

# 'Thalidomide Acts'

Transcription poems  
by  
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From the words of Mat Fraser

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## **The Way I've Been Treated**

I don't have grief  
over a body that I used to have.  
I don't have none of that  
born again stuff.  
So you can say that's a politicised decision  
but I hold that my anger is about  
the way I've been treated  
because I'm different.

I don't want long arms or a thumb, I'm fine.  
But it would be nice  
to have been treated equally.  
So the fury comes  
from not being treated equally, doesn't it?  
That's where I think it comes from.

## **My Parents**

I had a very, very happy childhood,  
although amongst a sort of broken home.  
My mum and my father met  
playing opposite each other  
in a tour of the musical 'Salad Days'.

My father was gay,  
he'd already had an unsuccessful marriage,  
he'd been thrown out of the R.A.F.  
for having sex with a guy,  
you know quietly, embarrassedly.

So he was definitely gay,  
but he, you know, had a,  
we came from quite a posh family  
and there was a lot of family pressure  
to be straight and sire a son  
to at least prove, you know,  
to the outside world  
that you could fake it.

## Sheen Mount

I remember going to Sheen Mount school,  
(now the poshest primary school in Britain)  
having lots of friends,  
one boy called me screwed-up arms,  
another girl kept telling me she felt sorry for me.

But apart from that  
I was just the life and soul and  
part of the gang,  
we had a gang I was part of it.  
Behind the bike sheds.

I went on fancy dress at eight years old,  
I went as a boxer,  
with boxing gloves on,  
which ostensibly looked like boxing gloves  
sewn on to your shoulders, you know..

No-one said a word.  
Let him be what he wants to be,  
his parents have obviously  
set him on that path.

Whenever I asked something  
they'd always say,  
I don't know, darling,  
why don't you try?

## **Kent College**

I was the only disabled boy.  
there was one gay boy,  
and one black guy and me.  
And we didn't like each other.

I have a very, I'm very ashamed to say this,  
but it's true and it happened.

One day I saw an Indian boy at school,  
across the quadrangle.  
And I don't know what possessed me,  
I just ran the entire length,  
stood ten yards from him  
and shouted 'Oi, Paki', as loud as I could,  
because I wanted everyone to look at him.

And he walked up to me,  
punched me in the face.  
Which is pretty reasonable  
under the circumstances.

And I, at home, I thought about the nature of racism  
for the first time in my life.  
It was really weird,  
and I thought that was a despicable thing to say.  
Why on earth did I do that?



I know why I did it now.  
I was just a desperate person trying  
to get someone else to be bullied for once.

### **Cheeky Boy**

I was, you know, one of the class comedians.  
Often. I would be the one..  
Because I knew that I was one step away from a slap,  
whereas any of my able-bodied counterparts  
would immediately get a slap.

I knew I could cheat them one more time before the slap.  
And so I was often appointed  
as the one who would say the really cheeky thing.  
Just because I could.

And then I would self-appoint  
a lot of the time and  
knowing that I had the amusement  
of my class to back me up.

But I don't, I can't ever say  
I ridiculed myself  
and my own arms  
in order to curry favour.

## **Punk**

And then punk happened.  
Of course, ideal vehicle,  
you go from being the school spastic  
to being the school punk. That is an upgrade.

I'm telling you right now,  
it's an upgrade,  
because it's not about the thing that  
everybody thinks is negative and embarrassing,  
your disability, you know.

## Mr Slade

We all had to write a five-minute play.  
It had to be a famous story  
done as a five-minute play.  
I did this 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'.  
But when Daddy Bear saw Goldilocks,  
I had Daddy Bear go Woaar  
and it got a huge laugh. From Mr Slade.

And that was it,  
I was hooked, that was the moment,  
I knew then that I wanted to entertain,  
I wanted to write, I wanted to be a performer,  
because I made my English teacher laugh.

In those days the English teacher  
always directed the school play.  
And I went up and said, 'Mr Slade,  
I want to audition for the school play'.

And I, I saw  
my first fearful smile from an adult.  
And it was a fixed,  
an unusually fixed smile  
for Mr Slade  
with fear in his eyes  
and falsity on his teeth.

And I thought to myself,

oh, that's weird,  
he's embarrassed.

### **The Band**

My friends said  
let's form a band.  
We were thirteen.  
And so I bought a drum kit.

And we became this  
weird teenage band  
who were allowed to practice  
in the cricket pavilion on Saturdays,  
on Sundays rather.

We were then branded  
part of the weird people.  
But that was when we were thirteen.  
By the time we were fifteen,  
that had become the cool people.

And the guys who were the army boys,  
(there were lots of quite sad kids there  
who didn't go home at holidays.  
And they were the ones  
who'd bullied me earlier  
and ridiculed me a little,  
because they were insecure.)

they wanted,

desperately wanted  
to be in the cool gang  
once it was ascertained  
that we went to gigs,  
listened to music and,  
dare we say it,  
older people smoked pot.

All that started happening.  
And girls. So um  
I had a very happy childhood.

## Being Bad

I enjoyed being in a band.  
I enjoyed having this new identity  
of being a punk but of course that meant  
being incredibly rebellious,  
telling the teachers to fuck off and things.

So I did that, and  
looking back I imagine them wrangling  
with their liberal, 'Oh God,  
I have to tell him shut up,  
but he's like the disabled one,  
so I've gotta be nice to him.

And I like him  
and I want him to succeed,  
but he's breaking the damned rules.'

I wanted to be bad,  
I wanted to be naughty,  
it was much cooler and fun,  
much more fun than being the school spastic.  
That's what I was called.  
I mean, yeah.

Flid, obviously, was my name at school,  
but I was still often a spastic  
and a spakko and a spasm,  
all those things.

## **Bronant Days (1)**

I went to a Welsh comprehensive,  
a Welsh farming comprehensive.  
So I went from being one of the thickies,  
because I wasn't in the alpha class,  
to the posh cunt, you know overnight.

And on day one this hulking  
heffalump of a man came towards me  
'Well, I'm gonna fight you.  
You're new. That's the rules.'

And I was like, oh, okay.  
Bam! Had me on the ground, you know  
I wriggled and struggled,  
kicked out a few times,  
tried to headbutt him,  
and he smacked me a few times

then stopped, got up and went  
'This lad's alright. He had a go.  
That's what matters.  
Nobody touch him, okay.'

And that was that, never got,  
I wasn't really friends with the guy  
but he was the hardest guy in the school

and he put the word out,  
no-one touch him.  
So that was that.

## **Bronant Days (2)**

I think the headmaster  
had had words with the class,  
like the assembly before I came  
was a little laden with  
*now we're going*  
*to be having a very special pupil coming.*

I got invited to tea, football,  
buddery all sorts.  
But unfortunately  
punk had got its way into my system.

Dan Jones had a punk badge on.  
And I said you like punk, I like punk,  
and that was that.

You know he's still my best friend,  
we met when we were fourteen,  
we were the only two punks in Dyfed.



## Colchester

He went to an art school  
and I carried on, got to Colchester  
and said, Dan, it's brilliant here!  
Leave Wales, come here!

There's like bands and everything.  
and there was, and he came,  
we finished our second year,  
I was eighteen by that point,  
my thalidomide compensation had kicked in,  
and perhaps foolishly my parents allowed  
me to buy a house.

For twelve and a half thousand pounds,  
a semi-detached two-bedroom house  
in Colchester,  
which became college party central  
for three years and the band HQ.

I didn't ever shut the back door,  
there would often be people  
in my house when I got home,  
they were always friends,  
there was lots of smoking pot  
and shagging and drinking and rock 'n roll,  
it was super fun. Throughout my A Level college.

And by that point we were in a band,

and then we had to move to London,  
because that's what you do.

## Say the Word

People have a very weird relationship  
with this word. Um, mine was just  
a non-judgemental,  
I'm called a flid, it's thalidomide,  
they can't bloody, why can't they  
pronounce thalidomide properly?

You know, flid is now  
a badge of honour amongst us all,  
it's what we call ourselves.

But the reason it was flid  
was because people  
couldn't pronounce the word  
thalidomide.

## Assessment

Age seven.

At Guy's Hospital, in a waiting room,  
suddenly see lots of other people  
with little arms.

Very shocked!

Never seen them before.

This was the assessment.

You know I got an annual settlement  
of what was then  
fifteen thousand pounds a year,  
based on my assessment.

My assessment was as follows.

At that meeting.

Walk into a room.

Mum not allowed,  
walk into a room.

Three men behind a desk.

On the right hand side of the room  
as you walk in by the door  
a three-tier filing cabinet,  
metal, old-school, up to about the shoulder.

One chair in front of the desk.

Went and sat on it.

Asked me a few questions,  
then they said 'Matthew,  
in the top drawer of that filing cabinet  
there are some sweets.  
You can help yourself if you like'.

So, fucking drag the chair over,  
got on the chair,  
opened the drawer, got the sweets,  
thanks very much, fifteen grand.

Only a year later I realised,  
and I was angry at my mother.  
'Mum, if you'd have told me,  
I'd have crawled across that.'

Even then, I knew what had happened,  
how I could have stacked the odds better  
if only I'd been given the information.

## Group Holiday

I found myself being the punk  
on an all fifteen-sixteen year old  
hot and horny as hell  
thalidomide holiday in Corfu  
with thirty other thalidomides,  
none of whom else had had sex yet  
because we were last in the pecking order.  
You can only imagine what happened.

I threw Simone in the pool,  
I was a bit boisterous,  
I threw Simone in the pool  
because she was a bloody nag.

We're still, still all know each other,  
that first group of fifteen year olds,  
we all still know each other.

And I'm the best of friends with Simone now.  
because she was the first of the other flids  
to politicise  
and call herself a disabled person,

I'll never forget it,  
because the rest of them,  
viewed through a Marxist perspective,  
the collective disability social construct  
meaning anger that thalidomiders suffered

was bought off by the state.

Why should they bother  
about being able to get on a bus?  
Compensation, a house and a Volvo,  
that's the average thalidomider.

I mean a Marxist perspective would go,  
yeah, your anger's been bought off by the state,  
you know, and there's truth in that.  
Because very few thalidomides  
are political disabled people.

## Prostheses

There was no collective  
'let's all chuck our arms in a bonfire',  
you know, moment.  
God I wish there had been!

But no. we all came to it  
personally and privately  
and in different ways.

My experience of that was,  
I'd have six-month check-ups  
with Dr Fletcher at Roehampton,  
because that was the catchment area.

it was stuff like seeing  
if I could pull my foreskin back,  
because I would need to be able to do that  
for washing, and just see with stuff if I could do.

I was taken into a different room  
one day by Dr Fletcher,  
with both my Mum and Dad,  
who didn't usually both accompany me.

And there were all, the array  
of every prosthetic arm you've ever seen  
around the walls.



And we're gonna try and fit you  
with one of those,  
I said, why?

He went, well we..  
thought you might like that.  
No. No, I don't want that.  
Don't want that at all.

And they went, okay!  
and just walked me out of the room,  
and that was that.  
I obviously had quite liberal parents.

Dr Fletcher, later in life, 'cause I,  
we became quite good friends.  
He said he knew  
all those limbs would be rejected.

He know straight off the bat.  
They were useless,  
and functionality was everything  
and cosmetic appearance was nothing.

And he said, he knew that they' d all be rejected  
and live under a bed sooner or later.  
But he had to do the bidding  
of the British Medical Association,  
he had to try his best.

## **Wearing the Arms**

I came to my false arms  
for a cabaret gag as an adult.  
And I still use them. For gags,  
on stage purely and simply only.

Because they render you useless,  
you can't do anything,  
you might only have one finger,  
but you can work the front door with it,  
not with your prosthetic arm on you can't,  
you can't do anything.

So they are utterly ridiculous and comedic.

## Stabbed with the Seed

Every one of us has a hideous teenage school story.  
You know Mary Duffy's is probably the worst,  
because she had no arms and  
was given the awful gas powered ones.  
She went to St Joseph, Mary and the Doodah,  
you know Catholic nuns' school  
in southern Ireland  
and her fucking arms,  
the gas ran out and she was in  
its full extension mode,  
she spent the day in crucifix position.  
Can you imagine that?  
Having to go sideways  
through all the doors that day.  
Wasn't allowed to take them off.  
Now *that's* trauma. That's trauma.

She's got a poem about that, too  
which is the thing that made me realise  
that I was a disabled person.  
We all have one person, don't we,  
that unlocked us, our coming out if you will.  
What happens is you get the seed,  
you get stabbed with the seed  
and you can only ignore it for so long,  
cause it will grow, whether you like it or not.  
And she stabbed me with the seed,  
with that poem called 'Whole',

about how she saw herself as a whole person,  
not unfinished.

## **Nijmegen**

I saw this poem called 'Whole' and it,  
it injected the seed of disability into me  
and I thought I should go and find this woman.

And then we spent like  
a day and a half together,  
she basically hauled me over the coals.

The trouble with you is  
you don't even think you're disabled,  
you don't even know what disabled is.  
I mean I really got it in the neck,  
cause I was being Flash Harry in the band,  
you know with the dreadlocks.  
And she's sort of like,  
you're one of us  
whether you like it or not,  
you're gonna have to come to terms with it  
and I'm gonna make you right now.  
And she did  
and I have her to thank for that,  
for ever and ever and ever.  
And a great conference.

Mary Duffy got me my disability consciousness.  
I saw it as a social construct,

I realised I was one of them,  
and when I came back to London  
I had a fire lit under me like you've never seen.

### **Punks Liked Me.**

I got my bus ticket and I went  
to the Rock Against Racism march,  
had my first Special Brew,  
remarkably strong lager,

totally overwhelmed me  
as a young fifteen year old.  
Marching, I'm like  
half falling over.

And the truck comes past  
with a punk band playing on the back.  
And the lead singer leans down  
and gives me his hand,

'cause he just spots me straightaway  
as someone who needs a hand,  
and yanks me,  
and pulls me onto the truck

and I spent the second half  
of the march to the gig  
on the back  
of the Ruts DC Truck.

Malcolm O  
committed suicide  
the following year.  
Amazing! You know.

## **Disco and Punk**

Punk was huge to me  
as it spoke to me.  
It was a music that didn't  
require me to be able-bodied.

At discos I wasn't welcome.  
Because I looked wrong.  
Several times bouncers  
wouldn't let me in.

And they're like, no offence mate,  
but you're gonna  
put some of the customers off,  
so sorry, not tonight, you know.

They'd think they were being  
liberal and nice about it,  
but that's not  
the message you receive, you know.

So disco, you had to be  
body perfect to be disco.

And punk  
was the antithesis of disco,

so of course I leapt at it,  
It didn't require me to be anything  
other than myself.  
With an added safety pin.

### **No More Crusty**

There were these two sexy girls  
on Oxford station and I saw them look,  
and I'm an expert at the looks.

And they looked and there was  
an initial disturbance from my hands,  
which was superseded by their wonder  
at my amazing dreadlocks and how crusty,  
how damned crusty I looked,

I looked like a real one,  
because my clothes,  
I had been one for four or five years and so it looked,  
I didn't look like I'd just put it on at a shop.

And their look changed from disturbed by the disability  
to admiration of the fashion. And in that instance I said,  
I have got to get rid of all of this  
I don't need this fucking identity.

I need *my* identity,  
I'm fucking disabled damn it.  
I'm not like that.  
It was a huge moment for me.



## **Backstage**

I grew up,  
people learning lines,  
people learning songs,  
actors laughing loudly  
because they were a bit pissed.

I grew up backstage,  
you know childcare is free  
if you just get the kid to the theatre  
and then they have the run of the place  
and they know where they're not allowed  
and everything else is okay.

And you learn theatre behaviour.  
So when I became an actor  
and I went backstage as an actor  
it just felt like home. It was weird.

## **'Ubu'**

My Mum had said there's this play on,  
called 'Ubu', at the Oval House.  
Might go, wanna come?  
Disability company, dunno.  
I didn't do disability in those days  
as far as my Mum was concerned.  
So, looking back, they were obviously like,  
it's about time we got this fellow to his natural home.

My brother came, I mean thinking about it,  
it was probably a pincer movement  
on my family's behalf, cause I was,  
the second that show opened I was hooked,  
the second,  
I just remember thinking,  
what the fuck is that guy saying?

Jamie Beddard, cake in his mouth,  
cerebral palsy, didn't give a toss.  
I looked round, and here's the big thing,  
no-one was embarrassed.  
This was the big thing to me,  
they were all able-bodied people, mostly,  
they were laughing, and enjoying it.  
Disabled people don't necessarily  
have to be embarrassed by being on stage.  
They can be good, and entertain,

and hit all the marks  
that an entertainer needs to hit.

I do want to be an actor.  
I don't want to be in my band any more.  
Knock knock knock Graeae.  
And that was all within twenty-four hours.

I told my band, I said  
I've got to go off and be disabled now  
and they went,  
we were kind of wondering  
when that was gonna happen.

We kind of sensed it  
for the last two or three years.  
Away, go, be happy.

## **Moving On**

I had a bit of embarrassment  
between my like punky, musician group  
that I'd been with for fifteen years,  
that community,  
very much who rejected all politics  
as being PC bollocks and so  
to say I'm disabled and proud  
sounded a bit like PC bollocks to them.  
So I lost maybe fifteen percent  
of my friends at that point. No,

I just didn't bother calling them anymore  
because I knew they'd be thinking  
it was PC bollocks.  
And they didn't call me to tell me it wasn't.

But I gained so many more people  
that it was more than worth it.

## Fighting Talk

I got my highs from martial arts training,  
that kind of exhilarated adrenalised feeling  
I got from punk, still, and from martial arts.  
And not so much the, the, the drugs.

The second I was in that community  
I was treated like an equal,  
because my kicks were just as tough as their kicks.  
And I could keep people at bay with my kicks  
and I got pretty damn good at it  
and that, I got respect as an equal.

Not, 'I will cerebrally recalibrate my brain  
to assume you are equal  
even though deep down  
I'm fighting against the feeling  
that you're lesser than me  
because you have less limbs'.

I just had a  
'dude, you can beat me up  
as well as I can beat you up,  
you're an equal'.  
It was not more complicated than that,  
so it was hugely attractive to me.  
Because I'm part of another community,  
there's always been a bit of a fighter,  
a warrior in me,



## **‘What the Butler Saw’**

I got the job at Graeae, I was offered a role,  
I auditioned for and got offered  
a role of Dr Prentice in  
‘What the Butler Saw’.

And had my first show.  
Very, very funny,  
a blind Dr Rance is genius  
when he gets the gun out.

And from ‘What the Butler Saw’,  
I got an Equity card!  
And an agent,  
from my first professional play.

Six months later, my agent  
got me a job in a fringe production,  
that had nothing to do with disability.  
It came and went

and nobody really noticed,  
but that’s not the point.  
I was in an actual play,  
on stage, as an equal.

## Sealo the Seal Boy

The only time I ever saw  
pictures of disabled people  
in writing  
was at freak shows.

And they all went, no, no, no,  
you can't touch that  
with a barge pole.  
It's the pornography of disability.

I was a crip.  
Fuck it, I'll critique freak shows.  
And I found  
quite the opposite,

I found a much more  
layered experience of disability.  
You know, fiscal independence  
was actually part of this,

And then I saw him. In a picture.  
A man with flippers.  
I thought 'Ah,  
I'm gonna do a play about *him*.



## **'Born Freak'**

I wrote 'Sealboy Freak'  
Did it at Chat's Palace,  
at the ICA, rewrote it,  
disability arts festivals,

nice cheap easy show,  
just me and a suitcase.  
So I've sort of ended up  
doing it around.

Paul Sapin, (who'd done  
an arty documentary  
about disabled women's sexuality) and me  
found ourselves talking

and he said, you wanna do  
a documentary  
about freak shows?  
And I was like, yes, I do.

And we went to Channel Four,  
I came in, flapped my flippers a bit,  
and said 'Yes, I can speak English'  
and went away again.

And then he pitched it.  
Three hundred and twenty five grand.  
That's how much we got.

So we made a film.

## **'Happy Birthday Thalidomide'**

It was the other story that I had to tell, which was,  
you know they were still using thalidomide in Brazil, it was used in,  
(this was twelve, however many years ago now)  
just sniffing around oncology,  
ten million terminally ill cancer patients  
being prescribed thalidomide.

It was just beginning the trials,  
now it's proper, you know, policy.

I remember it,  
there was a really weird bit during that,  
he said look, you know,  
when you do documentaries,  
they like to catch the real

and if they know you're the sort of performer  
who can do real and still perform  
and carry those two things simultaneously,  
they've got gold  
because that's the stuff of a good documentary.

And he said look,  
we're going to show you some,  
the woman in here that we're going to interview  
is using Thalidomide.

It's in the house.

And you're going to look at it.  
And I want it on film.  
Can you handle it?  
I said, of course I can handle it,  
can you handle if I burst into tears  
or kick the wall? He said,  
well we were hoping for something like that.

I said well I can't promise anything,  
I'm not going to fake anything.

I walk, we go to this house,  
it's a breeze block shack in the middle of a favela  
with no windows  
and a rag where the door should be.

This woman is in abject pain,  
she's got leprosy, right?  
Abject fucking pain.  
Only the most heartless thalidomider  
would resent someone using it as a pain..  
She's not going to have kids.

Anyway, the camera's on my shoulder,  
I can feel it burning the back of my neck,  
you know we walk in,  
I sit down and they show me the thalidomide.

And I'm looking at it  
and I'm waiting for all these emotions,

and they're there but I'm really confused  
and it, and Kit pushes it,  
it's like, so what are you thinking?

I was going oh, you know,  
I was just looking,  
I just turned to the camera and said  
well it's not how I expected  
but it's pretty fucking weird  
to actually hold the drug, you know...

It was, it was kind of weird, you know,  
so he caught all those wonderful moments,  
you know, that are real, and the stuff of real,  
when it's real the audience feel it.

We all get a little chill, you know, it's amazing.

## **'Every Time You Look at Me'**

It rated as BBC2's highest drama  
for audience satisfaction that year.  
And any non-disabled actor  
who'd been given the lead  
in a new film that was that popular  
would have automatically gone  
through the grooming station of the BBC,  
where you would have got your episode of 'Cracker',  
your small part in a returning series.

And if that worked out well, they'd promote,  
and if it didn't they'd fade away.  
But it always happens.

But of course somebody  
at some point about a year later  
suggested me for a programme,  
and the head of casting  
(this is verbatim) said,  
'Mat Fraser? Oh no,  
we've done Mat Fraser.'

Very, very painful words for me to hear.  
Because what she meant was  
we've done his impairment.  
We've done short arms.

I was like yeah, okay, I get it.

(I wish I knew who it was  
because I'd like to go and forgive them.)

### **Cage Fight**

I did a cage fighting documentary in 2004,  
which was a hundred and ten grand  
after the two hundred grand one.

And it became apparent that the documentary  
wasn't going to get made  
unless I allowed myself to become  
the subject of the documentary.

And I was slightly aware I was whoring myself.  
And, you know, I ended up actually  
having a cage fight with a seventeen year old.

Cor bloody hell the owner of that  
must have been worried for insurance,  
a cripple and a seventeen year old  
illegally potentially hospitalising each other  
in a cage that he owned.

There was a little discussion backstage,  
certain moves were not gonna be allowed  
to combat that. And to safeguard my face.  
I didn't want to have my nose broken.

Anyway. I did that, but

at that point I knew  
I didn't wanna do another documentary.  
Because if that's what they'd become,  
I didn't want in.



## Gatekeeper

You can't blame an individual  
for a society's failings.  
But you can sure look at the gatekeeper and go  
'Why d'you keep it locked all that time, bitch?'  
Why? You could have done so much.  
And at every twist and turn you went  
'Yes, massa'.

I think of all those things I could have done,  
all those roles I could have had.  
all that society we could have changed,  
all those minds we could have changed,  
all those careers we could have encouraged,  
all those awards that would have led to other careers,  
to other commissions that didn't happen  
because she is a fucking Tory.

Now it's unfair to blame her.  
But there are lots of people like her.  
Okay, it's really unfair.

You know what? I admonish myself  
for blaming the gatekeeper  
of the little slit in the wall  
when I should have been  
having a go at the wall.

But when I've got

nobody else to be angry with...

## **'Cast Offs'**

I heard a rumour there was going to be a drama in Channel Four,  
a pretend documentary about one of those things  
where you put people on an island  
and see if they can survive.

And I just wasn't getting a nod.  
They wanted nine fucking disabled actors,  
or six disabled actors. And they didn't call me.

And I realised. Somebody there doesn't like me.  
(I said to somebody,  
'Clean the fucking mops  
out of the disabled toilet, you wanker.  
It's not a fucking storeroom.')

I'd pissed off a lot of people in Channel Four.  
And now they were in bigger positions.

So I did what Mat Fraser always does.  
And I just looked in Contacts,  
found the name of the production company,  
called them up and said hi,  
I know you're looking for disabled actors,  
I know you won't be able to find enough,  
please let me come in and talk myself into the show.  
They laughed and went okay, come on in.

They'd auditioned everybody  
and only four of them were good enough.

For them, at that time.  
(They were casting for impairments.)

I left that meeting half an hour later  
having got the job. Because I said,  
you need an older person, write it for me,  
I'll help you write it, around,  
you know around my impairment  
or what have you. But for fuck's sake  
can we all agree  
that I should be in this fucking programme?

The person who said no  
had a grudge against me,  
so I just went round him.  
And I've always done that ever since,  
and I probably always will.

## Double Medical

Sitting with a writer  
at a BBC workshop,  
I said, of course it'd be weird  
if a thalidomide guy got cancer  
and then got prescribed thalidomide,  
that'd be pretty weird.

And his jaw dropped open,  
and he started salivating  
and he went, fuck me, it's a double medical,  
Holby are gonna  
shit themselves on that.

I think we've got it, we've got it.  
I'm gonna write it,  
I'll liaise with you  
for like medical facts  
and shit, alright.

They immediately bit it  
and I did an episode of 'Holby City'.

## The Invitation

I was dealing pot about,  
around about town, only to weirdos. And  
I got asked if I would go to Submission,  
this shop in Camden that sold rubber stuff.  
And I'm an old, I'm a perv, I'm kinky,  
I don't know any disabled people who don't,  
who are over forty who have a sexuality  
there isn't a kink in somewhere. I don't know of one.

Marisa Carnesky, the performance artist,  
was earning money in reception,  
and she got me to a bigger network of those people,  
because my pot was good. And eventually  
I was dealing to all these rubber people all the time.  
And I was like, oh what's all this rubber stuff?  
Come to the club sometime, we'd love to have you.  
You know, well I've got nothing to wear,  
well wear this. Um, and I went.  
And I got hit on like four times.  
In the first five minutes..

I didn't think, stop to think  
it's because I was the weirdest freakiest person there,  
and that was a badge of honour there,  
because how perverted can you be than  
fucking the cripple. I just thought,  
fucking hell, I'm gonna get laid here.  
Everyone seems to smile and loves it,

and there's all these naked people running around,  
I am in fucking heaven.

And er I, you know,  
I sort of interrogated a little bit  
what was going on and then  
I thought I don't really mind,  
it's a fairly good payoff.  
And just went a lot.

## Submission

I went to Record and Tape Exchange,  
I was upstairs and this guy came in with  
a big bin bag of stuff that like clinked inside,  
I said, what's that?  
He said it's a prostitute, she's just shut up shop.  
And the whole lot's a job lot  
of all the stuff she used to use in her dungeon.  
Thirty quid the lot. I went: done!  
Didn't even look in the bag.

And we fucking costumed up like the Five People.  
There was so much stuff in there.  
(We gave it a good clean.)  
And so we started to go to Submission,  
the club, that I could get into for free  
because I was the dealer.

The big moment was when Kitty Kickboxer,  
the hottest thing I'd ever seen on two legs,  
walked up to me and said,  
well aren't you something special?  
I said I dunno, am I?  
(Thinking what do you mean?!)

She said are you free  
for the next half an hour?  
I was like, yep!  
And she took me round the back and shagged me.





## **That Whole Fetish Thing**

So, that whole fetish thing,  
again like the freak show thing,  
was a sort of politically ambiguous,  
in terms of disability politics,  
place where we were put centre stage immediately.  
And celebrated. And who's to say  
it was the wrong kind of celebration.  
I know lots of people will,  
and have done. But I've been there.

And it's very difficult to gauge,  
it's ambiguous at best, it really is.  
And there are a lot of positives about it.  
I mean for fuck's sake  
if a perv is a perv  
and they have sex with a disabled person  
without thinking that they're less sexual,  
for me that's a good thing.

I dunno, it's complicated.

## Julie

I was moonlighting  
and we met on the stage  
of the Coney Island freak show  
doing a burlesque show.

It literally was the beginning  
of 'The Freak and the Showgirl'.  
Um, great show,  
huge amount of attraction,

I must, I know I fancied her.  
Because I taught her how  
to do a rear naked choke,  
which is how to

choke someone out  
and kill them.  
And I only ever did that  
with women that I fancied.

She is bored in her marriage,  
her husband is about to come out as gay,  
and she suddenly meets this  
really articulate English guy

who teaches her  
how to kill someone  
and then leaves.

She was smitten!

I was smitten.

## **Burlesque**

And Julie was like  
'Come to America!'  
And she is royalty  
in burlesque.

So she said  
I want you to host my next show.  
And it was rammed!  
And I was good.  
And everybody loved me.

And I got everyone  
to bark like a seal.  
And was really politically incorrect  
around my disability.

But in the way that I do it,  
the owning it way.  
Not let's make fun of other people  
who are not like us.

But I'll make fun of myself  
and it's really cool,  
don't you think this is a cool way to clap,  
why don't you all try it..

And they loved it,  
they couldn't believe

what they were seeing  
and I was the new crip..

I was English and new  
and they were bored  
with all their hosts.

So overnight I became  
like one of the most popular hosts  
In New York. And as I said  
to Dirty Martini,

that happened, she said,  
yeah, well  
you married into royalty  
didn't you?

## Progression

When I arrived in New York in 2008,  
when I started being Mat Sealboy  
the burlesque MC in downtown New York,  
they loved it,.

And then three years later  
when I said you know there's this thing  
I don't agree with  
and I'd like you all to not agree with it as well,  
they all went with it.  
They didn't even think twice.

And it's extremely gratifying  
that that happened. And I know now  
that if, if I needed to call a demo on a shop,  
I know I could galvanise thirty people  
and I know only five of them would be disabled.  
It's pretty good.  
Not bad. Not bad at all.

But then what we're witnessing  
right now, Allan,  
are re-politicisation of the youth, I believe.  
God, It's been long enough coming, innit?  
There've been times in the last twenty years  
when I've smashed my head against the wall.  
But now, they're looking at  
the shit they've got coming

and they don't like it.

But I think what we as disabled people  
are currently experiencing  
is what women and feminism was experiencing  
maybe fifteen years ago  
where young women are going  
no no no, don't need to do all that, we're equal.  
Are you? Are our wages equal?

So disabled people are now like,  
don't want to be identified as..  
I remember Lisa Hammond saying  
don't say 'crip', I hate that word,  
I hate that word crip.  
Because what she meant was  
it means all you political lot  
and I'm not like that.

Cause my friends don't like political people,  
because that's PC gone mad.

And this is my connectivity-going-on analysis.  
And so, so now  
we've got our youngsters going  
no no I'm not one of those angry disabled people  
that you don't like,  
I'm one of the good ones that you like,  
or I don't know what's going on Allan,  
but I feel that I'm, well you know



let's see who gets into power,  
let's see how many more rights are taken away  
before we feel the vitriol of the young disabled people again.

## **'Beauty and the Beast'**

Julie had said  
we need to do a project together,  
'cause at that time we couldn't really  
manifest our real desires,  
  
so we channelled it through art.  
I said, yeah, yeah sure,  
let's do a project.  
'Thalidomide the Musical' worked well,

me expanding to  
allowing myself to work with  
one non-disabled person.  
Let's see what it's like.

And she said why don't we just  
do 'Beauty and the Beast'?  
And it was like a light bulb.

First I thought, ah,  
of course, fairy tales.  
Adaptations for disability.  
Then I thought 'Bitch!

How could you have that idea  
and not me? I'm the disabled one.  
I should have thought of that.'  
But I thought hats off, you thought of it.

## **Phelim McDermott**

We had the meeting.  
And what happened was  
me and Julie tried to explain  
Beauty and the Beast to him  
as a couple with one of their favourite stories,  
they take each other over,  
they finish each other's sentences.  
And he pulled back . And he watched  
Mat and Julie  
try to explain' Beauty and the Beast'.

And he went, I'll do it,  
but only if it's about you two as well.  
I wanna use old-fashioned technology,  
like an overhead projector,  
cause I'm sick of fucking 3D computer imaging.  
And I want it to be about you two  
and 'Beauty and the Beast' in parallel.

We looked at each other  
and thought.  
'That's bloody weird.  
Great! Let's go!'

So we ended up

doing 'Beauty and the Beast'  
at Christmas at the Young Vic.  
Which was amazing.  
And we got good reviews,

so good that our local theatre in New York said  
we've just got a hole,  
a company's just dropped out for next March,  
d'you wanna come and do that show?

We said 'yes!'

## Review

In the taxi home  
we got a text from Phelim going  
you should read the New York Times.  
We were like, oh crap.

And we read it and  
it was the best review  
they'd ever given  
for any theatre production ever.

He said, 'watching this show  
is like falling in love'. I mean it was,  
you couldn't get a better review, right.  
It was great, because it meant

the rest of the run  
was a sellout and we almost  
made our money back.  
Which is real success, you know.

A woman from LA was in New York.  
Saw that review,  
decided to go, went to it.  
The second she saw me on stage

it triggered 'Oh, yeah,  
my friend's auditioning  
freaky people

right now in L.A.

I should probably tell them  
about this guy, he can act.'

The next day I got an audition  
for 'American Horror Story'.

## Off-Broadway Blues

We almost got an off-Broadway run  
of 'Beauty and the Beast' and then it,  
just as we were about to sign the contract  
they lost their bottle.

And the bottom line there, is  
you know, Britain, they don't mind  
a bit of flipper and penis onstage,  
it's all in the name of modern drama,

after all we had 'Romans in Britain', didn't we.  
You know, we can take it,  
even in the arts centres in Cumbria  
we can take it.

But you go outside of New York in America  
and you try and ask somebody  
to tolerate a mutant penis,  
a mutant who's got his penis out onstage

and it ain't happening buddy,  
it ain't happening,  
even at the most experimental places,  
they couldn't take it up 'em, sarge.

## The Call

I actually had to run back to England,  
get back on the drum kit  
and go out to Germany with Graeae  
to do another run of 'Reasons to be Cheerful'.

I got the call  
while we were getting bladdered  
in one of those weird German hotels  
where there were no other guests,

but it looks like the Hitler Youth  
used to holiday there,  
we were in Bavaria or something .  
Graeae on the lash,

fifteen of us really going for it  
and I get a call  
and have to go outside to the corridor  
and I'm speaking to casting from L.A.

And I don't fucking know  
what 'American Horror Story' is,  
I had to look it up on YouTube  
to get the acting style  
to do the audition right.

And it goes  
we'd like to offer you a part.



Well, tell me a bit more about it,  
I said,

(drunk, in Germany,  
having drummed  
with me Graeae buddies  
in the other room, ).

Non-disabled actors  
are playing some of the freaks?  
Mmm. I dunno how I feel about that.  
I'm gonna need twenty-four hours

to think about this, okay.  
And there was silence  
on the other end of the phone.  
No one had ever. Ever,

I mean I didn't know  
what I was doing,  
they were like err, okay.  
And I put the phone down on them.

And the next day I said  
so I've got this situation and they were WHAA?,  
all the young guys,  
all the young kids in the company were going

*'American Horror Story',  
what are you doing?*

I said, oh, I've obviously  
missed a trick here.

And so I called back.  
Yeah, I am quite keen.

## **Negotiation**

They wanted to tattoo,  
they wanted to fit me  
as a square peg  
into their already existing round hole.

And I said, no, what you're looking for is  
the guy, the tattooed man,  
you've found out he can't act and  
now you want me to play his part,  
well that's not going to work.

You have to make him a seal boy,  
because that's what I do  
and then I'll agree to be tattooed  
and we call him the Illustrated Seal Boy.

And you get your tattoos,  
I get authenticity,  
I know how to play it  
and believe me it'll be better.

Go and look at your history.

Look at my body, look at the history,  
you'll know I'm right.  
And then we can discuss.

So again, they had to  
go off and come back.  
And they were like,  
yeah okay, we'll go for it.

Now we want you tattooed  
completely from head to waist.  
I went no,  
not doing my face.

They were like  
who is this fucking guy?  
Who does he think he is?  
But I knew.

I know my money is my hands,  
but I also know the combo  
of the face and the hands  
is a conundrum for a lot of people.

Plus you get it all in one shot,  
one tight shot, in a mid close-up  
you can have the impairment  
and the face, right?

I know, I get that,

done enough telly to understand.  
And I knew, for my career and my longevity  
that we needed to see my face. So I just held out.

## Reflections

When I did  
'American Horror Story: Freak Show'  
several million disabled people  
saw themselves reflected  
for the first time on television in a long time.

They don't have short arms,  
they weren't in a freak show,  
but they saw themselves  
in a way they hadn't done  
when they saw A. N. Other person.

And I got told  
how wrong I was getting it  
by a lot of people.

And that's fine, I understand that,  
I tried to answer every one of them  
with a realistic appraisal  
of how unrealistic  
the television industry can be.

## **I'll Stick with the Freak Show Stuff**

Sooner or later  
someone with a lot of money  
is going to put their money  
where their mouth is  
and cast real people in the roles  
and it'll be high budget.

Then everyone.. I'll be in it,  
then everyone'll know me  
and then I'll get work as an actor.  
That's my strategy.  
It has, actually,  
secretly been my strategy  
for the last ten years.

And it worked,  
except it didn't work  
because I just did pilot seasons in L.A.,  
and I'm here to tell you,  
you may be unsurprised to learn this Allan,  
I'm ashamed for having forgotten it,  
they have no intention of giving me a job in Hollywood.

I was right for the freak show,  
but they can't see me as a neighbour  
or a father  
or a teacher.

No way, No way!

## Conventional Behaviour

I go to conventions  
and I sign my ten by eights  
at horror conventions  
for a line of people  
who tell me I'm their favourite.

And mostly, they are fifteen to twenty-five year olds  
inverted commas misunderstood young woman,  
the goth in their town, right,  
no one understands.  
Mat understands,  
because he's different.

No he fucking doesn't, but okay.  
And so I get the most delicious  
cultural phenomenally revolutionary moment  
where the nervous thirteen year old -

I did a lot of kissing and saying I love you  
on 'American Horror Story'  
so I was the romantic one -

come up to me with their nervous father,  
who's taken her there, right.  
He's younger than me,  
she's emoting in a sexualised, emotional way,  
she's not coming on to me because  
she's fifteen and I'm fifty-four



and that would be wrong for all of us.

But something is going on  
where she acknowledges my sexuality  
and she's asking for hers to be acknowledged  
in the way that young girls do ask,  
in their wildly inappropriate way that they do,  
and they don't understand why it's inappr - all of that.

And I simultaneously had to give her what she needs,  
make it okay and invisibly transmit to the dad  
it's alright, mate I'm not a paedo,  
I'm doing this for the cause, right.

Get a grip, I know you know that,  
I know that's why you've brought her here,  
because you approve of it. I get it.

What I'm doing here is going to last her  
for the rest of her life.  
and we all know we have to do this.

So then I have this interaction with her,  
and I go 'and how do you spell Lizzy?'  
And I go Lizzy Hotness or something.  
Exclamation mark! things.

I push it just as much as it's appropriate  
to push it inappropriately,  
it's appropriate inappropriateness,

cause that's my job.

I go away and then that girl  
in three years time will go to the school prom  
and she might say,  
to that guy with one arm  
or the guy in the wheelchair,  
'd'you wanna date?'  
where she might not have beforehand.

And I'm aware that all that  
is potentially resting  
on this cultural interaction.

And so,  
when you say don't do the TV thing, Mat,  
yeah but when you do  
then you get it, you get all of this,  
and that's really powerful.

## **Look at Me Now**

And when you get as an actor  
to show your universal humanity as a character,  
what you are is transcended by who you are.  
And no-one cares what you are any more,  
because they care about who you are.

(And the irony of having to wait around  
for seventeen years  
in order to portray a freak,  
to be allowed to show my universal humanity  
is not lost on me.)

So I've got twenty thousand  
young women followers,  
all of whom would have been  
abjectly embarrassed to meet me  
before 'American Horror Story'  
because they wouldn't have known  
how to shake my hand.

Now none of them give a fuck  
about how to shake my hand,  
'cause they've seen the essence  
of the human inside.

## The Plan

The other thing is that  
the first people that go there,  
that it's well written,  
well directed, well acted  
and has some exotic looking people,  
disabled people in the leads

and they let them go  
'NO I WILL NOT!' and cry  
and do the big fucking stuff,  
the big dramatic stuff,  
the first one that  
gets through the gate on that  
will win all the awards.

And then all the floodgates  
will hopefully open.  
This is the plan, right?  
And I very much want  
to be a part of that movement.

What's annoying is that,  
since 'American Horror Story'  
I've talked to the entire writing team  
at Twentieth Century Fox  
and I have had, I have had meetings  
you can only dream of...

I can see they don't believe me.  
They don't understand.  
And they're wrong! I said look,  
you're all, no offence but  
scrabbling around looking for a hit  
and it's all in front of you.  
And none of you have got the guts to have it.

## **Crisis**

I want the right to be in it,  
to be seen in the mainstream stuff,  
because otherwise how will I  
and then dot dot dot what I'm fifty four

what am I doing?  
I'm having an existential crisis.  
I am, no I'm actually  
at this moment  
going through it.

I broke down about a week ago,  
told Julie everything.  
She thinks I should go and have therapy,  
I probably will.

Trouble is, Allan,  
I don't trust non-disabled people  
to give me the therapy.

How do I know  
they won't read stuff into it?

## **Freak Show**

We did a live documentary,  
live interview with Dick D. Zegan  
on the stage at the freak show.

I'm like, I want to know what it's like,  
the experience of the freak.  
And he said, and this was real,  
well you either shit  
or get off the pot don't you?  
I'm inviting you to be in the freak show  
this weekend. That's how you're gonna know.

And, I'm put on the back foot and I agree.  
And it's a real moment  
that's caught on camera and you can see that.  
And though, I did it, and we did it,

I didn't enjoy the bally platform.  
I found that quite difficult.  
They have the guy on the platform outside  
going come on in,  
you're gonna see this,  
you're gonna see that, and you don't,  
you know there was a,  
you just get looked at and they come in  
whether they're fascinated enough  
by your physical difference or not, you know.

Um, so that's the exploitative end  
of the freak show. Definitely.  
Once you're inside of course,  
the beautiful thing  
is that you're the one talking.  
And they have to listen to you.

And there's an honesty about a freak show.  
So, you know, you don't have to wonder,  
I wonder if they're only here  
because they're looking at my arms,  
you *know* they're only there, right.  
And then, they have to listen to what you say.

So basically, I did it. And the cameras all went away,  
and he was like nononono,  
I let you and all the cameras in here for free.  
I want you to work the freak show tomorrow,  
with no cameras, all day,  
to pay me back. And he meant it,  
I was like fuck! Er..okay.

So I did the show eight times.  
I saw lots of poor black and hispanic  
and drunk white people marvel at my work,  
I realised I had never entertained them before,  
I had only ever entertained disabled people  
and middle class people before.

They weren't embarrassed



about looking at my arms.  
They saw no shame in it.  
They were genuinely interested  
to hear about thalidomide.  
Of which they knew nothing.

They were even more interested  
to hear that the FDA banned it  
back in the day  
when they used to do their job, little laugh,  
ooh I'm onto something.

Because of course Vioxx, you know,  
hey, you've got us to thank  
for the warning on the drug thing,  
happy to give a little love back.

Get a laugh, I think oh, this is the way to go.  
So I do standup. I do political standup ,  
I explain my arms, then I do political standup,  
then go but I'm a traditionalist,  
so I'm gonna end with a feat of skill,  
you're gonna go wow look at that  
he can do that with his arms.  
So I do a bit of drumming.  
I do 'Guess that Tune' on the drums. It's super fun.

And I realise that I'm educating people  
in many many ways.  
Literally, about my bone structure,

I know it sounds so odd that the best disability arts work that I've done in New York is at the freak show. But they were the first theatre in New York to become fully wheelchair accessible for performers. Isn't that ironic?

## Face-off

Some guy wanted a fight,  
'Right here, right now buddy'.  
So the dwarf guy goes, come on Mat,  
and I follow him in.

He gives me two baseball bats,  
takes two himself,  
we're coming out there  
we'll beat those fuckers up.

So I'm like, literally, what?  
So we come out and we're  
facing off these guys  
with baseball bats.

Now when you and a dwarf  
and a guy with a tattooed face  
are on the bally platform  
with baseball bats,

facing off a gang  
who want to fight you  
and you come off that,  
you feel like a comrade,

you feel like you've never felt before,  
this is real, this is back like  
it would have been in the fifties

at the circus, you know.

It's a camaraderie,  
between community and camaraderie,  
and a crip feeling, you know.  
But I was just hooked.

## Family Fun

Julie came down one day,  
with her besties,  
Bambi the Mermaid and Bunny Love.

Three blonde strippers,  
out for a day in Coney Island,  
licking ice creams  
and going to the freak show.

And I was like,  
this is my new family.  
I've got freaks down here in Coney Island,  
who are accepted up in Manhattan,  
on the cabaret stages where I'm allowed to host,

in the sold-out show  
with these people who are  
the most famous striptease artists  
in all of New York.

What's not to like?  
This is not being rejected,  
this is not  
'oh no we've done Mat Fraser'.

This is very different, this is  
'Wow! We love and want Mat Fraser!'  
So I just

dived head-first into it,  
didn't I?

### **New Crips on the Block**

As the Great Fredini  
recently observed to me,  
he said Mat,  
when you started,  
back in 2000, doing this, 2001,  
you were literally  
the only born freak doing it.  
And it was called  
the pornography of the disabled, wasn't it?  
I said, yeah,  
you've done your research, it was.

He said, now,  
with all these new kids coming in,  
It's like it's their new rock 'n roll.  
And he banged it right on the head.  
Because these young kids coming in,  
lots of deformed kids are joining sideshow.  
But they're learning  
pulling up things with nails,  
or their nipples, or banging a nail in their head  
or flesh-hook hanging with flippers.

## **Stanley Berent (Sealo the Seal Boy)**

You know, lest we forget,  
and I always remind people,  
in the thirties  
what would it have been like  
to be disabled, little flippers?

He was fiscally independent  
and kept all five members  
of his poor Polish family from Philadelphia  
clothed, housed and fed  
for his entire career.  
He was very proud of that.

In the seventies it had a different focus  
to the late forties maybe,  
and he went to court in 1973  
to demand the right of the freaks, because they,  
people said we want the circus  
but we don't want the freak show,  
it's in bad taste. And he went to court  
in 1973 to demand the right,  
and he won that year  
but the following year it was over.

## **That Whole Freak Show Thing Really Stuck with Me.**

I know what it's like to be a freak.  
I mean, I've literally done it,  
week in, week out.

I did, one year I did  
the whole summer season.  
Eight shows a day,  
six days a week  
for fifteen weeks or something.  
I mean, it was *brutal*.  
And I learnt the value of the single dollar.  
You're only paid  
seventeen fifty an hour there, or I was.  
Literally have to wait  
until you've earned your first ten bucks  
before you can have a sandwich, you know.  
You really, money so changes down there.  
And I'm grateful for that,  
because I didn't know  
the value of the single dollar  
until I did the freak show.

Then I got work in Manhattan.  
And they were like  
two hundred quid  
to get your knob out for five minutes.  
It would take me a week to earn that in the freak show.  
So I started working there less and less.



But I'm still royalty,  
I'm considered royalty down there.  
I was the first one to come back.  
In the politically correct days.  
I was the first one to arrive and go,  
no, this is okay, it has agency,  
I mean let's discuss this.  
I was the first one to say that in America.

## Quality of Life

It might not be, might be tomorrow.  
Then good.  
There's a lot of young 'uns out there.  
Things are changing.

So it's good,  
I manage not to go crazy.  
I'm still alive,  
I have a few battle scars,  
but they're not too bad.  
You know, I'm not dead  
like some of our compadres.  
Some people have committed suicide.

I'll always remember  
that kid with the ginger hair.  
On the meetings, on the demos.  
With the crutches.  
Fucking committed suicide.  
'Cause of the hopelessness  
of the projections of his life  
that he saw them at that time.

And he just..  
And it brings it home now,  
assisted suicide stuff, you know.  
We can't judge other people's quality of life.  
Period. We can't do it.

The only person that can judge  
the quality of life  
is the person. You know.

## **In Community**

I've always benefitted  
from being in community,  
and always found strength and identity  
from being in community.

Trying to combine communities is often difficult.  
Your punk mates and your disability mates  
don't always want to party at the same place.  
Funny, enough of them do.

And now, disability's really overcome  
the embarrassment struggle, I think, recently.  
Like, everyone gets it,  
everyone's going to have to move a little bit  
when the wheelchair user comes through the chocablock door.

Or in the pub, if a few chairs have to get shifted,  
no-one goes tut any more,  
they just get on with it don't they?  
I dunno, I hope so.

I think things have changed a bit  
and that certain aspects of disability access  
are taken as given by the general public.

Which makes us all a bit more,  
which makes society at large a bit more  
au fait with the disability community

and their needs and assimilate to it a bit.

Certainly I've found that  
with all my friends who, fifteen years ago  
were the ones that needed telling,  
they don't need telling any more.