

ORAL HISTORY EXTRACT TRANSCRIPT

'Fighting for our Rights' project

Surname Kashmiri

Given name Ali

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Extract 1: Misconceptions by society

It was all a bit difficult really, in fact the whole journey's been difficult. I mean I used to observe disabled people and think, oh you're just a moaning Minnie, and that was my view, you know, come on, put a smile on your face, come on, it's not that bad. But actually, when you start getting into the throws of life and you realise you can't find a house and your PA's giving you a hard time, or they're not turning up or there's recruitment to do, or then you've got to get something repaired or your wheelchair's broken down and everything is a hard slog, very slowly that smile gets wiped off your face. And I think that there's a misconception that actually if you have a disability everything gets done for you, I think that's how society tends to think, you know, if they see a disabled person, getting out of a car, they never see the person's rights for that car, they bought it with their own money, oh, you had to pay for that did you, oh I thought, you thought what, you thought I'd get that for free did you, I see. And yeah, you can apply that same mentality to houses and room shares and it's always somebody else behind pulling strings, but actually I think as a disabled person we have to work really hard, really hard, you know, to make an impression at work, you have to go above and beyond often to get noticed, everything is more expensive generally, there are lots of hidden costs attached to disability.

Extract 2: Prejudice when living independently

I moved into a block with nine flats, and it was a private block, and it was a relatively new block, and people--, and it was sort of at the end of the property boom, so it was in the recession, and people had moved there had spent sort of, yeah, touching 100,000 pounds to buy a flat, I picked mine up for 52. So you can imagine, I was new kid on the block, disabled person, and there was certainly a vibe, if not sort of direct speech as well, along the lines of we don't want you here, you lower the tone. But I suppose I was still quite naïve, and that carries me actually, I think if I'd been acutely aware of the prejudices and, you know, the hatred even, I would have probably cowered, but I mean superficially I was very tough and brave and I had a good front anyway.

Before I bought the flat it was run by--, the building was--, it's a leasehold flat, but it would mean that I would be one of the freeholders, that was a freehold building that the residents were effectively the leaseholder and the freeholder. It's quite a nice arrangement really but it also meant that people were--, there was a management company which was the residents, and so I approached them through my solicitor, to say would they have an objection if I were to build a ramp, which they would agree to, or at least superficially. But when it came to making some of the changes they all turned up--, well some of them turned a bit vile. Nowadays we would call it disability hate crime, get bangers on the window in the middle of the night, I had my van vandalised, they would do all sorts of funny things, and it would make me feel as though I shouldn't be there. But that I resisted really and then I applied for a disability--, disabled facilities grant, to get a ramp built to the front door, I had automatic doors fitted, and some of the internal doors widened, and

my bathroom made bigger. But that took probably, I think it was about a year and a half, after I moved in before I could say that it was liveable, manageable.

Extract 3: Power of direct action

I would say that it was that direct action, that actually has resulted in the public transport system that we have today, I don't think there's any other single action that disabled people, or organisations could have or would have done that could have made that more of a--, had such positive benefits, the fact that we could get on every single bus in London, the fact that over ground is largely accessible, underground is certainly on its way to being accessible, we've got black cabs, we've got, you know, roads, pavements, dropped kerbs. That whole movement, that hard graft, that campaigning, that really sacrificing lots of time and energy, I think that's been certainly paved the way and made it happen. Obviously I was just part of a much bigger network, but yeah, we travelled the country doing all sorts of stunts like that, whether it be for social care or getting people out of nursing homes and care homes, back into the community, you know, the whole drive around direct payments, independent living schemes, I mean I think in Kingston, and again I feel quite privileged that Kingston had direct payments before it was legal, and the fact that when there was, you know, there was a will and Kingston found the way. So yeah, I don't think I can say there was one single action that--, I think it was just sort of the cumulative impact that it's had, and it's quite sad that actually I feel we've lost that momentum, that drive, and I think with everything, unless you keep up that momentum, unless you keep the pressure up things do start to slide. And I think that's where we are at the moment, we're on the decline, or perhaps things are plateauing, I don't know which, but to me it feels like certainly in terms of the support people are getting, or not getting, the fact that we're slipping back into the dark ages and I think now that we haven't got places like day centres and other kind of community facilities where disabled people historically would have congregated, they're just hiding away at home, apparently receiving a personalised service, but actually are they getting the service, that's the worrying part.