

ORAL HISTORY EXTRACT TRANSCRIPT

'Fighting for our Rights' project

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Extract 1: explaining retinitis pigmentosa

Well it presented really as a lack of--, well I mean I didn't know that I was visually impaired, you never do of course because when you're born that way you don't know any different, so it only came about when I went on a nature trip with the junior school when I first joined there and I couldn't identify the leaves on the trees because I couldn't see the shapes, without actually pulling them off and bringing them right up to my eyes. And at that point they realised that I had inefficient eyes but they never gave it a name until I left school, retinitis pigmentosa being a genetic degeneration, wasn't really known much about in the '60s. I think we've learnt a lot more since, but it's apparently to put it crudely it's a garbage collection problem with the parts of the retina whereby the junk that it normally gets rid of doesn't get rid of, hasn't got rid of by the cells enough and eventually they die. But the trouble is the more that die they trigger their neighbours to die as well so that means that you get a sudden advance of the condition and it might be stable for ages, and then you'll get another sudden advance when another load die, and there's nothing they can do about it, apparently nowadays they can detect it in the womb I'm told, and the next thing will be to try to use a retrovirus to correct the genetic defect before you actually are born, so that you don't get any more degeneration after you're born. But once you've reached the state that I'm in you can't--, there's nothing you can do until they can replace the retina or make it regrow.

Extract 2: blind awareness

one of my real passionate things that I can't really do myself on my own in this borough, in fact in the whole country is when I was young, disabled people were going to schools and I mean when I say disabled I'm talking about blind people, and they were going to schools and they would teach schoolchildren about things, about blind people. But because they've managed to reduce blindness in children I get the feeling that they've decided that blindness has now been fixed and they don't need to do it anymore, whereas in fact we've now got older people that are blind that are even less firm than the youngsters that were blind before. And we don't--, I mean the number of times I get this, "You don't look blind Brian," I said, "Well I don't look blind in my own home, and I don't look blind if I'm standing there in a picture, but if you beam me down in the middle of Kingston I wouldn't know where the hell I was," and you know, that this is the problem that you get, that no--, you know, when you're asking somebody for help, it's still annoying to say, well if you just go over there, [laughs], or and all this business, that you still get it. Or the other one that you find is that you go into a shop and ask for assistance, and they go, follow me, and they've gone.

Extract 3: Talking Newspaper

Well I knew about Talking Newspapers from quite a young age because I had a blind uncle who lived in Leeds, and when I could see what I used to do, probably highly illegally, does anybody remember a series called *The Rockford Files* on TV with--, probably before all your times, probably around

1960s, 1970s time, what used to happen was is that I used to do the audio description on a cassette tape 'cause he couldn't see at all, he was blind with glaucoma. Well I'll tell you what--, how it works now, right, basically what happens is, is that I sit here all week gathering stuff for email and audio, that sound like they're very--, they could be useful for blind people, so they might be national or they might be local events or whatever. Sometimes it's just stuff from the council like we want to consult with blind people or whatever, but anyway, I do that, then on the Friday supposedly the *Surrey Comet* comes out and the guys--, the--, at the studio record it, and shove it into a pouch once they've done all the copies, 'cause on ram sticks we do them. The KAB give a--, if they give away these players which will play a ram stick you see, when I say give away, obviously permanent loan, nothing happens of course when you switch it on until you plug a stick in, now I don't know what's going to happen here because this is one of my sticks, could be anything on here. [Plays audio]. That's an automatic voice, but that I put--, you get this from the Council. [Plays audio]. This is the voting bit. [Plays audio]. And we do also put In Touch on which is from the BBC. [Plays audio]. These are extras that we put on the stick 'cause we've got a lot of room here you see. [Plays audio]. Then there's--which we put two on, from the RNIB. [Plays audio]. You can fast forward it just like a CD player, you know? [Plays audio]. This is a newsletter for--, just told you what it is hasn't he [laughs]? We get that read at the studio, I do the engineering on this one and it's all on various news and stuff.