

83. June Moore

(1) Tell me about your background.

I was born in Dolton in 1928. I'm the oldest of six. Went to the village school, where we left at fourteen.

What did your parents do?

Varying things: a taxi, my Dad drove a taxi; we lived in a pub for... we were in a pub through the war years. There was a Norwegian settlement, at the time, of men; we got to know them quite well. After, when I left school at fourteen, I went to Bideford to my auntie, and worked in a fruit shop, there, until I was seventeen. Then I came into Torrington and started work in the cottage hospital as a nurse. You didn't do training, then, as such, as a nurse; you just went in and did your bit. And I met Charles at a dance at High Bickington in... in February 1945, at a dance at High Bickington, and things just went on from there. We got married at Dolton Church in 1946, had our first daughter in 1947, another one in 1950, and then we had a son in 1956.

And tell me about your husband's background.

He was the third child of eight. In those days, there wasn't a lot of money about. His Dad worked on the council as a road man; mothers didn't go out to work, in those days. At five, Charles would have started school, walking to Roborough, which was a three mile journey each way. He said that as he got older, he used to get thirsty and scoop up water from beside the hedges to drink, and he would be getting tired, and one of the big boys - I imagine Charles wasn't that big - one of the big boys used to give him a piggy back home. And probably, just after that, they found that he'd got diabetes. He was in bed ill, and he said he could feel himself just sinking, and felt he was dying. And then they decided it was diabetes, and this was in 1935. He went to Barnstaple Hospital, as he understood, for six weeks, but measles broke out in the ward, so he got sent home after three weeks. He was off school, he thinks, for two years. But when he went back, he was thrilled, because he had a car to drive him to school, whereas everyone else had to walk, and, being a boy, he thought that was lovely.

(2) What did he tell you about his three weeks in hospital?

He used to help - he says - look after the other children. And I think he was a bit of a monkey: he used to... he says he used to, as the meals came around, he would press his plate down on to the one below, and then he would get banana on that, there was extra for him. Of course, when he was there, he had to learn how to do his injection, and I think, really, for what he was allowed to eat, he had to look after himself quite a bit. I mean, when he came out of hospital, he had to, sort of, sort out his own food a bit, because everything had to be weighed and measured, in those days. And being one of eight, I think - and he was home doing nothing - that he was a help to his mother. When he was a bit older, naturally, his older brother developed diabetes, but that older brother was already out at work.

Before we move on to life at home, any more memories of his time in hospital?

Yes, when he was there, he says the boy in the next bed, he says he had diabetes. Whether he did, I'm not sure, but the boy in the next bed died, so, of course, he thought he was going to die as well. When he was there, his Dad used to cycle ten miles each way to visit him. They lived in the country, and there was no buses and not many cars, in those days, and anyway, they wouldn't have afforded a car to travel with.

Well, you said that he needed a car to be supplied to take him to school, but why was he at home for two years without going to school?

Well, he had to do his own injections, do his own tests with a Bunsen burner, in those days, and, well, perhaps they... I really don't know, but I suppose they thought, perhaps, they weren't meant to go to school, and look after themselves. It was a long day for youngsters, walking.

How often did he have to inject himself?

Twice a day, in the morning and before his evening meal, and I think it was Protamine Zinc, the insulin, at that time. In later years, after he'd left work, he got put on to one injection a day. And he's had varying insulins, and the one he was taking more recently, that has been stopped, now, at the end of this year.

What did he do after he left school?

He went to work on a local farm for I think, possibly, perhaps, two or three years - perhaps not that long. And then, he knew there was a job going in Torrington, which was quite a few miles to cycle every day, in the milk factory. It was war-time and he got a job in the milk factory. And the farmer kicked up, because he said that he should be on the land still, but, being diabetic, the doctor said "no", it suited him better being in the milk factory, and it was good for him being there, because if ever he needed something, there was always a drink of milk.

What impression did you get of his diabetes, when you first knew him?

Well, it didn't concern me at all, and he told me just after I met him - probably because you would always wonder why they weren't gone into the forces. And he'd had his medical and obviously he didn't pass. That didn't mean any problems for me, and we got married in 1946, when he was twenty one and I was eighteen. When we got married, he moved to my village, which was Dolton. He cycled seven miles, each way, to the milk factory. He was on shift-work, and, as far as know by, he never even carried sugar; didn't carry anything.

So, tell me what you remember from the 1940s, before the National Health Service in 1948.

- (3) I don't really know what happened when he was a child, but I imagine he got everything of his insulin things free, then. But certainly after he was paying a stamp, insulin and everything - even if it was for something

other than diabetes, if he had tonsillitis - everything came free from the doctors. When we got married first, we lived with my parents, because houses were short. After eighteen months, there was council houses built for the first time in the village, and we got the first one, and there was quite a large garden, which pleased him, because he tilled all the vegetables. You couldn't have grass, because you couldn't eat grass; that was always what he had to say, and he was quite happy growing vegetables. He loved going to the river fishing, and he always liked ballroom dancing, which we did... you didn't get babysitters very often, in these days, but if we could go out once a year, we were quite content.

So, it sounds quite a healthy lifestyle.

Well, yes, it was, and towards eating, I think everybody ate much the same thing, in those days. We ate differently than people do now - you didn't go to the shop and buy things. He ate... he was sensible with his diet, but he ate the same as the rest of us. I mean, he wouldn't eat sweet cakes and things like that, but he always ate sensibly. And I always did... made jam and chutney, and things like that, that we knew exactly what was in it. We had vegetables from the garden. He would go out with a gun and shoot a rabbit or a pigeon, and that is the sort of things we ate, in those days. And there was rationing, so you didn't get too much of anything. Diabetics, if they gave up their sugar and jam allowance, they could have extra fats and cheese and meat, but he never did that, he always kept... and he had his sweet allowance, the same as everybody else. He never had a special diet.

(4) And how did his health continue after those early years of marriage?

Well, I would think he was always pretty good. In 1957, we moved into Torrington, so as he hadn't got that journey to cycle every day. When he was here - we'd been here a few years, I can't remember exactly - and he went to the doctor, one day, because he'd got tonsillitis. And he refused to sign him off when he was better, because, having left the hospital in 1935, he had never been back for a check-up. And the doctor wouldn't sign him off until he'd gone back to Barnstaple for a check-up, after all those years.

So, he had no hospital check-up between the age of ten, when he was diagnosed, and his thirties?

No, that's right, he went right through. But after that, he did go regularly. But that doesn't have to happen any more; that was with our local doctor at Torrington, now.

What adjustments did you feel that you had to make to his diabetes, when you got married?

Not a lot, really, because he ate fairly normally, but it was always necessary to have meals on time. If he was out and not home, I used to worry where he was. I would never let him know that, but I was always thankful to see him come home.

And what effect did his diabetes have on your children?

Not a lot, really, but later years, he might be not too well - possibly going into a hypo - and they would know to give him a sweet drink. Towards him having injections, I think that did them all good, my children and the grandchildren, because they never minded going having their injections for anything.

And what about meal-times?

Well, we always ate together. That was our meal-times, and they were always there; we were always as a family.

So, they had to keep to the strict times as well?

Yes. I mean, obviously, breakfast, he would have his at... that would be a different time for different... for what time starting work, but other than that, yes, we always ate together.

(5) What were your meal-times?

Our dinner, which you now call lunch, was always at 12.15, and our tea was always at 5.00. And that is one thing I did find that, if we went out for our lunch, which wasn't often, but I was always on pins, because they're never in a hurry, in the hotels, to serve you, and I was always on pins until it was served. And at our diamond wedding, the meal wasn't quite ready, and the daughter went into the kitchen and got his meal before the rest of us had ours. And they were very good, at the hotel; they understood.

And what about travel: did diabetes restrict your travelling?

I don't know, really, but in those days, people didn't have cars. We never had a car; we couldn't drive, either one of us. Jersey's the furthest we ever went on holiday. When the children were small, it wasn't far, but we always went to Westward Ho! and they had a jolly good holiday. We were there and it was self-catering, we went in a caravan, and we used to be at the sea all the time.

So, you didn't really have to make any adjustments for travel?

On no, someone always drove us down, and yes, that was all right. We did quite a few holidays through Dairy Crest, with the works, when they put on a holiday each year. Late years, we went on those, and had quite a... yes, we went on those holidays, and had quite a good time.

And you just took all his equipment with him?

Yes, but he never used to tell them, at those places, he was diabetic. He would just skip by the same as the rest of us. There was food always around.

Why didn't he tell people he was diabetic?

Well, I don't think... he never thought there was any need to, not... until he read, one day, that anywhere you went in a hotel, you should tell them, and

after that he did. And they used to say “shall we keep your insulin in the fridge for you?”, and he used to say “oh, no thank you”.

- (6) During those twenty or more years that he wasn't going to the hospital for his diabetes, did he go to your local doctor for his diabetes?

Not really. The only time he went to the doctor, every, perhaps, three or four years he would get tonsillitis, and then he would have to have the doctor. But apart from that, I used to go to the doctor for the prescription, and he would go to the chemist's and collect it.

So, nobody was really monitoring his diabetes?

Oh no.

So, can you tell me how he monitored his own diabetes?

Well, after the Bunsen burners went out of fashion, he did urine tests, which he did right up until late years, even after he should have gone on blood tests, which he didn't like. And he was buying his own Clinitest tablets, which were costing thirteen pound. But eventually he did go over to blood tests, which, most of the time, I did for him, because he didn't like doing it himself. He went on blood tests, I think, only about three years ago, because... well, and then I took over doing it for him, mainly because he would say “oh, that's near enough”, so I did it so as to know that it was accurate.

And tell me about his insulin.

He... when human insulin came in, the doctor changed him over, but he didn't get on with it, so he went back onto pork, which he stayed on until he passed away in March. Yes, he did keep on with his Clinitest tablets long after he needed to, really, but the blood test is much more accurate. And he did like - I don't know about liked - but he was always ready to go back to the eye specialist, and things like that, in later years.

- (7) So, he had eye tests at the hospital, in later years. Can you tell me all of your memories of his hospital visits, after he started going in his thirties?

Yes, years ago they had to go twice a week - I think it was once every three months. You went on Tuesday to have the blood test, and Thursday to go for the results, and if the results weren't good, you had to go back again in a couple of weeks. But, in those days, it meant having time off work, and you lost money.

How far was the hospital from your home?

Barnstaple - ten miles, and... well, you got there as best way you could, in those days. Later years, it came into eye tests once a year, and only about four or five years ago, Mr Gibson, his consultant, said that, testing his eyes, if he didn't know that he was diabetic, he wouldn't have... if he hadn't been told, he wouldn't have known, from testing his eyes.

And how were his feet?

The chiropodist: he didn't go there until he really had to, and the doctor told him he must go to the chiropodist. And she always said his feet were like silk, and they were the best ones in the town. But he always had, for some reason, a dread of an amputation, but, thank goodness, he never had any trouble at all. He had this dread of an amputation, I think, mainly because, at one stage, there was three Torrington men all in at the same time who had amputations, and Torrington isn't a very big town. At that time, everybody knew everyone else.

Was the chiropodist at the hospital or in Torrington?

The chiropodist comes to the Torrington hospital not as often as we would like. Well, I mean, they do come, but you don't get an appointment as often as you would like.

(8) So, am I right in thinking that he had no major complications as a result of diabetes?

No, and up to a few years ago, when he developed Paget's disease of the skull, if a youngster developed diabetes, I used to look at them and say "look at my husband, he's lived a near normal life", and I think, in a lot of cases, it helped. I used to say to them "well, look, he's doing this and he's doing that, quite normally". I never did tell them, though, that he would loved to have gone in the Navy, which he couldn't do.

What do you mean by a normal life?

Well, anyone looking at him wouldn't know there was anything wrong. And he used to love ballroom dancing, fishing, liked to do a small bet on horses, used to eat some things he didn't ought to eat. He used to love Jaffa Cakes, which I'm afraid one of our nurses was horrified at. But he used to get three... he always had a couple before he went to bed, and that was his supper. He liked an occasional drink. Later years, he did sort of stick to gin, rather than beer, but he used to have beers, years ago. But I could never make him... he would never understand that, if he was drinking beer, that he should be having something to eat, which, in the end, he did realise that. But he used to think as long as... if he was drinking beer, he was getting sugar, but that was all wrong. But then he used to carry glucose tablets, and he would have some. Years ago, I did think he should wear something, and I don't think you got identity bracelets, in those days. So, I went to Barnstaple and bought a St Christopher, and had "diabetic" printed on the back of it, which he never wore unless he was going away somewhere where people wouldn't know him, but thankfully he never had any use of it.

Did he ever have any major hypos?

Not that I know by, when he was away from home, but he used to get some home here, sometimes, especially at gardening time. He would come in, in the evening, and he would sit, and I mean, I have sent for help, when I've been frightened, once or twice.

What made you frightened?

Well, because he was quite strong - he never attempted to touch me or anything like that, I don't mean that - but to get something into him, and I was afraid of how bad he was going to get. He did get out of the bath, one night, and collapsed on the floor, and I came right down the stairs and phoned the doctor. But, by that time, he was getting better, by the time the doctor got here. And I know the doctor said to me - if he listens to this - he'll say to me "God was with you tonight". Occasionally, not very often, he would get a sweat at night, and I would have to wake him, and... well, sometimes it wasn't possible. I just had to get some - I always kept glucose beside the bed - and I used to get a little bit of glucose into him. And once he realised, he was very good, and he would sort of say "more, more", and then, eventually, he would say "that's enough", and I always trusted that he knew.

(9) And what kind of care do you feel you've had from your local GPs?

He had to go to Barnstaple for the tests - the quarterly tests - for quite some time, but now it's been moved to our local surgery in Torrington, where he had to go every six months. But everyone there, they're tip-top; they're excellent and helpful in any way.

Do they have a special diabetes clinic?

No, they send an appointment once every six months, where they... he has a blood test, and then he has to go back after about ten days for the results. And they just tell how you are, and your blood pressure and everything. But once every twelve months, they do your eyes and your feet as well. And I am now Type 2 diabetic, and they always fitted us in together, so that we could go - because I'd always gone with him anyway - so they've always been very good and fitted us all in together, even during our 'flu injections, when we went for our diabetic check-up, so as he hadn't got to come on those special 'flu days.

So, tell me about your own Type 2 diabetes.

Really, I've just taken it in my stride, because I've had it about, I suppose, twelve years, but I knew from what Charles ate that I could do much the same. I am on tablets. But I've always liked chocolate. He always had chocolate on the side that, if he wanted... if he needed sugar, he would always have chocolate. Never sugar-free sweets; that didn't appeal to him. But, being on insulin, if he needed something, he would have... and I mean, he would get boxes of chocolates given to him for Christmas, which would keep him going. In my opinion, I keep well on my diabetes, but I mustn't keep bars of chocolate or chocolate biscuits in the house, because it's too much of a temptation for me.

(10) Tell me more about your visits to the GP.

Well, once, when we were there, the nurse said: did Charles get aggressive when he was needing sugar? But he never did, he was a very gentle person. But we did take... after he'd got his seventy year medal, he took that down, very

proudly, and showed them. And the doctor's secretary, he was telling her that each diabetic is an individual, and they've got to live life as they think, and eat, within reason, what they want. And he was speaking quite loudly, because he was excited, and she told him to "sh, don't tell everybody".

Because she didn't want everybody to know that you should eat what you like?

Well, yes. Presumably she didn't think everybody should eat exactly as they wanted! He did eat a certain amount of sweet things, but he kept off of fatty things. He very rarely touched clotted cream, although he worked in it, and I think, in late years, that's proving... I find, now, they make more of not eating fat than they do sugar, for diabetics. He never had an update on his diet sheets, but, reading Balance magazine, in recent years, I think they take more notice, these days, of fat rather than sugar. And it's surprising how many recipes there is in there that you can put sugar in, because, when he was diabetic first, sugar, you shouldn't have at all.

And what are your impressions of the National Health Service, over the years?

Well, the diabetic team, they've been marvellous. At Torrington, our local nurses, and at Barnstaple, the specialist nurses, who only come if you've got a query, or perhaps if his insulin needs to be changed, they advise what to have. They've all been marvellous, they couldn't have been better.

And can you talk about your husband's health over the years?

Well, I think we just accepted it; he accepted it and so did I. You just lived... you just accepted it and lived as it was. Later years, because of his Paget's disease, he didn't always like going out. And if there was something special - like my Dad's birthday, for instance - I had a very good sister-in-law who would always come and sit with Charles. And he was always happy to have her, because it was his brother - her husband - he'd been diabetic as well. Oh, and I should have mentioned, she came all day when I went to the grandson's wedding, and he was quite happy. And I was quite happy to go out and leave him with her - she knew exactly how to deal with him.

Did you feel that your life was restricted by his diabetes at all?

Not really. I mean, we stuck to our meal-times, but then, that is me anyway - I'm a fuss-pot, right.

(June Moore adds that if Charles had high blood sugars, he would just eat 'a couple of eggs' instead of a full meal.)