

47. Colin Gates

(1) Tell me about your background.

Well, going way back, way back - bit of a London boy, in early-learly days, but war-time sent us out and about with evacuees. I started general life, really, in school in Woking in Surrey, as any other normal war-time kiddie: backside hanging out me trousers, I suppose, and wondering what an orange was! But we slowly came through very well. Mum's Dad's grandparents, they looked after us great, and so... But, from then on, we eventually moved, through my father's business, which was butchery. And his family was butchery - his father had his own business in Hounslow in Middlesex. He had a further six brothers, which were butchers, so it seemed that it was quite ordain that I was meant to be a butcher, and which I eventually became. I was a butcher's boy from about twelve, and eventually took up the trade on school leaving - in them days at fifteen - and took to it quite well, up until, I suppose, national service, in them days, came in, where I was taken into the British Army, legs kicking, not really wanting to go.

What year was that?

Oh, 1958, I'm sure it was - at the end of the fifties. I was one of the last ones, I think, to go on conscription, because cowardly - well, not cowardly - but job-wise, I took a five-year meat apprenticeship with the London Meat Trades Council. But it also got me deferred from the army, but not all the way - I still had to go and do my two years, so it was towards the late fifties.

Was national service the first time you'd left home?

To me, yes, it was, back in '58. I didn't want to leave Mummy! - because it kind of daunting thought. Perhaps I'd watched all the wrong films in them days. But we went in, as I say, bit depressed; dog with his tail between his legs. The only good thing about the start of my army life was that it was only fourteen miles away from where I lived: it was Aldershot! And they were quite dramatic, the first eight weeks of basic training. But looking back, I firmly believe that all these people today should do it. And in the end I was thoroughly enjoying myself, although I was quite lucky. They found out my trade in Civvy Street was butchery, so, after all the initial training period, I managed to get into the catering side. And they eventually put... I was in the catering corps - ACC - that was better known as Aldershot's Corps of Comedians. But we came through that okay, and once, having finished my army service, I went straight back into the same firm that I left. I was... I think they was obligated to take me back in any case, but wanted to. And there I stayed, and butchering most of my early life.

(2) Was there any diabetes in your family?

The answer to that, initially, was no, and I'm sure that was the case throughout the entire family, although my father developed diabetes right into his late life, but that was way after - he's up to seventy two before he turned diabetic. But,

at the time, no. My sister, she was - who is my only sibling - she was very athletic. She managed to progress quite well through athletics, so she was always checked for various things, because of her athletics. But no, up to that point and to this day, as far as I know, nobody else in the entire family.

Were you athletic?

I was, believe it or not. If anyone could see me now, they would disagree, but yes, I was quite proud of my little bit. I managed to represent my county at the hundred yards, in school days, and I progressed even a little further with me football. My claim to fame: I managed to play for my county at the old Reading football ground, which was in them days Elms Park. But yeah, I was quite athletic. And even in the army we managed to play for the army teams; well, not the army teams - the base teams at the particular regiment. And yes, I was quite athletic. It's only in previous years that I tend to spread west and south. But looking back, could be something to do with the diabetes. In fact, I'm positive, as a lot of people in the know have told me that's probably where it all stems from, in my case, was the weight problem that started it all off.

What was your diet like as you were growing up?

My diet as I was growing up: early life was typical, obviously, war-time, I suppose, so there was no luxuries, and fruit was of a minimum, unless it was home grown. But as... what shall we say, from eight years on, when I lived over a butcher's shop, as previously said, we tend to eat better than the average child. We was never short of the odd lamb chop or... meat was good, and mother was very good with her cooking still, so it was very good. But slowly - and whether this was the start of it, being too good - I tend to put a little bit of weight on, although I managed to keep it off, but over the years it's slowly built up; lack of exercise, but...

Did other members of your family

(3) put on weight?

Mother was always a little bit big, and father wasn't small, but, although he was well-proportioned, although fairly tiny. But me sister's always been completely normal! Well, whether it's through her athletics, but no, the rest of us all seemed to be fairly normal. Unfortunately, in my case, not so.

Would you have had a lot of sweet things as you were growing up after the war?

Yes. I can remember the day... I can't remember the day itself, but when sweets came off the ration book. I think every child went absolutely ape; never known such luxury. Yes, in them early days, we all went a bit silly. But in life in the past, I have always had a sweet tooth. Used to love sponge cakes with all the cream; very sweet tooth. Right up to the point of being diagnosed, I was a sweet tooth. That was one of the big adjustments I had to learn, which was quite hard!

Would your mother have made a lot of homemade cakes?

Yes; very proud of it. I think all these women from yesteryear, they used to... they knew nothing else. Everything was home-baked, home-cooked. You just didn't go down the supermarket and buy it. And no, all good home cooking, and used to make 'em out of next to nothing; wonderful time.

And what about the meat that you ate - would that have had much fat?

Yes, that was the main thing, especially with me father, and meself, as it turns out. But mother knew no different neither, 'cause she'd been married to a butcher all these years. She wouldn't even know what it was to go and buy a piece of meat, because father always used to bring it home. And in them days - war-time, early times - when she used to do all the cooking was the fact that Dad's theory was always "oh, you always need a bit of fat to help cook it". And so, you know, you sat down to a lamb chop and there was a good band of fat all the way around it, and it never got left. It got eaten, because it was enjoyable as much as any of the rest. And as for the rest of the diets throughout them times, sugar was a great thing back on after war-time; all these homemade cakes and cookings. But things were so different in them days than it is today. Kiddies today - well, we've even mentioned it with my grandchildren, and they go "uuugh, how did you live like that?". Teas, which was... part of your duty was to help lay the teacloth for afternoon teas, and it was always five o'clock. And you used to sit down, and it just used to be jam sandwiches or chocolate spread, but, once again, it was rounded off by a plateful of Mum's cakes or whatever. But it was always bread and jam, and you couldn't see children today eating bread and jam. But that was part of the diet and you used to think nothing else, because there was nothing else to think of. That's how we were brought up and...

Would you have eaten many vegetables or salad as you were growing up?

Vegetable, yes. Father used to have an allotment, and everything was come out the allotment. The day you wanted it, you used to go down and get it... well, not necessarily during the work days, but weekends, and oh yes, all home grown produce. Salads - they used to have. I was never ever a lover of lettuce and things like that, but I was always told "it's green, it's good for you"! But no, but plenty of vegetables; lovely.

(4) And when you left home for the first time and did national service, what was your diet like then?

Yeah, it was a little bit more upmarket, in as much as... war time, but it was... everything was different times, different way of cooking things. And it was a little bit strange, because we used to do a lot of field cooking. Everything... being I was supposed to be... at that particular time I was being trained to be a cook in the army, you used to have to go through all processes and do field cooking, where you used to have a whacking great fire and utensils, and you used to have to try and make the soup for the boys, you know. And we used to think "nobody's going to eat this, could you see what was going in it". There was not a lot of goodness, but it was... they believed in quantity, not quality.

And it was different, but eventually, during the course of army, I became quite good, and popular, because breakfast cooks always had plenty of mates, because they wanted an extra egg or something. But once again, you couldn't do that, to a certain extent, because you was allocated so many eggs for so many personnel, and so I didn't used to count them! But yeah, it wasn't too bad a living, the diet in the army. It was... but you never got enough, as such, so it was always visiting the NAAFI canteen and buying your bars of chocolate.

What was a typical breakfast like on national service?

It was edible, and, as I said earlier, not quite enough. You used to get marched to breakfast with your mug, knife, fork and spoon behind your back and you queued up. And you could have your choice of cornflakes, porridge, not egg and bacon every day, and that was basically it, with your mug of tea with a stir of bromide in it! - which really enhanced the tea. But that was basically breakfast. Maybe a bit of toast, and that what kept you going for the next eighteen hours! Well, with dinner thrown in.

Can you talk about the period after national service, when you were working as a butcher?

Yeah. It's all went back to normal way of life - it never seemed to stop. It went exactly as I left it two years previous. We carried on butchery for the next sixteen, seventeen years. In this period of time I got married. I even went into tied accommodation with the firm I worked for, for a house. So, in them days I was quite lucky: I had a house, with a new wife, which was quite a rare event them years ago. Only snag is that everybody that's in tied accommodation knew that if the job got wrong, you had to stick at it, because of the housing situation. But my first child came along when I was still butchering.

We'd better give some years. What year did you get married and what...?

Oh, sorry, yeah. What year... when did I say I got married, is it same time as '76, this would have been...

- (5) I got married in the year '62, and then two years later my son was born. By this time we had moved to a butcher's business in Oxford, and which was quite a change for all of us. We knuckled down, and then six years later me daughter was born, once again in Oxford, and still butchering. And I butchered all the time up until the end of the sixteenth, seventeenth years, when I decided a complete and utter change to my life, 'cause a big thing happened in my working life. By this time, I'd palled up with a friend and we started our own business. He knew nothing about butchery. I knew everything, or I like to think I knew everything about retail, but we bought these premises and off we went. And we was doing quite well, but the long story of it all - how my career came to an end - he'd done criminal things, and he eventually, through the worry of it, died, so the business died with it. So, I decided a complete and utter change in my life, and I went to one of the top security companies in the country, and it

still exists today, but it was a completely change of life. I decided to do radio work, so I was on the radio control side of things. And picked it up - had to go away, have a special course - and from then on we progressed in a different way completely. It was within this time of service with the company that I got promoted, and the work I had to do with the radio side was in the vaults area, where all the money was. And it was such a secure position that the people that worked there - and there was not many of us in this certain section - to get the insurance covered, the company had to be insisted that the workforce that worked there would go into a yearly health service. You had to have a health check every twelve months, so that you could still be covered to work there through the insurance side. And it was on a nice sunny day in 1979, I had my usual yearly check-up, and she said "did you realise you were diabetic?". And that was the first time I ever realised anything existed. I'd heard of it. Such a layman on it, I thought "well, that's okay, we'll get it cured!". How wrong one can be.

Had you had any symptoms?

Now, this was one of the amazing things. Obviously I was asked by this doctor who was doing it - had I noticed anything different with meself, and I hadn't. They kept saying "have you not been extra thirsty than you normally are?" - "no", although, I must admit, I always had a good intake of coffee, always have had, but I never noticed any difference. And also, at the other end of the cycle - "was you visiting the loos more often?". No more than I normally was, so that surprised me a little bit, but.

Had you felt tired?

No, not as such, because in them days I had to do a shift pattern, which was... you done twelve hour shifts. You done a six to six, and then the following week you done the six to six, so it's days and nights. So, some days you were feeling tired, albeit, I thought, maybe because I wasn't getting so much sleep when I should have been. But, to say I was actually feeling tired than I normally should have done, which is all the symptoms of diabetes, I wasn't, except I was still putting on weight. And this is where the crux come in. But all the symptoms, I really didn't notice too much, but, you know, the doctor frightened me so much when she explained to me what's happened, it was imperative that I lost weight.

- (6) Yeah, so, she frightened me enough into putting me on a diet, which I was quite willing to do, and then she wanted to see me in a certain... I can't exactly remember how long I had to leave it; it wasn't too long. But I'd done everything I should have done, or what she told me to do, and I went back for this second look at me, and she was amazed that I'd lost one and a half stone. And she was so pleased, it made me so pleased, but this is where my ignorance really came in. She said "absolutely, well done. That's what we've been looking for". And I remember saying "thank goodness for that, because I didn't really want to be what they call a diabetic". And

she says “why - do you think you’re cured?”, and I said “well, I’m hoping this has brought me that way”. And she said “no, I think it’s about time we made you understand that you’re a diabetic now for the rest of your natural”. And this bit I couldn’t get to grip with - not at first, just because I couldn’t... I didn’t understand it properly, until they give you all the leaflets and pamphlets, which, you know, you’re glad you get in the end. But, at the time, I just did not know, and it was hard to realise. But what I remember most of all, in them early days, was “this is something I’ve got, but oh, there’s no problem to it - you can cheat”, because I was told “you mustn’t have this, that and the other”. And going from normal life into a completely different way of life, it took a bit of understanding... well, not so much understanding, but accepting, in as much as I found myself having the odd choc-ice or a piece of cake. And I didn’t feel any worse afterwards - no, I felt good psychologically. I thought “well, there’s nothing wrong”. And, of course, in them days, I wasn’t taking blood readings, or didn’t have to... just used to have to go every so often to a doctor, and they just examined you and asked how you were, and I felt absolutely fine. I thought “there’s nothing to this diabetes at all”. But, of course, as life’s gone on, I’m the first one to put my hand up now and strongly try to advise anybody who’s been told they’re diabetic is please take notice right from the word go, because it’s one of these illnesses that catches up with you afterwards. You feel great at the time, but when you start having various complications with different parts of your body, you wish to goodness you never had that cream cake. Although it’s only one, I know, but that’s how it starts.

- (7) You said you’d been putting on weight for quite a while. When would you say you began putting on weight, or was it right through your life?

Putting on weight, yes, it’s slowly through me life, but I just think that was partly lifestyle, in them days. I’d packed up running, I was going to the cinemas quite... I don’t think... and then I eventually packed football, so there was lack of exercise as well, going back to them days. And butchery, there were fairly long hours, so lot of fun was mainly cinemas, sitting down. But the main time I really started, looking back, putting on life was obviously me job with this twelve hour shifts, day and night. It was sat down in a chair all the time doing radio work. Very lack of exercise, and, as you get a little older, the weight comes on and it’s difficult to get rid of it, and it’s slowly gone on and on. And, of course, I’m afraid I’ve even put... I’m going further down the story, but since the days I’ve had a stroke, my exercise regime is next to nothing. So, it’s a double-edged sword unfortunately, but even to this day, I’ve still got to try and lose weight.

What was your diet like after you got married for the first time - was it similar to your childhood diet?

Going back to them days, I had a new wife who was dead keen to impress not just me, but her mother-in-law! And yes, she... no, we lived quite a normal sort of life. Once again, I was still butchering. I could bring home what I like.

You know, we was... we lived a very good life, which - hindsight - is not always the answer, but course in them days, I was fine. Food was plentiful, I even had an allotment, so I was really gone back to the early days: fresh vegetables, but plenty of fat meat; lovely!

- (8) So, it must have been very difficult to lose one and a half stone after you were diagnosed.

Difficult, yes, although I was amazed how it came off in the space of time. I think a lot of this, thinking back, was probably through sheer horror and shock; being told that I had to do it. And I think, perhaps, I went really the whole hog, as such, because I literally went word perfect to whatever they were saying. You know, there was no sugar drinks going down me at all, there was brown bread, salad sandwiches, which I wasn't that much of a lover of salads.

Had you always had sugar in your tea and coffee?

Yes, I always did. Always at least two spoonfuls, and... but I had to go to a sweetener, which now I just look upon as ordinary; it's no problem. But in this early period, it was hard work, but I stuck to it, because the doctor basically... not frightened me, but really told me where the downfall's got to be. And so, yeah, I stuck at it. I was only eating what I should do: just make sure it was a minimum breakfast, but important to have a breakfast. But the job, at the time, it was difficult, because one week you're having breakfast early in the mornings, and you always had your midday lunch where you sat and worked, and then the evening I used to go home to a good meal. But then the following week, you're sleeping all day, so this didn't help getting it right... or perhaps it did, because, as I say, in this fairly short period of time I lost this stone and a half, and it was just through actually going eye to eye and crossing the t's. It was everything as it should have been, but hard work.

And then you thought you were cured and the doctor told you you weren't cured. What happened after that?

Yeah, when I had this news, I was such a layman on it, I thought "crikey. Like this for the rest of me life. This is going to be hard going". But it's not... looking back, it's not, because it's... when you've got this diabetes, it makes absolutely sense to do what they say, because, as I said once or twice earlier on, you cheat, and... although, I must admit, I cheat every day now, to this very moment in time, purely and simply because I always have my main meal - my evening meal -

- (9) end of the day, and I've always had one glass of beer. And my consultant at the diabetic clinic says "if you've been doing that all your life, don't stop now. Just have your... It's different if you start having six or seven glasses every night". So, it's the only time I cheat now. I'm a very good diabetic - I now preach what I say. I really do not cheat in any shape or form; no biscuits, nothing. And it's important that you do.

Were you depressed when you realised that you were going to have diabetes for the rest of your life?

Yes, the answer to that was yes, although, as I recently said, not understanding it fully, the word diabetic didn't sort of conjure up good things in my mind, and I was a bit down because I didn't know; I didn't know what it was. But they were very good. They issued pamphlets and leaflets and put me in the picture. And the clinic that you have to attend, they are excellent; they really are excellent. You think it's a pain to have to go maybe every six months, or whatever regime you're under, but no. Once you get into the swing of it, it's not depressing after all, because you can lead a normal life; you really can. But you just have to behave yourself!

Can you remember what the diabetic clinic at the hospital was like in '79 or '80, after you were diagnosed?

Yeah, certainly. It hasn't changed that much in performance - what they actually do. I first had to go to the old Radcliffe in the city centre of Oxford, and car parking is an exceptional minimum - I don't think the staff can even park! But it was smaller rooms, smaller compartments, but it's run much the same. There was a specialist nurse if you wished to see her. They didn't see you unless there was something completely wrong with you or something wa'n't going right. But the waiting times wasn't too bad at all - it just seemed longer because the rooms were smaller; everyone was sitting on one another's lap, so to speak. But it went quite well. But now we're rather spoilt in this area. We've got a whacking great twenty five million pound new complex on a new hospital grounds, and it's your own car parking space, specialist nurses for this, that, and it's great. As I say, if you've got to have an illness then this is the one to have, because they really do look after you. And it's altered only in as much of more modern equipment, but the actual nursing is exactly the same as it was when I first became diabetic.

What about the way medical staff treat you - has that changed over twenty five years?

To be fair to 'em, no. I've found them all - whether I'm lucky or not - but they all seem exceptionally good at their jobs, and you never seem to get 'em on a bad day. I'm going back, once again, to this new complex - they're absolutely ideal, they're really, really good people, and I've got all the time in the world for 'em. Anyone that's got any time for me, I've got all the time for them. But the actual whole sphere of the whole thing from way back, it's much on the same principle, but, like everything in life, as we go further down the line, it just gets better, because it gets more updated and streamlined. But the people in the diabetic world, as far as I'm concerned, they're all much the same; I've never met a grumpy one.

(10) And can you talk me through the medical treatment you've received from the outset?

Yeah, sure. From day one that I was told I was diabetic, they put me on one



tablet per day, which was no... seems to be not much bigger than a pin head. And I sometimes make myself look a fool on these names, but I think they called it a Glibenclamide, or something like that - all the medical people will laugh now - but it was very, very tiny and I just had to take one a day. And I took this for quite some time - I can't remember exactly - on its own. But, after further check-ups, after some time had gone by, they said this wasn't quite doing the trick, so we had to take an extra one a day - one in the morning, one in the evening; same tablet, but twice. And then, after a course of time, it didn't seem to be getting to grips with it. My readings wa'n't coming down as low as they'd hope, so they said "take two little ones in the morning and one at night". And this process went on months in and month out, so, you know, I could tell I was getting proper treatment; they was looking after me serious enough. But my blood sugar levels just wa'n't behaving, so they put me down, then, to two little ones in the morning, two at night. And the story went on and on, and still it kept slightly rising. So, then I came to an extra big one, besides all the two little ones in the morning and two in the evening, one big one - big one being called a Metformin. And then this had to increase again to one big with the two little ones in the morning and the same again in the evening. And then came the day - this was the end of '93. I started tablets, one a day, in '79, tablets going on till the end of '93 - so they decided in February '94, how did I feel about having an injection? And, I must admit, it sort of threw me back a bit. I thought "injections"... I wasn't too... I think it was mind over matter, really. I think it sounded worse than possibly what this was going to be. And they said "well, these tablets are just not controlling your diabetes, and it's important that we do get it controlled". And, of course, I found out since, control is the essence. So, I said "well, I'm willing to give it a go". You're not cheating on anybody; you're cheating on yourself if you cheat. And I said "well, we'll give it a

- (11) go", and they said "well, let's give it a try". They said "do you want to practice on an orange?", and I said "no" - I remember saying that. If I've got to do it, I go straight at it; it's how I am. And so they brought this syringe out and they showed me what to do, where to put it, and so I plucked up courage and give it a go, and there was no one more amazed than myself - I didn't feel a thing. And I was dead chuffed with that, and I said "well, is that what it is?", and they said "that's all you need to do, but next time we'll put some insulin in it!", but... I said "well, does that make a difference - does it hurt going in?", and they said "no". So, okay, they'd worked out what insulin I had to take, and so we went from there. And it was absolutely no problem at all, in as much that I found out, obviously, in the early days, the slower you done it, you did feel it a little bit, so the idea was just to go as fast as you can, and you literally do not feel a thing. And so that's how it started, although I eventually had to have one big tablet - eventually - with the injection; Metformin again. And then we went through this process, once again, that it worked fine for a while, and then the insulin had to be increased slightly, because it wasn't controlling it quite as much as they liked, so eventually it kept

going up and up and up, the amount, and so did the Metformin tablets. At this moment in time, I'm on three of the tablets, purely and simply, I believe to be understood, that they're good for the diabetic person, but it's the ones with the weight problem - it helps more with the weight, I believe. So, yes, that was fine, but that was, as I say, I started in February '94. But September in 2000, I reverted to this new way they do things with what they call a pen, which is nowadays so simple; it really is. You've got a cartridge permanently in the middle of this pen of insulin, and then when it's time to have it, you just turn your handle. You can do it on a plane - no one even knows. And it's the answer - it's the way to have it done; there's no mucking about. Oh, it's perfect. If you've got to do it, that's the way.

(12) And so, that's what I'm on now, and it's fine.

Had you measured your sugar levels, at all, when you were just on tablets?

No, I didn't; not in the early days. I just used to take me tablet and away we go, thinking life is perfect - "I've cracked this now. I'm diabetic - I just takes a little tablet and got to behave myself". But, with diabetes, you learn as you go along, and unfortunately you learn from your own failings, as such. But eventually, I had to prick my finger - they'd put me on blood reading, although in them days I didn't have a machine. I just used to have a little prick of blood and check it with your little dipstick thing you have, alongside the outside of the case. It's just a colour chart and you used to match the colours up. Good idea to a certain extent. They don't always give a complete and true reading, but it's better than what I was doing before. But now, I got a little machine, and, you know, they do everything for you. I mean, it's so simple, these days, to be a diabetic. Well, not simple to be one - you don't want to be one - but it's the answer. It's the answer now we've got to the Rolls-Royce of all the machines, and it's fine.

Were you using the dipstick, as you call it, while you were still on tablets only?

Yes, I was. Not straight away, but I was after a little while. These cartons that the sticks are in, there's this sort of coloured chart that they go different colours, and different colours tell you have much percent of sugar's in your blood. They're an accurate... not an accurate reading, but they're not far off, but it gives you some idea. But I was doing that before I was on the syringes with insulin, yes.

(13) Have you had any complications as a result of your diabetics?

Unfortunately, yes; a few. This is where you really have your mind made up, where cheating in the past catches up with you fast. That's how I put it: fast and last; it really is. Yeah, in my case, back in September '98, I... in them days, once I left... I changed the job, actually, and in them days I worked at a operating theatre in a hospital, would you believe. And this particular morning... I was always the first one in work. Parts of my job was to get all the operating theatres up and ready, ready for all the rest of the staff to come.

So, I used to get in about seven in the mornings and open up the theatres. This particular morning I arrived, and I felt unwell, in as much that I thought I got out of bed too quick, if you know the feeling sometimes. And I couldn't stop turning left. Sounds amusing, but I couldn't walk in a straight line, and I wondered what was wrong with me. But twenty minutes later I couldn't stand up; I just couldn't do my job. I crawled out of the operating theatre. There was no other staff there. I managed to get myself on a seat, and with luck, in them days we had an anaesthetist who was also qualified as a GP in his early medical career, and he knew instantly what was wrong with me. He managed to get me, with a nurse, carried through to recovery department, and explained to me that I was having a stroke. And it's not the thing that you really want to be told early in the morning - it frightened me to death. So, anyway, they put me on a bed, and within sort of twenty minutes I felt fine, absolutely fine. And I thought "gosh, whatever... if this was a stroke, he's either wrong, or if this is having a stroke then this is the one I'll have" - you know, I felt fine. And he come back to see me, and he said "I've got an ambulance coming for you to take you to the main hospital". And I said "well, I feel fine now". He said "you may do, but I'm sorry, but in a few minutes I don't think you will be". And, as doctors are, most of the time, they're completely right. By the time I was taken to the main hospital in Oxford, the John Radcliffe, I felt absolutely terrible. But this, they then told me, that I'd had this stroke,

- (14) and it stems from the diabetes, which is one thing that's come out of being a diabetic with me. Stroke-wise, I was still lucky, in as much, some poor souls don't get treated quite as good as I was. It's left me with a funny leg and a strange eye - only strange in as much as that it feels there's a snowball held to me eye all the time. But, I was lucky that, as I say, I can... although I came out of hospital on a Zimmer frame, I've thrown that out, and now I can now get around the house fairly well. Outside, I use a walking stick, but I can still get about, and I'm here to moan about it - that's the main thing. That's one of the things that comes out of my diabetes. Another thing, exactly a year later - well, two days extra - September the eighth (both these dates were prior to my birthday!) - I'd been having pains in my chest. And I thought at first it may have been - like everybody thinks - may have been indigestion, or we hope, but I knew it couldn't have been that because it was painful in my collar bone, for strange things. Any road, I went down to the doctor's, and he was absolutely brilliant, and he said "I've just phoned up the hospital. They're going to just have a look at you", he says "and we're not quite sure, but it's best to be looked at". And I said "oh, have you made me an appointment?", he said "yeah, you're going now". So, I thought "oh dear, it sounds a bit serious". Anyway, I went straight away, and it turned out that - in their words - "you got angina", and, as we all know, this word covers fairly a multitude of sins. And being a medical... not a medical man, but working in the hospital, about the only good point is... the only good thing you get is you jump a few queues a little bit. And they

managed to get me in to have an angiogram and see this cardiac guy, and he said “your heart is fine”, he said “absolutely perfect. Your heart is strong as anything”, and gosh, did I feel great. He said “but the pipe work that goes to it and back from it”, he said “are absolutely ludicrous!”. He said “I’m afraid we got to sort that out”. And I had a telephone call one Friday evening, and

- (15) it was a surgeon. I didn’t know him - never heard of him: a chap with a wonderful name, Mr Ratnatunga. And he said “well, we’re going to have you on the table Monday”, he said “but I’d like you to come in Sunday, so that we can make sure you don’t eat or drink”. So, I went in on the Monday. He come and had a chat with me, and I said “what you going to do?”. He said “well” - in his words was - “I don’t know until I’m in there”! But obviously, when I came round, I’d had four done; I had a quadruple. And in my opinion, that was the best thing I have ever had done in my life. I was out of pain, I could do things that I couldn’t do for months. But this was another thing, which I didn’t want to go through, but was caused through diabetes. And now I’m going through yet another one with my eyes. The vessels behind my eyes keep “giving birth”, I think is the words they said, and each time I get a new one they sort of rupture - they bleed - which is not good. So, I had it lasered - this was in one eye, me left eye - had it lasered there and then in the clinic, no problems. And they seemed to think that’d do fine. “Come back in a few weeks time”, which I did, and they said “there needs to be a little bit more work done on it”, so I had to go back and have it done again. And then they looked at the other eye, and he said “the same’s happening in the other eye”. And then, again... so that was four times. And the last time he said “it’s just not, once again, not being man enough. We need to get you in theatres”, which I did. And I said “well, I would like local, if I could”, because when I had my stroke, I was told that if I ever have any more surgery after that, there’s always a possibility that through anaesthetics you could have another stroke. Well, this has frightened me to death since, so I really didn’t want one. And I explained them why, and they said “well, if you’re brave enough to have a go, we’ll just give you a sedative and we’ll go for it”. Well, they gave me an extensive lasering, which they seemed to think would be the answer, and luckily, apparently, as it turned out, it had done the trick. The only trouble was that the blood that was going to drain away,
- (16) never did, and it congealed, and - in his words to me was - it went like blotting paper behind my retina. And my life was, in one eye, looked like a roller blind had come down half way down my eye, and I could only see half way. And they told me - daft as it sounds - that it was the other way round, really. It’s just the brain - as marvellous as a computer is - turns things around. So, I had to go back in and stay in over night, and they removed this. And I’ve now been told, only this very week, I’ve got to go back for a bit more laser, ’cause I’ve got a small hole appeared in my retina, which they - in their words - “want to stick it back down”. But

they seem to think that'd be fine then. So, all these kind things have come through diabetes, which it's not worth cheating with a chocolate biscuit early in your diabetic career, because it does catch up with you. The only thing I'm lucky, so far - although I've got dodgy legs, but I think that's through the stroke - my kidneys are fine, and I think that's one of the last things I've got to try and steer clear of diabetes, 'cause that is another thing. But no, I have them checked regular and I'm fine.

And did I understand you right - because you were afraid that anaesthesia would give you another stroke, you just had the laser treatment with a sedative?

Yeah. The reason of begging - well, not literally begging - but requesting if I could have local for this eye laser surgery part, through the thought of being told that if I have further surgery with anaesthetics, it could cause another stroke. And when they said to me "well, if you're brave enough" - it's not a question of being brave. I'd rather have a local than another stroke, so it wa'n't a question of being brave. But yeah, that's always at the back of mind now. But that's just me. I mean, other people could sail through no problem. And they tell me that a normal fit person... you know, anaesthetics is anaesthetics, you know, we all know that it's not the answer to everything, so that was my fear.

Was it all right having laser treatment with just a local anaesthetic?

Absolutely smashing. You see all different colours in the world - you don't feel a thing. It was really brilliant. You can hear everything going on and they speak to you, keep asking if you're okay. But life is just like a kaleidoscope of colours. Whatever they do, it's... although these colours stay with you for an hour or two after you're back in bed. But yeah, it was perfect - didn't feel a thing.

(17) Have you had any other medical treatment?

Yeah. As, probably, I may have said earlier that I get treated exceptionally well, they even made an appointment for me, earlier on, to make sure that the circulation stays pretty good, or as good as it's going to get. So, I've joined the band of people on chiropodists, podiatrists. I go down there, sitting with them all. It's not so much of having your nails clipped, but they test the circulation. They have one or two wonderful looking instruments. They done something what they call a... I think it's Dropper's or a Doppler's test. They - it's like an ultrasound - rub cream on your insteps, and the fantastic noises comes out of this thing they're rubbing round. It's just purely for circulation. And they also got a very fine brush, which they... you have to shut your eyes, and they rub it across your ankle, your instep, the base of your toes; if you can feel it. And then they got like a knitting needle - one's got a round end and one's got a very sharp end. And once again, you shut your eyes and they prod you around, and you've got to tell 'em whether you're touching with the sharp end or the blunt end. Sometimes I can tell, sometimes I don't even know they've touched me. That's how it... it's just circulation. Parts of it you can't feel, and obviously that's the concern. They like to think that circulation is going round. That's one of the reasons why they clip my nails, in as much that if I do me own - if

only I could reach them - if you cut your toe, that's the biggest problem with a diabetic is cutting your feet, because it just will not heal. The wound won't heal for ages, because the sugar deposits get down low, it's the furthest point from your heart, and it stops any healing. I mean, when I... going back to my quadruple heart bypass where they took the vein out of my leg, which was from ankle to me groin, they cut this vein into, well, in my case four places to make the connections to the heart. It was eight months before my leg cleared up, because, once again, diabetes just don't like you to have proper treatment like that, it just heals it up. So, since them days, that's the reason for the chiropodist and the circulation tests. And at least if I tread on something, after time I know I've trod on something, but their worry is whether it's a stone or a piece of glass. That's the idea of the sharp end and the blunt end. So, that's the end of that side of the treatment for that. So, I think that's about all the treatments now.

(18) So, how are you feeling now?

Well, in general, for what's happened, I suppose I'm quite well, really. It's just a question of knowing your limitations - it's simple as that. Some days I get up and I feel a bit sorry for myself, in as much that I have the great... being retired now, obviously, I want to do this that and the other, but I'm afraid it's all in the mind, because - I can't bend down. So, washing the car: I've got the cleanest car - the top half, the bottom half's the dirtiest you can get. It's just I can't bend too well. Wife's very good - she helps. But, on the whole, it's fine. But I get sensations more than other things, more so when it first happened; it was terrible. I'd be sat maybe watching television, and I could feel these spiders going across me face, or you got a whacking great hair hanging over your eye, and you're brushing away and there's nothing there at all. It's these weird sensations, and it's always spiders - that's the nearest description - going round your neck, or you think you've got a hair sticking out the top of your shirt or something. And it's the legs as well. It's so difficult to even tell doctors, to explain to 'em, it's... years ago, when kiddies at school, you used - I don't know if youngsters today do it - Chinese burn, where you twist people's skin one way and the other with the hand. And you get this in your leg, and it's just like Chinese burn. And I get up... every morning, I get up, I'll have a shower, in as much as I find it easier than getting in and out of a bath. But some mornings I can't stand under the shower 'cause it hurts. The water hitting my skin hurts - hurts enough to step out of it. But another morning, you can get in there and you can be like a bird in the birdbath - no problem at all. It's most strange, it's unusual. But it's usually face and legs. It doesn't seem to connect... you know, no feeling... the arms are normal and stomach, chest, back, but it's just face and legs. But then, everyone says I'm a queer person!

Have you had any follow up or advice on how to live after a stroke?

Good question. None at all - absolutely none at all. After I had the stroke, I had to go back once, I think it was, just to see how the various tablets I may have been taking at the time, but that is the one and only time. After the stroke, I had to pass what they call a slide test before they sent me home. I had to

manage to climb up two or three steps to see if I could do it. And I was on a Zimmer frame in these days, but they said “that’s fine, you can take the Zimmer frame with you and go home”, and that’s the last time I saw them. I do really feel - I’ve mentioned it to a couple of doctors since then days - it would have been nice to have gone back yet again, because you feel in yourself that perhaps there’s something more you could do, even if it was physiotherapy or something. But one of the GPs I spoke to - nice chap he was, my GP, in as much that he said “they’re so busy trying to get through the course of the day with the strokes they receive every day, to open up another clinic just...”. . . well, that was just a suggestion of his; he’s not saying that’s the reason. But it would be nice. I expect there must be somewhere - an association or a group of people that just have a chat over a cup of tea to hear one another’s stories. That would be nice, in one way, ’cause I’m sure some people have the same sufferings and the same feelings. Be just nice to know that someone else is having exactly the same problems you are. Then you know all is not lost. But it would be nice, but I can see that they are really, really busy. And if one has to have a stroke, I’ll have the one I’ve had.

(19) But do you think that the diabetes staff have kept an eye on you?

Oh, there’s no question. If there was gold medals to be handed out, they would be first in my book, ’cause I can’t fault them at all; really can’t. They’re all... I love them all, and I think they know me as well, but they’ve been excellent. So much so that four years ago, I think it would be now, one of the... while I was down there one day, they said that would I be prepared... they was looking for twelve people, something like that, to try a new study for a new drug through diabetes. It’s trying to help insulin, or whether they could ever try and get rid of insulin and just go back to tablet form. But this study would be important for a drug company, but it was a four year one. And I’m the first one to put my hand up, because you feel that you’ve got to put something back into it, because they look after you very well, so I agreed. And you have a test, first of all, to see if you’re half fit enough to take this on, and yes. It was at different times you had to go. The drug company that was running it in its entirety were very good - they used to send a taxi for you, and I’d live eighteen miles away from the clinic, so I used to have taxi there and back. And some days I had to go fasted, so they supplied breakfast. But I done this trial, and in the end it only took just over three years; it didn’t go the four years. But they tested various things all the way along: your liver functions and your kidney functions and your blood pressures and what the tablet was doing. And they increased it from strength to strength. You started off on a fifteen, you went to thirty and then the last lot were forty five. And oh, in the first instance you’re made to believe whether it’s the real thing or a placebo. But in my case, I mean, even a layman like me thought “I’ve got to be on the real thing here”, because my blood sugar readings were brilliant; brilliant. And I like to think everybody was pleased, although the staff said they’ve no idea what it is, which, we’ll say that’s true, but even they - they must have had an inkling. But the trial came to an end

(20) eventually, and then I had to stop taking this tablet, which I believe was, once again another silly name, but Pioglitazone, I think it was called. And so, we finished the trial, finished the tablets. How did I feel? Wrong! My blood sugars went crazy after I stopped taking this tablet, so I got a little bit concerned, obviously - it's my body, and I didn't want... I'm talking sugar levels up to eighteen and god knows what, and I'd been sort of regular of fives and sixes. And they said "well, take some more insulin to counteract this". Well, I was finishing up taking over two hundred units of insulin a day, and it's such a double-edged sword. The insulin's marvellous, but the more you take, the more weight you put on, and it's one thing I could ill afford. So, I phoned them up again, and they said "well, we'll have to make some enquiries", because at that time the drug is not really registered within the country's legal whatever, so they had to see about it. Well, I eventually got authorisation that I could go back on this tablet, and, of course, that caused a few problems with pharmacists and that. They said "oh, I don't know...", and I said "well, I'm sure the doctors wouldn't issue this if it, you know, I wasn't to...". As soon I went back on it again, my sugars have been way back down, so I'm all in favour of this. I just hope it stays as it is, so that was good. Then I had a phone call back from the diabetic centre saying "there's another set of people would like to see if you could do something for them". I think they put all these different things into a computer and out comes my name! - 'cause I got all the characteristics of what they want, you know. I think it's diabetes, heart problems, strokes - my name's there at the top of the list. And they're wanting, now, to do a study of another drug to assist blood circulations, and so I'm having to go through an MRI structured thing. They're taking my heart and arteries and the atora and the main ones down the side of me neck. They put plates on me chest through the MRI, and I'm on this. Anyway, this one's only a twelve month, but I'm running on this now, and I'm now taking yet another drug - or placebo! And I really, really - out of 'em all - would like this one to be successful, being purely for myself, in that if it does increase blood circulation, I feel that's possibly where some of my feelings from my leg. The circulation doesn't get there through wherein I had the stroke. The blood... you know, the fussure at the base of me brain, you know, sealed off a few things, and your blood has to learn to go another way. So, it would be nice to think that this did do something and make me a two year old again.

(21) Now looking back over the years, can you talk about the effect of diabetes on your family life?

Yes, sure. I like to think, at the end of the day, I haven't really thrown their lifestyle out completely. They've handled it very well, really. Back in 1976 I got married for the second time, so, in them days, obviously, things was pretty normal as far as food and that went, because that was before I was actually diagnosed. But a brand new wife, I had custody of me children, and so they took on - although they knew my new wife way before I was married to her -



and they accepted it fine, and absolutely very lucky I was. But come '79, as I say, when I was diagnosed diabetic, lifestyle had to change for me, but to tell kiddies, you know, "I don't think we can cook any cakes or ice-creams and that", I said that that wouldn't have been on, obviously, and they never went without at all. The wife used to carry on cooking their favourite cakes and whatever, and their lifestyle never changed. Although, the unfortunate part was, my brand new wife has had her own problem with diet-wise, because she has got an allergy to gluten, which is in flour. Celiac disease they call this. And it doesn't sound dramatic, but when you think the amount of things flour is in, from sausages, biscuits, bread, soups, you know, just endless... don't go to Italy for a holiday! But no, she was very good. She carried on making buns and whatever for the children, so the rest of the family never suffered at all. And my wife, to this day, does her a little bit of favours, in some instances, with sugar, but it doesn't really interfere at all, 'cause she can't make cakes now, a) because there's sugar for me and flour for her. So, it's no problem, we just don't have anything. But throughout my sister's, and everybody, no problem at all; it hasn't interfered with us.

Have members of your family had to deal with you having any hypos?

This is a word, which, in the early days, was a word none of us wanted to know, you know, "oh my god - what happens?". Even I didn't know. But I, on three separate occasions, I've been close to one. It's only where your sugars go really low and you have to get something down you a bit sharpish. But, as I said earlier, I really try to be a good practising diabetic. And I know there's times that it tends to catch you out sometimes - you're not quite sure. Even to this day, in my car, all the time, is a can of Coca-Cola - regular Coca-Cola - which is the quickest thing I've found to bring your levels back up, and a packet of chocolate biscuits. This is the cruel thing with diabetes: chocolate biscuits - lovely. You mustn't have them, but it's okay to have 'em if you're going low! But all my family know of the symptoms, and they know what to do if they did happen to find me going down in a coma or whatever. They do know, but touch wood, and thank the master, it's never occurred to me.

(22) And how have your work colleagues reacted to your diabetes over the years?

Oh right, yeah. Some of these cases are bit of a laugh, because all through my time... it never touched my butchery side, as such, because I never came diabetic, as I say, till '79, but I was with Securicor in them days. They knew of my problem, and they were all told - by me - if something should happen, what to do. But the company, which was very good, had a typewritten notice put up purely for my behalf, just in case there was a stranger came in one particular day as a relief, at least knew of me, which was very good of 'em. And then, although I don't believe I've mentioned, from finishing with Securicor on the radio side, I went for a while at Thames Valley Police Headquarters on the radio transmissions for them. And they were all informed - they were very good about it. Used to laugh and joke and pull me leg, and said I had to have a young lady

sat by the side of me for this particular reason. But it was all taken light-hearted, but the side of it was very serious, and they knew of that and they knew exactly if something did occur. But, as I say, I always tried to make sure that I was, you know, never putting anybody into that position. But sometimes, just sometimes, diabetes can throw a quirk at you and make you go low for no reason, and you just don't know. So, that's why it's always good to have a sweet in your pocket or something to hand, but it's never happened, so I hope it never will.

And how did your colleagues react when you were a hospital theatre orderly?

Once again, I mean, I suppose they were the best of the lot, I suppose, having medical knowledge of all these things, although where I actually worked was an orthopaedic hospital and not sort of general, but they all go through their various trainings. They knew of it - they knew of me, and they says "make sure you don't overdo it". And I just loved the job so much. I mean, never knew I'd got this job, because working in an operating theatre, everyone was amazed that I went for it, 'cause I didn't even know I could handle it. But they was so pleased with me that unbeknowingly, one particular month, I gets this letter saying that I've been put forward for an award for -which is run through the hospitals - for whether you grovel or whether you're doing too much work or whatever. But, I was kindly voted that I won this particular award, and it was given in a cash cheque for receiving it, photographs in the local paper. And it's quite pleasing in one way: you've got this slight problem, which is diabetes, but on the other hand they were pleased with the work I was doing. And it was heavy work at times, you know - some patients can weigh a little bit more than me! But no, it was nice. They handled the situation and I was very pleased with them.

(23) And when did you retire?

Well, that's fairly easy for me to remember. It was the day... I never done a day's work after the day of the stroke, which was September in '98. From that day, I never done a day's work, although the hospital were very, very kind. Obviously there was sick leave, which went on. Then - I imagine it's still the same within hospitals - you - even doctors - you have to see staff health; what they call staff health. And I had a couple of appointments with 'em, and they said that they was ever so sorry, but unfortunately I would have to finish, 'cause... and I could understand that, you know. I was walking round a bit like peg leg out of... off of a boat - I was a bit wayward - so I understood that. But they said "it doesn't mean to say you can't work any more, but I'm afraid you just can't do the job that you was doing". So, I decided "well, that's it", you know. It's got to take a special person to take me on, and the only job that would manage to do properly would be answer a telephone, and in this day and age with internets and emails, telephones are virtually out. So no, I graciously took retirement at fifty nine years old; 1998. Does get a little bit harder than a normal guy who retires. If you normally retire at sixty five, you've got your plans: play a bit more golf, do a bit more fishing. Can't manage any of them things. Even if I was fit and well I don't think I could play golf. But no, I'm a

bit restricted in what I can do, but I still manage to amuse meself. I refuses to turn television on in the mornings - that's the simple answer, but no, reading, try and help a bit out in the garden, if possible. If I stay too long, my sensations come in, and my legs get as big as dustbin lids. They don't, but they feel like... so, no. But I can still drive - that's the main thing. I can do anything sat down, so we do all right; I do all right.

So what keeps you going in life?

Amusement, I think. I've always been somebody laughing and joking. I can never take things serious, not even now. My sister says we're built like my father. My sister's riddled with arthritis and various things, but she's always laughing. I'm much the same, and neither of us knows when we've got a pain. I can't moan about it, so I just really, daft as it sounds, enjoys life. It's as simple as that. And that really keeps me going, because I think if I... some people - we're all different - but some people you see or talk to or you see down the supermarket, life can be so unhappy for some people. I said to the wife "if ever I get like that, shoot me", because I just can't be like that. So, it's going back to the start of diabetes: if anyone from now on gets told "unfortunately, I think you're diabetic", I've only got one good message to say is practice being a good one from day one. You can get away with it for years. You find yourself: "oh, I could eat that, it didn't upset me, I wasn't ill", you won't be - you can do it again the next day. It's a year or two's time it all comes knocking on your door, and then you wished you didn't do it from day one. That's all I can say: don't do it.