

85. Roy

(1) Tell me about your background.

Well, I was born in Ravenstone, near Coalville, in the mining area. Then we - when I was about, I believe it was six years old - we moved to Barrow on Soar, and my father then worked in the concrete works, just across the road from where we lived. My mother was born in Peggs Green. Her father and mother were both in the colliery, at the time, and, after I was born, as I say, we moved to Barrow on Soar. My father went to work in the concrete work, which was across the road. My mother, she looked after us: me and me sister. And then, when I started work, I went in the shoe factory at Sileby.

What did you do in the shoe factory?

I was in the press room, sorting the soles and the insoles, then we passed them on... they passed on round the factory to be... They were ladies' shoes. After that, I went to work in the service department of the Royal Ordnance factory, which was then in Broome Lane, Rearsby.

Can you tell me about when you were diagnosed with diabetes?

Ah, well, in 1942, in March '42, I was drinking a lot of water and passing a lot of urine, also losing weight. I went to see Dr Gray at Barrow on Soar, and he sent me to Leicester Royal Infirmary, where they said that I'd got this - is it A1 diabetes, i'nt it? - which needed insulin. So, I was put into the Langham ward at LRI for a month, to get stabilised. After that, when I came out, I went to live with my Aunt Liz - Ashby Road, Coalville - and I stayed with her for three and a half years.

(2) Can you tell me what happened while you were in Leicester Royal Infirmary?

There's only one thing I can remember. The first meal they bought me was a big plateful of dried minced meat. It was bloody terrible! I only had a little bit of it, and after that they gave me basic vegetables with a little potato, because of carbohydrate.

Can you remember anything about your insulin injections?

Well, they injected me while I was in the infirmary for the month, and then, when I came out, the syringe were about five mile long, and the needle were a bit bigger, you know.

Who taught you to inject yourself?

Me cousin, Elsie, she injected me, when I moved to me Aunt Liz's, for... till I got used to the needles, and then I injected myself.

Can you remember how your cousin learnt to inject?

Well, she injected just here, but I swapped, because I had so much in the morning and so much in the evening, you know, to last overnight. Then I moved from off

my arms into the groin, in me legs.

Why did you move the site of injection?

Well, because you get lumps. The lumps form wherever you're doing it, that's why I moved about... you move it around your body. Now, what I do now, on this new stuff, is inject it in the stomach.

(3) What did you learn, while you were in hospital, about testing your sugar levels?

Well, while I was there, they did it; the nurses did it, you know. I had to learn it when I came out. Used to have little strips in a tube, for testing your urine.

Can you remember who taught you how to do that?

I taught myself. You just got the supply of the stuff, and you had to do it yourself. I mean, the stuff that they give you, it had got instruction leaflets on the way to do it, you know.

So, they didn't send a district nurse out to help you?

No, never had a district nurse, no.

So, there was nobody, then, to teach your cousin how to inject you?

No, not at all. You got the leaflets telling you how much insulin to put in the syringe, and how to stick it in your arm. That was all. There was no other instruction whatsoever. You taught yourself as you went along, you know.

Can you remember if your diet changed?

Well, you regulated your diet by the colour of the urine, as you tested yourself morning and night, before you went to work, and when you come back, before your evening meal.

What did you eat?

I've always liked my food, but I literally cut out all sugar, chocolate, anything that contained any amount of sugar. Now I have, in the morning, I have one Weetabix, no sugar. I put warm water in the Weetabix and a little milk, and I have a couple of rounds of bread and margarine, and a cup of tea. Lunchtime: I shall have a couple of rounds of bread and margarine, with perhaps a little cooked meat, and the wife does the evening meal, which is mostly vegetables, a few potatoes, and the cooked... the meat. But no sweet, we don't have a dessert.

(4) And is that what you ate when you were first diagnosed as well?

Yes, near enough.

Can you remember being told anything about measuring carbohydrate?

No, we just know that carbohydrate was potatoes. Of course, there's carbohydrate in bread, isn't there, yes.

So, did you measure your potatoes?

Well, no, not really. I don't have a lot.

When you were first diagnosed, were you given any scales to measure food?

No, nowtsoever, no scales at all.

So, how did you know how much carbohydrate you could eat?

Well, I used to go to Leicester Royal Infirmary perhaps every three months, and they'd tell me how I was balanced. I never got no instruction about it - at least I can't remember any.

Can you remember what happened at the three monthly visits to Leicester Royal Infirmary?

Well, they'd take a urine sample there, they'd test it, and then they'd tell you if it was too high or normal, you see. All you did, it was a little strip, you put it in the urine and it recorded it. If it was red, you wanted some more insulin, you know, because your blood sugar was too high. But I can't remember any instructions as to the amount of food I was supposed to eat.

So, the reaction, always, to high levels was more insulin?

Oh yes, definitely.

(5) What was it like to cope with diabetes after you came out of hospital?

Well, it was rather difficult. I mean, you went to the doctor, and they gave you this and they gave you that, but really, it was... when you were at work, it was very difficult. You'd got to keep everything more or less to a minimum, otherwise you keel over. I have keeled over at work, yes. When I lived at my Aunt Sorrel's, driving the truck, and I felt dicky, and the next thing I know, I were gone. When I come round, Dr Sheriff had come from Barrow on Soar, and he gave me a shot in the arm to bring me round. I've keeled over once or twice - well, keeled over twice, while at work. I've done it here, when the wife's been out at work. They've fetched her from work, because I blacked out.

When you first had diabetes, how did people at work react?

Well, as a matter of fact, I never told them. I just got a job and went to work, and that was it. I never told them I was diabetic. Should I have done?

Why didn't you?

Well, it never occurred to me. I just went to work normally. Well, as a matter of fact, I've never mentioned it to anyone, really. Well, I suppose I don't like to say I'm a diabetic.

Why not?

It's just the thought of it, the... I suppose, you don't just go round and say "Hello", shouting "I'm a diabetic" you know, do you? Well, it never occurred to me.

(6) How did diabetes affect your social life?

Well, not much, really, at all, except when I felt ill, and, of course, then I lost a lot of time from work, when I was feeling really ill and the diabetes was getting on top of me. But really, the social life, it never hardly affected me at all.

Did you tell your friends?

Well, I told my bosses when I went to work for them, and I told John, didn't I? John Nurse. That's about all.

You were diagnosed in 1942, in the middle of the Second World War. Can you remember what it was like to have diabetes in war-time?

I got extra rations. What, exactly, I got, I don't know.

What about joining up?

I couldn't join, because I failed me test to join; the examination. Being that I'd got diabetes, I asked them if I could go in the medical corps, and join that, being as the medicine were there. But I got a group four, and that was it.

What was a group four?

Well, more or less, you're exempt; you're not fit.

Were you disappointed?

Well, of course, definitely. I should have loved to have gone, but it wasn't to be.

So, what are your main memories of having diabetes, before you met your wife?

I suppose I had hypo... is it hypoglycaemia, or summat? I don't know, hypo... I monitored the insulin with the reading on the urine tape. If it was high, I administered a little more insulin, and if it was down low, which was then yellow, I lowered the insulin. I monitored it like that, through the war, and up until when I met the wife.

And from there, we'll let her take up the story.

Roy's wife, Madge (86) takes up the story.