

## ORAL HISTORY EXTRACT TRANSCRIPT

### 'Fighting for our Rights' project

**Surname** Johnson

**Given name(s)** Jessica

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#### Extract 1: Wes' accident and Stoke Mandeville

Wes again grew up in the Borough here, and he would go to work from Surbiton to Brentford, which is where he worked, on a motorbike, and he had a new motorbike for his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and he was driving through Kingston and along what is now the Canbury Park Gardens way, and a car came in the opposite direction and hit him, and he came off his motorbike, hit a bollard by the Thames, the bike went into the Thames and he broke his back and pulled his shoulder from there. So went very quickly, well from Kingston then to Stoke Mandeville straight away. So that was just a few weeks after his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I mean I didn't know him at that stage because he's seven years older than me. So as I say, I was 17, I met him when he was 24 so although I knew of him, if you like, around--, so he was in Stoke Mandeville for sort of nine to ten months straight the way through, and initially he had what they call a T3, T4 lesion of his spine so he had no movement from sort of lower chest down, obviously doubly incontinent. But he also pulled a brachial plexus lesion in his left shoulder, so his left arm never had full momentum really. And so he stayed in Stoke Mandeville, he still remembers the names of the matrons, as he called them, and the sisters that bullied them into actually doing as much as they could for themselves. But he did say he was, at that time he was at what was then Kingston College of Technology doing electronic engineering and he'd already met somebody on his course in a wheelchair. So he said it wasn't the paraplegia that threw him so much, it was the missing of his left arm because he was by that time getting to be a really accomplished church organist. So he was aware he could use two arms but it was the thought of having only one hand that was his real problem I think from there. But he spent, as I say, nine to ten months in Stoke Mandeville. He then came back to 23 the Crest where we are now, to his parents' home, and they put a bed downstairs. But then they also managed this annex put on the back of the house here, so the single room here. His uncle was an architect and had been designing this house anyway about ten years before, so they added on a room at the back to a house they had already had previously built as a family before his accident, but built that on. And so he then had a room downstairs and then varying bits of equipment coming from Kingston then. Some Kingston Authority, some sort of put in with the building of the room and things a little bit, but I mean this was still very early days for adaption because we're talking here 65, 1968, so early 1960s, late 1960s.

#### Extract 2: community activity & care

In the end he was, it was a struggle, I mean I'm now aware just how much effort he put in to every day, but he was always ready to go really. I mean he was getting more tired by the end, but he had a big social, well, a social life, but I would say musical life in the end. And that was why he was really part of the community, so he, by the end, the last few years, he was playing brass band with Cobham brass band. Now that meant he could go in the car here, it would require people to help him at the other end with cornets and music stands and everything else, but he did all the band concerts and band displays with them. He played with them for about six years and won bandsman of the year one year, really because he was so determined and so reliable, in spite of all the urinary everything

else. And his musicianship was such that he could always tell when the rhythm was out [laughs] or they were flat or not in tune, and he'd help the younger ones next to him, although he was only really just learning the cornet. He was a music teacher, although he'd never done it, he was a natural music teacher. So it was your brass band, he was tenor at Kingston Choral Society, really which was Surbiton oratorio society originally, which he joined I think before his accident even, so he was there from sort of 18 right the way through until he died, so he always sang with them. He sang in a variety of church choirs, we were at St Mathews and he was a key part in the whole musical life there, both for the church choir but also playing cornet, writing music and other bits and pieces as well. Tiffin, son was at Tiffin, and Wes was a key part of the Tiffin oratorio singing that went on then every year after year. So again, right up until his last years he could be seen in the Tiffin oratorio choir. He'd go and help out the Kingston Grammar School equivalent of the oratorio choir because he was a tenor, but he could also sing other parts, so he was quite well known. But he could only do that because people at the other end would always help him out if he needed it, whether it's with music or things falling out of his bag or dropping it or whatever. So he developed a whole band of supporters, just as he'd done at work, he did that with choir, with band. And the same, if you go round the local shops, the chemist, the post office, the postman here, he would be in conversation with him so they always felt they worked with him. So it was community care in the real sense of community from having a relationship with people as much as with paid staff.

### Extract 3: using buses in Kingston

So I mean in and out of the borough of Kingston we never really tried public transport much at all until we got involved in doing a piece of research, I think it was for London Transport, this must be about five years ago, and we were given a day and sort of all those tickets. We could go round, we had to clock what we were doing where and when, and we managed to get ourselves out, we did the K2s into Kingston and we then went to Richmond and we got ourselves out at the top of Richmond Hill and had a little drink at one of the pub's, 'cause we were on the bus so it didn't matter! And then came back via different bus routes from there and clocked that out. And actually that did start him using the buses a bit more, and because he then had some appointments at Kingston Hospital and the parking used to be dire for cars, in fact at times he would then tend to go on the bus to Kingston Hospital. But he has some stories of that as well, of times, and including once when we were really dressed up for an evening do, which we didn't do very often, in Kingston, and we went up and the ramp got down to get us off but then didn't go back up on the bus, and we stopped and watched and we felt awful then for all the people on the bus because we'd sort of caused it and they were stuck, although we'd got to where we want, and it's those sorts of things. I mean he had quite a lot of experiences of not being able to get on when the buses were full and the buses going past because they were full. And then literally about three weeks before he died he took a photo of a bus, he was trying to get on outside Kingston Hospital and there were road works in Galsworthy Road, and a van had parked by the bus stop so the bus couldn't park where it needed to park to put the ramp down to get him on. So he actually took a photo of the van and then said, well he'd wait for the next bus or wait until that guy had gone, and he tried talking to the guy who came back to do the van and got sworn at, so he wasn't too enamoured with that. So it's those sort of dilemmas as we try and get better on things. But he did more at going on the buses in his last few years of life.