that soon revives you. And that's how I've got round it, sort of thing.

Any other complications?

Not really, no. I've got this cataract in my... well, I've got them in both eyes, but the left eye has been there longer than the one in the right eye. And that's where I was yesterday, at the Oxford Eye Hospital - had it examined and whatnot. I've got to go and... well, they're going to take the cataract away on the tenth of January. I've got to go again on the twenty first of December, and that's when they tell you all about it and what to expect and things like that, and then I have to go in on the tenth to have it done. I thought it was rather quickly, really.

Can you describe a typical day in your life now, including taking tablets; everything that you do?

Anything that I can get involved in, 'cause I'll have a go at anything, really, if... When we have the sports out in the fields here, I tend to join them. If it means a bit of running or something like that, I try to do my best. And I do go for long walks from here up to the Whitehorse Hill and the crossroads, and that's a mile and a quarter each way, so I love doing that. But just recently it's got harder, 'cause my problems I have with my legs, but I still struggle along.

What problems are you having with your legs?

There's a pain in my... That's all to do with about five years ago, I was carrying - I think I did tell you over the phone - that memorial for those airmen that was killed over the village when I was - 1940 to '42. And it crashed in the field just along... a couple of fields away, and they were all killed in there. They were all my friends - same squadron... we both came from the same squadrons. But we managed to get back to Stanton Harcourt, which was a grass airfield, where we made an emergency landing. We all survived, but the other six of 'em in the other plane, they all perished. They just... the plane just nosedived into the... 'cause it was where we was going round to get in line for the bombing raids, which was just over there - over the Whitehorse Hill. We was coming over this village and going round like that, and the one that collided with us, it was coming underneath us and travelling slightly faster, and the tail plane of this aircraft struck our port engine. Of course, we lost the port engine, and it lost its control. By knocking it off its tail fin, it just lost control and went straight down. But we did manage to... we had power enough to struggle to this airfield, and

although we lost from ten thousand feet down to eight hundred feet before we recovered.

And you made a memorial?

I made this thing - Do you want to see it?

(20) What I have in my hand now, this is a photograph of the little memorial stone that I made myself, in memory of the aircrew of the Wellington bomber that was lost - a DV595 - who lost their lives on the twenty fifth of August 1942, and that's in a couple of fields away. And while I did that, while I was carrying this stone, my back cracked like a stick, and I was just stationary there for about twenty minutes to half an hour before I could do anything. It's left me now with problems in my legs: a crushed vertebra, is it? And I've that to put up with now. But I thought, well, it had been so many years that I knew that these people were there, I knew them all, that I tried to get the whole parish to be interested in it. They said "well, that's a fine idea, jolly fine idea, 'cause", they said, "there's a lot of places that they make these memorials for the airmen that's been coming in, killed on their way back from Germany and whatnot". But it had never gone any further than that, so, in the end, I made up my mind to do it myself. So, I got this stone and shaped it, and the brass I got from the undertaker in Faringdon, and he carved what I wanted on it, and all the names and things like that - well, I didn't put the men's names, because I knew... I've got their names, but I didn't think it would be right to do that without the permission of their parents, and I wouldn't know where they are now.

And you've lived on with quite a serious illness. What's kept you going all these years?

Well, it's just the things that I do and the things that I know I want to do. It's just there's a target in front of me, and I'm reaching out for that all the time, sort of thing. And I... you'll probably say how stupid I am, but one of my main ambitions is to do wing-walking. There's a place you can do it near Cheltenham - they used to call it the Utterly Butterly Aerobatic Team - go on display and wing-walk. I have applied once, and they said, well, they'd got enough applicants to last them for that season, and they said "but try again". But I've got to get in touch with them again to see what happens!

What advice would you give to anybody who was diagnosed with diabetes now?

Well, it just depends on what sever... severe it is, whether... I've found I've felt really poorly at different times with it, but I've always come back And I just think, well, start afresh and make for whatevers. Like my doctor told me once, they said "well, whatever you feel you want to do", he says "go ahead and do it now", he said "because no one knows where we're going to be tomorrow", and that's been my motto.

(21) But, of course, it is very different being diagnosed with diabetes now from how it was in 1968. What changes have you seen over the years?

Well, I've seen quite a number of changes. I know when I go to my diabetic check-ups now, I always feel more relaxed than what I used to do years ago, because you used to think they were so strict. Well, virtually I was terrified of them, but nowadays you go in there, it's like they're talking to your best friend. It's all, you know, nice to think, well, we all look upon one another as the same nowadays, whereas you used to feel a little bit shy of talking too much to them.

Would you have been shy of the nurses as well as the doctors?

Well, I was, yes, because I thought, well, you were talking to the lady, and you used to think "well, I've got to be careful", you know, "I want to speak to them as perfectly as I can to show a good impression"; I used to think that. But, I said, but the men folk, well, they used to be more a lot like John Blunt, and I hardly used to know how to... I couldn't tell how to take them, really, whether they were serious or not. But nowadays, I do... well, some of them they told me to call them by their name. I thought "that's unusual"; I couldn't believe it!

Do you mean by their first name?

Yes, they do. And they used to say "well, you take this to..." - they fill in a note to take somewhere else. After one doctor had seen you, take it somewhere else - they said "well, you take this to Jill, so she'll tell you what to do next". Well, I don't know who Jill is! I used to have to fathom out who he meant, but it used to work out well in the end anyway. But I feel... I don't mind going into hospital or anywhere like that to talk to them. I know I talk to them in my own language, and they've always understood me.

When you say they used to be strict, how did they show their strictness?

Well, in their manners - they were sharp in what they said, a bit more like the teacher days. It was... well, you didn't speak unless you was asked something; that's how I was. But now, I've started writing notes down of whatever I want to ask - ask the doctors or nurse. I just read it out. I say "can I read this out? This is the little things that I've got down that I want to ask you". "Oh", she says "well, you go ahead".

(22) Well, the doctors, as well, have said the same. They says "we wish people would do that more often", they said "then we know where we're getting to", but...

Have you noticed any differences in the way the National Health Service is organised, like waiting times?

Well, that's one thing that, especially when I go to my diabetic clinic up there, it always seems to be such a long wait. But I think what it is, it's probably not as long as you think it is, but you feel it because you're all sat in there. And you may be with... well, you're sat in there with these old fogies! They don't speak to you - they look at you. You say somet' to them, they don't answer you! I

feel a little bit... I think "well, I'd better keep me mouth shut"! 'Cause I tend to be a friendly sort of a person, and if I think of something, I might come out with it, you know. But I always came out on top in the end, anyway; people have always appreciated talking to me in the end.

Has most of the treatment for your diabetes been done by a diabetic clinic in a hospital or by your GP?

Well, the main of the things, when I've had things - sort of any slight changes in whatever I'm taking and things like that, or doing - it usually comes through the Radcliffe; the main doctors. But my doctor, this time - well, there was a time when they were going to put me on insulin. And I went into the hospital to see the nurse in there, and she told me all about it and showed me what to do, and she gave me a list of things that I had to collect from my pharmacy in the clinic in Faringdon. Well, I'd done what I was told to do. When I went to collect it, they said "well, we've got nothing for you like that Mr Jones", they said "are you sure you've got to have that?". I said "well, I've got..." - I took the letter in what I'd got - they said "well, we've got nothing like that". And I went and saw my doctor - asked if I could make a special arrangement to go and see my doctor - because I hadn't got this stuff. I was supposed to have been starting it on the Monday; this was on the Thursday of the week before, previous week. And I saw my doctor. She says "Never. They don't want to start messing around with you like that, not with someone of your age". They said "and your blood sugar readings", they says "they're not..." - 'cause they told me that they was dangerously high at the John Radcliffe - and she said "they're not dangerously high at all". Anyway, she says "leave it to me", she says "I'll get

(23) in touch with them". And she did, and that was the end of the... She told me what she'd said to them. She said "I thought it was stupid to put someone of your age on there, because there's more to taking insulin than just taking it", she says "you've got to know everything there is about it and understand it thoroughly, otherwise it can make you very poorly". I said "well, if that's going to do that", I says "I definitely don't want it", and that's how it ended. And when I went to see them again the next time, when they had to tell 'em that I wasn't going to do it, she says "no", she says "we know that Mr Jones", she says "your doctor's been talking to us". She says "we think that she's a wonderful doctor"! I thought "well, why all that fuss trying to get me to do this, take this insulin?". 'Cause I said to them, I said "I've got a brother that's on insulin", I says "and he doesn't enjoy life like I do", and I said "again, because", I said "he's been very poorly at different times, where his control has gone haywire, sort of thing". And she said "well, that's what does happen". But they was trying to drum it into me that, if I went onto insulin, it would improve my way I felt. I told them, I said "I don't feel too badly. I do all these things that what I do do". I said "if I felt poorly, I wouldn't be doing that, would I?". But it did... well, she brought them to heel, anyway! But now, I've lost her - she's left last week; she's gone. She's expecting -

she's only a young doctor - and she's expecting her second child, and she's had to leave. I think they're going to move down into Bath. I think her husband's working at Cardiff. I don't know whether he's a doctor as well, but she said "I've got to go with him", because that's where her home is, and it's rather a long way to go from here to Bath every day, so she's had to go. So, I've got another doctor now, a Dr Brown, but he's quite nice. He's been there before as a locum, but he is very nice. He's another one that you can sit and talk to, and he sits and listens to you, and... But normally, well, years ago, you had to hold your breath when you spoke to the doctor, for what they might say.