

17. Mr Baghria

(1) Tell me about your background.

My background - I was born in Moseley Sorrento Hospital in 1963. Moved to Chelmsley Wood, then from Chelmsley Wood to Bearwood - lived over there. And the last twenty two years I've been at Great Barr in Birmingham, where I live here with my wife and two children, so. I enjoy it here, and I work mainly away, out of town and everything, and enjoy my work actually.

Why did you move around so much when you were a child?

I don't really... I think me dad didn't have the rent or what or moved... It was up to me father really and the family, but which sort of got me to know Birmingham very well anyway. But I'm glad where I lived and I'm glad where I was brought up, really.

What was it like, the place you were brought up?

Chelmsley Wood was very, very, I'd say, down to earth, and honest, hardworking, middleclass people. Bearwood, which was a bit more expensive - the houses we lived in there, and then when I moved over here to Great Barr, which was the first house I've ever bought - the only one up to now, and it's quite comfortable here, and the kids and family enjoy it, like. I was also brought up in Small Heath, which was a back to back house, which I was probably the age of six, seven. And then we moved, when I was fourteen, fifteen, from there to another house, which was a nice area, as I was growing up with my friends and family. We made ends meet, as people do, you know.

Your voice gives away that you come from Birmingham, but your name is clearly Sikh, so can you explain that?

Right, yes. My voice or me dialect's very, very broad Brummie, but I was brought up as a young Indian Sikh kid, but never ever really went to learn Indian or speak Indian, which I can speak Indian, like, but enjoying the school background and everything else, I didn't really need to speak Indian very much. But it was just something to have, or useful when visited by relatives, and, you know, things, and also ordering stuff in a restaurant, I suppose! But most of my food that I eat or whatever is, you know, done in Europe. I do eat quite a lot of different foreign foods, especially France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, which are very, very nice, you know, which I didn't find nice at first, 'cause obviously, going there, new foods and whatever. But the last twenty years of my job, or my experience of working away, I've acquired these tastes of nice food actually.

Were you brought up on Indian food?

Not really, no. We was brought up on all different things, you know, was like any normal English family - bacon and egg and everything else, English breakfasts and Sunday dinners. But now I do eat a mixture of food. Because of me diabetes, I have to be very, very careful, and I do try and look after myself.

Where were your parents born?

They was born in India. They came over in the 1950s and got a job over here working, and they made ends meet, as you do, like. And they enjoyed working here, really.

What did

(2) your father do?

He was a galvaniser in a factory in Digbeth, and, as I say, he worked very hard and, you know, six days a week, sometimes seven when needed be, just to make sure we got a good education and a better life really, you know.

Did your parents practise as Sikhs?

I wouldn't say they would, no. They were, I would say, atheist more than anything, you know. They just believed in as long as, you know, you had manners and you was brought up properly, that was it. And a good education was the main aspect of them, like, but as I say, I did, I would say, at school very average. I wasn't sort of, you know, like a lot of Indian families that do very well or whatever. I just did, I would say, average, and then ended up doing the job I did, which I've always wanted to do as a child, like, you know.

It must have been quite difficult moving from school to school as you moved to different areas of Birmingham?

Yes, that was very difficult actually, 'cause of obviously making new friends all the time and different people and different things. And yes, it was, that was quite difficult, but I seemed to mix and blend in quite well with the new schools and whatever. As I say, it was very difficult, but I enjoyed it really, you know.

And you say you'd always wanted to be a truck driver. How did that come about?

I think from... since being a child, the only way I could go to sleep was with a plastic plate actually! I'd go to bed with a plastic plate and pretend to be driving a truck. I ended up, when I was older then, eventually we saved up and I got me licence and me class one and everything, and twenty years later I'm still actually driving a truck at the moment. But I do enjoy it and still enjoy it, like, you know.

What happened when you left school?

I had several different jobs, because obviously you couldn't drive a class one until you was twenty one. I did van driving, sort of anything to do with driving, forklift driving, anything, and then eventually, when I become twenty-one then, got my HGV and never looked back really. And, you know, still enjoy my job very much.

Was that quite hard to get, the HGV licence?

It was - not the sense of the test or anything, but the actual price of it and the money of it was quite expensive. And we saved very, very hard for it, and obviously

- (3) six months later, becoming diabetic, they revoked my licence, which was more of a heartache to me than actually being diabetic at the time. But they've actually given me my licence every year now, where I have a medical every year with Dr Wright, and up to now, touch wood, everything's been fine. I've had no problems with it and enjoyed, you know, enjoy going there for me medical and everything, and have a good liaison with Dr Wright.

I'll come to your diagnosis in a minute, but when you say "we saved up for it", do you mean your parents or...?

No, I mean my wife. We saved up. Well, every penny we had we, you know, put towards it and saved up, and as I say, never looked back, really, from it.

So when did you marry or come together?

We've been together now twenty four years now. My wife has put up, you know, with the diabetes and everything, and she's coped very, very well, I think. I think it's very difficult for anybody in a relationship to have diabetes, and to cope with it as well, with a partner, is, you know... It's very good on her behalf really that she can, you know, look after me or help me if ever there was a problem or whatever. But as I say, I don't really have that many problems, but if I did, she would be there to help me or see me through it, like, you know.

How did your diagnosis of diabetes come about?

Well, I was working in a milk plant at the time, and I'd just started exercising in a gym a lot more than what I would do normally. And then I suddenly started losing weight rapidly, which I wasn't very... I was a thin frame anyway, and become thirsty and going to the toilet quite a lot. And it ended up, they said that I had thrush, which I didn't know what it was at the time because I'd never had it before. When I went to the hospital, obviously, with this problem, they diagnosed me as diabetic and put me straight onto insulin. They said it was, you know, very bad and whatever and went straight on to insulin. And then, obviously, spent two weeks in hospital to be stabilised and to be checked and whatever, and from then on I've coped... well, I would say probably the first two or three months I was a bit nervous

- (4) of us all not coping with it brilliantly. But after that, I've never really had a problem with it, up to now.

Can you remember what they taught you in the hospital?

The main thing was to actually look after yourself, in the sense of your feet, your eyes, have regular checks, any problems at all to always contact the doctor or the hospital or whatever. But just make sure that, you know, if my sugar goes too low, or, make sure I keep chocolate or something sweet in me pockets. I've got a card which says in several different languages - at this present day this

is - that I'm diabetic dependant on insulin. And, as I say, after the first three months, I was okay then, I was comfortable with it.

Back to the hospital, what did they teach you? Can you remember being taught about injections, for example?

Yeah, how to use the injections and the milligrams, and how well or how much and whatever. And I mean, after two weeks I learnt quite quickly, for the main reason I just wanted to get out the hospital really, but I did actually pick it up quite well. And there was a lot of people in there who didn't cope with it, or, there was children in there of very small ages who couldn't cope with it, you know, who didn't know what was happening to them. And as I say, I'd done quite well on it to just, you know, to come out after two weeks and look after myself.

Can you remember how you were taught to test your blood sugars?

Yes, at the time there wasn't a lot of the sugar machines about, only in hospitals and different places, so a lot of it we had to use the diasticks to urinate, you know, urinate on them. And they'd tell you if your sugar was high or bad with the colours, like, which was not a problem. And nowadays, I think quite a lot of people use the sugar testing machines now, which I do to the present day, but at the time then, for two or three years until I saved up for a machine, I actually used the diasticks.

Can you remember what you were taught about diet in hospital?

Yes, the dietician was very, very helpful there - the carbohydrates, and what I had to eat, and the units and everything. And I try my best to actually stick with as much of the diet as possible, like, you know. I mean, you can't do it all the time, but

- (5) in general, you know, I cope with it quite well, and try to stick to the diet and everything, and try and exercise a bit more - I find that helps.

Did you have to weigh and measure your food in those days?

Yes, it was all weighed, measured and everything else. I don't do it now because I know roughly how much to have, how much not to have, what to eat. And in the present day it's not a problem, but then, when I was first diagnosed, it was quite difficult actually.

How did you manage when you got home?

We would just organise where my wife would have a different meal to mine, and I would totally cut down on food altogether. I'm not a great, great eater anyway, but my diet totally changed from eating sort of chips, or an evening meal with roast potatoes to boiled potatoes, brown bread from white bread, sugar without tea and coffee and, you know. But adapting to it was a little bit difficult, but now it don't seem to be a problem.

Were you tempted to break the diet in the early days?

Not really, because on a weekend, I would just make sure I had a treat on a weekend of something; a takeaway or whatever. And it was only once a week, which didn't seem to hurt or didn't seem to bother, you know, my diet, my weight or anything, and I, you know, I look forward to the treat really, so. But yes, it was difficult at times, yeah, but I coped with it, and I don't see any problems at all now. In fact, present day diabetics can live quite a normal life without any problems, as long as they can control themselves.

How did your family react to the diagnosis?

Well, they was a bit shocked, in the sense that I'd got diabetes, but my father had it, and I presume, due to hereditary and whatever, that's how I received it. But at present day, my sister's got it, and one of me brother's has got it, and I've got it, so I put it down to hereditary. And they do say a lot of Afro-Caribbean or Asian people do tend to get it, but I also know a hell of a lot of people now... I would say a family... every other family, sort of, now, somewhere along the line, has got

(6) diabetes.

Are the members of your family all type one diabetes?

Yes, at present they are now, yeah, they have become type one diabetes. They wasn't when they first started, but with me I was immediately diagnosed automatically on insulin, where the others became a diabetic on tablets and they now are on insulin, you know. But I think my sister doesn't really cope that well with it, like, you know. She's very, very much overweight now. I think she worries more about it than anything, and I think worrying about it and the stress can probably... is making her have sort of not a very good control of it, like, you know.

How long's she had it and how old is she?

She's nearly forty eight now. I'm not too sure about that, but she has had diabetes for about five or six years now. But I wouldn't say the control or how she copes with it is very, very good; she seems very worried about it. But I do speak to her when I can about it, which is not very often 'cause I work away, like, you know. But it's just, I would say, she worries about it too much, and her control or her sugar goes low quite often. But I do try and say to her, you know, to stop worrying about it and whatever, and she has took a bit of advice off me and whatever, and she seems to be a little bit better, but, you know, I'll have to speak to her about it, really, more often, you know.

(7) Tell me how you came to lose your licence after you were diagnosed.

Yeah, once I was diagnosed, I'd not recently passed my HGV, and they revoked my licence because of insulin dependent diabetic. They did say I could re-appeal for it, whatever, which I did, and they give me a yearly licence at the time then, which I have a medical every year with Dr Wright, which up to now I've coped very well with and don't see any problems at all. But there's no diabetics now on

insulin who get the licence, before the 1994 grandfather rights which I've got to still hold my licence, which I find a bit unfair, because I think if I can cope with it, I don't see any other diabetics on insulin who should have a problem with it. But there is a lot of diabetics on insulin now who are losing their licences, especially in driving, because of obviously overweight or bad eyesight or different things, which are actually, you know, they're not fit to pass the medical. But also there is fit people who are still okay and coping with diabetes on insulin, but they're getting their licence revoked now for the future, that they can't drive anymore, which, as I say, is very, very unfair. And, you know, I can cope with it, so I don't see why they shouldn't be able to, you know, cope with it, but that's the licensing authority and that's their law really.

What was life like for you during the period when your licence was revoked?

Very, very depressing actually, because we'd saved a lot of money up to get it, which was only, I think, six months, a year, and then all of a sudden I was diagnosed diabetic. And to have it taken away after saving all that money was very, very horrible, really. But, as I say, I fought for it and got it back, and to this present day, up to now, I'm still driving.

What did you do during the period when the licence was taken away from you?

I found other work, just working in a warehouse and just driving a forklift or whatever, just to make ends meet and whatever. But once I got it back, I was very, very happy, and. . .

You said you fought to get it back. Tell me about that.

Yes, it was very, very difficult, writing a lot of letters and everything else to a former place where they used to have it at Cumberland House in Broad Street for HGV Licences, and whatever. And I even had the support of my manager and my boss, who wrote letters as well, and together we fought back for it. And they actually allowed me to have it for a twelve month period, which I was quite happy with, you know, which, as I say, to this present day now, I just have a yearly medical.

(8) So your gaffer wasn't at all worried about you having diabetes?

No, Dennis, the actual boss where I worked, he was actually a diabetic himself, and he was, you know, very supportive to helping me and to help me keep my licence, which, as I say, I coped very well with it. And they just said, you know, have a yearly licence and a yearly medical, and, you know, that's how it stands, the way it is, or that's how they've left it now.

So how did you cope when you got your licence back?

Very well actually, I had no problems at all. I was doing Italy, Greece, driving down there, away for weeks on end. And I had enough food in me truck to cope with it, I had a fridge to keep me insulin in, and I didn't see any problems at all anywhere. I could get food quite regularly at truck stops or service stations, and also had me own cooker and fridge and everything, and yeah, you know, it was

no trouble. So, as long as I could cope with my job, or round it with diabetes, I didn't see any problems at all.

How did you cope with the time changes across Europe?

It's not a problem really, because like Spain, Italy or France or Belgium, it was only an hour's difference, like. I mean, there's only Greece, I would say, which is four hours' difference, but anywhere else it's not a problem really. As I say, I learnt a few languages along the way - not fluent, but I can get by on them, you know. I would say my favourite or my best sort of language is German really, but, which is self-taught really - just listening to people, you know. And I get by and cope, you know, get on with everybody and don't seem to have any problems really.

It sounds as though your cab was quite luxurious, even back in 1987, if you had a fridge and a cooker.

I wouldn't say luxurious. I would probably say enough to cope with and to get on with the job really, which is... It's just a working caravan really, that's the way we look at it, like. Or I call it, we're all the same, we're steering wheel attendants, you know! But in them days, we all used to cope and help each other, you know, and if somebody broke down, or an English lad broke down in Italy or Spain with, you know, a puncture or something, we'd all help change a tyre. And it, you know,

- (9) it was a very, very sort of... I think everybody stuck together, because we didn't have much, like, you know, but, you know.

What do you mean you didn't have much?

The money was there because you worked away from home, and that was the only reason you got better money, because of working away. But in a sense of like, we couldn't eat out, you know, steak and chips or very good meals every night, because we just didn't have the money. A lot of the times we'd cook up in the cabs and whatever, and that's the only reason really we had fridges and cookers. And me being diabetic, I did make sure I had a spare cooker and, you know, my fridge was a very good fridge where I didn't have any problems with it or whatever. But no, I did enjoy it actually, and in fact I still enjoy a cook up to now, like, you know.

So in the early days, how did you manage the weighing and measuring in the cab of your truck?

I had scales, I had the jugs with me with the numbers on and everything, and I didn't have any problems at all. It was just like sort of living at home but just in the cab. Got used to the way of cooking and everything else, and didn't have any problems with it.

Did you share cooking with other drivers?

Yeah, now and again, yes. On a weekend we'd have the odd occasion of a camion

stew, which is a trucker's stew really. You just bung tins of whatever you've got and whatever they've got straight into a stew and you'd eat it. And a lot of people would say "ooh, no, I couldn't eat pineapples with tuna chunks and curry sauce", but believe it or not, it tasted all right when you was hungry, really, you know. But, you know, the only thing I was careful of is that there wasn't too many tins of rice pudding or whatever in there, like, you know, which was very, very, you know, sweet, obviously!

Did you tell all your fellow truck drivers that you were diabetic?

Yes, the people or the drivers I work with and any drivers I used to meet, they used to know, you know. I'd tell 'em "yes, I have to be careful - diabetes", or they'd have a beer or whatever and I'd have a glass of red wine, with, you know, with no calories in, or whatever. And they used to say to me "oh, you've got to watch what you eat and watch what you drink", and yeah, like, I coped with it. I mean, now and again, on a weekend, some of us would overdo it or whatever, but not to the extent where, you know, I was drunk too much or anything like that.

How did they react when you told them you were diabetic?

I mean, when I first was

- (10) diagnosed, a lot of people really I'd speak to didn't really know about it, or they knew what it meant, but they didn't actually know, you know, how you have to have insulin or you could go on tablets or diet; where now, everybody seems to know more about it, because there's more people diagnosed. I don't know why or for what reason, but the, you know, it seems nowadays there's more people diagnosed with diabetes, or maybe then the people didn't speak about it or what. I think, like, a lot of people are embarrassed about it, but it doesn't bother me, you know. I generally tell people because it's better that people know that you've got it than, you know, than for them not to know, like, you know.

Have you ever had any crises while you've been out driving?

Not really, with diabetes you mean or...? No, I wouldn't say I've had any worrying times or different to anybody else who hasn't got diabetes. As I say, I count myself actually quite lucky that I've coped with it, and I know now a lot of people that can't cope with it or find it difficult to - they're very worried about what they should eat. And maybe because I've had it a long time now that I can cope with it, I don't know. I don't know if I'm better than anybody else. I find myself quite comfortable with it now, because it's just something I just get on with, like.

How did you know - with foreign foods that you'd never tried before - how did you know what quantities to have?

I would generally just order a meal, or I would look at somebody else's meal and see roughly what they was eating or whatever. Sometimes I didn't know actually



what it was, but then other times I did. But that was my main concern, which is, like, any tinned food or anything I buy in a shop now abroad, I generally know what it means from the ingredients and everything. I always look at that first before I buy it. But just mainly looking at other people's foods and ordering it, and just eating roughly how much I would know how much to eat, like, you know. Sometimes it might be only half of what I've got to eat and then other times, you know, a full meal - it would cover my carbohydrates.

How has the job changed in the twenty years that you've done it?

I would find now the job is harder in a lot of ways than it was before. Very, very difficult in the sense of easy access to the continent through the Eurotunnel now, which is only thirty five minutes. Customs - there's no customs to do T forms and documents - everything's done by fast freight now and express work and whatever. Where it used to take us, say - to get to the German borders - a day and a half, two days sometimes, now you can do it in nine hours. And you can be... you know, I can leave Birmingham in the morning, and then nine o'clock on the night I can be on the German border, which was unheard of twenty years ago, you know, because of all the, obviously, customs papers you had to do, you could only go on ferries. And there was no mobile phones or anything; it was just you got there when you got there and phoned in from a factory or whatever. It's totally changed in that sense. In some ways it's better, but it's also faster, and everything's... you know, there's more traffic on the road nowadays. It's a more difficult job and stressful job than it was twenty years ago.

Why is it more stressful?

I would say, generally, just the volume of traffic everywhere. You know, anywhere you go now, irrelevant of what country or where, the traffic is unbelievable, you know. I'm very surprised you don't get car park tickets now on motorways and that! Because of how traffic and the volume, and everybody seems to have a car each nowadays, where twenty years ago you was lucky if you had a car, like, you know, in one family. I'd say everybody now, or an average family, has got a couple of cars, you know. So it's sheer volume, really.

- (11) And also now, I would say the employers are pushing for more work now and more pressure than there was twenty years ago, where as long as you got your job done they was happy. Now, you've got a lot of problems now where there is a big shortage of HGV drivers, and they're bringing in a lot of now, especially international companies, a lot of foreign drivers and Eastern Block people. You've got more pressures now where you've got illegal immigrants trying to get in your trailers quite often.

Has that ever happened to you?

Yes, it has actually, a couple of years ago. Actually stopped at the train for a check, and three of them had actually sneaked on and got on my trailer, which I was fined for - three thousand pound, which actually, it did actually make a very stressful impact to my life at the time because my sleeping pattern changed

totally, because of, you know, thinking immigrants were getting in all the time. But it's very, very... this is another stress on the job for any international driver now, where they're just trying to get in. You've got drug trafficking, which is bigger than ever, I would say, now, and you've also got the stress of, you know, that the goods have got to be there earlier than what they should be, and the customers' sort of demands are getting greater and bigger. And I would say now, yes, it has got a very, very difficult job, which is, at the end of the day, very, very stressful just for a normal person as well, you know. But I try and cope with it the best I can, and I still enjoy my work, although it's a lot more stressful than I would say, you know, twenty years ago.

How does the stress affect your diabetes?

I don't seem to have a problem with it, because I have spoke to people with diabetes, and some people can't cope with it and some people can, not just in truck driving but in different jobs or whatever. But no, I don't seem to have any problems with it at all, really, you know. I would say we all have bad days, everybody does, but it's not because of diabetes that I have a bad day, like, you know.

And clearly your employers aren't at all worried that you're going to suddenly pass out at the wheel or anything?

No, I mean, I've been at this employer quite a long time,

- (12) and I've never ever had a problem with diabetes or anything, you know. I mean, my references would say, like, that they've never ever seen me lying down with a hypoglycaemic attack or anything like that, which is, as I say, says a lot really for the control of diabetes, really. I try my best to cope with it the best I can, and I don't really have any problems with it.

How has your cab changed over the twenty years?

It's changed very, very much now, I would say. Like new cars now, where the present they've got everything - the navigation system, and this, that and the other. But I do have now an up-to-date fridge-freezer, I have a microwave, I have a cooker still, which I've had for many years. You've got the truck stops. Generally abroad they're very, very good. You can get a shower - everything's spotless over there. I still have to say that in England, the service stations still have a lot to be desired for, but that is my personal point of view, and the facilities are not so good in England as they are abroad. You have got everything over there without any problems, or you can get a shower or a wash or whatever without a problem.

Are the English stops worse than any other European country?

I would say actually one of the worst, yes. Foreigners come over here, like Germans or Dutch, and you have to pay for services or to stop on the services. Even if you park there, you have to pay something like twelve pounds or something just to park overnight. But in Europe, generally, you don't have to pay anything,

and that the food is cooked fresh, the facilities are better. In general, everything abroad is a lot better.

(13) Have your relationships with other truck drivers changed over the years?

I would say I still get on with everybody who I've known over the years as continental driving or just driving in the UK. But yes, it has changed, where abroad now, not many people... I mean, we all used to wave, us Brits going down the road - everybody'd put their hand up. Now, generally, people look the other way or turn a blind eye that they haven't seen, and yes, it has changed, which is quite saddening actually. It's a changing way of transport or society or what, I don't know, but it definitely has got worse, you know, in the sense of anybody helping you, really.

Would that affect you if you ever did have a hypo?

Not really, no, because, as I say, generally we drive alone all the time anyway and you just cope with... I mean, I have everything - I have chocolates, dextrose, you know, everything at hand. Or if I go out for a walk or whatever, I take, you know, enough dextrose with me if there's any problems, but no... It wouldn't affect me, no, it wouldn't change me personally or anybody else really. It's just that the job, because of shortage of truck drivers now, that that's why I think generally everybody's just for themselves, like.

And what about exercise, how do you manage that?

Believe it or not I've got a foldaway pushbike, which most of our drivers laugh at, because it's only got small wheels and big handlebars and everything. But at the end of the day, you know, I do cycle on that when possible - I would say probably twice a week, three times a week. I do go to the gym on a weekend, but generally I try my best, especially in the summer now, to get in as many cycling - an hour a day or something, just to help me, like, you know, exercise.

When do you do that?

Generally, if I've got a forty five minute break, an hour - you know, I have to drive four and a half and have to have an hour's break - I do it in that hour. Or I will do it at the end of my shift - four, five o'clock in the evening or something, and then go and do it then, and generally go and have a shower, then have something to eat then.

So you must get to know the countries quite well?

I would say now, yes, I do know generally where I'm going, but there again, it's only like going from Birmingham to London now, it's that quick and forward and well signposted and everything else. It's not really, I wouldn't say, a problem for anybody really. In general, you know, you can get anywhere within hours as well, where you couldn't, like, years ago.

(14) Have you always done that amount of exercise?

Not generally, not on a bike. I've been going to the gym most weekends when I come home, but generally I walk quite a lot, and on a weekend, even if I don't go to the gym, I'll walk four and a half mile with my son, which I quite enjoy actually. But now, at the present time, I've got my foldaway bike, which I've had for roughly eight, ten months, I go cycling more now rather than walking, like, you know, which I also enjoy very much as well, you know. I've changed my insulin now, since last year, which is NovoRapid and Glargine. The weight seems to have actually come off me quite easily without even exercising really, but I do try my best to exercise as much as I can.

So you noticed a real difference, did you, when you changed insulin?

Yes; very, very rapidly actually. What happened, my specialist, Dr Wright, had been asking me for quite a while to change, or he advised me, but me being 'better the devil I know' type of thing stopped on it. But when I did change, yes, it was very, very good. It seems to make diabetes even easier than what it was. And I can eat less on the evening, which I enjoy, because, as I say, sometimes parking up very, very late on the evening, I just have a sandwich. I have my dinner now dinnertime, which... and then come the evening, I just have a sandwich or something to go to sleep on, which has helped obviously - I'm not going to bed on a full stomach or anything, which, you know, that's helped me lose weight as well, without even trying.

You've mentioned Dr Wright quite often. When did you start seeing him?

It's now been, roughly it's been about fifteen years or something like that I've been seeing Dr Wright, who's actually helped me very, very much to cope with diabetes - advised me on a lot of things, put me right in a lot of things, probably where I might have gone wrong, "Do I check this? Do I... ", you know. And generally we've got a very, very good relationship, and I class him more as a close friend now than as a diabetic specialist, like, you know. Enjoy going to his meetings. I think he feels the same now,

- (15) actually. We do look forward to meeting each year. And I have my checkups and everything, and yes, we have a good relationship, which he keeps an eye on, and he's quite amazed how well I've coped with this new insulin as well.

Where were you treated before you saw Dr Wright?

It used to be the General Hospital, which is... I don't know what it's called now. It's got another name or something or it's closed down - I can't remember, but I used to actually go just to the diabetic clinic in the General Hospital in Birmingham.

How did you find that?

Not a problem at all. And the reason I had to start going private to see a specialist was because I couldn't get an appointment in the week of being away, or I had to take a week off to see somebody on a Wednesday or something for

the clinic or something. And then got in touch with Dr Wright, who would see me on a Saturday morning, which was suitable for me, and we went from there then. And as I say, I haven't looked back, really.

So, do you have any contact with the National Health Service?

I do visit my diabetic clinic near my house, my general GP, who does diabetic checks and everything. And I just have my blood checked every three months there and just a general check-up, and, you know, it hasn't been a problem there at all. I generally go on a Saturday morning, which obviously I can't go in the week a lot of the times because I'm at work, but yeah, I don't seem to have any problems there, you know. I have my checkups quite regular, and up to now been okay.

Is it just blood, or do you have eye and feet checkups as well?

Yeah, I have everything - my feet checked, my eyes, blood taken for the last hundred days of my sugar, which was quite good. I've just had now, just come out at - on an average for a hundred days - at 5.6, which is like a normal person really. And, as I say, I, you know, cope quite well with it, and I think a lot of people are quite amazed, still, how I cope with it and still drive, and haven't... my eyesight or anything hasn't deteriorated in any way, really.

Do you know any other truckers with diabetes?

Yeah, I know a lad I work with, who actually doesn't cope very well with it, and he's in fact - not putting it in a bad way - looks very, very ill. And I advised him to, you know, seek help or see a specialist, or get his sugar checked more regularly.

- (16) If he's listened to me, I don't know, but, you know, he doesn't seem to be coping very, very well with it. I know it's a stressful job in a lot of ways, but he doesn't seem to actually be able to eat the right food, he doesn't look for the right food, says to me he doesn't eat very often, but every time I see him he's got a sandwich in his hand! But I do feel sorry for him, and I can only advise him, really - I can't do it for him. But I would say no, he's not coping very well with it.

Sandwiches must be quite a problem, because there are so many ready made sandwiches nowadays, and they presumably don't necessarily have the right ingredients for you, do they?

No, I take... most of my sandwiches I take on a Monday morning. I buy everything on a Monday morning and make me own sandwiches on the evening for me evening snack, and I'm quite happy with it actually. In fact, with this new insulin, I even need less food to take away as well, although I've got, like, three months supply of food in there if required in a strike or a break down or somewhere or whatever. But generally no, I don't need that much food, because my food intake has got a lot less as well.

Have you ever worried about your insulin supply, supposing something happened in Europe?

No, because I've got a separate small cooler box, which is left under my bed, which is switched on all the time. That's got probably three or four months supply in there, and I've also, in my other refrigerator, I've got probably three months supply in there. I've got several jackets, work jackets as well as casual jackets, where I keep different insulin just in case. No, I don't ever see a problem with that, and generally in Europe, anyway, you can get insulin at your local chemist or whatever, if required.

Can you talk about any kind of contact you've had with chemists or doctors in Europe?

I haven't actually, no. The only place I've ever actually been is a place in Essen in Germany where I had a wasp sting, which was a bit unfortunate, but I suppose it happens to everybody, and I had to have the poison taken out of that. But apart from that, I wouldn't say I've had to go to hospital or visit hospitals due to any accidents or diabetes, or anything really.

What have been your impressions of medical staff, doctors or nurses, with whom you've had contact in this country over the years?

Quite good actually, I've never ever had a cross word with anybody. I would say probably at my local GP, booking an appointment for Saturday morning when I could do with it, where they're very busy, and as I say. But generally I have a good working relationship with my specialist and with my local GP, the diabetic nurse, everybody. We speak quite, you know, frequently about how I cope with it and any problems or anything, and generally no, I would say a good relationship to be honest with you.

- (17) Yes, as I said, very, very good relationship with them all, and I do take them the odd bottle of wine over when I visit them, which is quite nice, you know. And I don't have any problems at all. In fact, I know I don't visit the doctors every week or every month or something, but generally I can get an appointment. And my specialist I see once a year anyway, and sometimes twice a year; that's normally arranged on a Saturday morning. As I say, we look forward to it sort of having a chat, really, you know.

You said that you tend to drink wine when the other truckers are drinking beer. Is wine okay for you?

I drink red wine. And if I do drink beer, I generally drink Holsten Pils, which is no sugar in it, which I can buy, like, in Calais or in hypermarkets in France quite cheap; cheaper than what I do here. And generally, if I do have a beer, I only drink that, like, really. If I'm in a truck stop or something, I'll have a glass of red wine or a couple of glasses of red wine, like, you know.

How often to you test your blood sugars?

Probably too much actually, I overdo it - three, four times a day sometimes. I have even been told by the chemist to stop checking it that often, because of using too many strips up and whatever, like. And, you know, my wife collects the strips or something, and they'll say "oh, he's not used them all up already?". And, you know, generally it's because maybe I'm over cautious, I don't know. But I have been told it's not good to test your sugar too much, because of, you know, the finger pricks in your hands or your nerves at the ends of your fingers playing up or whatever in, like when you're in your older days. But I think I'm just a bit over cautious sometimes, to be honest with you. I mean, even before I open my eyes first thing in the morning, the first thing I do is check me sugar, last thing at night before going to bed, before meals, after meals. I think it's just being over cautious or maybe too over cautious, I don't know. Some people, as I say, a colleague of mine - he checks it once twice a day if, you know, he's got time or whatever, but he doesn't actually make time to do anything, like, where I do. And maybe that's probably why I cope with it better than he does, I don't know. But I have said to him you should check it more often, but he doesn't seem to want to listen to me, you know, in that sense really.

I think many people assume that you have to give up driving all together when you become a diabetic, so are people fairly amazed that you're an HGV driver all over Europe?

Especially HGV drivers themselves, because obviously they've read in magazines or in papers or whatever, diabetics dependant on insulin will be now revoked - as from 1994 that law come in. As I say, yes, I do get it quite a shock more off lorry drivers or colleagues of mine who don't know than I do off anybody else, really. But generally, I just put it down to - if I can work round my job with diabetes, I've conquered diabetes, really.

(18) You say you've conquered diabetes. How do you see your future?

I would look at it now, I would probably drive another four or five years on international work. Probably then look for a job, still in probably in transport, but not actually driving or whatever. But I do believe, or I think anyway, as far as - unless they come out with a cure or something in the next sort of ten years - maybe they can change diabetes or whatever with these pancreas transplants and whatever. But me, personally myself, only see myself driving for the next five years. I think transport in general is changing, like, especially with Eastern Block people coming in to do the jobs - cheap labour and whatever - I think we'll be eradicated, you know, from our jobs anyway, so. I would say the next five years and I would be, you know, looking for something else in a different line of work, or still in transport hopefully.

So it won't necessarily be diabetes that's stopping you?

No, I wouldn't say so, no, unless I failed a medical due to a bad illness or, you know, I got cancer or something else, then possibly I would come off the road. But as it goes now, no, I feel better than I did say ten years ago to be honest with

you. I feel good actually - I feel good, I feel happy, I don't have any depression of any sort, or.

How come you feel better than you did ten years ago?

Maybe because I'm exercising a lot more, thinking about your health, your problems, what can happen or what can't happen. I've seen a lot of sort of friends with cancer, with diabetes, suffer and not look after their bodies health-wise. It just makes you more aware really, and more appreciative of yourself really, you know. But yeah, you know, I think you get to a certain age anyway where you think you must look after yourself a lot more than you ever did before; not that I didn't, but I do actually feel better now than I did say ten years ago.

Do you feel your life would have been any different if you hadn't had diabetes?

No, I don't think... maybe probably have been very, very much overweight and probably have been less healthy, to be honest with you. This has helped me keep my health and problems down a bit really, which I'm, you know, quite happy with. But I couldn't...

(19) No, I would probably say unhealthier really.

Why do you say that? Is that true of most of your friends, or?

A lot them, yeah. They're very, very much overweight, and don't really care what they eat or what time they eat or how they cope with it really, because they haven't got to worry about it until something happens to them, you know. I mean, there's a lot of truck drivers now having heart attacks, there's a lot of truck drivers getting diabetes - I think the biggest problem is heart attacks, and obesity is a big thing in lorry drivers. But I would say, in transport, things are changing, where a lot of these big retail supermarket chains are giving the drivers at their depots... like, they're putting gyms in and exercise, you know, which was never heard of, like, years ago, you know. But generally, no, I think if I didn't have diabetes, I would be probably very obese and unhealthy to be honest with you, or probably have had a heart attack by now, or I don't know. But yeah, I generally, you know, in one sense I'm glad I've got it, in another sense I'm not really.

With a history of diabetes in your family, how have you brought up your two boys?

Mainly to not have sugar and eat the wrong foods and McDonalds, or. Generally, you know, what young kids eat nowadays is very, very bad food - I'm not saying just McDonalds, but generally eating junk food and everything. I try to sort of, you know, - my wife does as well - cook 'em, you know, a lot of greens and a lot of different foods which are good for them, like, you know. And they've coped with it quite well actually - I'm very surprised. Now and again, like on a weekend, as I say, we all have one treat on a weekend. But apart from that, we generally cope with it okay, and they eat generally pretty good food, you know.

Have you ever had any protests about eating greens or not having crisps?



Well, the young one, we've sort of got him into the greens now, but at one time he wouldn't even look at them or, you know. But when there's only that on the table and nothing else to offer - on purpose like, you know - then he's started eating it, but this is a few years ago now. Generally the pair of them eat quite good food really, you know. As I say, weekends they'll have a takeaway or something, which is a treat, but generally in the week or whatever they, you know, have pretty good food, like, really, which is my main concern, rather than eating junk food. And I'll, you know, say to them that "there is a very big chance you could get diabetes, and how would you cope if, you know,

- (20) you get it and you can't cope with it?", you know, and generally that... they'll generally eat the greens then!

What message would you have to anyone newly diagnosed with diabetes?

It's a big change in your life generally. You would probably be stressed out just having the diabetes to try and, you know, stabilise yourself, control, because it is a new thing that's happened to you; it's a change in your body and everything. But generally, try not to worry about it and be very, very careful with it. I mean, doctors today, especially me with my specialist, they help me in a big way where I can cope with it, you know. A lot of it does depend on how the doctors and people help 'em, but I would generally just say not to worry about it and try your best to control, you know, the best control you can. Some people cope with it very well, and then other people can't cope with it, which is, you know, understandable - we're only human beings. But it's a very, very difficult thing to have. And to control it, you know, I feel quite actually proud about it really; and still having my licence as well, which is a great bonus, which is my sort of bread and butter really, like, you know.

And you've said how your specialist has helped you, so what advice would you have to medical staff on how to help diabetics?

Generally just to tell them not to worry, which, when I first was diagnosed, I was very stressed and worried about it. And try and make sure they look after their feet, their eyes, anything slightly wrong... I mean, your immune system can be very, very low, and you can catch, you know, especially your feet, you know, you can get verrucas or gangrene or whatever. I mean, anywhere I go for a shower now, abroad or at home, I'll wear flip-flops, because of verrucas, you know, bacteria and everything. Things like that - just looking after yourself really, in general. As long as I do, then I don't see a problem. You can live quite a normal life with it, you know, as I do, like, you know.

- (21) One thing we haven't talked about is whether you adjust your insulin, or is it just your food intake you adjust?

Well, generally I adjust... if I've got the 'flu or I'm ill or feeling under the weather, generally your immune system's very, very low. I would then have obviously a little bit more insulin to cover that and to make sure I'm, you know, getting better, 'cause obviously with diabetics, everything - healing up or any

problems - takes a little bit longer than a non-diabetic. But generally no, I cope with that quite well, as I say. Or if I'm exercising, I'll exercise more just to probably eat a little bit more or to have a treat as a couple of glasses of wine. Generally - nothing sweet or nothing like that - but I will exercise more to adapt to have a treat or a takeaway or something, you know, which, as I say, is generally on a weekend. But I have to earn it first - I don't just go and eat it, and obviously you're putting on weight then. I mean, I think I've lost probably, since this new insulin, I lost nearly two stone now without really trying that hard, like. So, you know, it has worked well for me, and obviously made me better, healthier, fitter, and a little bit more quick minded, like, you know.

And we also haven't talked about what you do outside work, if you have any spare time outside work.

Well, generally just go for a walk or the gym. I use a social club quite regular, like. I would eventually, once getting round to the time, which I generally don't have a lot of time, is to sort some sort of charity out for diabetes, where we could, you know, get a bit more money in for the Diabetic Association. Something like a walkathon, or even a bit of a do up our club, where, you know, brings in money for a diabetic charity. And that's just my personal sort of something towards the Diabetic Association, which has helped me a lot really, like.

How has it helped you?

I would say it's like the packs they do now, which I've had off the nurse and off the GP as well, just generally putting me right about the update of diabetes and whatever. And obviously, like the Diabetic Association, and Dr Wright, people like that, who're still working very, very hard to sort of see if they can bring a cure to diabetes. So I suppose that's my way of thanking them and putting in... my way of donating money with a collection and that, like, really.