

86. Madge

- (1) He was diagnosed in 1942, and you married in 1951. How was he coping with diabetes when you married?

He was coping quite well. He didn't let it worry him; it's never bothered him very much. And he did have hypos, and I got fetched from work, one day, and that was the first time I'd seen him in a hypo. But the doctor was there, and he gave him an injection and brought him round quite quickly.

What was his hypo like?

Well, by the time I got there, he was just lying sort of unconscious on the settee. And the doctor was giving him this injection, and he came round quite quickly from that, but... And then, afterwards, I found out that you could get glucose powder to mix with water to bring them round, and then there are dextrose tablets, glucose tablets, that fetch him round. You can get an injection, but they don't last... they only last for a month, and, you know, if you've not had a hypo in that month then you've wasted it, so I didn't bother with them. But he has had quite a lot of hypos. And it was a worry, when he was lorry driving, because, you know, it's dangerous.

When was he lorry driving?

Well, he was lorry driving before I met him, and when I met him, he was driving a mobile shop round the villages - that was before supermarkets, when people shopped locally. And he did have a hypo when he was doing that, and his boss's son brought him home. And then he left there, and he went to work... he drove a concrete mixer on the motorway, on the M1, when they were building the M1. But that didn't last very long, because the M1 was about finished, then - or that section was - and so he went into the shoe factory.

When he was driving a concrete mixer, or a truck, or a mobile van, did any of his bosses know that he'd got diabetes?

The boss of the mobile van did, but I don't know about the others; I'm not sure.

- (2) Can you tell me more about coping with his hypos when you first got married, in the 1950s?

Well, it was quite frightening, really, because he would be... I did sometimes send for a doctor, but they didn't like to come out to them; you know, you were supposed to cope by yourself. And so, I found out about these... the glucose that you could get, and the dextrose tablets, and that made it a bit easier. But it was, you know, quite frightening. And a lot of his hypos were during the night.

How did you become aware of them?

Well, he would sweat, he would be... and the bed would be wet; really sweat. And I got to that I knew - it was usually between two and three o'clock in the morning, when he'd have these - and I got that I would wake up just to see if he was all right. But when he was... you know, he was so far gone, then, that it

took a long time - sometimes three hours - to get him out. And then, of course, the bed was wet through; I'd got to change the bed, and all that. And it was a bit traumatic, at times.

How did he behave when he had a hypo?

Well, sometimes he would shake a lot, and his arms would flail about, and, you know, he really. . . It wasn't as though he was just lying there quietly. He was sort of acting a bit violent, and yeah, that was worrying, that I often. . . I had to dodge his arms, and that, that were going about.

(3) Can you tell me about your diet, after you got married?

Well, when I was at home, we always had just plain food - meat and veg, and things - and that was what I carried on doing, because we weren't told about a specific diet, when we were first married, except carbohydrates and sweet things. So, we just ate plain food, and I didn't do puddings or desserts, and didn't buy many cakes - only for the children. And that's the way we've always lived.

You mentioned the children. Tell me about them.

Well, we had three: two girls and a boy. And they just accepted, you know, what their Dad. . . what was wrong with him, and they coped very well. And they grew up, and they ate the same as we did, and still do; they still like their Sunday roast, and things like that. They don't eat fancy foods, although one of them owns a pub, and she does all the cooking in the pub; she's a really good cook. And then the boy died, when he was thirty eight, from cancer, and that was a sad loss, but the two girls are still around.

Were you at all worried that your children might get diabetes?

Well, I did think about it quite a lot, but they've had no problems at all. And one daughter's got two boys, and they're quite healthy.

You said that they're quite healthy. Do you think of diabetes as being unhealthy?

Not really, I just think it's more of a nuisance. I mean, Roy is quite. . . he's always been quite well, apart from that. He's had no problems at all, apart from his diabetes, and so. . . until 2003, when he did have some illnesses.

(4) What happened in 2003?

Well, one day he just said "I don't feel very well", and he went to bed at about six o'clock in the evening. And a little while afterwards he was sick, and he carried on being sick all night. And about six o'clock in the morning - I didn't go to bed - and about six o'clock in the morning, he couldn't stand. And I sent for the doctor, and she came, and by then he was just unconscious. And I tried to test his sugar, and I couldn't get a reading, and the doctor came, she tried to do it, and she couldn't get a reading. And so, she rang for an ambulance, and said "I need one straight away, because it's a complete shutdown". She said everything in his body had stopped working. And the ambulance came in minutes, and they couldn't get a reading, and so they took him straight into the

City General at Leicester, into intensive care. And they said he would not live, because people don't survive ketoacidosis. But I didn't know what it was, but my grandson looked on the internet, and he said people don't survive it. But he did, and he was seventy nine, then. But he came out of the hospital with a chest infection, and, three days later, he went back into the Royal at Leicester with pneumonia. And he was in there for about, I think, three or four weeks, and he came out still with a chest infection. And he went into Glenfield, and he was in there for a couple of weeks, and then he came out. And then he got terrible diarrhoea, and they sent him back into Glenfield until the diarrhoea cleared. And so, in all, from December 2003 till February, he just had a few days, in between, at home. And then, in 2004 - November 2004 - he had aortic valve replacement, and that went quite well, and he's been fine since.

- (5) Was the ketoacidosis, in 2003, the first serious affect of his diabetes, apart from the hypos?

No, in 1972 he started having haemorrhages in his eyes, and he lost the sight in one eye. And he had a lot of laser treatment, and they've managed to save some of the sight in his other eye. He's still got... he's got a little sight in that eye now.

In 1972 - I'm just trying to do the maths - he was forty seven-ish. How did it affect his life, this loss of sight?

Well, because he'd got one good eye, it didn't affect him that much. He had to stop driving, and that was... he didn't like that, but that was... He coped very well with it. He's got little sight now... a little bit of sight, which he still manages quite well.

How did his loss of sight affect you?

Well, it made me the driver! I have to do all the driving, but apart from that, it didn't really affect me at all. It does now, because, when we're out, he can only see what's straight in front of him. He's got no peripheral vision, and so he can't see anything that's either side of him, so I have to guide him about a bit, when we're out.

- (6) What impression have you had of the health service, over the years that you've been married?

Well, it's been very good; we've got no complaints at all about the health service. He's always been well looked after - we both have - and so I can't complain about the health service at all. Well, we go to Leicester Royal to the diabetic clinic, and they've got very good doctors there. And they've now got specialist nurses that I can ring if I've got any problems, and, you know, they've looked after him very well. And they've changed his insulin now to a pen, and he has no hypos now, on this new insulin, which is very good for both of us. And that's about it, really.

Well, you said that you woke yourself between two and three in the morning.

How many years did that go on for?

Well, more or less ever since we were married, until he changed his insulin last year. It was a long time, and it's very nice, now, to be able to sleep through the night and not have to wake up. They did try him on one - a different sort to what he's got now - and his blood sugar kept going up, rising; went up quite a lot. And so, he stopped... he went back onto... He went into the hospital with this... He had the ketoacidosis twice, actually, but the second time wasn't as bad as the first. But when he went back in with the second lot, they changed him back onto his old insulin. And then, last year, they'd said that they weren't making any more of that insulin, so he went onto the pens, but a different sort - it was a different insulin - and that's been marvellous. The old insulin that he was on was pork Actrapid and Insulatard, and then it was changed to the pens, and it's NovoRapid, and I can't think of the other one.

So, coming off pork insulin, a year ago, made a big difference?

Yes, it did. It made a vast difference to us both, because I'm not worried now about hypos, and I can sleep at night.

(7) So, how big a part of your life has been played by your husband's diabetes?

Well, quite a big part, really, because you've always got to be aware of time: meal-times and, you know, the times for his injections. And you have to get into a routine and stick to it, because the times are very important. When I was at work, I used to occasionally get fetched out of work, because he was in a hypo at work. And they would just send for the ambulance, and we'd go off to the hospital.

But you still told me that most of the time he was well.

Yes. Apart from the diabetes, there was nothing - up to 1972 - there was nothing else wrong; he was quite well. And then his eyes started to deteriorate, and... But his general health has always been quite well.

How would he manage his diabetes without you?

Well, probably he'd manage his diabetes all right, but his food - food-wise - he can't cook. And I often ask him how he would manage without me, and he said he didn't think he'd be able to. But we've got a daughter who lives around the corner, and he always says "Pat'll look after me"! One weekend a year, I go out with some friends, and we went, last weekend, to Exmouth for the weekend. And he goes to my daughter's, round the corner, for his meals, and she looks after him. And so, that's my one weekend of the year when I'm completely without him.