

A: Okay. Tell me some more about Angryfish.

R: So, Angryfish came about in about 1999 as a stage name if you like. So I'd been doing lots of stuff around disability art for a long long time in various things, you know music, poetry whatever. And then I decided that I wanted to put together an album. And I needed a name, I wanted a name, I didn't need a name. And I kind of, as you do, if you go and research for a band name or whatever. Or a stage name you know you go through., you go from the sublime to the ridiculous and I suppose Angryfish probably picked on the ridiculous end of band names. I ummed and ahed and ummed and ahed and talked to a few people and they were like well how do you reflect you? And I think that it's a combination of three things as a start point. One, me as a swimmer, two with a name like Surgeoner, I've been called Surgeon many, many, many times. And probably, maybe some of that but obviously from a political, you know disability art, politics side of it I do have angry, is it angry? A bit of anger shall we say, frustration and anger. And it's a kind of all of those things suddenly, this epiphany of Angryfish. And it stuck, I just used it. So kind of Angryfish is me, and then there have been two incarnations of Angryfish the band, so that's me with other people coming in and doing various bits. I had my brother-in-law who's passed away, but he was drummer in a band he had muscular dystrophy at one point. And another guy on bass. And then the band, Angryfish the band now, when I put together Black Thursday as an album, I recorded it with some friends who were, (weren't shit-hot musicians). But then if I release this I wanna be able to play it, d'you know what, why don't I do a bit of positive discrimination. And then I put out an advert for disabled musicians to create a band.

And so we ended up with a band of four, four guys, but not by intention, it's just, you can only come back to who applies. It was me, Phil on drums who's blind and looks like he was in Z.Z.Top, he'll be seventy-two this year, I think, and still plays like a young rocker. And I know the impairments aren't particularly relevant, but just for making it make sense, the bass player's a guy called Ian who has, lost his legs as a teenager. And then the other guitar player, who's a

guy called Sam, who's late twenties and has Aspergers, other kind of spectrumy stuff. He's also a songwriter and singer. So if you like, so Angryfish as an entity is a kind of malleable thing. So if there's me, I am Angryfish. And so almost everything that I've produced in the last twenty years has gone under the name of Angryfish. So that's who I am. I am Angryfish and then I have other fish with me. Bob Findlay, because when we get onto everything we could have been, he was one of the cohort, within one of those cohorts and we were labelled as Angryfish and crips. You know, which is fabulous, although in the public arena loses some of its irony. So we had that. That was the internal name we had.

We were practising and trying to get gigs and doing stuff. And I still run it and do things and, it depends where you want to get to, what point you wanna talk about now as opposed to up to now.

A: I'll just take individual bits and edit them anyway. Either as individual poems themselves, or even mixed up with other bits you told me in the first interview to make a single poem. I'll oversee that side.

R: So I mean Angryfish is gonna stay, Angryfish is here to stay. Just occasionally becomes a flounder. Not least the last few years where it.. As an individual disabled artist it has become immensely difficult to get funding unless you can continually be, you know, avant-garde and innovative and stuff like that. And there comes a point where being those things for the sake of having to be them doesn't necessarily make good art. From my point of view, you know 'cause no-one told Shakespeare he had to write differently, he just continued doing what worked well. That's the vein I'm in at the moment is well I can only do what I know works well with some little bits here and there and trying to do it. The last grant I put in for got turned down purely on the grounds that there were other more innovative projects. No-one's doing anything, no that's not fair. The whole point of the Why Festival, right from its inception, before it was called the Why Festival was about giving, providing safe opportunities for disabled people who are not at this point necessarily artists, they may well become, they could already be, but about giving them safe learning, creative performance opportunities. Because most of us are either too old, or it's not accessible to

just suddenly go to Stagecoach or some other, you know buy-in drama school sort of thing that you can go to when you're eleven but not when you're twenty-one, or fifty-one, or whatever it is.

So my rationale all the way through it was about creating new opportunities for new up-and-coming and wherever it was appropriate um mid-career artists to perform, you know to have the opportunity to work together to create collaboratively and deliver performance spaces. And that's like yeah we don't care about that any more. That 'cause it's not new, you're not painting yourself gold and hanging upside-down in a wheelchair from Waterloo Bridge or some kind of headline-grabbing kind of spectacle. But it forgets the me and yous of this world that are artists who wanna just do their art and want to help other people become the artists that they could be, or even don't yet know that they could be, but by offering those really kind of small windows of opportunity. And yet, you know I've got, not wishing to blow my own trumpet, but there's a poet now called Kuli Kohli who had been doing some poetry, had written lots of poetry but would not perform them. She's a forty-something, maybe even fifty-something year old Asian woman with CP, married, got kids, she's written her own back story, you don't need that from me, she would be someone that you might want to talk to in the future. So she came along and she said I could do all this, write all those things, but will you perform them for me. And I went no. No I won't. Not in a horrible way, you can do it, she said I can't, I can't. Without going through the whole process, I gave her the confidence that she's now, she's doing trips to foreign places, reading her poetry. So you know I've been completely usurped. She sends me everything and there's always like you know, I didn't help her particularly, I didn't help her as a poet, I helped her as a performer of poetry. But she's gone on.

Robert Pontin, I don't know if you know Robert. He's now kind of operating as Robert Pontin or the Bitterfly, sort of play on butterfly. Again he had CP, got speech issues. But he's now recorded a thirty-track poetry CD in my place, but you know he did his first course with me ten years ago probably and then he did 'All the Things We Could Have Been' and its like 'I can do this!' But without opportunities like what I've always tried to offer those people would just be, I'm not saying I'm thoroughly responsible, but you know what I'm saying is they may

not have found themselves and this opportunity to be who they are inside without that kind of safe environment to do it.

So at the moment I'm writing songs and stuff, but I'm forever trying to, I don't know if you've had the experience, you put in fucking hours and hours and hours of work into an ACE application, you know you get endorsements and sharing this and then they go sorry, no somebody else is more interesting. And you're like, the investment into the application, you can't suddenly go back to someone and say, yeah that one failed, can you spend another couple of hours writing something for me, can you do this? So at the moment, I keep having, I keep visiting this you know internal conversation about can you come up with something good, or sellable in terms of funding and what have you, And at the moment I think I'm still a bit too cross to do that, because you just, you know I didn't become an artist or I don't identify as an artist to become a bureaucrat.

It's a huge contradiction. You accept that if you get it wrong you've gotta administer it and all the rest of, well depends who you are and what your setup is, certainly is as a sole artist. Accepting that that, and reporting, proper accounting, all the rest of it you've gotta deal with and.. to an office in Manchester that, they don't feel the weight of the boot that they've just shut the lid with. So you know in terms of current output and I'm doing stuff, I'm writing, but I'm writing in a way that's just, it's very organic. I mean my writing's mostly been organic anyway, but it's like, you know there are bits and they're very kind of acerbic. Occasional vitriol, if that wasn't a contradiction, I'm full of occasional vitriol. But I suppose without compromising the quality of it, because what I don't want to do is just become Angryfish actually is angry poet, cause I'm not. So although the name suggests it, there needs to be a turning point in the conception of angry to actually creatively, constructively positive. There you go.

A: D'yu wanna take that back to the beginning?

R: Right. So. The beginning being I played various festivals right back in the early 2000s. Judith Stevenson and the Council of Disabled People did the Millenium Festival, then we had the Liberty, which kind of fell on its arse for

various reasons. And that ran for a couple of years and did like quite a lot of disability art does, it's a great idea, then nothing gets publicised and nobody goes to it. So lots of little things in between and then of course DaDa happened. I did quite a lot of the early stuff up in Liverpool. And, and then I thought well if they can do that, why can't I do something, obviously I don't have the scale of DaDa as it became, was NWDAF or something I think back in those days. And er so probably about 2012 maybe, 2013, I'd had an idea that I'd like to do this, so I went to see Ruth Gould and we spent a lot of time chatting. And she was really good, really, you know, supportive, said she'd mentor any ideas I'd got. So that was great, and then I can't remember, some things you try to put out of your mind but then.. I faltered because there was just, like these things can take time. And then, so at that point it didn't have a name as such, but it was the ideas I've already talked about, about you know and doing a mix of bringing in some established artists to, when you've got your performance ready, the idea is that, like any support act, you're coming in and you've got an audience because someone's come to see somebody bigger than you. That's the theory. Anyway, so not remembering the exact machinations of it, a bit later, Ruth then contacted me and said can you come and see me, I've been asked to throw together a strategic funding thing, looking at the six areas of lowest engagement in the arts, which included the Black Country, it was the Black Country, Newham and Stratford, so Ju was involved. Belfast, or Northern Ireland perhaps, um Liverpool, St Helen's, those six anyway.

A: West Country?

R: No, no. there was, there was a sort of cohort of the North-West, plus Northern Ireland, Black Country, Newham and Stratford. And then, so she took my idea, I don't mean that in the wrong way, it was different to DaDaFest, because DaDaFest was very much about presenting what was there. But then she like the whole concept of it, so she then built the concept that I'd put together in to being a sort of foundational bit of this National Disability Arts project, which for the life of me I now can't remember what it was called. I mean you saw bits of it, when we came up there, some of that was the stuff that went on in DaDa. And it was a three year project, culminating in what was probably the 2016 DaDaFest, thinking about it. Um. Or it might have been

earlier. Forgive the time scales, I'm sure we can find those out. So, yeah that, so I then took on that I would, so I was invited from having had this original concept to then be the lynch-pin for anything in the Black Country. And then obviously I had links with various other people in the Black country and then put together this, originally it was called Wolverhampton and something Fest. And then the spanner in all of this, and it was really, really horrible was that Paul Darke then threw his toys out of the pram because we hadn't asked him if we could do work in Wolverhampton. Him and Ann Whitehurst, Paul's missus, summoned me to a meeting at the Arena and it was vile, really horrible, me and Ruth came out of it like fucking white, I mean it was so offensive, based on the ground that we were stealing their work, we were going into their territory,. Nothing can happen in Wolverhampton without their permission, it was really awful. And that kind of really put a knock on stuff. To the point that actually, in the end, we did the work. I mean and I've spoken to Paul a couple of times and the odd Facebook kind of affirmation, but actually, we'd been really good friends up until this point. And he took it as a total snub from both me and Ruth. It wasn't anything of the sort, it wasn't, you know, hadn't even got to the stage really of who was gonna be involved at the local level. He put two and two together and made ninety-four, you know, then had this, to the point where I was supposed to be doing, Alan, what's his bloody name, we were supposed to be doing some work in Wolverhampton for December the 3rd or around that day. And we were threatened by Paul that if we did this, they would scupper everything that we ever did in the future. This was when his wife had been elected to, was on the council. And I actually got these emails saying if you turn up at this, it's the end of your world in disability arts. And so we did it and his wife came in as a councillor, and just stood as I performed at the back staring me down. And I'm like hold on I'm the one up here with the microphone performing. You're not going to intimidate me too much. I mean, it's intimidating, it is, You'd lie if you said it didn't. But it was that kind of intense around it, no we're not gonna let that happen, you know. So I, Paul has a very, have to be really careful, I don't know how good friends you are with Paul.

A: Don't worry about it. Not particularly.

R: He has a very, he's very good at getting work and getting money, he doesn't go

to anything he funds or supports, because he says it's all shit. How does that work? There is a real contradiction of things going on there. Which is annoying,. But anyway. That bit out of the way, so I embraced what I was gonna do for the West Midlands. Instead of calling it whatever we did, I needed to come up with something and I came up with the Why Festival. And this what we called it before I was aware that there was anything else called the Why Festival or the Why Not Festival, and I'm sure they came afterwards and nicked the name, or happened upon it anyway. Um. And then so my concept is that the Why Festival is not about why not but simply, why is a much bigger question, why are you doing this, why haven't you done it, why aren't you doing it, why can you do it, why shouldn't you do it, how, why is that what you're doing. You know there's a, it was meant to be why as a positive 'Why?'. 'Why can't I?' 'Why shouldn't I?' Not 'why aren't you?'. It's a very, you know it's meant as a much more positive reflection on, perhaps effectively the same questions to some degree. And so all the stuff I then did under the strategic touring grant in the Black Country was done as the Why Festival. There were lots of little things that went on but then there were two events, but of course we didn't do one in Wolverhampton, which was a real pain in the arse. So we ended up doing one at a really great venue called the Glass House in Stourbridge, which has changed a bit now, but that was really good, it was a college for young adults, typically with non-neurotypical behaviours. And kind of associations, so there were some kids with physical impairments, young adults, sort of range of people, but this college was tertiary place about learning, but learning about art skills and using glass. So the Glass House is still there, it's like a, got lots of mini-workshops for contemporary artisans, it's a really, really interesting place. But it's also got histories of glass in the area and all kinds of things. But they also have this incredible performance space, because the college students as part of the broader bit of what they were doing, were doing performance-type things, or had the space to do it. So you got DJs and all kind of manner of things going on. So then, I was able to put in both local artists, but then we had the touring artists that came in, which were Krip Hop, um and Gareth Berliner and Karuna Stammell doing whatever the show was as the sort of headline acts. But it was so difficult to sell space, to get people to them, then brought in all these other artists, like the local artists who were just chuffed to be getting an opportunity.

So when that finished, I then did reapply and got however long it was worth of funding, I mean I massively, massively underpriced it to get it under the fifteen grand, for effectively a two-year project, so most of it I did for free. Um and then kind of kept it all, so we did loads and loads of workshops, and er< I'm trying to remember, this is really bad now, because it all meshes into one, I'm trying to think whether all the things we could have been did have a separate, yes it must have done.

So, yeah, so, so I then, so we built on it and then did loads of work around it, lots and lots of workshops, but then bringing that all together came all the bits of all the things we could have been, which again I will come back to but..

A: Give me some more about the workshops before we move on. What sort of workshops were they?

R: So, a lot of them were, created, were, if you like sort of free-thinking creative writingy things but literally about me using my skills as a facilitator to get people to do stuff that they didn't know they could do. And, you know, so some of these were like workshops in day centres, for example, that were just with the cohort, and I'd say okay we're gonna do a song writing workshop, and they're like okay, but you're never really gonna get anything out of these people, and at the end of the day they would always have produced a song. Whether it was, you know, as simple as doh re mi or something else, but it was always about, what I got really, you know, I'll blow me own trumpet, really good at, I don't know how, but good at, was getting people to sit in a place, brainstorm, come up with a few ideas then work on those ideas and work on those ideas, so that we'd end up with so many flipcharts or whatever and drawings, and my cartooning got better, it's still crap but, often you got people who don't have reading skills or good reading skills so being able to use pictures as well. And then kind of collating those together and all through agreement, saying okay well this means this, so as a set of words, cause obviously a lot of people who don't say have English, written English, you know reading and writing, still have a reasonable understanding of the spoken English. So then, you know, putting it all together and coming up with, you know saying well this picture, that word, those things

this means we wanna choose what we wanna do. And then you literally put in building blocks, the bit that I would do generally, I would take what I usually classed as my box of hitty-bangy things and occasional blowy things. But yeah that gets really yuck. But I would use my capacity to play the guitar. But again also agreeing, I would come up with what mood do we want, do you want this to be a slow song, do you want this to be a jumpy up and down song, do you want it to be, and then through agreement and then produce you know a simple set of chords that would drive a melody, so then they get that and they'd have you know (SINGS) duh duh duh duh duh and they'd go okay 'we wanna choose what we wanna do'. And there would be that kind of building songs by Lego almost if you like, but absolutely in a collaborative agreement way, very unlike Brexit negotiations. And so I've got a whole series of these songs, you know and depending on the circumstances sometimes it'd be a bit of longer one, and I'd go in and take the computer in and do some, you know, record a bit. Some workshops could have been four weeks, so you've got a bit more time but then you teach people a tiny bit about multi-track recording.

But it was, the whole point of it was about empowering people to do something different and to think about themselves in a different way, you know, and I would say to people, you know, okay this is, I want you to be creative and if at the end of the day all you've done is go AAAGH and we've got that recorded in some way, that is as valid a contribution as, you know I wandered lonely as a cloud. Because it's your contribution about you and your relationship with the world. So it's all, you know, very grandiose perceptions of myself, but it's about that idea of giving people that idea, so that's right, so get my chronologies and things right. So the Why Festival finished, the second lot, with a big event, it was at a local college, but it's a performing arts place. And we had, you know, did a whole day festival with two stage running simultaneously, an art exhibition and poetry stuff all going on, which was fab. Again, incredibly under-attended but that just seems to be how it is with disability art.

A: When was that?

S: I think it was July 2017.

A: Right.

R: You know how so much goes on, but then I'd also got, so I then had another application, which was called 'Permission to Perform'. So right back into the 2006/7 period I did a lot of workshops which were called 'Permission to Speak'. Very much exactly what I'm talking about. And this is when Robert Punton came on, early ones and other people who are now doing bigger things. And some who just really really enjoyed the experience. But I ran these 'Permission to Speak' workshops um, which, actually that was through local authority funding when it still existed. So they ended up in workshops, I did a whole series of workshops in the bottom of the , I say in the bottom, of the ICC in Symphony Hall in Birmingham, where I'd used... It was a great place, cause we had the, where it is. Sometimes and I think it does matter, sometimes places just being there give you a, a sense of oh I can be artistic here because of where it is. And then , so 'Permission to Speak' and I got two or three like compilation CDs, so it would be a series of days of building up about how they work, and there was never any prescription about what people had to do, so, you know but I always had a bass guitar, I always had a guitar and some hitty-bangy things as I said. So people would then choose what they wanted to create. They might just want to do spoken word or it might have gone, well can you help me write, can you turn this into a short song or whatever.

Sp that was 'Permission to Speak'. | And obviously again it was about, it wasn't about saying you can talk now at all , it was about the whole political notion of who you are and it's okay to have questions about how you're treated and how you engage with society because of barriers blahblahblah. So then kind of, finished that original one. And then I had this idea to write a one-man show which became, which, I invented the title right at the beginning, so it was one of those few things where the title came first, which Was 'All the Things We Could Have Been' which in essence is I dunno, I'm sure there's a posh you know literature or arts name for it. But it's taken my story and lots of other people's stories that I understand or had tangential relationships with or whatever. And my understanding of the world as I see it to create this kind of story arc which goes from being a completely misunderstood teenager to coming out the other end of it as a self-determined artist, agent provocateur, disability activist

whatever.

And then it goes through, there's a sort of, it's almost like a, again I'm not trying to be up me own arse but in the simplest terms it's a kind of rite of passage thing, from you know, being a disabled child and being treated as a disabled child through to at some point finding out who you are and starting to stand up for who you are. It's not a, it's an ongoing project at that point but.. So then I, so I wrote 'All the Things We Could Have Been' and I'd made, I'd made the decision that I wanted to be able to perform it as a solo show and be as portable as possible. So I designed it around, I would write the piece, I would create, any scenery there would be would be portable and that I could put up as a wheelchair user. And that I could literally perform solo bit without wanting to compromise, compromising as little access as I could. The show ended up as a solo performance, I do the main narrative, but in the background is a video, it's set in, the whole play is set in a pub called 'The Hasty and the Hurting'. And it's the pub that's next door to the pearly gates. And I kind of play both the landlord and thw narrator and the performer and then, so looking at it now it's a little hack, a little tired, but I'd love to be able to fund it to do it properly but..

Behind me, running on a video screen is what looks like a stage, with 'The Hasty and The Hurting' written across the back of it. And then there's a sign language interpreter filmed, already doing the sign language of my performance. But I'd made all of those decisions, that was how I would do it before I'd written it, so then I had to work out how on earth I write something that I can pace, with the sign language going on behind me. So the whole, almost the whole of the show, the play, I mean it's like a very, I call it my baby Faust, really. So it's all written in, almost entirely in couplets. But some really, really complicated ones that do bear out as you get through them. But it took me, I started writing it, bits of it anyway, outlines of it, you know you get, a scene come in your head, or a bit of little, I've still got most of them at home as well, pages or a book like you've got in front of you. Suddenly there'd be ten lines in it with a block round the going such and such to the play. So I ended up writing it in these very complicated couplets so that, well it was doubly challenging 'cause I refused, I refused to compromise on, on rhyme. So it took me a long, you know rather than going oh if I put down wham cause it happens to rhyme with sham, then fine, but then I

wasn't gonna do that. It was, I would spend, I would have pages going on missing half a line. And I'd just have to wait till it came, how do I put that, how do I phrase that?

So I really didn't compromise at all on any of the rhymes to get me the story that I wanted to give. With the kind of underlying idea that I'd written it, or half of the reason I'd written it that way was so that I could then give myself a metre to be able to play in time with what I couldn't see was going on behind me. No rhythm track going tss, tss, tss, because that would just annoy the shit out of everybody. And I tried doing a bit of rappy singing version of it. It doesn't work in that sense, cause it's prose rather than poetry I suppose. Not really knowing the distinction. Cause it does rhyme, but they're not 8.000 words of iambic pentameters. Because some of the lines might have twenty words in and some of might only have six. Anyway.

So I then created this piece and then it's got, its got four songs in it, it's got, which again the soundtrack was recorded without the vocal, so I would then sing the vocal, so that's in the video as well. There are some, I had some mantras in it as well, which were sort of built in as natural breaks for me, which were pre-recorded but I could choose to say them at the same time, 'nobody noticed, nobody cared, prepare to be frightened, prepare to be scared'. Bit sinister but um and then another one was 'who died today, who died today, who died today, what did the papers say they said nothing'. You know because, probably even this time it was really early around the whole like people dying because of the result of changes to benefits and stuff like that. People that read it now.. And this was like really prophetic. I wish I could remember his bloody name, Alan .. This is annoying me now. I shall look and cheat. Can't be that many people in my phone book called Alan. Alan McLean.

And he's always been quite a good supporter of my work. I did a lot of the workshops with him or for him in the days when we had funding. He was even sort of six, seven, eight years after I'd written it the people were still saying how did you see all this back then. It's like, I haven't, nothing's changed, it's just that other people now see it if that makes sense. It's like I had the sort of, my own looking glass as if it were, were somehow able, don't get me wrong I'm not

saying other people are, I'm seeing more than anybody else, I've managed to capture it.

Can we pause for a minute?

R: Okay, we running? So, we were talking about 'All the Things We Could Have Been', weren't we. So I created this show which, when I do it as a solo show, it's about an hour and ten minutes. People that have seen it, it might not be the most polished piece of art, and it's so long that I don't know it off by heart, but I don't pretend to. I bought myself a massive big black book and I use it, kind of Domesday thing, I read through it, but make it part of the performance. And it's amazing when it's there, how little you do look at it cause you just need to see little bits of it. You know, I don't profess to have a memory for performance, even as a songwriter, this is one of those strange things, I can remember phone numbers till they come out of my bum, lyrics, even the ones I write, some of them, the moment I put them on the page they're in my head, others not. Anyway.

And so the show ends up, so there's me as the only live person as it were, the video running, with music tracks in it where appropriate and the sign language interpreter, and then there are three guests, because, so going back to the setting of the pub that's next door to the gates and there's lots of references um, sort of quasi-religious references about people come in, whether they should come in and go back out through the in door, Led Zeppelin reference, that's in through the out door isn't it, this is out through the in door but, so when the landlord speaks as the narrator being the landlord, there are various other references about who I am and how I see my people, but then comes this whole thing about my people and being kind of the activist disabled population, but then, so there are three guest appearances, which act as again, rests and kind of not, distractions is probably the wrong word. Maybe. But because the main narrative is very, it raises a gazillion questions cause every one that's seen it wants to see it again because there's so much there that they don't, you know cause if you focus on that, almost every rhyming couplet's a question. And then people are like I missed that because I was trying, I was thinking about what you'd said *then*. Cause it covers this huge breadth of things, from euthanasia and aborting disabled fetuses through to, you know, careers offices and there's

a massive thing of what life is as a disabled person, which I suppose is the same as anybody else's but there's just, all the extra ramifications of it.

So anyway, you've got these distractions, there is , so one song is sung by a young woman who is, who generally has paraplegia but her title in the show is Miss Paralysis. And she does this heavy rock rap. And then it happens to be my son Josh.

A: Who genuinely has paraplegia.

R: Yes, I haven't just brought someone in and put them in a wheelchair. And then my son Josh, who is also a wheelchair user as it happens . He play the character, again this is a real sort of just a break almost, he plays the character of the Little Limerick Laureate. And I can't remember how many but he delivers six, seven or eight really completely un-PC, disability focused limericks. And the biggest, probably the longest separate section, which is about half way through is a story called 'The Red Hand from Ulster'. And it tells the story of the hand, the hand that went on to live for time immemorial, having been chopped off and thrown on the shore. You don't necessarily need to know the story of the red hand of Ulster, because the story is kind of self-contained. But yeah. It's a little baby story of absolute independence: even if you're only a hand, if you learn how to live, you can do on your own, you can live. Yeah and it's quite funny because it ends up as, it's, I suppose the only, it's probably the only bit of it that's now slightly anachronistic in the sense that, the story tells, this hand ends up living in the betting shop on a council estate in, somewhere in Northern Ireland. And all it does is watch football all day. But still wants to have some influence on the world. And it works out that actually through its own will power he can affect what people do on the football pitch, the hand of certain players. And then it goes, Maradona, didn't know what he was doing, Thierry Henry had no control over that. And then a line about Northern Ireland having beating southern Ireland or whatever it was, no the French beating Ireland, whichever it was, so if you don't know your football history that doesn't necessarily make sense. It's just that you'd lose a little bit of it.

But anyway. So then I produced it and then you know, and it is, I mean if I look at

it back you know I've made little revisions to it , you know, you would do ten years down the line. But fundamentally not, just tidied little bits up, I think I've taken out some swear words as I've grown into an adult. I think there's still some in there, but I think I've just, just tweaked little bits of it and we performed it and read it, so I'll come back to the next bit of it but essentially I still look at that and go fuck I wrote that, that was really good. If there's one the one thing, you know because it doesn't rely on my guitar playing, it doesn't rely on me being able to sing, it is the pure piece of work. And then, as I wrote it, and it's written in chapters so it's not just an 80,000 word poem, it's written in chapters and then you can, I've used , so I did it so you can use any given chapter as the beginning, for a workshop, what is this asking, so whether you're doing disabled people, or social workers or whoever, it's there and it's a real strong critique, a lot of people are like really? Particularly when they're not disabled people. And there is that? No way. Yes way. There's nothing in there that's made up, well the red hand from Ulster but you know what I'm saying, the real stuff, It's all real , it just might not be attached to the person that it happened to is the sense of it.

Yeah. I mean I don't.. So, you know there is a chapter called The Impact. And actually it's all about my realisation as a late teenager, probably, of what Michael Oliver called the Social Model. Which I was living long before I had the name, but in terms of being able to externalise it, literally, on stage I'd go and it hit me like a slap in the face. And then.. It's both a positive and a negative realisation, because it goes on to focus on the fact that okay, you can feel better that it's not you who says that, you go through that externalisation from self-blame to what's been done to me, but actually is that recognition any more comfort? Because do people not want me, do people not like you because of your disability? There is a real sting in the tail of that self-realisation. Sometimes you know, while it's not in the play, the whole idea of ignorance being bliss, maybe it is, maybe you're not always - I've been accused, I can remember, but if you tell people that, they're gonna be more unhappy as they realise that they're being discriminated against and it's like yeah but I'm still gonna tell them. You know. So there is that sort of double-edged sword to it.

I mean it, that was funded, so that had a series of performances. But you

know, once I've finished the ones that are funded by the grant, could I get anywhere else? I've done a few little performances, well people are like well, who's your booking agent, what (techno schools?) have you done, they just could not, mainstream arts venues well who are you, we're not gonna put it on, we don't know who you are. So it's kind of, it got shelved for a bit. So then and then I redid it for Birmingham Arts, Theatre and Arts Festival. I thought d'you know, I'll apply, I had to apply for this, it's one of those festivals where it comes under the name, but you've still got to pay to do it, but then you get your ticket sales minus whatever. And I thought d'you know what, this needs to come out again. So I got it out and did it, and some people who hadn't seen it came and like fucking hell that is so powerful. So I then, I thought what shall I do with it? So then I thought, I tell you what, so this moves on to then becoming the omnibus.

I then put a proposal to ACE which, this one they did approve, this was the last one they approved, I think, to use the original performance piece as the introduction to a series of creative writing, creative discovery workshops. So each, I think they were eight week, you know I got the money and booked out rehearsal space and the end of, end of course performance in the main auditorium. I did them both at Newhampton Arts Centre, in Wolverhampton. So the idea being, oh no sorry we did one at Newhampton Arts Centre, and then the second one at a place called the Blue Orange, which is an independent theatre in Birmingham. So the idea was that the very first thing apart from doing a bit of an ice-breaker's like sit down and watch me now. And then I would perform the piece in its original format. And then have the discussions about how did that make you feel, okay how does that make you feel about yourself blahblahblah. So that the end, the purpose was that then each of the people that were in the cohort devised themselves a character and then that got slotted into the main performance.

So from the original narrative or whatever you call it, script, I would then adjust the little bits to be able to fit in. So changed some of the continuity, so the whole play still started at one point and finished at the same point, cause the finish which are two songs, the play opens with the song 'What Could Have Been' and finishes with the song 'Don't Ever Give Up'. So then people would then

spend the time working on writing something, but I brought in a dramaturg as well, who helped with running, giving people some performance and drama skills as well, even in this little space. Guy called Patrice Naiambana, who's pretty well-known. He played Aslan for RSC and Hamlet and all sorts of things like that. The first course, he came on the first one as the dramaturg. I think for me this was, a lovely kind of result of it was that he, he did what I asked him to do but he was, he became so engaged, cause he's from Sierra, he's French Sierra, he's a mixture of Sierra Leone, but with a French background and some West Indies as well. So he, a lot of his stuff is very powerful, he's won all manner of awards for his own one-man shows and stuff.

So anyway, he was so engaged by the process that he came up to me and said can I have a part in this. I wanna write my own piece and put it in, and he came in as this kind of African overlord came on stage, with AK47, which he just happened to have in the annals of collections of things he uses as props. And an anti-Mugabe T-shirt and all kinds of things. To me that was like a testament if you like, because he was you know. So then the show ended up being, going from my an hour and six minutes, hour and ten minutes, whatever it is, through to being a show in two halves, which ended up being two hours and twenty minutes, because it expanded. And it gave all these people, I mean the problem about it was it was fucking great fun, all these people, one of them being Kuli Kohli, Bob Findlay was involved in this, Robert Punton was involved in this, you know, not just, nobody's a nobody, but there are people you know who were involved in it and Patrice, who as I say is a national touring actor, you know getting him, he was supposed to do the second one but then he got taken on tour and I had to live with it, it was just, you know. That's how it goes in that world isn't it? To then all be part of what was a performance.

And then the band, so the band that is now Angryfish became both creators in their own right and had their own spoken word pieces within the broader thing, but also then the songs became played live and then we had to use an interpreter. So that point, because it changed so much, we did bring in an interpreter to, who was like 'oh my god, I can't believe this' kind of, but she was lovely, she was really good. But she's an arts, proper arts interpreter, not just someone, you know, from the local list of interpreters. And that was amazing. And people like when can we do the next thing, when can we do the next thing.

But right back to the beginning with this, you can't do the same thing again. No matter how fucking well it works. From the Grants for the Arts thing, it just seems it's gotta be, it's gotta change, it's gotta move, it's gotta evolve.

But from my point of view, there's 10,000 disabled people who could benefit from taking part in this and learn about themselves who don't need, that is their involvement, that will be part of their involvement will be to be doing something like this that is not just a workshop and that feels good or like you come and sit there and watch somebody else do something, it was totally immersive. And I suppose that's yeah. I can't remember if I've ever sent you the script. Did I send it to you with the preambles to this, I could send you a version. Might be worth you going well actually I'll kick that out of this. Because as I say it is eight thousand, something like eight thousand words long. In terms of a straight simple performance it's an hour's worth of words.

That's still bubbling under there, my wife keeps saying well what can we do with that, can't we revisit it, can't we do that? There's just no, I dunno. I'm sure, because what's absolutely certain is it is a completely relevant now, if not more so, because we've seen this, you know this, such a turnaround in the public perspective. We all know that the paralympic/Olympic legacies are a fart in the wind. It has made a difference but legacy, no. You know that, living in London, what change has it made. The only, the real only disability arts organisation from that part of London got fucking pushed aside to create the Paralympic legacy, which is a bit of a joke really. Gosh another baby rant there.

So if you like, so 'All the Things We Could Have Been' as either the solo thing, could probably do with upgrading, particularly now filming is so much more easy with technology. And or its versions that could be, you know can't we do it again. Sometimes. The play in itself could be done again, but rehashing the one that they've done doesn't work, it is that, the organic growth of the eight week process that delivers the and you've built to it and you've all worked towards it and then you've done it and you've got that euphoria and it's really sometimes hard to kind of go back and oh shall we do that again? Well why. Yes, it's probably equally valid because for those people they've only ever done it once, but finding a way to make it a viable thing because at the end of the day, I did

think for a moment I'd won the lottery and then I woke up.

So that's a lot of 'All the Things We Could Have Been'. And all of this goes under the banner of the Why Festival. For me, even though it's probably been sitting on the back burner as they say for maybe eighteen months, it's now a standing, I call it a standing festival. So it's there, so whatever I do, if I'm doing anything public that is more than me being asked to go and do something, it comes under the Why Festival. Cause it's, it works, it's a product, the website's still up there, I haven't done anything to it forever because I haven't needed to. There is this thing called the Why Festival. I still get emails, enquiries and things. So really, now Angryfish and the Why Festival are kind of two, had their own lives within me I suppose. But then, you know because of all the changes and the lack of funding across the board, not just my lack of ability to gain Arts Council funding, I've had to take on other work because I now, as I think I said last time, I coach six days a week now. That has its own poetry.

But I bring me to it. I bring who I am to how I coach. And I approach how I've got, I'm bringing through para, I'm actively trying to find other para swimmers to bring in and to develop through within an inclusive setting. So I kind of, all of that stuff still kind of goes on, it's just at the moment, the financially supportive focus of it is in sport. But then sport and art aren't supposed to be divorced even though they seem to be a lot of the time.

So Black Thursday..

A: You're reading this upside-down.

R: Well a bit of it, yeah. So there were two early pieces that I wrote that became performed by others. Lots of little kind of vignettes or whatever they call them. But one of them that for me I remember, there was one called Mine Won't Stand up in My Hand, which was done with a group of people, the majority of whom were recovering from having had strokes, life-changing strokes. And it was a whole take on the Diet Coke advert about you know the kind of, sounds a bit bizarre but you know the women in the Diet Coke lusting after somebody and then this guy, used to be kind of virile builder guy. And this was all about real

people, but again taking their experiences and building it into a narrative, you know he loves Diet Coke but he can't get an erection any more. So it's kind of a pretty white-knuckle ride if it's, you're the wrong person and it's very much, it was written as a piece that was then delivered with the people, but as a question, to front workshops and question and answer sessions about understanding disability and relating to it, whether that's from other disabled people or health professionals or whatever.

And then I was, at the time Josh would have been about ten maybe, maybe slightly younger, and we were involved in Stagecoach, because he did a little bit of classes and stuff. And I was, the principal of the school knew that I had started writing again and writing stuff, I haven't really talked of anything other than sport pre the late 1990s but she said it would be really great to have a piece, an original piece, because we don't get original pieces. So I said okay, how do we do, we need to involve as many people as possible. So then I wrote this play which was entered into the then Birmingham and Solihull Theatre Guild Festival, that was the aim of where it was going. And so I wrote this play which was about a load of kids at a theatre school going to a summer camp and then the magnifying glass of being at a summer camp and the relationships that delivers made people realise that people have things that they don't see and then it focuses on a relationship between the guy who's a wheelchair user and the girl who seems to be the principal of everything but when they go on this camp suddenly becomes really withdrawn and has always got her headphones on other than when she's in the workshop, she's always got her headphones on, always on her own. And having it uses this kind of Romeo and Juliet on the balcony kind of moment of him talking to her and then opening up to each other and he's about his worries about how people see him as a wheelchair use, whether he's fanciable. So it's very teenage thing. And then her opening up to him that the reason she always learns her lines, and the reason she's always got her headphones on like this, is because she's dyslexic. So she gets all her scripts sent to her on tape, but has never told anybody this other than the school to get it all recorded. And then how they, and then actually then how this opening up of who they are to each other is the healing element of it, so actually taking the nuances of learning or the nuances of the relationships you have as a disabled person actually is positive ones.

And then other people going well I could learn my lines like that. But helping learn lines when you can't, you know.. But for me it was a really pivotal piece of writing that made me realise that I could write something that was a bit more substantial but still kept my core ethos of around disabled people helping each other to empower themselves, or empower each other within the scenario. And it was from that that I then went on to really get the idea for, you know being able to, that I had the belief in myself that I could write a one-man show, performing it that was another whole matter but anyway, you know. Having been on stage as a guitarist and a singer is one thing but actually, I don't hide behind my guitar but it's a barrier if you like. It's the protection as a performer. And when I sing, a lot of the time, so I think not so much now but there've been various points where I go on stage and I am being Angryfish as opposed to Robin Surgeoner with a guitar. So you're stepping into that character and putting on the armour that that character delivers to be able to go out there and often do things, bits of performance that are really quite questioning, undermining, abrasive as well as, it depends on who you are, because for me, if you're a disabled person and you understand where I'm coming from or begin to, you see it as an uplift, you see it as a fillip, you see it as solidarity and cohesion. If you're an able-bodied person you see it as crap he's really undermining everything I thought about me, disabled people, the world how we relate to them blahblahblah.

And so when I go out to do gigs and open mike, just a pub, get a gig, open mike or even with the band, there is a kind of very deep intake of breath before going into any given song, you know 'Fascist Fucking' for example, which we don't do very often, you know and it's not about having sex, it's about the fascists, it's about undermining them. I remember doing it once, we'd entered, this is the earlier cohort of Angryfish. And we'd entered this Battle of the Bands and one of the bands, and their very physical supporters were obviously a right-wing band. And we went on and you could hear from the crowd what are they doing on there, they should be in homes, put 'em in hospitals. Them not knowing that my brother-in-law, not the one that was drumming but another one and his mates, were all about six three, they had this big band of them, they're not rugby players but fucking big guys. So I changed our set and then finished with this

song, 'Fascist Fucking', which is an out and out punk song, completely, the meaning, you gotta, the chorus is something like 'you've gotta screw these fascist morons and their politics of perfection, you've gotta demonstrate how wrong they are through rioting imperfection, you've gotta take these dickheads by the throats and throttle their obsessions'. I was so cross and the band I don't care you said we've gotta do it, we'll do it. And then they got really, and the other band were on after us. And there was an absolute ruck, because when we'd got off and they knew we were safely offstage, our supporters this other band came on and were trying to give it some and they just went in and kicked the shit out of them. I don't condone violence but there was a certain retribution needed at that point, in a not hospitalisation sense but you can get away with a lot in a mosh pit that you really shouldn't, shall we say.

I started writing poetry as a teenager and I've got folders and folders of things that I've written. Two-liners, ten-liners, forty liners, you know. And a lot of it is really very, very angst, you know like 'god this was written by a depressed teenage' kind of. But you can only, when you're writing at that kind of level of who you are, it's gotta come out. But if it wasn't for the writing, I think, and I don't want to offend anybody who has had genuine mental health illnesses because it's very easy perhaps to say what I'm gonna say, but I believe that my creative indulgences, I mean and sometimes I'm talking very, very deep, very sometimes loathsome ones, where actually what stopped me from ending up, that kept me, I think equilibrium would be way off the truth but stopped me descending far enough to end up ill, or if I was ill I was, I self-medicated through, perhaps, oh yeah there was a lot of alcohol, that probably was both good and bad, but I could have a little bit to drink and then could unleash what I needed to through the pencil. So, yeah, so no I never got sectioned, I have seen psychiatrists, psychologists, but you know they usually, my experience was as long as you told them what they wanted to hear then they'd let you go. Although at one point one psychologist gave me a tape, it was in the original cassette, and it was literally about lying back, closing my eyes, starting with a blank canvas and then seeing a blue square and a red triangle. And you'd think it was utterly banal, but for me I've never forgotten, if I really need to I can go back to that utterly simple, so that psychologist did see something and gave me something that worked. So that's good. But yeah, I've probably had some

really dark times, you know and, I think what you find is that I've developed a good deal of bravado, but if you know me you know when it's bravado and when, if I'm not careful now I could cry quite easily, things that have gone on in your life, and what you end up with is that you just, you do, and I'm not even sure suppress would be the right word, you just, you've got those scales, or it's like I've got a dustbin next to me that I put things in. But sometimes you haven't had time to get a bigger dustbin. And then, then you put something else in the bin and the bin overflows. And then you go into, I don't know whether it's self-reverie or manic whatever, or just, I don't revert to alcohol any more because again I realised there is a point, having had a brain aneurism and this that and the next thing, having fallen over and banged my head drunk blah blah blah, that actually, I'm not teetotal, but I know that I, moderation, I sound like a very good Christian there, but in a sensible sense now that I, you know, I will have, at the end of the day I might sit down and have a Jack Daniels or a little beer, just to relax. I don't drink to find myself, because actually I now know that it just takes me to somewhere I don't want to be.

But you know, and I think some of the songs I've written, I hope I'm bringing this to make some kind of whole here. So all of those sets of emotions, you know with loss of things, losing family, I think that, you know my swimming career also helped keep me a little bit on the straight and narrow. I think if I hadn't had the swimming career, again I don't know where I would be now. But I had that, my sobriety was delivered by swimming eight times a week or whatever. But in the same way as, you know Tony Adams was a functioning alcoholic, again I was probably not quite that bad but it was, getting in the swimming pool in the morning at half past five sobers you up really quickly. Whether I should always have driven to the swimming pool in the morning's another matter but you know. I put all my own personal experiences, I'm probably very much like you and a lot of people who believe that they're writers, artists, whatever, you take a lot of cognizance of other people's stories. And then the luck, is it luck, the fortitude travelling the world, if that's the right word, travelling the world as a sportsperson and seeing a lot of other cultures and a lot of ways how people, disabled people see themselves, how they're treated. There are still countries who don't send people to the paralympics because they don't have disabled people. Hello!

All of those things go into my, when I get my pencil out to write something and I can write to order but I tend not to, I tend to wait till something's either festered or grown enough creative juice or whatever to come out. And then, so I put all of those things in, so I kind of, very much like 'All the Things We Could Have Been', a lot of the stuff I write, I write from a, I don't know, I write as Angryfish, there you go, I write as this conglomeration of experiences that then enable me to write. So there's a song on, so 'Barbed Wire and Potholes' was this hope, vision of hope, which didn't materialise. The songs are all still pretty valid. Then I wrote 'Black Thursday'. So 'Black Thursday' is the title track and it's all about election days. Any given bloody election pretty much, if it is was in America it'd be Black Monday for example. But there's a song in there which, we played it yesterday, we had a rehearsal, I played it yesterday and when I play it right it still makes the hairs on my arms stand up. It's a song I wrote and it's not a song about a real person as such, but the song's called 'The Last Time Ever I Saw Your Face'. So it's kind of, you know you've got 'First Time Ever I Saw Your Face' being, you know a love Song, 'The Last Time Ever I Saw Your Face', the premise of the song is that you should never go out of the front door or close the bedroom door or storm out of an office or whatever without resolving an argument. Because you never know what's gonna happen the other side of that door, the other side of that argument. And so the story's about loss and it finishes with the line 'and we never got a chance to say goodbye'. I remember I did it, one of the first times I did it, was at one of the early Why Festival performances and Krip Hop were there, you remember Krip Hop, you've seen them, the rap group, they came as part of that DaDa Festival. Sasha, who plays the psycho, his stage name is Psycho, just massive big German guy, had mental health, comes from a mental health background. But he's a real big German rock/rap kind of Grrr I was playing before them and I did that, he said you bastard, I said what? He said how am I supposed to go on stage. I've been crying. I listened to that song in the green room and I was in tears. And I said and it's not even a real, and I know it's not, it just gets hold of you because of how the words fit together, and it's written, the song it's dramatically, or melodramatically in a minor chords and whatever. I can't always play it. Like if I'm in the wrong mood I can't play it because, if I am feeling a bit vulnerable, I'll choke halfway through, it's that powerful, and it's not even, it is real because

ity's real in the sense of it is, yes it's not one person's story, it's kind of many people's stories.

If I was to send you lyrics of the song, because it is so powerful. And then, so 'Black Thursday is a concept album'. Again it goes through, it's very much like 'Bilge'. It's not a concept album in the sense that there is a real, there's lots of story in it that you're telling, it's just that it's a sort of, it's a story of realisations again, I suppose, but with some other bits thrown in, some funny, like the song 'Far Queue', which is all about the experience of festivals as a disabled person, I think we talked about that before. And then, you know 'Basement Billy'. So there's a song on Barbed Wire and Potholes which mentions somebody called Basement Billy. And then fifteen years later, Billy reappears and it tells his story in relation to how, there's a bit, without referencing the song, it references it by

A: (Got into?) the character

R: Yeah. Cause he ends up.. So in the earlier song he's already incarcerated, whereas in the modern version that we've heard, the actual song about Basement Billy, it's about how he becomes incarcerated as a result of mental health issues by being, you know, losing his benefits, losing, bedroom tax, this that and the next thing that build and build until he loses the plot and ends up on drugs. Cause the original song says Basement Billy hasn't got a view, he hasn't got a clue, or what ever. But, again, musically that's a quite in your face song, 'The Tale of Basement Billy'. But then the album finished with 'Black Thursday', which is, literally takes you, it starts with the line 'Come and put your cross in the box'. So it's all about elections. And if you've seen the album cover, Colin did the album cover for it, it's a picture of an election box with a stick going into it. That is, you know the black and white images of the (...) It might even be on here if I can find it and show you. And then, but again it's a really slow, grungy blues song, but then goes right through to gentrification, justification, the cleansing of the poor. It's all about modern kind of conservative politics 'they didn't tell me they were lying, I could have done more if I'd known'. As the voter, if you like. I'll find it in a minute if I can.

And then you know, although it's a long song so it never gets played, if anything

gets played on the radio, that doesn't because it's too long. Can't remember if it's got any swearing in it. But then that doesn't seem to matter these days on modern radio. Come on, Surgeoner, should know how to use your phone, you'd think I'd know.

So, and I'm. And I'm still writing a lot of poetry. I've taken, not a lot but I have another friend, who, guy called Joe Cook, who is an incredible drummer and a performance poet and has really bad dyslexia but writes the most incredible poetry, really astute political poetry. And he loves what I do and he's always getting me to, he's always inviting me to um... I don't want artists, I want album, why is it not coming up..Anyway he's always asked, he puts on, he has his own, I dunno, bi-monthly poets, spoken word evening which he calls Mouth Pieces. And I've been to a few. That awakened me to performance poetry, so I've written a few bits and pieces now where it's much more, the words still tell all the story but there is this performance element to it and I did, there's one called you what, mate, which tells the story of going down the street and you hear people saying all stupid things. I'm just reading the poem and all of a sudden I'll go 'You what, mate'. And other ones, there's another one which I love doing which works for reading, as long as you've got a good audience, I give out a slip which has got like two lines of response on it. And they have to give it at the right time, and things like that, which is really good, a much more engaging way of doing poetry. So I'm writing...here we go.

That's the picture anyway (plays song from phone)

R: Okay, so. Have we not covered anything?

A: Nothing. Do you remember in the last interview we were taking about rights and responsibilities. Do you want to tell me a bit more about that?

R: I mean almost, earlier I was saying that people had been, when I was doing workshops and delivering self-empowerment or self-realisation, or giving people the tools to do that. And people saying what if it makes less unhappy, more unhappy sorry. Because it changes their reflection on who they are. I think everybody needs to know what their rights are. We are supposedly born with

inalienable human rights. Unless you're born a disabled person or you acquire an impairment and then apparently that inalienable ability gets zapped away. But at the same time, if you embrace your rights, you have to do it in a way that, you have to be responsible for how you then fight for your rights or engage in your rights. And therefore you have to be responsible about your actions in pursuance of your rights. So I was, what I always liked about DAN historically was it was non-violent public demonstration. You know, chaining yourself to a bus isn't violent, holding a placard isn't violent. But for me, all of these things are on scales for people, but for me when they were going to go to such and such and throw red paint..nah. Because that's not responsible. For me, you know some people would call me a jesse if I say I'm not doing that. And in the same way as I'm not gonna put a bomb under the houses of parliament, because there is a point, if you start down that road where does that road end up? It ends up in civil war and terrorism. And that might sound really dramatic. But I think that you can't expect people to treat you, if you want your rights and you want to be treated in a way that befits those rights, you have to behave in a way that befits those rights. Does that make sense?

A: I think so.

R: And with that, there's a kind of reasonableness as well. Without mentioning any names, there was quite a bit of activism in Coventry for a while, it had its own disability rights organisation and stuff. There was a person who was incensed that Coventry, that the shopping centre had a hill in it, and it was built on a hill, and kind of undermined such good stuff by this continual rhetoric about, but how are people supposed to push up the hill. But Coventry was built on a hill, there's a hill there, you cannot take out the hill that is Coventry, that the cathedral's built on the top of, because some wheelchair users are gonna struggle to get up there. What you do is you create a route that enables them, you create a method. So geography, as a wheelchair user, geography and geographical features can be an absolute pain in the arse. But I don't expect them to fill the Thames because I can't walk, I can't row across it or wheel across it, you know, they build bridges. And there are, the realisation that there actually really is something called reasonableness. And that whilst reasonable adjustment usually means not doing anything, actually proper reasonable

adjustment does, and it is that meeting of everything, you know, you, there are always going to be barriers to some people's participation in some things. I'm never gonna be able to ice skate. Okay? But when I take my daughter ice skating I ask to go on the rink in my chair. And they're like, okay, if you want to. If they said no, it'd be like why. I'm not gonna injure anyone because I can't go fast enough, and as long as I'm looking out for people crashing into me, but I'm never gonna be able to ice skate, I'm never gonna be able to climb Mount Everest. I can't fly, but you don't hear people going let's sue the birds because we can't fly. D'you know what I mean., there will be acts of sacrifice and self-sacrifice that happen, that people will do because they feel so strongly, running out in front of the King's horse, for example, is memorable. Was it the thing that brought suffrage for women? Probably not. But it, in its own it didn't. There are, so things that happen, people that self-immolate as a protest. I mean they, maybe I just haven't got the balls to do something like that. But then again, we talked last time, I quite happily went through the streets of Coventry naked in my wheelchair as part of a protest, as make-do Lady Godivas. Some people would say that was pretty extreme. It was extreme without being destructive and somehow detracting because the focus becomes on the action rather than what the action was intended to signify. Is that okay?

A: Well you tell me.

R: Yeah. So these things are done. You know. I'm trying to remember her name now. The woman that streaked at Twickenham.

A: Oh right Erica..

R: That's it. Yeah. See, you remember it. I couldn't tell you why she did it. You remember the action and not what it was for. I mean Emmeline Pankhurst we do know why she did it.

A: It wasn't Emmeline Pankhurst at Twickenham. Emily something else.

Erica.... But, yeah, the, I was just trying to get it right. Just for me, there is that need for, that you have to still, to have rights you have to respect other

people's rights. And that's where the responsibility comes in. For me there is a big difference. Freedom to speak and freedom of speech and for me freedom, the freedom of speech doesn't mean being allowed to impinge on someone else's liberty. So the American version of freedom of speech, for me goes too far, because you can just say what the hell you like and call it freedom of speech, irrespective of the fact that it could be inciting hatred of whatever version it is.

A: A country full of lawyers had pushed that. Pornography has been legalised as freedom of speech.

R: Yeah but so long as everybody that's participating in it does it absolutely freedom of will and there's no drug laws involved and there's not this and there's no that and they're not doing it because they're on the breadline 'cause of austerity or they're broke students or whatever. You know if they're doing it purely for the joy of demonstrating sex with their bodies, fine. You know, I'm not a prude about, you know that as a topic, I'm not a prude about if people wish to show themselves off.

A: Sorry I've got off the topic of freedom of speech

R: But it's, the idea of coercion is, for me, going back when that DAN action took place and people threw red paint, people were coerced into that by being made to think that it was the right thing to do. And it will make a difference by other people who thought they could get away with it.

A: Was that the one at Downing Street?

R: There was Downing Street and there was a big one at a hotel in Manchester. The Leonard Cheshire Ball. I think they might be very careful about what you publicise about it, because I think they're probably still looking for the organisers. But it happened. It's that kind of, you've gotta be really careful, but what you don't do is, in the fight for your rights, you end up creating your own kind of mob mentality. And I would never want to do that. Solidarity is one thing, but mob mentality, doing something, it might not be the most pernicious version of

coercion, but there are still various people trying to persuade.. It's like every student rally, there was a big time in Birmingham where every disability rally there was a huge, like the Socialist Worker activists would appear. And I'm not saying they weren't supporting disability rights, but what they did was jump on the back of that for their own agenda and then, to the point where they got asked to stop coming to things, because any disability access agenda or whatever it was, rights agenda, was lost behind something, you know something that was political rather than apolitical. Rights are political, but not in a party-political sense. Anyway we've diversified far too much and I'm looking at the clock.

A: Okay. I think we've covered everything. Anything more?

R: I think, if I was to say what do I think of disability arts now, I would like to see us getting back to the opportunity for disabled people to celebrate with each other inclusively, but what I really feel, what's been lost was that momentum of who we are. You know when, it seems it's utterly okay in the able-bodied arts world to have cabaret, yet it's like oh no we've done that in disability art, you can't do that any more. Well why not? People loved it. You can't have mixed cohort events. You can't have comedians on with poets and bands and do disability art within it, cause you can't. There's not really, it's like well we've done that.

A: Yeah I think there's a big loss.

R: I would live to see that back. I never did play there, but Jackson's Lane, all the things that they used to do there, all the stuff that we did as the DAFs was fabulous, and that somehow got lost in the misunderstanding of inclusion.

A: I think cabaret was a brilliant.. It was Geof Armstrong who started that all off. Geof's always been good at presenting stuff. But cabaret provides something that, it had some sort of pizzazz to it, it was, it took things in a different direction than people were used to, sad shows for the cripples, the idea that you can glitz the place up a bit, you can put flowers on the table, tablecloths on the table. And you have drink. That was really basic.

R: You were allowed to drink.

A: But also, it was a very accessible format. Having everybody seated round tables, I've done shows supposedly for disabled people run by, in a theatre, with rows and rows and rows of fixed seats. I mean you know if you have tables and chair people can sit themselves how they want to be. And you don't know quite what impairment people are gonna have, what access needs people are gonna have, but you make it flexible and you can sort it. It provides a really good entry point. Sorry, I should turn this off now. Are we done3?

R: Yeah.

Ends.