26. Leon Cowdery

(1) Tell me about your background.

Well, I was only just an ordinary normal youngster. I brought up on a council estate. My Dad was an ordinary working class, though my Mum was a much... she was really a middle class and reasonably wealthy, and she was only one... had only one in the family, one youngster. I mean, she was the sort that went around with a little gold watch on her hand. But my Dad was one of about seventeen, I think it was, and he used to do two paper rounds before he went to school, and then all that money from that paper round went to his Mum to help bring up the rest of the children. And when he finished school, he had to go straight home to a piece of land that my grandfather rented from the council, and he had a job laid out for him to do. My grandfather then came home, working at the time for the gasworks. My grandfather inspected what my Dad had done - the work. If he'd done it well, he had one slice of bread and dripping; if he had not done it well, he had nothing. So, he'd had nothing to eat almost from the morning until that time at night.

And what did your Dad do for a living?

Well, my Dad, although he was quite an intelligent person, he ended up as what they called a tacker. My grandfather was a plasterer's labourer, and a tacker is you tack laths on the ceiling, and, of course, you're going tack, tack, tack, tack, and that's why you got the name a tacker. But really, he only done that job because, in a way, my grandfather done a lot of tacking, and he followed him into that sort of job.

So, how did he come to marry somebody who was from the middle class?

I don't know, but I think what happened was, an evangelist called - now, what was his name? I ought to remember his name well, but I can't - he came to Reading and conducted a Seventh-day Adventists' campaign. And I think, though I'm not sure about this - I can't state it categorically - but I think my Mum and my Dad met at that campaign, because I know both my grandmother Jackson, which was my mother's side, and, of course, my Dad's name being Cowdery, my grandmother Cowdery and quite a few of the other Cowderys went to that Seventh-day Adventist church in Reading. So, I'm assuming - and I'm sure I'm about right - that he met my Mum at that campaign, and that's where they both had things in common.

Tell me about your life before you had diabetes?

Well, I think I was quite a happy, easy-going lad, but I was not a bit interested in sports in anyway at all, which I think could make me a little bit different than most youngsters, because they're all interested in kicking a bag - what I call - a bag-o'-wind about. I was not, and I'm still not, not a bit interested in any kind of sports at all. Now, I suppose the biggest thing in my life before that is when I - obviously I don't remember this, I only know what I was told, though I've got the markings of it - when I was one, and my Mum was cooking some

parsnips, and I got up and pulled the handle down and I got completely scalded from head to foot. They rushed me off into hospital - I was only one - and I stayed in hospital for a year. And they tell me I was like a little Mummy with just my little eyes, and I've got dark brown eyes, so, of course, my little eyes were popping out. And I'm now scalded across my chest, down both of my legs and under my chin as well, and down the sides of my face. And my Mum never ever - I know it's an irrational thing - but she never ever cooked parsnips again, because, I suppose, she felt that that was the sort of thing that brought her bad luck.

(2) And what memories have you got yourself from before you had diabetes?

Well, obviously I went down with other small complaints like everyone else did, but the only thing I can really remember is, I suppose, I remember a Dr O'Brien coming into my bedroom and I was ill. And I don't remember having measles before that, but I know he diagnosed me as having measles, and I can distinctly remember my Mum saying to him "well, he's had measles", so, like typical doctor I suppose, "oh well", he said "it must be German measles then", and off he went out of the room and that was it, so I had German measles. But, of course, in those days, if I remember rightly - and I'm sure I'm right - any kind of illness - I did anyway - we looked upon as a sort of... I don't know, a sort of a sense of weakness or even a sense of shame, and chronic illnesses like diabetes, they sort of... they almost carried a kind of a stigma. And I can remember there was a man - my Mum used to listen to him on the radio, and that's how I heard him - of course, radios were not so used quite so much then. But there was a man called a radio-doctor in... if I remember rightly, his name was Dr Hill, and he had a very deep, gravely voice. And I can remember - although I don't remember the programmes that he ran - there was one distinct thing I remember him carrying out or saying, and he said "if you're bald, you're bald, and put a polish on it", and that was the general attitude. Now, I went down in - I suppose it must have been 19... yes, it was 1949, and I was not quite thirteen... fourteen I mean, not thirteen, not quite fourteen - I was thirteen and three quarters - and I suppose I must have gotten a bit thirsty or something or other, although I don't remember it, and I remember my Mum taking me to the doctor's. And she said to him "his food turns to water", and so Dr O'Brien looked at my Mum, and he said "what do you mean? He's got diarrhoea?".

(3) And what happened then?

Well, I don't remember all the details, but I do remember him going down to a little cupboard out the back off of his surgery - I remember this distinctly now, the room and everything, but anyway - and he came back out with a little Bunsen burner. Well, I had to put some urine in a little container or something, and he got this Bunsen burner out, and although I didn't know at the time, there was some stuff called... I think it was called Benedictine solution - it was sort of a blue solution - and you put the solution in a tube, and then so many drops of urine, and he waggled the tube round in the flame and he watched. And I can remember it turning a green, and then an orange, and then to a bright sort of a

deep reddish-brown. And so he said "well", he said "I thought that was it", he said "he's got sugar diabetes", 'cause in those days you weren't known as having diabetes, it was sugar diabetes, or we always called ourselves as having - being a diabetic. But though, to me anyway, and to a lot of other people, somehow sugar diabetes almost seemed a derogatory kind of term.

In what way?

I don't know. But, of course, my parents - and I suppose most people, then, in the forties and fifties, especially the forties - could remember the days when most people that were diabetics, they shortly or very quickly died. But anyway, I remember going into the Royal Berkshire Hospital, I suppose it was about four days after seeing my GP. I went in for about a week - maybe ten days, but I don't think so – and, of course, my GP, and I suppose other people in the hospital, they were all quickly trying to work out why should I end up as a diabetic. That would, of course, been in early 1949, March '49. In December 1948, my grandfather - that is my Mum's father – died; he died quickly of a heart attack on a train in Reading, and they put it down - the shock must have been the cause. But, I do remember when I went into the hospital at that time, I weighed four stone thirteen.

And how tall were you?

Well,

(4) I would imagine, although I don't really know, because I don't know that they bothered to measure you much in those days - I mean, now I'm five foot three – so, I suppose in those days I would have been about... let's see, I would imagine I would have been less than five feet, because I kept growing until I was about twenty three. Now, I remember that week when I had to go into the hospital after being first diagnosed, and the thing that sticks in my mind, more than anything in that hospital, is - I'd never had the experience before – remember, I'd already had the shock of being found a diabetic - I woke up in the middle of the night, I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, I couldn't open my eyes, but I knew what was going on around me, I knew where I was. And I was desperately, I was struggling, I strained everything I could do to move, and then suddenly, almost like a bang, I woke up - oh, out of breath, and I could move. And I remember mentioning it to the nurses and that in there, but no one could tell me the cause of it. And I also can remember being in there - one of the nurses, I don't really feel - or I didn't at the time - feel that she should have been a nurse. But I remember her telling the patient next to me, well within all of my hearing, all about the complications of being a diabetic, including TB, and TB at that time was quite a killer because it was before the days of streptomycin. Anyway, not only putting me on my diet - on my food - what they used to do, they then used to do what they called a four-point blood test. They would take quite a large syringe full of blood and send it down to the laboratory for a test, so that they could determine how the

blood sugars were going up and down during the day. And I can remember being in that hospital being extremely hungry, really hungry. The insulin that they had, if I remember rightly, was in grades of ten, twenty, forty, sixty and eighty units per cc; you didn't have a hundred units, I don't think, in those days. And another thing - I don't ever remember being told about hypos; may sound a bit strange. I can remember getting up, having a slice of bread in the middle of the night, and then it made me feel a lot better.

(5) And so, I'd found that by eating, that cured it, but it was just a strange feeling to me. Mind you, if you'd have put the word "hypos" to me, I would not have known what it meant.

So, how often was your sugar level measured?

I think they'd done it about twice while I was in the hospital that time; all of them a, what they called, a four-point test. It was one, I think, in the morning, one midday, one about six o'clock in the evening, and then one on going to bed. And then they worked out their food and everything from that and out you went. But, of course, in the hospital, you would be sitting there more or less resting, but when you got out, especially being a young lad of fourteen, I was out on my bike and racing around everywhere.

Can you remember learning to do injections in the hospital?

Yes, I can remember, and we didn't mess about with putting it in any oranges or anything like that. All I'd done was just straight into my leg and got on with it. But what I do remember about it, they was huge great big syringes, big glass things - much, much bigger than the amount of dose that I needed. But I'm sure it was only one, at that time, one injection per day, and that would have been in the morning. Later on, I seem to think I went onto two per day.

And then you've said that, after doing the blood test, they then decided on your food. What were you taught about diet?

All of our food was worked out on a portion basis. You had ten grams per portion, and you had so many portions per meal. For instance, you would have four portions, which would equal forty grams for breakfast, you would have roughly the same for a midday meal, and then roughly the same - some people had fifty, some even had sixty, but not very many - it was usually forty or fifty grams, so in other words four or five portions. Now, some people - but I was not familiar with that - their food was worked out on lines equalling ten grams and five grams, but mine, being in the Royal Berks, they always worked it out on portions.

And what kinds of food were you allowed?

Well, they gave you a diet sheet, and this diet sheet had about forty common foods on them. No processed food, no such things as canned soup or anything complicated, and most of it was what you'd call natural foods, like apples, pears,

bananas. And everything had to be weighed. If, for instance, you were going to have an apple and you wanted a ten gram of carbohydrate apple, you weighed it, though, strange enough, the scales always worked in ounces, although the carbohydrate content was always worked out in ten grams.

How did you manage that?

So, if the apple was too big, you cut a piece of the apple off. You threw that piece away and you then had your ten gram portion. And with your meals - for instance, most of the carbohydrate of say your dinner would have consisted of potato. You may have made up a few with maybe broad beans or something like that, but, in the main, your meal

(6) would have been greens with no carbohydrates, potatoes that would have had carbohydrates, and then you may have had some in the beans, and then the rest of the meal would have been made up, maybe ten grams of fruit, an apple or so after the meal.

What about protein, like eggs, fish, cheese, meat?

Well, they tried to push and make you have lots of meat, fish, eggs and cheese, but very, very little carbohydrate.

What happened when you came out of hospital?

Well, I can remember coming from the hospital and I was armed with a big large glass syringe and separate needles, detachable needles, and pieces of brass wire that went with the needles, so that each time you used the syringe, you had to boil it afterwards - or at least that what you were supposed to do; we didn't always do it, I must admit. But you were supposed to boil it, and then clean the needle out - it was a huge great big needle - with this piece of brass wire, so it would keep it clean inside. I had my soluble insulin, I had my diet sheet with about forty, as I said, forty different foods and everything on it, and then a bottle, I think it was, of this Benedictine solution and a test-tube to test my urine over... well, we didn't have a Bunsen burner, but we had a gas stove for cooking our meal and so we used to put the tube over the gas. And they also gave me this very small set of scales with a little tiny plastic bowl on the top for weighing my food, which weighed down to mostly in thirds and quarters of ounces. Now, I can remember leaving the hospital with all that, and on the way - while I was in the hospital, that first week, I kept getting, which I'd never ever had before, acid indigestion - and so my Mum, I remember her buying me a tube of Rennies. Well, I didn't even know what Rennies were at the time, but she bought me this tube of Rennies. We called into the chemist on the way home, and I had a few Rennies on the way home and that cured the acid, which I will mention at this point that I have acid indigestion ever since, but never ever had it before.

So, do you reckon that was caused by the change of diet?

I imagine it could well have been, but I would more than anything put it down

to the stress; the psychological stress at the time.

How did you feel, coming out of hospital at the age of nearly fourteen, with all this equipment?

I don't know, but I do seem to remember feeling very - I mean, I felt quite secure before I had this diabetes, but with all these problems, I felt very insecure.

(7) How did your family react to your having diabetes?

Well, I have to stop and scratch my head, but I can go back to how they reacted. I mean, my Mum - I'm not saying that she took it in her stride - but she sort of... in the end she started making quite a bit of a fuss of me; I suppose she was trying to compensate. And then I can remember my brother, being eighteen months older than me, he tended to rebel a bit, because food, at that time, was a little bit short, and, of course, it was still on ration, although things was getting a bit easer. But nevertheless, basic foods were all still on ration. And I can remember my Mum giving me a lot more eggs, trying to boost my amount of food up, because I was always hungry. And my brother used to get really, really nasty, because he could see the eggs in the larder, on the shelf there - maybe half a dozen - and he would want an egg, and my Mum would say "no", because I wanted them. And he couldn't see why he couldn't have them, and he could never - even though he would have been fifteen or even sixteen - he could never take that in. And I could tell my Dad's attitude did seem to harden towards me. And I don't know whether my Dad felt that I was not really following what I should be doing, but I can remember him really blurting out to me one day, getting really nasty, "you'll end up as thin as a lath". Now, I don't know if you know what a lath is, but a lath is that little thin piece of timber that you nail on a ceiling to stick the plaster to, and it's very, very thin. Well, he used to use these laths in his job at work, and that's why, I suppose, he tended to use that thing "you'll end up as thin as a lath". And also, I tended ... there was definitely a personality change, because I can remember I was quite an outward going person. I would get mixed in with everything, and I was quite - even though I say it myself - I know I was quite a bit of a character in the Scouts. What I'd done with the Scouts, I just very quietly and silently left; I just didn't go. I never told a single soul why I didn't go. The thing was - I used to go the camps and the weekends and things like that. Well, I knew that with all my food and all my insulin, there was no way that I could cope with it. But I still told no one; I just quietly left and got out. Now, we also at that time, we had ration books, and I had then - my ration book was taken away - and I was given a special ration book. In this book, there was... they took away... you had coupons for sweets, you had coupons for sugar, you had coupons for margarine, butter and cheese. Well, they took out the one for the sugar, they took out the one for the sweets, I had more cheese and I had more butter. But even so, I can remember at that time going to bed, and quite often - even though I was a young lad - I just could not sleep, and the reason I couldn't sleep was because I was so hungry.

(8) I remember my Mum - I think she felt quite sorry for me, really - and what she tried to do, to make it up, or at least take my mind off of it - because after coming out of the hospital, I didn't have to go to school. I don't know the reason why, but I know I did not go to school for about three weeks, and so I had this three weeks to, what you might call, brood over it all. And what my Mum done - she never had the money for it... I had an old bike falling to pieces, which I'd made up myself, and she went out and bought me a brand new black Raleigh bicycle from a shop in Reading. I can remember the name of the shop and everything - it was called Len Owen's bicycle shop in Caversham Road in Reading, I remember it extremely well - and she bought this bike for me, specially to take my mind off it. And I can remember going round on the council estate where I lived, riding it around as proud as a peacock.

And what happened when you went back to school?

Well, I think, perhaps... I told no one at school, not even my teacher, that I'd become a diabetic; that was too much of a sort of, as I said, a sort of a stigma to me, and I never told any of my friends at all, none of them. But, I think - I mean, my teachers must have known that I was a diabetic, so my Mum either went in without me knowing or wrote a letter, which she prob... because she was very good letter writer - not so my Dad, but my Mum was a very good letter writer - because I can remember on one of my school reports a Mr Soper writing that he thought I always looked tired and it must have been due to me being a diabetic.

Did you manage to do sports at school?

No, I had absolutely no interest in sports at all, and that piece... I cannot remember... I know I told no one, and yet I was excused from playing football; I never ever played football. And when we went to football, we could, if we wanted to, go gardening instead, and I always went doing the gardening.

(9) Tell me about leaving school.

Well, before leaving school, I was quite... when I was at school, I was quite an artistic youngster; I mean, I could always guarantee, without any doubt whatsoever, I would come top of the class for art. And I was very good with the paintbrush, and what appealed to me, which was quite a well paid job at the time, and that was sign writing, so I wanted to get myself a job as a sign writer. Well, I can remember my Mum and I going round - she always went with me, I suppose she felt that she needed to protect me or something, but she always went with me - and we went to try and get a job sign writing. Well, when you left school in those days, they gave you a card, and on that card, I think it was put - although I don't remember all the details - I think there was a recommendation on there for you for the type of job that you wanted to do, but it also stated on my card "no machinery and no ladders to be used", so I couldn't use any machinery and I couldn't go up any ladders. Well, as soon as it said "no ladders", that meant that I could not be a sign writer, so I couldn't

get a job. So, I know quite a bit of time went by - quite a few weeks or may even have been months - where I could not get a job. Well, I was also quite a dab hand at bicycle repairing - bit self-taught, but nevertheless, I was quite a dab hand. So, in the end, I ended up working in Halfords, which was a motor car accessory and bicycle shop in Reading. But before... I had been there very, very short before I was, in the end, what you might call a head mechanic - I was head mechanic because I was the only one - but nevertheless, I was the only one there that could take all the gears to pieces and rebuild wheels and put all new spokes in and new rims and that type of thing, so I got on quite well. Now, while I was at Halfords building all these other people's wheels and repairing all their complicated four-speed hub gears, I decided my black bike, although I liked it very much, I decided I wanted something a bit more sporty, being a young lad. So, I got a second hand Peugeot lightweight expensive cycle frame, I bought hubs, I bought spokes, and I purchased wheels, and I completely made a bicycle up, custom-made for myself; another like my bespoke suit I had done years before. And I used to zip around on that, rather than my drab old black one. And I remember while I was at Halfords, next door to the Halfords shop, in what they call West Street in Reading, was a public house. And at Christmas, the rest of the staff all used to go into the public house and have a sociable drink, and they tried - and they used to smoke, every one of them smoked. All of them tried to get me to smoke, but none of them managed it; they'd tried to get me into the public house next door to have a drink at Christmas - no way did they manage it. So, I must have been a bit of a disciplinarian even then, 'cause I had no smoking and no drinking. Now, about the same time - might have been a little later, but I think it was about that same time - a new insulin came on the market, came available; it was called protamine zinc. And what you done with that, you put your soluble insulin in the syringe first, then you pulled the needle out, you puts it in the next bottle of protamine zinc, but you made sure you shook the promatine zinc up first. What it was, it was literally ground up zinc in with a soluble insulin, which made it last a lot longer. And then, I think - I think my memory's serving me right - we then could cut down - instead of an injection in the morning and one in the evening, I could just have the one in the morning, because the protamine zinc would come in during the evening. While I was at Halfords, although I was what you might call, as I said before, the chief mechanic, it was also my duty, being only the boy - because the others were all much older than me - it was my job to go down into the cellar down the bottom and make the tea every mid-morning and lunchtime and mid-afternoon. And I can remember often going down there, having myself a swig of good cold water straight out of the tap. So, my blood sugars, all of the time, must have been running reasonably - looking back on it now – reasonably, if not quite, high.

(10) How long were you at Halfords for?

It was roughly about three years, because I know I was not eighteen when I left - I was about seventeen and a half, seventeen and three quarters; something like that. And how I came to leave was, I was moving much more into Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I was forced, and it was always... it used to get at

my conscience. Every Saturday when I used to go in, it used to niggle at my conscience, and I felt it was wrong and I shouldn't be going, irrespective of what my opinions are now, but that was my opinion, anyway, at the time. And I could see the opportunity of getting out of it, and also making a bit extra money as well. Well, I was one of these dab hands - I could put my hand to anything. I only had to see it done once, and it didn't take me long to do it. Well, I was with my Dad once and I saw carpenters laying flooring, and they were desperate for people to lay floors, and they were getting well behind in holding the job up. So, what I'd done, I decided to go back in the evening and I started laying flooring - only flooring, which was really a job that most of the carpenters despised doing it, they only done it almost out... because it had to be done. And I went what they called floor bumping, it was called, because you were going bump, bump, bump – bump, bump, bump, putting the nails in one after the other, one after the other, one after the other. Well, I started doing this flooring. Well, I started getting on so well, and I was earning so much money at it, in the end I started doing it during the day as well, and even went back sometimes on the weekends doing it. And so, of course, I had to become self-employed then, and that means doing all my own stamps and doing my own income tax as well. And I... really what that was - you could not do it today, you couldn't do it many years ago, but you could do it at that particular time - I got in - onto carpentry and the building industry - what you might term, the backdoor. But I had to... by working during the day, it made it a bit more complicated with my food. And so what my Mum used to do, she bought a big thermos flask, or thermos jar rather, not a flask - it was jar with a big opening at the top - and she used to cook my meal overnight and do it all warm, and I used to take a cooked vegetable meal to work, so that I had a few potatoes, quite a few greens and beans in this thing. And the reason for it was to keep the carbohydrate down low, because the thing was, in those days - low carbohydrate, plenty of meat, fish, eggs and cheese. So, what she used to do was keep all the carbohydrates down low, so I had no sandwiches. And I know that what she used to do for me as well, and what I had a lot of them - although I can't remember quite how they were made - but it was called egg custard. And you used to whip up some raw eggs or something - and I don't know how it's done - but I know that I used to have a lot. I haven't had them for many, many years now. My wife, I don't think, has ever done them, but I know my Mum used to do a lot of them to boost my quantity of food up. And I got on so well, I then purchased my first car. I think I had a motorbike at the time, but I'm not sure. But anyway, I purchased my first car: an Austin 10. But at the same time, I can remember still going to the standpipe having a drink of water fairly often.

(11) Did you have any health problems at this stage of your life?

Well, in general, I don't think that I did, but I do remember very distinctly getting several like septic pieces coming up on my legs where I'd been injecting. And I remember distinctly one particular time where I had to go into hospital, because my leg... like a huge great big, almost as big as half an orange, came up on my thigh. And it came up so big, I went down to the outpatients at the

hospital - my GP sent me down there - and they decided to operate straight away. And I went in, and I was operated on that same day, and then I stayed in hospital for several days while they kept just cleaning the... and letting everything, as it were, ooze out. And I also remember, at the time, it was generally expected - I can remember medical people talking about it - that diabetics really expected to live at least twenty years less than the average person, and somehow, in my mind - I don't know where I got it from - but in my mind, I always seemed to think that if I could make forty five, I would be doing extremely well, and that's all I expected to do.

And how long did you stay working in flooring?

Well, I don't suppose doing flooring, only, lasted any more than maybe five, six months - something like that - at the most. But, you see, I was the sort that only had to see a thing done once and I could pick it up very quickly, and it didn't matter whether it was engineering or whether it was carpentry work. And before I knew where I was, I was doing the more lucrative and easier to do work, such as putting up stairs, even the winding stairs, and then putting in door frames and things like that. In fact, later on, I got to the point where I even purchased myself a book, I sat down indoors and I studied how to use a very technical tool called a roofing square. And at the time, you could go to the average building site with, say, twenty carpenters on the job - skilled carpenters with apprenticeships and everything - you would be lucky if you could find one that would know how to use a roofing square. Well, I ended up on the site, where, when the roofers went on holiday, the carpenter foremans and all the other apprentice carpenters could not set a roof out, and I came in for setting out the roofs for the bricklayers so that they could run up the gable ends. So, of course, I was getting even at the top end of the thing, even though I say it myself. And what I actually was doing, although on my card, my employment card when I left school, it said "not to use any ladders or to use any machinery", I was actually getting in on the skilled labour, and, of course, the wages as well, by the backdoor.

(12) It sounds as though you kept yourself very well then.

Well, yes, I think I did, but a lot of it would have been due to my Mum, the way she used to make sure that I always had my lunch and everything ready for me before I went, and it was always cooked everyday. And when I used to have my meal, I used to get away. Most people used to sit upstairs in the houses on the bare floorboards having their sandwiches. But me, not having sandwiches, I used to keep right away from everyone else, in another house if anything, and sit down with a fork, sticking the fork in the top of the thermos flask. But I did keep quite well. And I was, in height, I was about five foot three, or in metric that's, I think, one-point-six, and in weight I was nine stone, or I think that's about fifty eight kilo. And I remember, at that time, my grandmother dying - that would have been 1952-53, and at that very same time I needed a suit, so I thought what I would do, I would get a suit quickly made. Well, I found a man in Reading, a little Jewish gentleman, a little firm called Jonmo's, a little Jewish

gent. He made me a suit up - what they used to call a bespoke suit – and, but he made it in three days, and I thought "well, there's no way a suit could fit me well and proper in three days". Well, I went back after the three days, tried the suit on in the shop, and it was absolutely perfect. And not only was it perfect, but there was no belt loops on the trousers and there was no bracer buttons, so the trousers had to fit - either they fitted or they didn't - and they did; they fitted perfectly. And also, at the same time as this, my food - although my Mum was preparing it and putting it all in this thermos flask - all the food I had all the time, my breakfast and everything - my bread especially, because I did have a certain amount of bread - was always weighed. She would put the slice on the top of the scales, and then she would cut a piece off, then weigh it again until it was absolutely dead right. And I can remember the urine testing. Well, we just found that didn't work and so we gave it up. And what I used to do to keep myself what you might call controlled, for want of a better word - when I used to have a hypo, I could tell it with the greatest of ease. There was no threat, no danger, no anything. I could feel it coming on, I knew exactly what it was, and there was no problem me suddenly going unconscious; no way at all. In fact, I could hold on to a hypo for quite a while and I was quite safe. So, what I used to do, I used to, several times a day, I would use a hypo as what you might call a bouncing platform. I would let it go down, and when I knew I'd hit the bottom, I knew then I had it controlled. And that, I used, in a way, as a substitute for any urine testing, which I found was no good anyway, because I could do a urine test, which at that time was with a Benedictine solution, it would read high, and then very, very shortly after I'd have a hypo, and I then knew it was very low. So, I knew that urine testing was of no value, so I didn't bother with it. But then later on, I suppose - moving on a little bit - I suppose it would have been roughly about 1957, give or take a year or two, but a kit came out and it was called a Clinitest kit. And what it was, it was like a little plastic container, about as big as a packet of cigarettes, I suppose - a big packet of cigarettes - and in there you had a test tube and you had a dropper, and in the dropper you put so many drops of urine and then you put in a Clinitest tablet and you waited. And that had exactly the same effect as the Benedictine solution. It boiled up the urine in the tube, and it then went from - it's a greeny colour, up to, in the end, like a bright orange. And so really, that was quite a move forward and you could do it a lot easier. But I still found that the urine test was useless, because, as I say again, it was just the same: you'd get a very high reading, and then I would get a hypo later on.

Can you explain exactly what you meant by using your hypos as a bouncing platform?

Well, you see, I knew that if I had a hypo, I knew that my blood sugar was low, and so, therefore, as far

(13) as I was concerned, it was low. Now, of course, I've got a meter, I can tell - where it would be very low one hour, and within less than half an hour it can go right up - but I didn't realise it at that time, 'cause I'd not had the

experience of using a meter. As far as I was concerned, if at ten o'clock in the morning I felt a hypo and it was low, that would hold low for the rest of the day. I knew it would go up and down a little bit, but I never ever realised that it can go up and down like it can. So, at the time, I was quite content - although I was wrong - but I was quite content to feel that I was having it well under control.

And now, returning to your career, did you stay in the building trade?

Yes, I did, for quite a long time; in fact, I've n ever moved out of it, but I did diversify, as it were. What I actually done is, I was earning fairly good money, but I did work hard. I would even go back sometimes in the evening and get all the wood in the house ready to use the next morning, and I would sometimes go back on the weekend, even on a Sunday, and do a day's work then, so I was working hard. Maybe that was part of my saviour, spending the energy and help keeping the blood glucose controlled. But anyway, what I done, I purchased a plot of land, and I kept this plot of land. And then a bit later on - moving forward again, I'm now moving forward to 1958 - I then got married. I purchased a caravan on hire purchase, I found I had to sell my car, and we got married, as I say, and we moved in to the caravan. And what I'd done, I then purchased - it was second hand - but a really desirable top of the range AJS motorcycle. That would have been in 1959.

And when you got married, how did your wife cope with you having diabetes?

Well, before I got married, of course, obviously the wife and I had spoken quite a bit about my food, and when we used to get out and about, she could see, of course, how I had to juggle with it all the time. And so, by the time we got married, she was fairly familiar with it. But at the same time, my Mum was absolutely convinced that nobody would be able to look after me properly, and nobody could persuade her otherwise. But anyway, we moved into the caravan, and I really got on quite well, but I do remember, whilst living in that caravan - we lived in it for about... I suppose we'd been living in it for about two years at the time - and I went down with quite a bad bout of, what they called at the time, double pneumonia, and I was out of work for must have been nearly a month. And I put it down due to the fact that I used to go to work, freezing cold weather, on a motorbike, then I would work all day in the cold, no heating, no anything, then come home and living in a caravan at night. But nevertheless, I did get over it, and we had two boys while we were living in that caravan.

(14) What my real plans were, even before I put the caravan on the land, was to build a house on the land and move into it. Well, when it came to building the house, obviously I needed money - I needed a mortgage. Now, the problem was, diabetics could not get a life insurance, therefore no insurance, no mortgage. Because what it meant was, if I'd moved into the house with a family and then suddenly, being a diabetic, I died before the mortgage was paid, who was going to pay for the house? And they knew that they would have quite a game ever trying to get a wife and children

out of the house, so, therefore, they would not grant a mortgage. So, I was in the position - no house, no mortgage, no money. So, what I done, I worked even harder. I got the house up to the roof and I got the roof on. I then decided, or at least the man living next door to me said "why don't you go and see my bank manager? He'll lend you some money to get that finished off". So, I went to see the bank manager, and the bank manager called me in... or I had to go into the back room - a Mr Knowles - and he said to me "well", he said "you're rather a youngster", he said "wanting house building", he said "developing, and that", and I don't think he took me seriously. But he said "anyway", he said "you get me all the credentials for the house, the deeds and everything", he said "and I'll contact you later on". Well, unbeknown to me, what he actually done was, he wrote to my next-door neighbour and he asked my next-door neighbour what sort of character I was. Well, although I don't remember all the details, I was called back in to his office, and he said "that's okay" he said. "How much do you want to build the house?". So, I'd had it all worked out exactly how much I needed to get it finished. He said "right", he said "now, I can finance it for you", he said "on one condition, and that is as soon as the house is finished, the house goes on the market and it is sold, irrespective of whether you've got anywhere for your wife or your children to live", he said "and remember" - I can remember the exact words - he said "this will be, if it goes wrong, a millstone round your neck". So, I sat there; I thought "well, what do I do?". And I took a little while, and I said "okay, I'll take it on". So, he said "all right, I'll make all the arrangements". So, I had to go back and see him a few days later, and I went into the office out the back. He said "it's all through, it's okay",

(15) he said "now you", he said "will need cash up front, won't you?". I said "well, I will need a certain amount of cash", I said "but I will need a cheque book". Now, I -remember I had no account in this bank, I had no bank account at all anywhere, not even a post office account - and he made all the cheque book out for me with my name and everything in. He took me out the front, he said "how much cash" he said "do you want to take away with you now?", and I forget how much, but I told him "it's several hundred", and he went up to the girl behind the counter, he said "see that Mr Cowdery has so much". And off I came out with the cash in my hand, got on with the job, got the house finished, and as soon as the house was finished, although I hadn't paid for the house, I shopped around for another piece of land. This would have been 1962. And I then made arrangements to purchase another piece of land in Goring, and the house, the bungalow, then went on the market and was sold. After purchasing the piece of land at Goring, what I'd done was, I decided to do exactly the same all over again. So, I moved - and I made quite a profit on the first bungalow I'd built. Obviously before I got any of the money, the bank had to take out of it because they held all the deeds, they held everything, and I just got what you might call the change. But it was quite a lump sum

- enough to buy the piece of land, move my caravan onto the new piece of land, and build the new house up and get all the roof on and all the plastering done inside. So, all I had to actually pay for was the fittings inside and getting it all fitted out. We actually moved into that bungalow. Okay, we only had the vanity unit propped up with a piece of what we call tile baton, and no floor tiles on the floor in the kitchen, but I had everything made there, and I made all the kitchen units to save the money. But at least we were in and we had a flush toilet, which is more than we'd ever had before. And then, I suppose, maybe a couple of years passed - something like that - and then we had a third son in that bungalow.

(16) So, now we've got to the 1970s. How was your diabetes in the 1970s?

Well, I mean, if you'd asked me that question at the time, I would have said that I'm doing extremely well. As far as I was concerned, I was controlling it fairly well. Looking back on it, I don't think I was controlling it anywhere near as well as I should have been. I never used to go - or at least very, very rarely did I go to the diabetic clinic - that was in Reading - because I went there time and time again, and I just felt it was worthless. And I can remember going there, and not once - not once did they ever look into my eyes. I don't remember them ever once, ever looking at my feet. All they were interested in was going down there... I think they used to do a urine test - not a blood test, a urine test - and have a look - I can't remember... we had no records for anything, and I just felt it was worthle... or wasting my time. But nevertheless, in the seventies - it was the early seventies when I first had a bit of an awakening, because that's when I first started getting some troubles. I had kept seeing little spots of red in my eyes, and, of course, it kept getting worse and worse. Now, I didn't know what it was at the time, and I went to my GP several times; they couldn't quite make it out. Anyway, eventually I went, and I can remember my GP trying to look in - he didn't dilate my eyes, obviously, I mean, that was out of the question - but he looked in as best he could. And, of course, as soon as he put the light in my eyes, my eyes would obviously close up, so he had a job to see, but he, I think, suspected retinopathy. And he sent me to what was then a brand new, the very latest hi-tech eye hospital that had just been built in Reading. It was - to use common jargon - the cat's whisker. And I...

(17) Well, I went down to the Reading eye hospital, and I think I remember going down there a couple of times in fairly quick succession. Well, they did verify that I had retinopathy problems, but they could do nothing about it - they had no treatment, no anything. But, they knew there was a new type of treatment at the Oxford eye hospital, so they transferred - they made an appointment for me - and I was then transferred to go to the Oxford eye hospital; I saw a Mr Audley. And the building itself was a much older - compared to the one in Reading - I mean an old fashioned Edwardian building. And they definitely confirmed it was retinopathy and I had an option. They had just developed a new laser treatment. I had a choice. There was no proof at all - nothing, no proof at all - whether

they could cure it, but what they did put to me: it was either that, or I would go blind, but they said "don't make up your mind now - leave it. Come back in a few weeks and tell us what you want us to do". Well, I did, and I decided... well, there was no choice, and I opted to have the laser treatment. Well, at the time... they had this... it was called jumbo. The laser machine was about the size of a dining room dresser, and it was called a jumbo because it had a large white, like a chunk, a huge great big tube coming out at the end, and this tube would have been about four and a half inches across and it was about five or six foot long. And this huge big tube came out the end, so you can quite see why it was called a jumbo. They had one at Oxford, one at Moorfields, and I think - they only had three in the country - I think the other one was at Glasgow, but it was up north somewhere. And really what we were - like it or not - really we were guinea pigs, but I had no option and I took a chance. Well, eventually an appointment was made and I went in, and we went in - we were in for three days. You went in for the first day, preparation; second day you had the treatment, then the next day you came out, and they'd done one eye only at a time. But they still didn't know whether it would work. And the treatment was an awful experience. What happened was, they got this huge great big long needle - I suppose, if I... I'm sure my memory treats me well, it was about two inches long - and they pushed this needle in the side the corner of your eye,

(18) so that it would go right the way round the back to the nerve, and then they anaesthetised it. And then they waited for quite a while. You have that done, I think, in the ward; I'm sure I had that done in the ward. By the time I got in the room where they have this jumbo machine, it was then working, and what it actually done, it numbed the eye so you could not turn it; you could still see out of it, but you couldn't move it. So, if you turned your head, one eye would turn with your face - with your head; the other eye you would move like you would normally, so you were getting two pictures all flashing around. And so what I decided to do was to put my hand over the other eye. So, the good eye - the one they had not anaesthetised - I couldn't see out of, so I could only see out of the one that they'd anaesthetised. I then went down to have the treatment. And what they done, they - I can remember the surgeon leaning right over me, Mr Audley - and he had a big pedal at his foot, and then they put this big trunk over your face, and I remember them putting like a cloth across my forehead. And when he pressed the pedal - this big pedal, like a big car brake pedal - it went "bang", so every now and again you got "bang, bang", then you might wait seven or eight, maybe ten seconds, then you'd get "bang" again. And each time you have a bang, you could feel a surge of heat across your face. And at the same time, you had a nurse standing there with water, and he would keep saying to her "more" or "less", "more", and the more he wanted, the more water she poured onto my eye. And it ran on my eye and all the way down my face and down my

neck. And when it was all over, I just felt absolutely exhausted. And we went back to the ward, and it took - oh, I don't know - I suppose it must have been at least eight hours before that anaesthetising began to work off and my eyes became normal, and it was most frightening. And then I had to go back again, I think it was a week or so later. I can't remember - I know I had the other eye done as well, but I can't remember how... they only done one eye at a time, on separate occasions, but I can't remember how close I had one done after the other one.

And did the laser treatment work?

Well, as far as I was concerned, it didn't work one hundred percent, but nevertheless the bleeding definitely improved and it did seem to stabilise for several years, but then it started coming back. But I remember when I went into the hospital that first time, the doctors there said to us that it's the only ward in the hospital where you go in feeling fairly well and you come out feeling depressed, and I could see it. I saw quite a few of the other patients end up completely in tears - full grown big men ending up in tears, and I felt about the same.

(19) So, did you have reasonably good sight, then, all through the 1970s?

My sight, in general, was quite good, in general, apart from these bits of blood that kept on appearing, and then they would seem to drop... well, not drop down - they were dropping down, but to me they appeared to be going up. And they would go up very slowly over a matter of days, they would go up, and then disappear out the top of my vision. But the vision in itself was quite good, and in all eye tests I came out quite well. But then, coming up to about 1979, the bleeding started to get worse, quite a bit worse, so I went... I had an appointment at the clinic. If I remember rightly, at the time, I used to go down there every six months. Well, a new man came on the scene, a Mr Cheng, and he had a look, and he said "well", he said "all I can do is give you three months to see - no more". He said "but what I can do", he said "I can try quite a bit of laser treatment first". So, I thought "okay, I'll have more laser treatment", but the laser machine by that time was vastly improved on the old jumbo; it was a much more modern machine. You didn't have any of the injecting or anaesthetising in the side of your eye or anything, none of the water pouring on. Over that time, it had vastly changed in a very short period of time. So, the experience of having it done was nowhere near so unpleasant. But he did say to me "is there anything that you want to do?", and I said "well, the wife's got a sister in Australia and other relatives over there", and we did really want to go and see them, and I said "I've also got an aunt in America that I would like to see". And he said to me "well, look", he said "as soon as we've done the laser treatment", he said "you ought to go", he said "because if you don't", he said "I think it will be too late". So, as soon as I'd had the laser treatment, was quite quickly, I dropped everything, we went straight off to Australia. And at the time I had been building the occasional house. I used to build a house, and then while it was up for sale I would go back on the site and do some carpentry work, and then as soon as I got the money back for the house, I would buy another piece

of land, and so I would keep going. But at that point, I could see the axe falling, and I thought "no, I'll stop", and I stopped buying any more land at that point.

(20) Now, before we get on to your trip to Australia, tell me everything that happened before you went.

Well, I can't remember a great deal really, but there is one incident that does really stick in my mind. Not amusing really, but I can remember I was quite ill and I was in a terrific pain - stomach pains, and I don't know what I didn't have. And so my local GP, who was very, very good - he was a very good GP, but he was very blunt, he didn't have very much in the way of bedside manner, but he was very skilled and very good, and I liked him very much - he came to see me, and he straightaway diagnosed hyperglycaemia. And I said to him "no", I said "you're wrong". Well, we had had disagreements before, and he said to me "look, this time I'm right, and you are going into hospital", and I said "no", I said "you're wrong". He said "you're going in". So, I decided that the best thing to do was to keep quiet and let him have his way, so I ended up going into hospital - all the sirens sounding, all the blue lights flashing. I can remember vomiting all the way from my house in Goring to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, and they were giving me painkillers. By the time I got to the hospital I felt rather strange, all sort of numb and tingly all over. The x-ray departments were all closed, and they got all the people out to operate the x-rays and they x-rayed me all over and everything, and in I went into the ward. But I still didn't know what was wrong with me. Well, anyway, I'm laying there in bed the next couple of days or so - I think two days passed - and I was just laying there in bed thinking of nothing really, but I was still in a fair amount of pain, and I still didn't know what was wrong with me, and who walked in but my doctor, my GP. Now, what it was, he was a heart specialist at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, so what he'd done, he called in on the way. And he came up to me and he said "do you know what?", he said "you were right, again", he said "and I should never get the hang of that damn complaint". And I thought "what a magnanimous man!". And I've never forgotten it. But he was a very good doctor.

(21) So, what was wrong with you then?

Well, what it turned out to be... but it still took several days. I suppose I was in there at least a week before they decided what was wrong with me, because I still tended to vomit quite a lot. I would have the food and within a matter of hours it would start coming up again, and being a diabetic that was getting quite complicated. But anyway, what it turned out to be was a simple internal blockage. Now, I don't remember them giving me an enema or anything like that - I don't remember really them giving me any medication - but whether it sorted itself out or not, I don't know, but that's what it turned out to be. But, of course, although I can look back and say "well, why didn't my doctor know?", all the symptoms did look like hyperglycaemia; I can quite see that. And in those days, we had no blood meters, and the only way you could find out what the blood glucose level was, was to go into hospital and have a proper blood test taken, and then wait while it all went down to the lab, whereas my

doctor had no option, so in I had to go. But not long after that, I then saw an item in the Balance, which is the diabetic magazine, and it was about an item on a new invention: a home blood glucose monitoring machine. It sounded very interesting, and as my eyes were under threat, I thought "well, this could be a very good investment". It was going to cost eighty pound, but you had to have a letter from your GP. So, I got all the information and I went to see my GP for the letter. I explained it all to him, and he said to me "well", he said "to tell you the truth", he said "I think they'd be a waste of money", he said "but if you want a letter", he said "I'll do one for you". Well, he gave me the letter.

(22) So, getting the letter from my GP, I sent it off with all the other bits and pieces and my eighty pound - and eighty pound, in those days, was a lot of money. But anyway, I suppose it must have been worth two, three, maybe even four hundred pounds - eighty pounds, then. Well, it turned out that there was no machines. So, I rang up, and I actually spoke to the managing director himself, and I said "well look, I'm wanting to go off to Australia" - I explained this situation to him - and he was very, very sympathetic, but they still didn't have any machines. He said "well, what I will do", he said "as soon as we've got them made" - because they made them themselves, they weren't imported in from Taiwan or China in those days - he said "as soon as we've got them made", he said "I'll make sure that you get one straight away", he said "and I will personally see to it myself" - not the staff. And when I got it, the serial number on my machine was 02, so I must have had the second - they probably kept the first one for their own museum, or whatever you like to keep it - I had number two. And at the time, there was no other meters available in Britain. Those were the very first and only ones available, so I assume - maybe wrongly - but I assume that I was the very first person in Britain ever to use a home meter.

Can you remember where they were manufactured?

Well, they were very primitively made, and Hypoguard was up near Ipswich, I think, just north of Ipswich, and they've still got an office there. But now, I think, they've been taken over by an American firm - still going, and we're now 2004. They're still going, but they've also got a big department in the States, and they distribute from the States as well. And they've also got more modern machines in the States than they've got in England, but where the machines are made now, I don't know. But altogether, I had quite a few different machines off of them over the years, and I've still got even the very first one that I had all those years ago. I don't use it, obviously - it's well out of date now, because they've all moved on - but I've still got the same, the original machine.

How did it work?

Well, you still had a strip, but... and you had to - instead of just sliding them in, like you do now, and they automatically turn on, you didn't. You had your own buttons that you turned on, and you had to slide a piece of plastic sideways, you put the strip in, then you put the... but you put the blood - if I remember

rightly - you put the blood on the strip first, then you slid it in and it then read. But you had to wait several minutes. I seem to think it was about three minutes, I think, before you got a reading. And the thing itself was about, oh, the size of a margarine container, so it was fairly big, so it was not the sort of thing that you could cart about, but nevertheless you could. It had a battery built into it. When the battery eventually expired, you had to send your meter away and they would unsolder it and put you in a new battery. But the thing was, to get the blood, you had to use the same needle that you used on your insulin syringe - not the one you were actually using, but you would use the same sort of thing. You dabbed it into your finger, got a nice big blob of blood - it had to be quite a large piece - and put that on the strip. Later on, very shortly after that, they developed one like a piece of chrome tube, about half an inch size chrome tube, and on the end it was like an ordinary insulin syringe, and you pressed the plunger which pushed a needle out at the other end. But nevertheless, you could, up to a point, gauge the depth, so it wasn't like just banging it with a pin, so you had gone at least on a little bit. But the machine really did give me a rude awakening, because I thought, using the bouncing system, that I was getting it fairly near the mark, but when I had this machine, I found that I was nowhere near the mark. And I found it virtually impossible – in fact I got very depressed over it, because I'd done everything I could to get the readings right, and I just could not get them right.

(23) So, did you think that the Hypoguard was worth the eighty pounds that you spent on it?

Well, yes, I did. In fact, although my GP told me it would be a waste of money, to me, looking back on it, even now, I would say it was the best eighty pounds I've ever spent. And although it did make me quite depressed, because I could just never get on the top of it, I did find it gave me at least a guide, although I realise now they were not anywhere near as accurate as they could have been, but nevertheless it gave me a much, much better guide. And I took it off, which is what I wanted it for initially, I took it off to Australia with me. But the strips - you had to buy the strips; no such thing as prescription then. And if my memory serves me well, I think they were four pound for a container of twenty five, but four pounds then was quite a bit of money. So, at the very beginning, when I very first had, I only used it about three times a week, but I very quickly found that I needed to use it every day, and so what I started doing then was using it once every morning.

How long did you stay in Australia?

We stayed in Australia for three months, and in general I seemed to get on very well. I did tend to step up the using of the meter: instead of using it my usual three times a week, I stuck to the once a day. And when I was on the flight, I tended to use it on the plane as well to see how things were going, irrespective of the cost. And on the way home, we flew round the other side of the world and dropped down in California to see an aunt and some cousins that were living over there, and we had quite a good time there. We stayed there about a week. I

seemed to be managing the food and everything okay, and I, taking it all round, I felt quite proud of myself, the way I'd handled it all, especially with all the problems with the time as well. But what I used to do was keep my watch always at the time of the place that I had just left, and then the wife would put her watch on the time at the destination, and I used to juggle my food with all of that.

(24) And did your eyesight hold out for the whole time you were in Australia?

Yes, in fact it seemed to stabilise quite a bit. Obviously it was not quite right, because I was still getting bits of bleeding, but it was... if anything it was improving, and it held up very well. But what I did notice - not necessarily while I was away in Australia, but it was about that time, maybe afterwards - I used to get a bit sticky during the night, but I started to wake up absolutely drenched, and when I say drenched, I mean wringing wet; absolutely soaked, and no one seemed to know why. I had a new, much younger GP, and I mentioned it to him, and he said "well, it is well known that diabetics do perspire quite a lot", but that was about as much as I could get out of it. Well, anyway, I was beginning to increase my tests to night and morning - you still couldn't get them on prescription, so it was costing me more - and what I was doing was keeping a record. But what I was not aware of - I can look back on it now, easy to be wise afterwards - but what was actually happening was, I was getting much better control by using a meter, and I would refer to my record as to know what I was going to do next in the way of my insulin. Then I can remember... because I don't remember going, at that time, to any diabetic clinic. If I did, it would have been well apart. I seem to remember not going when I should have gone, and then ringing up and making an appointment about another five months later, and then going down, and then missing the next one and then doing it again, so I remember that. But in Balance, there was an article about Unit 100 insulin coming on the market, so I went down to my GP and mentioned it to him, and so I got myself on the Unit 100 insulin. I think that - I couldn't state definitely - but I think that was in the early eighties, because my GP had no diabetic clinic and he had no such thing as a diabetic nurse, not then.

(25) And with all this new treatment, how did your eyes hold up?

Well, I suppose, in general, they seemed to be holding okay, but then they rapidly - well, not they - but one eye rapidly began to deteriorate, and that was the left one began to deteriorate. And I did eventually - it took quite a while - I suppose it took over a period at least a year, eighteen months, before the sight went completely - but it began to bleed, and I could only then see out of half of it, then I could only see out of a quarter of it, and then, in the end, I could only see just on the edge of the left hand side at the bottom, and I can still see out of that left hand side at the bottom. But - and this is the best part of it, if there's any best part - and that was I held onto the right eye, but the eye still bled a little bit, but very, very little. At the same time, I was carrying on, although I wasn't aware of it, I was improving more and more with my blood glucose levels. But nevertheless, all the way back from 1958 when I first got married, my wife,

Ann, was still weighing my food on a ten gram basis; in other words, I was still working my food out on the portion basis. And she always made me my lunch for work, so I always had my food. But my food was... how we worked it was, it was virtually the same each day, but by then we were beginning to get away - though she did start with a thermos flask - but we were beginning to get away from the thermos flask, and I would start getting into a sandwich or two. But nevertheless, still exactly the same food every day, so my lunch was the same. And every time I got home, without fail, my dinner would be ready and there on the table ready. Even when I was in the caravan, my meal, every time I came home, was on the table. Although, for the want of a better word, I really was the tutor, but nevertheless my wife proved herself more than able to feed me, and willing as well, and, I think, to my Mum's surprise.

(26) And how did the management of your diabetes progress?

Well, during the eighties, really, things went on very much the same, but as we got into the early nineties, the strips that we were using on the meters went - I think it was the early nineties - they went on prescription. Well, I then decided, what I done, I'd tested before each meal, and I still kept a perfect record, and the insulin that I took afterwards as well, and then I added how much carbohydrate I took before going to bed to get me through the night. And what I was doing, I was juggling with the insulin. I could still use - if I had a hypo - I could still tally it with no problem at all, so I could still bounce with it, but what I began to do, I was juggling with the insulin up and down. If the test result just before a meal was fairly high, I would have an extra unit or two; if it was quite low, I would drop it a unit or two. And I'd work it out by, not only the results, but the work or what I was going to be doing next, because since I started on the construction industry, right the way back from 1954, I think it was when I started there – yes, it was '54 - my energy expenditure varied greatly. I mean, while I was at work, one day I might be lugging great big pieces of timber onto a roof, another day I might be doing a much, much lighter job like hanging doors, and so my energy expenditure varied greatly. Then, on a weekend, I might be sitting down. We always went to a friend's during the Saturday – we'd have what you might call the day off, so there was no work done at all, so that was a very, very restful day in contrast to all the other days. So, I was juggling it up and down. But I never told anyone at any of the clinics, or any medical profession at all, what I was doing, because, in general, that was not the done thing.

So, why didn't you tell the people at the hospital what you were doing?

Well, because I feel - I think I'm quite right, even looking back on it in retrospect - I still think, had I told them what I was doing, they would have given me a good telling off, and asked me how I thought I was going to control it if I'm going to keep on putting my insulin up and down, so I said nothing. Even when I went to see them, I told them nothing. And, of course, at that time, they could tell nothing because there was no HbA1c test, as they're now called. I should have mentioned - the people that I was not telling this was at the Oxford diabetic clinic, because I got my GP to make an appointment - I'd read good

reports about the Oxford diabetic clinic, and so I thought "that's a good place to go to" - and so I went, got myself transferred and I went there. That would have been about, I would say, about 1980.

(27) Now, going back, I mentioned about having these terrible night sweats. Well, although no one could give me any clue as to the cause, I strongly suspected that it was to do with my low blood glucose during the night. So, what I started to do, when I woke up soaking wet, I would dry myself off with a towel first, because I would be freezing cold, and I then done a blood test with my meter. And every time I found it was very, very low, so what I would do then is have something to eat and then go back to bed. And I learned quite a bit from that, so what I decided to do in the end - took me a while to make my mind up and eventually get in to it - but I then decided to do a blood test in the middle of every night and after every meal as well, so altogether I was doing at least five blood tests a day. And the night tests taught me a great deal, and by doing the night tests I found I had absolutely no sweats; they completely disappeared. And what another thing, above all, what had stopped, because I still had that occasionally - not so often, but nevertheless I still had it occasionally - and that was waking up in the middle of the night completely conscious, rigid, couldn't move. And I was absolutely struggling - I knew the wife was next to me - and I used to lay there straining and straining, and it seemed just to be ages to get my arm out to try and wake the wife up, and just could not wake her up because I couldn't move. That completely and utterly stopped, and I've never had them from that day to this.

And did that stop because you were eating in the middle of the night?

No, the reason it stopped was, by doing the test before the night and then the test in the middle of the night, I began to learn to see how it dropped in the night. so I then adjusted my carbohydrate before going to bed. So, if it was fairly low on going to bed, I began to learn how many grams to have. And I devised a method where I'd work it out on either ten grams... I mean five grams, ten grams or fifteen grams. If it was quite low on going to bed, I would have fifteen grams, and then I would still test in the middle of the night. If it was low, I would then quickly have a little bit to eat, something that was quick - a glucose tablet or something like that - and then go back to bed and then see what it was like in the morning. And over a period of time - it took me quite a while - but I began to devise and get a much, much better balance. So, by doing the test in the middle of the night I learned a great deal, and I learned a lot more - all due respect to the medical profession, I got on with them extremely well and I have a great respect for them - but nevertheless, I find the only person that can be your doctor is yourself, and if you're not your own doctor then you haven't got one.

It sounds as though diabetes was taking up quite a lot of your time and attention.

Well, it was taking up a lot of my time. In fact, I had to be completely preoccupied

with it. It was either that, I felt - rightly or wrongly - it was either that or I would lose the other eye, and faced with the option, I felt it was better to be preoccupied than it was to lose the other eye, because if I'd have lost the other eye, what could I have done? I could do nothing, I couldn't even look after myself. So, I done everything I possibly could to save that other eye. And I must admit, I don't take the medical advice very seriously, because every time they give me any advice, I know that, really, I've tried it all before. But nevertheless, I do what they say, and without fail, every time, I've messed my balancing up; it starts going all over the show. So, as I say, I've had to be my own doctor.

(28) Also, being very strict with my food - I am, as I said before, I'm a non-smoker, a non-drinker - in fact, I have never ever had a drink of alcohol in my life. Well, that's not quite right. When I was about ten, I was ill - I don't know what it was, common children's complaint I expect - and my Mum gave me a teaspoon full of brandy in a cup of tea. That is the only alcohol I've had. So, I'm a non-smoker, non-drinker, and I'm also a vegetarian. In fact, I'm almost - I'm not quite, because I have an egg and very, very rarely a bit of cheese now and again - but in the main, I'm almost a vegan.

And what's life like for you now?

Well, I'm now sixty nine. So, I did really retire at sixty five - officially I retired at sixty five - but nevertheless I still carried on working; you would often find me up on the top of a roof or doing something else. But, being self-employed, I didn't really... it wasn't as if I was working for another company from nine to five. I could go in when I wanted to, I could leave when I wanted to, and this was one of the main things why I liked being self-employed. All the time I was working on sites doing heavy roofing, other people were always working in pairs, but I never ever did. I always done everything on my own, so that I could control everything. I didn't have to stop and have food when they wanted it; I could have it when I wanted it. And if I did want to do a test, I could zip round the corner out the way and do it, whereas if you're in pairs, you just can't do that, and I wasn't prepared to tell anybody what was wrong with me; that was between me and myself only. But anyway, the early part of this year - we're now at, if we come up to this year, 2004 - we had to visit again to Australia, and we went over there in March, we came back in April. We didn't stay so long this time, though we have been to Australia and America several times since my first going back in 1979, so we have been over there a few times. When I got back from Australia, there was a letter there from the DVLC to do with my driving licence, because it was due for renewal when I was sixty nine, and I was sixty nine in this April, that's 2004. Well, what they done, they sent me for some new types of peripheral - because I'd had laser treatment, I had to fill in a form - I told them everything, I hid nothing - they checked my peripheral vision. And it appears that what had actually happened - although I did know that a certain amount of damage was done - with the early lasers that they had, the jumbos, they were nowhere near, nothing like as accurate as a laser that you've

got now. And what they tended to do was spray instead of pinpoint exactly on the tiny little arteries that they wanted to seal up, so there was a lot of damage done round the outside. But that was the cost of saving the centre of the eye, which you really use to see. And so, the thing was, the upshot was, the DVLC decided that I did not come up to standard and so they withdrew my... well, they didn't withdrew it, they just simply did not renew it. It expired in the April and they didn't renew it. Now, at the time,

(29) I was driving my van to work, I was driving my car, and I was still riding, for leisure, my AJS that I'd purchased right the way back in 1959; that was forty five years ago, and I was still riding it. But my sight appeared not - even over the last twenty years - did not really appear to deteriorate. Even at the hospital they said it had not deteriorated, but nevertheless the hospital, the Oxford eye hospital, they checked it out and they said that I did not come up to standard. So, that was it: I lost my driving licence. And it's ironic, really, because now I find myself riding the very same black Raleigh bike and the grey bike that I built for myself when I was sixteen or seventeen. Both I've kept over the years, both now still in first class, excellent condition. I find myself going back to that - the same Raleigh that my Mum purchased for me to take my mind off of my condition then, so now the Raleigh is taking my mind, in a way, back to it. I've had the three sons over the years, and not one of those - they're now up in their thirties and forties - the youngest one, I think, is about thirty four, and the eldest one is about forty five - and they show no signs of diabetes at all. And none of my relatives - going right the way back in any of my great grandparents, or as far as my grandparents could go right the way back - there was no relatives, anyone at all, with diabetes. But one must remember that you were only a diabetic, in those days, if you took insulin. If you didn't take insulin, you were no diabetic. There was no such thing as a type two. If you had, in those days, what we would now call type two diabetes, well, it was just your old age creeping up on you.

(30) My GP, he has about once, I think it is, every six months, trainee doctors from - I don't think it's from a hospital, but it is from a medical university, and they come to his surgery for, as it were, hands-on experience. And so he gives me a ring, and one or two other people as well, of course, and we go along, I go along to the surgery. And I go in, you take all your outer clothing off and lay on the table, and then it's left for these, usually two, doctors - one asking me the questions and the other one writing down all the notes, and they give me a good running over. At the time, they know very little about me, and so they give me a good check-up. But, of course, sometimes they will ask me a direct question, and if they ask me a direct question - I mean, they might say to me "well, have you got anything wrong with you that you think we ought to know?". Well, I'm then in an awkward position because I feel I have to tell them. Then, of course, they've got a lead, but they still can't find anything wrong as far as diabetic complications are concerned. And the doctor, then - my GP

- usually comes in and gives them a good lecturing and they give me a good going over. So, really, I consider myself in quite a good condition, because they give me a good going over. But visually - I mean, they don't look into my eyes, because they can't unless they dilate the pupil - but nevertheless they give me a good going over and they can find more or less nothing wrong with me; everything looks good. Even this week, I went to the Oxford endocrinology unit, and the chiropodist there checked my feet, and he said to me "your feet are the best pair that I will see today". So, I consider myself, really, after all - having been a diabetic - and you note I say a diabetic, because I consider myself to be a diabetic. I know they seem to try and avoid the word, but to me we have diabetes, I'm a diabetic - and I still feel myself in very good condition. If I want to run, I can run; no trouble at all. And I feel, in fact, in myself – really, put to my test, I wouldn't be - but nevertheless, I feel I can run about equally as good - I can run up a ladder, I can get on a roof no trouble - just as easy as I could when I was twenty, and if I want to run up to the road, I can run.

(31) About the early part... well no, it wasn't the early part this year, it was - we're now in November - in August, September, my youngest son, who's now about thirty three, thirty four, something like that - you have to forgive me for not knowing exactly, I think he was born in 1970, but anyway - he got married over in the States, and obviously we were all invited over. The whole of the family were invited over, so over we go. So, everyone wanted to know what am I going to wear. Well, I told no one. I didn't tell anyone what I was going to wear until the very, very last minute; I didn't even tell the wife. I still had my suit that I had made for me, bespoke as I said, when I was seventeen. It was still in very good condition. I took it down to the local cleaners, they cleaned it all up for me, and I then put it carefully away in my wardrobe till we were ready the day before we were ready to go. Then I get it out, and they then know what I'm going to wear. Well, I wore it to the wedding - gave it a first class airing. And the jacket fits absolutely perfect. If I had one made now, it would not fit better. And the trousers, although they had no adjustment on the waist band at all, there is a button that you can move sideways on the side was still in its same place, and it still fits me absolutely perfectly, as it did when I was seventeen. I sometimes wonder - I can remember all those friends that I used to have a school, my schoolmates. When it came to the sports and the PT, I was at the back of the class; I was absolutely no good at all. I was a diabetic then, but nevertheless, I was no good at all. But I wonder, if we had a reunion and we then had, as it were, a replay or a rerun, I wonder if I would come at the back now.

Do you think it's because of the strict regime you've had because you're diabetic that you're so fit?

Yes, I think that is it, because my GP, when he was speaking to these - the last time I went down there - to these medical students, he said "the reason he's

probably like this is purely because he's very, very strict and he keeps a very, very tight rein". And although I don't feel myself I'm keeping a really tight rein, I'm keep a very, very tight rein compared with what I used to years ago. But even so, you would still find me now and again, although I'm now sixty nine, I would still get up on a roof and I will still go working and do a day's work, just as easily now as I did years ago. But being sixty nine, I feel, well, you never know when the end's going to come. Just because I'm fit and okay at the moment, you still never know when the thing's going to come. So, really, I am cutting my workload down so I don't get that variation in my energy expenditure, so in turn, I'm getting rewarded with even better control. Because before, it would go - although I tried to correct it with insulin and everything else and my food - it still used to go up and down quite a bit, and I would still try and correct it, but now I find it levels out much, much easier, because, in a way, I'm much more now like a person that works in an office, where each day he knows exactly what he's going to be doing, and I find that makes things much easier. But that's not the end, of course, because I've not died yet, and anyway, that's the last thing I intend doing.

(32) So, what keeps you going?

Well, I suppose, in a nutshell, what keeps me going is always having something to do. I mean, even though I'm not working, I sometimes wonder however I managed to do any work, because although I don't go off to work now on a regular basis - I mean, I'm going to be going to work next week, I know that, and I'm going to be up on roofs next week, and I have done a day's work earlier this week - but in the main I have a lot more time to myself, but I've always got plenty to do. You see, I'm interested in almost everything. Although I don't actually do any of the gardening - I do the brawny work of the gardening - the wife does all the planting of the flowers, I do all the cutting of the grass and that sort of thing. But I'm very interested in old British - no foreign - old British motorbikes. And although you've heard me talk about the AJS one that I still have been riding up until recently, I've also got other ones as well, and I've got another three. Altogether I've got four motorbikes, and they are all old ones going back to the fifties, and there's always something I can find that I want to do on them. And also, there's always things, even though I'm living in a comparatively new house - the house is only a couple or three years old - I can still find plenty of things that I want to do, things I want to alter. And if I'm not soldering this, I'm mending that. And the secret is to always find plenty to do, and I really don't find enough hours in the day to do... I would like to do a lot more reading, although strictly speaking I don't think the reading physically would do me any good, because when you sit down reading, that's when your blood glucose levels would tend to creep up, whereas if you're messing around, even if you're only what they call fiddling or pottering... And I've got a huge big shed in the garden, what was originally a potting shed - it's got written outside on the wall "The Potting Shed". Really it should say "The Pottering Shed", because I'm always in there pottering around, doing something or other. I'm never ever sitting down, and that is the secret of keeping everything on the

move.