

(1) Tell me about your background.

I was brought up in Farnworth, near Bolton. My mother was slightly disabled - she had a clubfoot - and I don't think she'd worked, or at least not very much. She looked after her mother, prior to her marriage, and she didn't get married till she was about thirty six. I was the only child. And my father worked in the cotton mill as an overlooker. When I was about five, my mother had breast cancer, and she died just after my sixth birthday. I spent a little time with her mother and family, then I went to live with my father's mother, so that he could carry on working. He remarried when I was about eight, a lady I did know who had been a family friend, but unfortunately she died when I was eleven. So, I've had a few moves around schools. I didn't pass my Eleven Plus, so I went to secondary school. And when I left there, at first I worked in the blind school, in the shop there in Bolton, then I moved to GUS, to the mail order people. My father remarried for the third time when I was about twenty one, and he bought a shop, and we all moved to the shop, which I worked in the shop a while in the evenings. Then he bought a house, when he sold the shop, and wanted me to go back. . . I meant to say, when they sold the shop, he'd stayed in an elderly aunt's house, because she was in a home. When he actually bought another house, he wanted me to go back home, but I didn't get on very well with my step mother. And I had a boyfriend in London, so I used that as an advantage to get away, and I got a job in London with the civil service, where I stayed till I retired.

What did you do?

Initially, I was a clerical assistant, and then I just did the general tax. And with promotions, you go on to do more complicated tax, eventually ending up working in compliance, chasing ghosts and moonlighters, and doing a bit of enquiry work.

(2) Tell me about meeting your husband, or your husband-to-be.

Well, due to my mother dying before her mother, her father, in his turn, had left the money to be divided between the children, so I inherited my mother's share when I was twenty one. And I was mad keen to have a car. I had learnt to drive, though my father didn't drive; my mother had driven. So, eventually I buy this car, and every time you turn round it had got a flat battery. The guy I bought it off had moved to Bolton, quite recently, with a firm that he knew who manufactured racing cars, and they were sharing the same premises. The designer of these racing cars was so sick, eventually, of seeing my car in, he decided he would fix it. And through that, and taking my car back, I met Doug in February '67. We just knew each other; we weren't. . . not involved at all.

What was he doing?

He was then working as a musician in the evenings, and he was company secretary and director of this racing car company. When, as I said, my father bought the house, I moved to London and joined the civil service. And not long after that, he started to come down to see me, either for business or if he was seeing his family. And it just went on from then. In December '71, I managed to get a

transfer back to Manchester, and got myself a bed-sit in Stretford. Then, in September '73, we bought the house where we live now and moved in together. During the seventies - I can't remember the date - Doug had his first heart attack, and a week later ended up in Stepping Hill Hospital, because the doctor had told him to double his tablets. But they'd masked the fact that his diabetes wasn't right, and he went into a coma. I knew about this, and he'd told me to give him sugar and water, which I managed to get him to drink, but he'd given me the impression that it was instant. So, I rang for advice to ask somebody, but they sent an ambulance, hence he ended up in hospital overnight.

(3) Had your husband told you that he had diabetes when you first met him?

No, he never mentioned it, and nobody else was aware, because, as you'll appreciate, he was racing, and there's no way a diabetic would get a racing licence. So, he used to, when he had to do the urine tests that they did in those days, he used to make sure it was all right first. It only came out when he had an operation on his thumb, in the private patients' hospital at Manchester Infirmary. And I was visiting, as were a couple of his other friends, and the consultant walked in and mentioned diabetes, and that was the first we three of us ever knew about it.

How long had you known your husband then?

I should think about four years, though I had suspected, because sometimes we used to go, say, to Brands Hatch, to motor racing. And we'd be there all day, we'd be coming back. Suddenly, he'd pull in at the side of the road, and suddenly eat a whole bar of chocolate, and not offer me any. I thought "how rude"! But, you know, I just took it for granted; it never... much problem. I've never had a great deal to do with it. He's always maintained it himself. I just watch what he eats.

But how did he manage to hide diabetes from you for four years, because by the end of those four years, you were living together?

I don't really know. I suppose, when you came to it, he'd just go to toilet and, you know, take his insulin. He didn't test himself very much at all, in those days. So, he just had his insulin in his pocket, and there were never any... he kept himself quite high, so there was never any problems.

And you never spotted a syringe around the house?

I had come across syringes. While I was still in London, I'd stayed with him at one time, and at first I thought drugs, and then I realised that they was probably not, but I didn't ask.

(4) And then, when he was in hospital, you learnt that he'd got diabetes, after knowing him for four years. How did that change things?

It didn't really change things at all. He still didn't talk about it. It was never mentioned when we were out with people, though, because I was aware of it, I was more conscious, and tended to watch what, you know, we were doing or

eating, and whether it was going too long. And we've always tended to avoid going on holiday with people, because of the same problem, being with them so much. But no real difference in our relationship at all.

Did his diabetes continue to be a secret from other people?

Yes, they did. And if we went to people's houses for meals, it was my job to try and find out what we were having, so he could guess how much insulin to take before the meal. And that's how he's always worked his insulin. When we've gone out to restaurants, we obviously have a good idea what he'd ordered, and would take the appropriate amount of insulin.

So, all the time from when you knew him, he was adjusting his insulin for what he was going to eat. Do you know how that came about? Had he been taught to do that?

I don't know; he'd always done that. He'd always made it fit in with what he wanted to do, and - from what he tells me, anyway - and, you know, it still carries on like that now. He'll decide, you know... but now he does regularly test, two or three times a day, and based on what he sees, how much insulin he takes. In all the years, I think he's only been hypo two or three times, in all those years.

- (5) Well, I'm sorry that I can't record your husband's own memories, as he's in hospital, but he's told you a lot about the history of his diabetes, so could you tell me?

It started when he was about three or four, and they think it was caused by shock. He was in bed one night, and there was a very bad thunderstorm, which his mother didn't like, and she woke him up suddenly. And that's the only reason, because there's no record of diabetes in the family at all. Fortunately, he was an only child. And he was taken to see Dr Lawrence, both at Harley Street and at King's College, and his family were wealthy enough to be able to afford the foods he needed to eat, and, you know, the services he needed. So, he was controlled quite well. When, in the beginning of the war, Dr Lawrence arranged for a lot of his young patients to be sent away for the war. Doug went to Brentwood, then, and, in fact, quite a lot of children from London went; many of whom, their parents just disappeared, because they couldn't really afford the food they needed for their children. And he was there until he was sixteen. He hated school, and managed to get his parents to agree that he left. And he was given a job, by Dr Lawrence, at King's College, working in his path lab. So, he used to do the blood tests, and hours of doing the... what's needed to get the results that's now done in seconds. He was going to night school, then, to try and get more qualifications to carry on in that, but got side-tracked with his music. And after doing a few odd jobs - he was a journalist, and one thing and another - he went into the music business.

- (6) When did he get involved with big band music?

Well, he'd been having drumming lessons after he'd left school, and for a drummer,

which is quite unusual, he can actually read music. And so, at the end of the war, he got a job with the big bands in London. The band he was with, after a while, moved to Birmingham, where he was for a year or so. Then they were coming to Manchester, to open at the Ritz. And he didn't want to come, because if Birmingham was supposed to be the second city, he certainly didn't want to come to Manchester. However, the band leader did get him to say he would go for two weeks, which he did, and he's been based in Manchester ever since. He loved it when he first came, and lived - though he has moved away with different bands, in the past - you know, he's always been based here. At some stage, while he was working in the big bands, he did get married, but I'm not quite sure what happened. There were no children, and they'd divorced in the early sixties, before we'd met. Although, he had had a stint, during this period, on the liners sailing to Australia and back - mainly with the ten pound assisted passages - to make money.

And how did he get involved with racing cars?

Well, like a lot of musicians, they've got a lot of free time during the day, and they get involved with cars, trading and selling them. And, at some stage, came across Derek Bennett, who was a designer, building cars, and he got into motor racing. He actually had a racing licence, and we've got quite a lot of cups that he won. But, of course, being diabetic, he should never have got a licence, but managed to get through the medicals by making sure the urine tests were very right. He did, actually, race once while we were together, in about '74, because he - with the man he worked with - he'd been and bought a car, which had been entered in this race. And he insisted that they carried on with the entry, so, though he hadn't driven for ten years, he actually raced, and came third and got a cup.

- (7) Well, you've got pictures of the racing world, all round the walls in the room that we're sitting, conveying kind of the speed and excitement. But how did he manage with diabetes during the races?

I think what he must have done was made sure that he was high, and would remain that high during the race. They weren't long races he was in: quite often ten, twelve laps, so maybe twenty five, half an hour. So, you know, it worked that way, I think.

So, tell me, then, about the rest of his career, until he met you.

About the mid sixties, he'd stopped working with the big bands, and was doing more clubs in Manchester; duos and trios. And he'd got in with, as I say, the racing people, and one, who was a brilliant engineer, who designed cars. And they'd started to manufacture these cars, and they were very successful. And as it got bigger, the place they had in Salford just wasn't big enough, and they moved to premises in a former cotton mill in Bolton, for the manufacturing purposes. And that's the premises where my car was being repaired every time it broke down.

And he was one of the directors?

And he was one of the directors there, yes, and the company secretary. So, he did the books, and the other two directors were... they could do the actual building.

Do you think the other directors knew that he had diabetes?

No, I don't think so. Virtually nobody knew.

Well, we've talked about you learning that he had diabetes, after you'd known him for four years, and also his heart attack. Can you take me on from there?

Well, we decided, in 1980, that we would get married, which we did on 31st of March in '81, to take advantage of the tax reliefs for the whole year, by only being married five days in the tax year. And we continued to live where we are here, in Cheadle Hulme, and life just went on. In about May '88, he had a second heart attack, and was in Stepping Hill Hospital. By this time, he was... he was 62, at that time, and they weren't very keen to do bypasses, at that age, with diabetes. However, as part of one of my pay deals, we'd got private insurance for medicine, and he talked the specialist at Stepping Hill to refer him to a doctor at Wythenshawe, which is noted for its heart surgery. And he managed to get them to agree to operate, and in January '89 they did five heart bypasses, which was a great success. And he had no more problems with his heart, until the last two or three years.

Talk about living with someone who has diabetes, once you knew. What effects did it have on your life?

Well, apart from just watching what he ate, and making sure, you know, that things weren't too rich or too much carbohydrate, it didn't really make much difference. We travelled. We would drive to the south of France; we went there about six years running. We've been to Turkey, we've been to Canada, and travelled across Canada. And we've just got on with life, and gone where we've wanted to go.

What about the secrecy - how did that affect you?

Well, generally, it was a tension thing, myself, because I always felt I had to watch to make sure that he wasn't, you know, getting too low and losing consciousness, or, you know, starting to talk rubbish. That was a bit of a stress, if we were with people. So, more often than not, we've tended to be on our own when we were away on holiday.

- (8) By this time, he'd started, actually, to go to a diabetic clinic, regularly, at Wythenshawe Hospital. And they had managed to get funding to convert one of the old doctors' homes into a walk-in diabetic clinic. And they realised that Doug was at least the oldest surviving diabetic in South Manchester, so asked him if he would open the diabetic clinic with Paul Goggins, the MP for the area. This, of course, got covered in the press, and everybody suddenly discovered that he was diabetic. And he didn't

get a lot of rib... he did get a lot of ribbing from people for keeping it quiet, all those years.

How did he feel about it being known?

I think he felt, in the end, relaxed, because really, he was no longer racing, so it didn't affect anything in any way, it didn't alter our lives in any way. And it's helped to explain things now, when his health has deteriorated in later time.

You said he'd started going to a clinic. How much had he been to clinics, in the past?

He virtually never went to a clinic in twenty years, or more, I wouldn't have thought, especially when he was in the big bands. It was only in the seventies, early eighties that he started to take a bit more care, and he'd moved onto blood testing from urine testing. And he'd also had, with the U100 coming in, he had a bit of problems sorting himself out. He liked the pork insulin, and there was quite a few experiments trying to get him stable.

Did he move onto a different insulin?

Yes, he did, and since then he's moved on again. I can't think what they're called now.

(9) So, from 1998, nine years ago, everyone has known about his diabetes. Tell me what's happened since then.

Well, generally, for quite a long time, not a lot happened. He's got older, obviously, and he started having problems walking. Eventually he had a knee replacement, in November '03, and after being discharged, he had breathing problems. And they took him back into hospital, thinking he'd got an embolism, but in actual fact it was fluid on the lung. But while he was there, he acquired a blister on his heel. And the district nurses came.

How did he get the blister?

I think he must have... the bedspread must have been a honeycomb, or something, and he must have been moving his heel up and down, and a blister had just appeared on his heel. The district nurses were coming in to dress it, because he was diabetic. And we'd started to put moisturiser on his legs, to - since he'd had his knee replacement - to encourage it, or the skin, and we were using an E45. One of the district nurse sisters had an emulsifier, which she thought was probably better, and used it on his legs, but unfortunately it started the skin weeping. And nothing we tried could stop it, and, of course, he developed lots of ulcers. And it just went on and on, till the following... in 2004, in the September, they took him into hospital, and made him have bed rest with his legs up. Because the weeping is partly vascular, he was only comfortable to sleep with his legs hanging over the bed, which is the worst thing can happen for the ulcers. So, they had him in hospital with bed rest, and his legs did dry up, and they were starting to heal quite well. Eventually, by the summer of '05, they'd virtually healed, and he just had two tiny ulcers on the ends of his toes,

though he had lost a couple of toes. We went to Jersey, that year, on holiday, which was the first holiday we'd had away for quite... for three or four years. But he was eighty that year - sorry, seventy nine, he was - but he was healing nicely. Then, following his eightieth birthday, we were invited to a party. And he had a little too much to drink, and when he got out of the car and walked round the front to come in the house, he staggered and fell and broke his hip, and ended up back in hospital again. And within thirty six hours, had ulcers on both heels. And we've struggled, now, for the last ten, eleven months trying to get those healed. And then, in July this year, he fell over again, and broke his collar bone. And that's why he's still in hospital at this time.

(10) How good would you say his treatment has been, in recent years?

Well, generally very good. When he went into Wythenshawe for bed rest in '05, the diabetic people didn't have any beds, and because the vascular specialist was on holiday, they managed to get one of his beds. And when he came back, he'd seen Doug, and he was star... two or three of his toes were dying. And the specialist wanted to take his leg off, which would have had to have been above the knee, because of the knee replacement. However, a very good podiatrist, Simon Goodwin, said that he thought he could save his leg, and as he wasn't keen to lose his leg, he decided to go with him. And he has been absolutely wonderful, and that's why his toes had healed up, just before he fell over in 19... sorry, 2006. Also, the specialist at Wythenshawe, Dr Younis, has also been great, and very helpful. All this time, from the December of '03, we've been having district nurses - sometimes daily, sometimes three times a week - and they've been absolutely wonderful. I mean, the fact that when she gave them lubrication that set his legs off, she wasn't to know that he was allergic, just as he can't take cotton wool against his legs, now, and some dressings. But, we've been really well looked after, under the National Health, these last few years.

Would you say that, since you've known he had diabetes, it's been a big thing in your lives?

No, I don't really think so. It's always been there, in the background. But we've just tried, you know, to do what we've wanted to do, and make it fit in around our plans.

(11) Has it had a big effect on his life?

Over the years, I'm sure it must have done, especially in the early years, when things were much more restricted of what you could do, and what you could eat and not eat, and the way people viewed it, in those days. In those days, they seemed to think it was a disability, and even some people thought it could be caught. So, I think he was restricted in some of the activities he could do, as a youngster, that they go ahead and do now. But, as he became a racing driver, and was quite successful, it shows you can get around it, even though I'm sure today, you still wouldn't get a racing licence.

What equipment does he use for his diabetes now?

Well, he still uses the disposable syringe; he's never used a pen or the ones that can help... are putting it in all the time. And he has blood testing meters, which are provided by the manufacturer, so that, I suppose, they're getting his doctor to buy the strips for him.

And what about his attitude to diet - is that very strict?

Not really, no; it's a case of what he fancies. He's always said that he bases his life, as a diabetic, on Dr Lawrence.

In what ways?

Well, I think Dr Lawrence, from what he tells me, was more as "do as I say, not do as I do". He says about him going to dinners, and Dr Lawrence would just go into the gents and inject himself straight through his trousers. And he drank, and did everything that you were not supposed to.

And is that the model that you husband has followed?

And it's certainly the model my husband has followed. He has always drunk quite... until the last few years, he's always been quite a large drinker.

Have you ever had any involvement in his injections or blood tests?

No, I've never needed to. He's always managed them himself, and even now, he's over eighty, he still does all his own blood tests and his insulin injections. He'd been managing for years, before he even met me, that it's just a way of life for him now.