

Session 1

Track 1

A : Tell me what you had for breakfast this morning.

C: I had some , some very fine granola mixed with some bran flakes. I like to mix and match my cereals.

Track ends

Track 2

C: Can we stop at any time?

A: Yeah.

A: Okay, start at the very beginning. What's your first memory?

C: I thought that was going to be the question! I saw it on the computer. Just ten minutes ago.

So my first memory was um er quite a.. Um my first memory was of being about the age of two and a half, maybe three and being held by my grandfather, by my mum's dad and it's more of a feeling than an actual kind of visceral memory, it has it evokes something of, of, of him, he died when I was five and that was particularly um powerful event. They were Roman Catholics and so when my grand-dad died um there was, you know it was very, very much in that grand sort of Catholic kind of tradition of, you know that the, his body being laid out in the coffin for everyone to kind of mourn over before for several days before going to church and all that kind of um ceremony that the Catholic church traditionally attached to funerary rites. And my memory is very much of being excluded, of being considered too young to, to go and pay last respects to him in the coffin. And um, er and I had a very strong sense of injustice that I was being denied something that was my right. And that I had this very kind of strong visceral feeling, sense of who he was and a kind of connection to him and um and I felt this connection was being kind of.. disrespected I suppose actually. And er and um I guess, I guess it was the first really big event in my life, that kind of made an impression that's, that's never gone away and I have a very strong kind of visual memory of, of my grand-dad and he was, he was quite a character, I mean he was quite a man, really. He lived through, through the first and the second world war, he served in both wars and um, he um, he was all the major conflicts in the first world war, Ypres and Vichy Ridge, one of the other major, Arras, was it? Can't remember now. And he, he lived through them, he um, he's kind of cited in the war records for the first world war, um he and his brother, his brother is cited for the, 'for having skills in manufacturing mystery ships', which were, as far as I understand, the um, the constructions, they were big concrete hexagonal blocks that the government put something like a million quid into this in sort about 1917 and they were um they built several of them, they were stationed at Shoreham um and the idea was that they were going to float them across the Channel and position them to prevent submarines from Germany. And the technology, the was ended before.. *(Phone rings)*

A: Mystery ships.

C: Mystery ships, yeah, they were, they were these huge hexagonal blocks that were built and the idea was that they had to be able to float them across the Atlantic and then, to plant them and they were, and they had to be big enough to create a barrier. One of them is in the Solent

and is used as a helipad. And I think the rest that were built were broken up but they didn't, the war ended before they got to be able to use them, but the technology, the engineering that went into them was then used for the D-Day landings. You know the idea of creating an artificial harbour that happened for D-Day when they had to land all the troops without an actual harbour. And um. Yeah, so my grand-uncle was engaged.

A: Is this a noise from outside?

C: I'm not sure if it's the microphone..

A: Keep going..

C: So my grand-uncle was engaged in um the construction of these, these things, these are, there's some history about it in a little museum in Shoreham.

A: Yeah. We've been there.

C: Aha. Yeah.

A: Coming back from the first world war. Tell me about your family.

C: So um So my dad was considered quite a catch for my mum, he, you know my mum's family were, were a large Irish Catholic family, you know of Irish um extraction, couple of generations, um with, my mum was one of seven sisters and three brothers, so she had um, she had nine siblings, and they all grew up in a, a three-bedroom flat in, in Fulham, near Fulham Broadway that, it was, Fulham Court they lived in subsequently, I mean they were all kind of quite young when the second world war started so um they spent quite a lot of, my mum and her brothers and sisters were kind of evacuated um out of London which was pretty tough experience, I think, the stories of being treated pretty badly were quite horrendous really. But they, it sort of certainly made them bond as a group of brothers and sisters they learnt how to fight for each other and to stick up for each other and that was, that's something that kind of followed them through really.

They love a sing-song, still do, the few members of the family that are left. So I do have very strong childhood memories of, you know being surrounded by adults launching into song, which was quite nice, although not at the time particularly.

So my mum met my dad, I think he, she would have been um would have been the late forties, few years after the war, she was working as a secretary although I'm not sure what the firm was, he was in the process of um, you know, the kind of, apprenticing, as an apprentice to be a bookmaker, a bookkeeper, a bookkeeper! He had aspirations to becoming an accountant. So um, my mum's kind of family considered him to be quite a catch and he, he came from working class family in, he grew up in Dulwich and his mum, my nan was put into service at the age of about

twelve, I think, twelve or thirteen, so she had been a, she had been a parlour maid, a kitchen maid rather. And er my grandfather was a messenger boy and um they were very, I suppose very Victorian is the best way to describe my grandparents really, there was something very Victorian about the house and the way that they lived and who they were and my grandmother was quite a formidable character, you know she'd, was, everything had to be very proper, prim and proper and right. My grandfather was um a very warm individual, um, and was very, kind of very generous spirit but, um, she kind of ruled the roost really, she did what he said, she was in charge in every respect. And .. I'm not sure where that squeak's coming from

A: No. Me neither. It's not the end of the world anyway.

C: No. Is it something I'm doing, do you think?

A: I've no idea.

C: As long as it's not going to..

A: If we were recording for a film, or we wanted to use the sound then it would matter, but for transcription..

C: It's not the end of the world . Right.

C: Yeah. So um so both my mum and dad, their childhoods and their families were very much Central London. And at that time in the sort of early fifties there was a, the aspiration was to move out to the suburbs of London. And they, so my brother was born in 1955, and my mum and dad were still living in my dad's house when my brother was born. I presume, I think they got married in about 1953 and um so, so they moved to um, they moved to Fairlings Avenue, which was where I grew up, where we grew up, would have been about 1956 they moved there, my brother would have still been a baby. And it was very much on the cusp, it was one of these new estates that was built in the thirties on the edge of, between Morden and Sutton, and it was very much kind of on the edge between a kind of working class area and a middle class area and so that, going to school on the St Helier estate kind of it sort of imbibed that sort of sense of working class identity really. My brother escaped, he went to the grammar school so that sense of identity was always quite disparate between us, I kind of held on to the working class thing, that was kind of ingrained in me really, whereas, he learnt to speak proper, he learnt to not drop his aitches and say his F's properly. Yeah, it's one of my kind of abiding memories through childhood, I, being told it's, just trying to think of a word that would describe it, um, it um, it's faith, Colin , not fayf. Saying your F's properly was something I never quite got right as a child.

So er, so I was, I was born in 1958 um and my younger sister Jenny was three years later. I've a very strong abiding memory of her being born, because she was born at home, and um I was very excited and and I, I remember being invited in to the bedroom to see my new sister and I

don't know what I said but um it was obviously something very kind of sweet and childlike because they all burst into fits of laughter. And that's what I remember, why are all these adults laughing? Are they laughing at me? So I um, I was a very dreamy child, um, I had, I have very strong memories of um in the back garden laying down looking at the sky and the kind of cloudscape coming alive and kind of turning into spirits and levitating into the sky from lots of, kind of, young child, all my young child memories are of kind of quite strange sort of spiritual events. I um, I always saw things you know especially at night time I had lots of night visions of burglars coming up the stairs kind of with a big bag of swag and with archetypal burglar outfit and a lion coming up the stairs and coming into the bedroom, these were all kind of waking visions I suppose. And I, I kind of felt I guess in some ways more connected on that kind of level than I did to reality. It was always, it was very, reality was always quite difficult, quite harsh and was embedded in the Jehovah's Witness faith that was an incredibly powerfully oppressive..

A: From what age?

C: This was the thing as well you see because.

A: That was a factual question from my point of view, it's not trying to elicit..

C: From when I was born. The Jehovah's Witnesses came to the door shortly before I was born, my mum was very heavily pregnant with me. And um I guess she was very frightened and very vulnerable. And, well she was, she was very frightened and vulnerable, she'd lost the, she'd lost the connection that she had with her siblings and she was in a, in an environment that she never really quite kind of was at home in community-wise. She didn't fit, you know, she came from this very, very close-knit working class family with twelve of them in you know, tiny flat to an environment with much more space but less, less connection at all levels really. And um I think like a lot of people who hit a particularly vulnerable period in their life they turn to religion. And um the Jehovah's Witnesses were, you know, offering an answer. The fact that it was all a bunch of lies is neither here nor there. It was an answer and it was something that she unfortunately invested in very heavily and um and the kind of story that she told herself I was very much embedded in that story so um the story that I heard later was that as a spirit, before I was born, I told her this is the truth, that the Jehovah's Witnesses had the truth.

Which was a particularly pernicious way of trying to justify your outlook on life really, but then my mother was kind of, um it was, she was clutching at straws and so I got kind of caught into this narrative, um and it was, it was particularly oppressive because the Jehovah's Witnesses were preaching that the world was going to come to an end in 1975. This was their big message and the Watchtower Society had all of their um, the Brethren had the connection with God and God had told them this and had told them how to interpret the Bible in such a way as to um see this truth and um. They used all kinds of manipulation, they used, they had this thing called the Truth Book, which was a book of stories about Jehovah's Witnesses,

contemporary stories about Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide who'd been imprisoned and had, you know undergone starvation and undergone all kinds of ordeals in the name of their faith and this was used as a ploy to kind of convince you that you had to, you had to not, to just believe but to go beyond the beyond in order to believe. It was on the scale of The Handmaid's Tale. It was, you know, kind of Jeanette Winterson, Jeanette Winterson come true. Is Jeanette Winterson Handmaid's Tale?

A: No it was Margaret Atwood.

C: Margaret Atwood, Margaret Atwood, yeah. I mean the, you know, the men were the, only the men could have a connection with God. And the women had to fall in line and obey. And this was the only way of getting to heaven. So um it um, not unsurprisingly, sent my mother mad. She, because my father refused to have anything to do with the religion, so we were all damned anyway, because only families with the, the male at the head of the household leading the family would enter into the.. *(Equipment whistling)* Shall I carry on?

A: Talking about the Jehovahs

C: The Jehovah's Witnesses, yeah. They um, *(Worse equipment noises)*

Track ends

Track 3

C: So, the Jehovah's Witnesses. Oh yes, I was just talking about how this kind of conflict around the, the fact that my father refused to be convinced of the, of their lies, was something which sent my mother mad and it kind of happened slowly over quite a long period of time and.. So what happened was that she started to get her own messages from God and she started to reinterpret certain aspects of the religion and they were a kind of understanding and tolerant of this up to the point where, when we used to do what was called going on the doors, which was kind of going door to door selling the Watchtower and the Awake! magazines. And she started to tell people that she was God, and that she specifically had come to save them. Which was fairly alarming as you might imagine for a seven, eight year old child, to hear their parent coming out with this sort of gobbledegook. But even worse was the reactions of the.. Actually I don't really remember very much of the reactions of the kind of householders, but certainly the Brethren..

A: 'Good morning, I'm God. Would you like to buy a magazine?'

C: Yes exactly. You can use that quote if you like. 'Good morning, I'm God. Would you like to buy a magazine?' It would be funny if it wasn't so fucking awful. So they, they decided that she and in fact the whole family, us, we as a family had been sent by Satan to disturb the flock. This was the official um kind of statement. I kind of learnt to pride myself on the fact that I have a hotline to Satan. Others are very proud of their hotline to God, but me, I've got, I've got Satan at my back. I'm very happy about that!

A: Right, carry on.

C: Yeah. So we were thrown out of the faith. I think I would have, how old was I then?, would have been about eight, eight or nine. And this was kind of, this was very difficult for me at the time personally, because as I said before there was this, a strong connection to the belief system that my mother had kind of inculcated in me in particular. And so I've, I had, I was very anxious to hold on to this connection and I continued as a child, as quite a small child really to go to the Sunday services, it was about a twenty minute walk down the road to the church and I used to go and um.. I used to take my sister as well. My mother encouraged this, knowing that she wasn't welcome there. It had been made quite plain that she wasn't welcome there. And so, yeah I was ten, I was a little bit older, I was ten and um I, the last time that I went to the church, I'd taken my sister and the brother had given a talk about devils in lambs' clothing that had come into the church, into the presence of the church, and it was a direct reference to me and my sister, preached in a very kind of abstract, but was a direct message and I remember crying and leaving the church, surrounded by the holy saved who, get thee back Satan, and we left. And so after that point Satan never darkened their doors again, apparently.

A: And you were ten?

C: I was ten.

A: How old was your sister?

C: She would have been six.

A: Was she upset by it? Or did she not understand?

C: She didn't understand.

A: But she'd have seen that *you* were upset.

C: Yeah.

A: That's wicked, isn't it?

C: Wicked. Absolutely. Wicked. It was nineteen sixty-seven, was.. No I was nine. I was nine, I was nine in 1967. It was a very big year. The big event of 1967 was that the Beatles' Sergeant Peppers album came out. And, and the day that it was released my brother's best friend had bought a copy and brought it round. And we had like an old-style gramophone and played it on the gramophone. And I was completely transported. I was totally transfixed. It was, I'd never heard anything like it and, I'd never heard music that I was so completely captivated by. And 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds', specifically, the Jehovah's Witnesses preached that this was the sign, that song in particular was the sign that the devils' influence on the world was increasing and that the end of days had come. And that song in particular was regarded by the Jehovah's Witnesses as the absolute epitome of evil.

A: Why?

C: The, the main thing was the drugs, the kind of, the association that it had with LSD. Because of the acronym. And the um kind of it was a combination of that and the kind of hypnotic cadence of the chord structures - and I guess the lyrics as well, the fact that they had some imagination, which obviously imagination is the first prerequisite of any devil, and the kingdom of Satan is ruled by the imagination, you're not supposed to have imagination in a world that is very straight and everything is explained, there's nothing to worry about because life and death have their place and there is no thought required. So um, you can imagine I was a very confused ten year old.

Oh God, yeah, there were various terrible things that happened as a result of.. I was very vulnerable and I was , that vulnerability was picked up by other kind of bullying children and er it was very um, very much abused actually, I was sexually abused at the age of ten by an older boy who had, who I'd um sort of um, I think I was ten, he was probably thirteen, fourteen, he'd sort of er I, I, I'd he'd, we'd had an attachment to him I was enthralled by the fact that an older boy was interested in me er and um and that led to, yes, maybe this would maybe the incident

with kind of being thrown out, must have been a bit later actually, it's difficult to get the years into, maybe I was nine and he was thirteen, um but anyway what happened was that um, I mean it was, I'd say it was sexual abuse, it was kind of fairly innocent really in the scheme of things but I and he, I'd invited him on a few occasions around the house when no-one else was in and he'd played around dressing up in my mother's clothes, which I found a bit strange. And he had, there had been some kind of, you know, fondling going on and so I told my mother that this had been happening and I got kind of put up in front of the Jehovah's Witnesses and.. I remember this lecture, the three brethren lecturing us on what a sin it was to you know touch your private parts and it's laid down in the Bible what a sin it is and especially for um two members of the same sex to touch each other's genitals was an especially sinful act. And er and so they, the message that came across to me was that it was a sin for me to touch my willy. So I had months of painful experience after that trying to wee without touching myself at all, constantly flooding the toilet and trying to work out the way that you were supposed to have a wee without actually physically touching your penis. These were the sorts of concerns that my childhood was, was, were embedded in me throughout my childhood, so it wasn't surprising that I went mad. The kind of, the chronology of these events is, is kind of a bit confused um but it was that, that period from sort of from about seven to ten that um and then um then it came to the eleven plus and um and I should have gone up into the grammar school and the teacher knew that I had the nous, the intelligence to, but I was an incredibly frightened and nervous child and er any kind of notion of being put to a test was immediately just clammed up, I didn't know anything, I couldn't speak. So I didn't get through the eleven plus and went to the um it was what was it, it wasn't a secondary modern, it wasn't a comprehensive, er what was it called it was a, well it was, it was a form of secondary modern school, it was a very rough and ready school, you were really being trained to either go into a trade, go into um the army or if you were um deemed to be intelligent to go into the civil service, they, you know they were the three options really attached to the school that I went to and um the, the summer before going to the high school, Glastonbury it was called, um, from Glastonbury Road on the St Helier estate. and that was a um, um..

That summer before um my, my dad had joked with me that I wasn't going to be allowed to wear long trousers, that he was gonna, I was gonna be kept in short trousers. And, I don't think he realised how traumatic that was for me. With the tales of um new children being initiated into the school by being stretched and all that kind of being tortured, all this sort of thing, was kind of very prevalent and yeah, so I was pretty terrified and um as it turned out it wasn't, got through the summer under this cloud of, of what the fuck's gonna happen, life is going to come to an end, and obviously that wasn't the case, it was all some, another weird adult joke. And um so, so school was kind of actually alright and I was in the top stream for every subject and we had a very brilliant English teacher called Mr Murphy who, who really encouraged the devil in me, imagination and er he used to set us some very creative essay titles and I really got into writing short stories, it was very, it was a real outlet and he was a fantastic teacher, he was one of the first to really encourage me and to really kind of not only to see some potential in me but to impart that, to give me something to be proud of in myself and some faith in myself, some self-confidence of which I had absolutely none and..

I might tell a story actually, going back a little bit which was um, um so there was a period for a time after, as my Mum became increasingly disturbed, so her appearance changed quite drastically and, so I have very strong memory of kind of being laughed at by contemporary kids who were taunting her as being a witch. This would have been like in the local park and being very upset by this and, and I remember being asked by the teacher, Mrs Bickerdyke, her name was), one of those grand English names.

A: There are some names that only a certain sort of teacher seem to have.

C: And Mrs Bickerdyke set us this task of um doing a portrait of someone important to us, a family member or, it didn't have to be family but to do a portrait and I started doing this portrait of my mum and trying to get the likeness and of course, as happens with watercolours you know, the more you add watercolours the muddier the painting becomes. And so the uglier and uglier this portrait became. And um, and I got very frightened because I'd been having recurring nightmares of my mother melting, of her being made of plastic and melting and these nightmares were accompanied by a very strong sense of smell. And I'd wake up with this smell of molten plastic um, so I kind of saw this happening in this painting and I got very frightened and so when Mrs Bickerdyke kind of asked me who it was, I couldn't admit that it was my mother and um so I told her it was her. To which, she laughed in such a way as to completely dissipate my fear and sense that I had of meaning that I'd projected into this painting. And yeah, she was another kind of teacher who was a real lifesaver in that respect, very kind of warm kind person.

And yeah um and yeah I mean my childhood was, was just full of nightmares really. And then it got worse! So um the um the next kind of really, the next really significant thing that happened when I looking, with hindsight it was, it was really when I became a disabled person was on my thirteenth birthday and I um, I had, I suffered a brain injury that was, that was very significant, I'd, I'd gone out on my bike and had, cycled out into the country to Box Hill and had come down the escarpment on the other side of Box Hill, the plan having been to meet up at the, there's like a restaurant below the bottom and the plan had been that we were going to meet and have a meal in this pub. And I, I came off the bike, I'd slammed the front brake on and had flown through the air and landed on my head and was probably doing about twenty miles an hour or something like that at the time and um I didn't wake up for two or three days and the whole of my head had swollen so I couldn't see. And after that I went from being the top of the class in every subject to really struggling to be able to remember anything, the key thing was that my memory became very severely impaired after that and that I suffered mood swings that were put down to adolescence, but were actually to do with brain trauma. And it wasn't, it wasn't diagnosed.

A: So what form were those mood swings?

C: Well, I made several suicide attempts as a child, stealing paracetamol and taking huge volumes of paracetamol, making myself sick. At the age of fourteen..

A: I'm glad you didn't succeed. Paracetamol's an awful way to commit suicide. When you succeed it's a really nasty, slow death. I'm also glad you didn't succeed because you're still alive, obviously!

C: This interview wouldn't be taking place now. Um it is a miracle I'm alive, actually. I mean, you know, Satan has been looking after me! He was damn sure that I was gonna stay alive. He wasn't gonna have me dead, there were lots and lots of situations which I really should have died. But I didn't and I'm, and ah flippin' 'eck people are stupid aren't they? You know, I'd get, I got called up to the headmaster, Mr Oram, who gave me this lecture on um er why it was the best time of my life and um I should be enjoying myself and to put all this nonsense aside, that was his answer. The most kind of, one of the most patronised (*patronising?*) speeches I've ever experienced. Bless him. They're just idiots really. I er I got given a letter to give to my parents to explain that, explaining that I needed to see a psychiatrist and um and I know what was in the letter, I just tore it up and threw it away. Because, yeah, I hadn't told the story of, yeah, my mum, I was eleven when my mum was first sectioned and um this was after she had, she had had a bit of a spat with the next door neighbour who was um who, she became very paranoid about the next door neighbours over a kind of lengthy period but it all came to a head and er, and they called the police because she'd been shouting at them and so a psychiatrist came round and he took me alone into my bedroom and gave me a lecture on how he was going to make my mother well and so he wanted me to tell him everything that my mother had been saying and to whom. And he proceeded to take her away, give her so much ECT that when we went to visit her she couldn't remember who her children were, didn't know that she had any children, she hardly knew who my father was, he just completely eviscerated her brain to be curing her.

And um this had the effect on me of um I remember it was, it was really like falling into a pit, to the centre of the earth, it was a kind of, a very visceral feeling of um complete and utter devastation that I was directly responsible for. Because I'd erm told him all this stuff about her. And um um so I, I took, I took on the blame for her um being tortured by this fucking psychiatrist. Um. So yeah, so the depression was pretty understandable from all kinds of different angles. And then of course I began seeing things and hearing things and becoming quite disturbed myself a a child and um it was really only my um, the bond, the closeness between me and my sister that, that um, that saved me really, that, you know we ah had each other. At a very kind of, at a very fundamental level we kind of helped each other to survive this particularly fucking awful childhood. Um. And, I mean me and my brother and sister, we're all pretty mad in our own ways but, but we're still very close, we, we looked after each other to an extent. Um and um it wouldn't have been possible to survive the..that childhood without the three of us having at some fundamental level being able to give each other something quite precious really and um.. And then I made a friendship that changed everything when I was, was a bit older, I got to um fifteen, fifteen or sixteen and um I'd really been hanging on by the skin of my teeth, I mean the school was a strange place because on one level I was, I was very much the outcast and was, was the um, um seen as a mental case really um

but on the other hand the, you know, and there was, there was quite a lot, there was a lot, quite a lot of bullying. But on the other hand there was also quite a lot of acceptance um and the, you know um so, you know I was um, um I was the loony of the class, I was, I had various nicknames that kind of stuck from different times, I was Cosmic Colin, um you know I would just come out with stuff that was just completely weird and wasn't the kind of, sort of thing that fourteen year olds were, should come out with, that just kind of, you know allegiances to God and, kind of spiritual nonsense um and em. And also I used to draw a lot and so that was seen as further proof of me being a mental case because what I drew wasn't representational, because it was from the imagination and it was um, a kind of, an expression of, of, of what I was feeling and again that was, that was another key thing that helped me to survive. I, I did a painting when I was fifteen of, from, it was from a self-portrait from when I was eleven and it was um, it was one of those photographs that had happened by accident, I had, actually this is very typical of me as a child, I'd got the camera in my hand and fiddling around with it and trying to work out what to do with it and of course you know, I've got the lens facing at me er and um by complete accident take a photograph um that wasn't meant to happen. And then subsequently, years down, I used that photograph as the subject for a painting and it was at a time when I was really tryng to work out who the fuck I was that I had such little memory and er trying to piece it all together and you know, I was hallucinating like billy-oh and er..

So I made this painting, about A3 size, um, with myself in the centre and I painted myself blue, blue skin, it was um like Krishna and there was kind of representation of family and home life in one corner and a representation of a kind of connection with nature in another bit of the painting and then there was um a kind of derivatives of the kind of Beatles Yellow Submarine fantasy figures that I identified with. And then there was also this kind of deeply disturbed um part of me that was represented in, in the painting as well with a kind of, you know, kind of hands praying in a position of there's got to be a way through but where does that come from.

And um, a similar time I did um another self-portrait which was more abstract which was of myself represented as these, the luminous selves that were hanging by a chain in a liminal space. And this was the kind of, a representation of feeling invisible to the world, being invisible to the world, I was convinced that I was invisible. And um Those two paintings in particular gave me a thread to hang on to life because, I woke up to the fact that I could use art in a way that um allowed me control of the narrative and that um everything that was going on that I couldn't trust my head but there was something deeper that I could put on to paper that gave me something that I could trust because it was concrete and it was outside of me and it was a reflection of who I was. And um, and I worked that out and I think that's pretty fucking incredible that a fifteen year old could kind of intuit , completely surrounded by fucking stupid adults, I mean they were all bloody idiots, for Christ's sake, not an ounce of human dignity or common sense or anything in any of them, it's a bloody awful world. But I found something really really precious that I could, that gave me kind of a sense that life could be magical and that it could be fulfilling and it could have meaning and all those things and um it didn't um it , you know it didn't stop things being difficult but it , it gave me some ground under my feet, where there was none before.

Um. I wouldn't mind another..

(Track ends.)

Track 4

C: So painting and drawing became very important to me. At that time in my life it was er um it was helped by the fact that also I had a very um I had a, I had a we had, I had a, an art teacher called Mr Poole, who was very supportive of work that wasn't completely representational. He'd set us still lives and all the things that you were supposed to do, but he would also, he encouraged me, taking the art a step further in using it as a way of um expressing something deeper and using metaphor and um, so he was very influential and um supportive of my.. I was largely kind of, the attitude was that I, this kind of goes back to that nickname Cosmic Colin, there was a very big assumption within the school that, that I'd been experimenting with drugs at the age of fourteen, fifteen and that all this work was very much influenced by me doing something naughty. So that was kind, so there was this sort of, there was this sort of mystique around me I guess.

A: Yeah. Gave you kind of status did it?

C: I guess so, I guess that there was some status from that which um at the time it annoyed the fuck out of me because I kind of felt it was dismissive that, that I was kind of doing something important, that obviously I'd imbued a lot of meaning in um developing different styles of making artwork. Um and the assumption that it was all done under the influence of drugs I found sort of to be very dismissive of having been developing this visual language, very much under my own steam, um, the influences were I suppose quite obvious as well, there were influences from the artwork of the surrealists, Salvador Dali and um the Beatles' artwork and um. Yes, yes, that's right, I was starting to talk about the friendship that formed with Kevin at school, he, that sort of completely, that completely turned things around because I was um very much the outcast castigated and to some extent bullied but also kind of revered in some strange way er and he was probably the most popular boy in the school year, he, he had a knack of being able to get on with all the thugs in our year as well as you know the more intelligent boys. And um, and so for him to befriend me was hugely important and um and we bonded around music, around our love of the Beatles' music, that was the thing and er..

And very, very quickly, as our kind of friendship developed, he became Paul McCartney and I became John Lennon. And we took to speaking in fake Liverpool accents all the time. Much to the annoyance of many, I would imagine. It was kind of like oh God, those idiots they're at it again. And it sort of, I guess it introduced a kind of, a lightness into life that hadn't been there, that it had been incredibly heavy and difficult and um, and we started making lots of noise together. And um so we'd choose times when our respective parents and siblings were out of the house and we'd take the house over and anything and everything became a musical instrument. And my Dad had this reel to reel tape recorder which the machine had become misaligned and so, when you, when you played back, it reversed the sounds. And you could speed it up and slow it down and create all these weird and wonderful noises. And so we used to incorporate all of this kind of gizmo into a very um kind of ad hoc kind of amateur way, you know we sort of knew a few chords and we'd endlessly write songs er and started to make all

these albums.

We um we'd sort of particularly like choose times when our families went away on holiday for a couple of weeks, we'd choose not to go away on holiday with our families and just to spend that time recording quite intensively. So we, we used to use cassette tape, that was what we recorded on, but um we made loads and loads of these really dreadful albums. And my stuff was all very deep and meaningless and um kind of deeply philosophical and um and er Kevin's stuff was very much rooted in the real world. He made an album, we made an album of his songs that were all about maths. With titles like the Boolean Boogie. And um yeah they were pretty happy days, it was the first time in my life that I kind of felt genuinely happy and um and the the um, I think the teachers were kind of relieved as well. We had a, I remember we had a, we had a school party, we'd, we'd have been about um, would have been about sixteen, I think it was probably the end of doing the O levels, that kind of time. And we were allowed to have a party at school. And um of course brought alcohol into the party illegally um but of course it wasn't, it wasn't a big thing then, I mean the, we, there were one or two of the teachers there that befriended us in the sixth form who used to go down the pub, who used to take us down the pub, take groups of us down the pub it was not regarded in the same way that it would be now, to bring alcohol into, you know, under-age drinking in school.

And I um famously filled all the school trophies with beer. Which was discovered and I got reprimanded by the head teacher. But I think they were so relieved that I was still alive that it was kind of glossed over. It wasn't a big thing at all. And um so we yeah we used to um I can't remember how it came about now, well it was my dad's influence actually, yeah, my dad had always been a very keen cyclist. And um, I'd, god knows how but I, I got over the fear of the bike and um my dad had always kind of given, had these stories about kind of epic cycle rides that he'd done as a youth. And um I thought this sounded like a really interesting thing to do and so um it was the, it was the summer of 1975, yeah, so that was the year when the world was supposed to come to an end. And I went on an epic cycle ride from London to Scotland, staying at youth hostels, which in those days were kind of very sort of hippyish places, they were very you know, especially the smaller ones, there would always be someone with long hair and a guitar and lots of singing and um and so my friend Richard and I managed to get from London to Edinburgh in eight days. And um then I, he had had enough at that point and got the train back. And I spent a further five or six weeks during the summer holiday um just kind of slowly making my way back south again and um, it opened me up to life in a way that I hadn't, I hadn't experienced before, kind of having interesting conversations with str., complete strangers and kind of um finding people that I could talk to about how weird life was without being just completely kind of dismissed and kind of looked down on for it.

And um it was a very, very, yeah, it was a brilliant experience and very influential in the group of us who went on to, stayed to do A levels at school. Um because it became, it became the thing to do. So lots of the peers started kind of dreaming up different kind of cycle trips and going off to different places and so we, we cycled the whole of the south coast and we cycled to um cycled across Somerset to South Wales and then up the Wye valley um I have yeah, I have

very strong memory on my eighteenth birthday of um group of us camping in a field somewhere and um getting completely and utterly rat-arsed on Somerset cider, had no idea it was as strong as it was, because it came, it came out of a barrel and was, it just tasted like apple juice.

A: A mistake many have made!

C: And yes, yeah I've done all sorts of unmentionable things in people's shoes. Woke up the next morning, we discovered. So um yeah, they were um, they were good times, they were kind of um some of the better formative times and um so I was um so I went on to art college from after kind of doing very, very badly at A levels. I hadn't done very well at O levels either. Um and um art college I found..

A: Was that Dartington?

C: This was Epsom. I did a foundation course at Epsom art college in 1976, 76 to 77, it was the year that punk exploded. And um, and I was completely in the thrall of punk I was kind of immediately captivated by it and um I can't remember what the programme was but seeing the Sex Pistols on telly was kind of a seminal moment for me. And I remember Kevin wasn't impressed at all. He was appalled by it at first but I managed to, I managed to turn him around and, and then, and then we went to see Marc Bolan, who was one of his kind of all-time favourites musically and he was, Marc Bolan was supported by The Damned. And that was it, after that, after that moment, this was at the Roundhouse in Finsbury Park and we were just completely captivated after that, that was just, the kind of hypnotic wall of noise was just completely and utterly captivating and, and the sense of energy and the sense of fun as well, The Damned in particular had, were known for having a lot of fun on stage. And being very silly. Which was kind of not the image that punk had overall. But they, they, they, you know, cause Captain Sensible used to come on dressed in a nurses' outfit and things like this, it was an opportunity to dress up and be a kid for them.

And um and so we, so we started going to quite a lot of punk gigs in, er, in Croydon. And in London. And er and our kind of attempts to, at making music very soon turned into punk. And we formed a band. We were called Scrambled Acne. It, it kind of, the friendship really worked because.. You know I had this kind of deep depressive side to me that Kevin was able to kind of balance really. And to bring me out of myself and um it, we kind of balanced each other really in that respect I think. So yeah, so I ended up doing a foundation course, which wasn't a very good experience. Cause I, I'd invested so much into this kind of process of using art as a way of, of um, kind of understanding something much deeper and more fundamental about life and relationship to life. And then at art college I found that none of that had any respect or was, was just vilified and um, it was really very much a kind of geared towards kind of um how you saw yourself in relationship to the history of art. And following kind of trends um, using trends in art as a kind of focus for developing your own artwork and just kind of copying I guess really. Um, I mean you're meant to come up with something new, but it also had to be derivative of stuff in art beforehand um, it was supposed to be, you were supposed to

be learning the language of art.

Which didn't really hold very much interest for me at all. Um, I was much more interested in, in um art as a psychological tool and you know, I sort of discovered this incredible life-saving um kind of effect that, that art could have and, and kind of wanted to explore that and to talk about that but was, just found myself being shut down at that level. And so, so I came out of that after a year, being very disillusioned and um confused really, 'cause I had this deep-seated need to, to make art. But equally there was how you gonna live and if you, you know if you make art that people want then you're selling out and all these ridiculous kind of ideals and um. And I was just trying to cope with being a mad person. And you know through all this the kind of um the hallucinations and the kind of hearing voices and all that completely, it never went away. In fact I kind of, at, it was at that time I did start to, to take drugs, which only exacerbated the situation. I'd read quite a lot of R.D.Laing, and um his um, his kind of ideas around kind of using drugs as a way of breaking through, that really appealed to me. But I have to say the combination of speed and magic mushrooms on the top of um Ryegate Hill very nearly did for me. I, I um gave myself a mini-stroke through this combination of drugs, I kind of physically felt my brain, one side of my brain just closing down momentarily. And um, yeah that didn't help the brain damage!

And um, yeah life continued in that sort of vein from my early twenties as well, I did the most fucking awful jobs that were all conducive to brain damage. I worked at a, a silk-screen studio in Loughbrough Junction. Just down the road, it was a small family-run business called Spinks, Spinks Studios. But this was all..

A: Was that in the railway arches?

C: It was in one of the railway arches, yeah. And, ah flipping heck, it was all kind of commercial printing on vinyl, it was very boring really. But it was, having failed art college it was the only place to go I suppose. And, God's sake, they had these huge five gallon cans of black vinyl ink. And you prised the top off of the lid and the fumes from this would just completely knock you out. And um that was, I mean, you know, getting paid for sniffing glue. It was horrendous. And er, and then I had this other job in kind of Streatham High Road, it was one of the big um building conglomerates and I was put rather unfairly on to, on to the dyelining machine, which is this huge printing um press twelve, fifteen foot wide, used to print out all the blueprints for buildings, huge. And it ran on ammonia fumes. There was no health and safety. And after a day's work I didn't know, I couldn't remember who I was. I didn't know who I was, I was completely at a loss. It was um, um, my memories are very disparate and kind of fragmented because um, it, nothing really made sense and there was no um there was nowhere to go, it was just very kind of, much, kind of er, um, relying on my own kind of inner resources to survive and um. And all through this I was absolutely utterly convinced that psychiatry was the kind of modern day witchcraft and I could see this kind of line from um from the seventeenth century through to the day in which those, those ways of manipulating people by kind of inculcating fear um into society er was still very prevalent that, that, that er. And so

I was pretty obsessed really with um understanding why society allowed psychiatry to torture people in the way that it did and the way that it does still to this day. And um so I kind of very much took myself into the lion's den and er um got a, got a position as a community service volunteer in um an institution in um in Berkshire in halfway between Reading and Oxford, called Fairmile. And this was, that would have been sort of around when I was twenty. And of course I thought well, you know, I'll be in the right place! For trying to get to grips with my own madness. And er, and of course what I discovered was that it was an incredibly violent place where people were abused in the most horrendous ways and that actually not a lot had changed since the seventeenth century and the kind of, all the kind of tortures that um were subjected to. People who were deemed as witches that it was still going on.

A: What sort of things did you see?

C: Um people being subjected to um huge amounts of drugs um people being coerced into, into um spending er, you know day after day kind of um in, in what, what was called um factory therapy, it was you know it was industrial therapy that's what it was called, industrial therapy, which was, you know is a euphemism for kind of keeping people in a, in a very, very perverse humiliated state of being, being used and um, um people who didn't comply were, were, would get physically abused. And um locked up for long periods of time in um.. It was fucking awful! Sort of, you know, it just confirmed all my kind of sense of the fact that society wasn't this kind of veneer of civilisation, was actually a complete and utter falsehood. And um that actually, being mad was probably the best way to be, when, everything, everything that I was confronted with just um was just, was just horrendous, you know. People were shit. To each other and to themselves. There was no um, there was very little kind of softness or gentility or humanity about it at all, you know and there were, there were a lot of, there were women who'd been locked up there for life for having had a child out of wedlock. And that's, that sort of happened to a lot, you know that was, there were a lot of long-term um patients as they were called inmates who, who um had ended up there no fault of their own very much kind of victims of families who, who had rejected them and um found it a useful way of um getting rid of people that they were you know associated with by blood but didn't want anything to do with.

And um so that was kind of um pretty um you know it was yet another pretty difficult experience to (c..) with. Um I, I was sort of on the edge of, I was in the um, I was in the art department there and um, just looked after, you know looked after all the art materials and encouraged people to paint and to draw and to make pots and to um. And they had, there was a printing press there as well, old-style letterpress and um I used to manage that as well and er I used to do stuff with people and, and quite enjoyed that actually you know in that, in that environment it was a, er the art block was kind of away from the main part of the hospital um so I was kind of cushioned from a lot of the terrible stuff that was going on around, and just doing my best to kind of er bring a bit of humanity into people's lives in a really quite a desperate and awful situation, where you know um the people who got on were the bullies of the institution and it was very much run by the bullies. A lot of the nursing staff had breakdowns, something like a third of the nursing staff had breakdowns and ended up for periods in other, in other hospitals

um that's a mark of how harsh the environment was and the expectations you know on this one hand psychiatry is this caring and sharing and blahdeblah but on the other hand the reality is very very different. And it is a very cruel, manipulative and um vindictive form of social control.

Um and um this was, this was the late seventies, early eighties. And so chlorpromazine had been used for thirty years at this point. And so there were a lot of the long-term inmates had been subjected to chlorpromazine for a very long time, who were um, just turned into vegetables by um, you know a mixture of chlorpromazine and um ETC. And of course other treatments that had fallen out of favour by that time but had been used on these people like lobotomy and leucotomy, all those experiments in kind of taking bits out of people's brains, you know I mean, no-one, how anyone with an ounce of sense could argue that this was a method that was going to um be curative in any way shape or form is, you know, it's sort of psychiatry has this um, it has this veneer but the reality is that, it's, it's historically it's a place for sadists to go and do whatever the fuck they want to do. And that's certainly, well that goes all the way back to, to the beginning of the asylums I think, you know, I guess some were better than others, Fairmile certainly a very dark institution.

And um, um I was very glad to kind of see myself with the mad people rather than with the normal people in that environment. Normality had always struck me as a, a kind of, a manipulative concept. And um, yeah, so I kind of came out of that after, after just over a year in that institution with like, you know it was um absolutely devastating. And er I didn't really wanna be much part of society at all at that point and um .. And so I gravitated towards the friends that I'd been taking drugs with in the kind of year previous to that. And er we ended up squatting in North London and um I kind of went then through several years of kind of between homelessness and squatting and kind of very much living from hand to mouth and um, um. That might be a good place to take a breather.

A: Squatting.

C: Yeah. I thought I might go back a little bit.

A: Yeah.

C: And just to tell um a story about those, there were years when I was kind of doing a lot of dead-end jobs, going from one to another but it was during that time that I fell in love for the first time and that, that again was actually through Kevin and um he, he had um he'd been to a youth club, that's right, he'd been to a youth club that Nancy had been to during a time when she was being fostered and um. She'd gone from foster care to foster care and the, the local authority had um paid for her to have a place at a em a private school in (Limsfield?) And um this, this was um, how old were we then, probably er seventeen, eighteen and um so Kevin had gone to um, he'd, he'd um had, he sort of continued correspondence with Nancy and um er and he's gone down to visit and had started going out with one of Nancy's best friends and um, and

she was looking for a boyfriend and er, um I got invited to to come and meet her, she was I think she was singing in the school choir at a church In Elephant and Castle, which was where we first met. And um, um we were younger than that, we were still kind of sixteen at that point I think. And, because Nancy and I had a, a letter, we kind of got to know each other through writing to each other, that was how the relationship (..) fostered, was nurtured. And um, and she was in a similar situation to me, with a parent who was in, very very severely mentally ill and er, and her mother was unable to look after her. Because she also had two young brothers as well. And um there was a kind of, an immediate kind of reciprocal understanding of each other's kind of difficulties in life that were very, you know, unusual, I guess. And um and so we formed a real bond and um and she was wonderful, she was um absolutely gorgeous, she was um, her mother was Egyptian, her father was Kuwaiti and she was just very very beautiful. And um so it was, I was completely amazed that someone so wonderful would give me a second glance, you know I was so, such a kind of awkward animal socially and um kind of, in terms of, well in every respect really and er so this was quite a, this was huge kind of boost to my sense of self and er it was another kind of real, real kind of important life-saver really, the relationship was kind of fraught in many ways but also was, was, was, had lots of magical times and aspects to the relationship.

She had, she had two um young , very young brothers of Salman and (Ridger) who were um about three and five at the time, the kind of pair of us looking after the kids, taking them to the park and things like that were just very magical times, they were really wonderful times, used to take them to Brockwell Park, because they lived here, lived in Brixton. And um, yeah. Yeah there were some nice moments we um were very close, and you know we, we still know each other today, we've sustained a friendship of sorts um. Yeah, I just thought I'd put something a bit less doom and gloomy in there.

A: It's alright, there's plenty in there along the way actually.

C: So, um so yes, , yes we, we squatted in lots of, we squatted some flats in er North London on, near um on the Pentonville Road I think it was just off there and sort of er around er Camden, kind of King's Cross, there was at that time in the early eighties, there was a kind of huge network of squats across North London in particular. Um that I became caught up in and um and with that I can't remember if it was through kind of squatting connections or it might have been through um what was that predecessor of Time Out?

A: Not predecessor, but there was City Limits

C: City Limits, yeah.

A: Came after Time Out.

C: They were rivals for a time and then..

A: I'll tell you the whole story. I wrote for City Limits.

C: It might have been through City Limits um but equally it might have been through the squatting connections that I got involved in the Campaign Against Psychiatric Oppression and met Eric Owen and Frank Bangay and um got a whole other education and found a , you know a network of people who'd been through the mental health system who'd been labelled and um who were also kicking back against, against all of the abuse and um. I kind of on those, through those years really I was very much on the run really in many respects, because I er, I knew that if I got caught I would be sectioned. Because I was not in a good state mentally. And um and so it was, it was really um important to me to kind of form a bond with a circle of, of people who had been through similar experiences and were, were fighting the system in as kind of um

A: Is this when you had the pyjamas experience?

C: Yes

A: Tell us that story for the tape.

C: Yeah, erm so um, I used to spend a lot of that, a lot of the time during those years in London's parks and green spaces and going out to um the kind of edges, you know, the um, what's that river that runs through Tottenham, goes out into Hertfordshire? And kind of keep that connection with nature was a really, really thing that kept me grounded and, I mean I did bits of gardening and stuff like that as well, that was really important and um. Yeah, there was one occasion when I'd found a jay's feather, the back feathers of the, these kind of beautiful blue and black part of the tail um feathers. It was a kind of very exquisite and um I had a in my kind of misguided mental state I'd kind of imbued this feather with much more meaning than was sane, put it like that. I was convinced that this, that this had magical properties and that was going to, you know, there was part of me that would always, was always looking for um something that was going to save the world. I think that was a kind of key, a key um kind of theme through those years really, it was that kind of trying to find the thing that was going to save my life. Save the world in effect um. And, and this feather kind of took on those nuances and er and I ended up, I was on a tube, er going to Seven Sisters and um god knows, I must have looked like some strange, I must have looked very strange, I was dressed in pyjamas and holding this feather with some kind of glazed, beatific expression on my face. And um, and I made eye contact with a woman who was sitting on the tube opposite me. Um and I made the mistake of smiling. And so we got to the next stop, which was Seven Sisters. And she immediately came up to me and she was an off-duty policewoman. And she made the assumption, not wholly unpalatable, that I'd just escaped from Friern Barnet. And um, but she was off-duty so she wasn't kind of, she was in conflict with herself whether she should do her duty and escort me back to Friern Barnet or do a duty to herself and go home and relax. So we had this conversation and, I could see that my life was on an edge here, um but I managed to have the sense to promise her faithfully that I would go back to Friern Barnet of my own accord. And so I escaped. There were, there were lots of occasions like that.

I was very lucky. I was very close to the edge on several occasions like that. There was another occasion on which I was, I was actually living in a house opposite Broadwater Farm. This was before the riots went off and life was pretty tense um, you know even as white boy er the police were picking us up and frisking us and kind of doing untoward things on a pretty much daily basis, so god knows what it was like for black boys at the time, the police had all the licence in the world, with the kind of sus laws that Thatcher had brought in and um it was pretty dangerous and um I was with, I was with Ant late at night in the park behind Broadwater Farm and um and we got stopped by the police and um, and he happened to have a hash knife on him and that was, that was just a stroke of complete um miracle that we didn't end up getting put away. I think Satan was looking after me at that point!

A: So what, they found it but let you go?

C: Um, yes, yeah that's right yeah, he managed to say something that disarmed them and kind of, and they let us go, yeah. So, so I got involved with the Campaign Against Psychiatric Oppression and um the, the um I think the really important thing that, that CAPO did, was to produce a manifesto that um set out a critique of the mental health system. And um deconstructed it, in Marxist terms it gets very in left-wing kind of, certainly left-wing, kind of political analysis um and that really was the beginning of an attempt to kind of make mental health services more humane and to bring in user-led forums and to um to, to change the balance of power, to, to um stop the psychiatrists being able to section individuals carte blanche without any other opinion, so, you know it became a legal right to have, you know you had in order to section an individual there had to be more than one professional opinion. Things like that. And it's um, that, it was the um there was a kind of the spring of mental health groups um kind of um Survivors Speak Out, um was one of the other key groups and um and various kind of um programmes from within Mind, some of the Minds kind of also became very vociferous in challenging the kind of mental health politics and the status quo and um and CAPO was very small, you know it was just a few individuals but when I think back to what Frank Bangay and Eric Owen achieved then, it was actually you know it was the seed for something that has, has been very important um in the way that um um you know lots of things that were, a lot of the violence that was carte blanche within mental institutions sort of for that time came under much closer scrutiny as a result of the pressure groups like CAPO and Survivors Speak Out. And the question of accountability for psychiatric services became much more in the public domain. And I think um, I think there was a very important movement to try and create change for the better. It's um it's a difficult kind of, it's a conundrum really, the whole (...) mental health, because um, or a paradox, perhaps that's a better way of putting it, because mental illness does and doesn't exist, you know it's not, it's not a proven organic illness um within the brain which is something that psychiatrists, psychiatry kind of attempts to convey and in a very you know, easily discredited way you can discredit the, you know if you look at the arguments that psychiatry puts as scientific evidence, it's, it's very easily pulled apart, there is no science to it. But of course on the other hand, mental disturbance is a very real thing and can be cause of a lot of suffering. Um it can also be a wonderful thing um but if

your brain's taking you off into other, on to other planes it's not very um, being in that kind of state of mind isn't very conducive to having a job and earning a living and being able to function in society as we know it. And I think a lot of those challenges were really about also trying to create um alternatives to the capitalist system that insists that we kind of exist in this very narrow framework where we, you know, um eat, sleep and consume and um, sell our services to society. I'm not sure where I'm going with all this. But it kind of, talking about the kinds of discussions that, that we were having at that time and the, the the kind of general um sense of trying to create a better world, I suppose, in essence and er um and then I went to art college. I was, I was reaching the end of my twenties by that time.

A: I think that might be a point...

(Session ends.)

Session 2

Track 5

A and C: I've pressed record one two three testing testing, one two three. Yup.

Track 6

(Outside)

A: From here the lights don't show up so well.

So tell me about getting in. Was it difficult to..?

C: To get into college?

A: How did you find out about it, what was the whole procedure?

C: Um well, I'd been trying for years to get into college and had made very, a lot of applications to um, (*Initially, I think?*) I applied to the London colleges um, Norwich Art College, I had a particularly eventful interview at Norwich Art College that was er quite, just, one of those things you know. I got the coach very early in the morning to get to Norwich. The coach was sat in Victoria Coach Station and was just about to set off and the vibration from the engine struck a certain vibration and the whole of the glass of the front of the coach, it was like a double-decker coach, shattered. And um, yeah I was just like a few seats back from. I was very late for this interview and it went exceedingly badly. I just remember these kind of three stone-faced, they managed to fit me in but there were these three stone-faced interviewers who were pretty aggressive in their interview techniques and I just wasn't strong enough to rebuff their kind of intimidation tactics. Found that a lot actually, right through, even after college, you know, then subsequently applying after having done a, you know the degree, then applying for MAs and things, I dunno it, it's art college in particular, but there is a particular strand of culture within art colleges of just being really nasty and intimidatory and um quite, very sexist as well, actually, there's a particular culture within art colleges.

A: Is this in relation to you or to..?

C: Well, um I, I got interviewed at Brighton College and um er a bunch of guys who were only interested in attracting pretty girls on the, onto the courses, um, who were just, took great pleasure in cutting me apart really and just being pretty rude and nasty, you know they're, they'd decided, before the interview, they'd decided they didn't want me, they just, I'd only been accepted for interview to bolster up the numbers. And they kept me waiting in the corridor for over three hours. You know I had to be there for something like eleven o'clock in the morning. And they kept me waiting till two o'clock in the afternoon. It's just, just disgraceful. Um I found that all along, getting interviewed for art college was very, I encountered a lot of discrimination and um perhaps foolishly, naively, I was quite open about this technique that I'd developed and wanting to push it further and um kind of, you know using the art to understand kind of mental health and er, talking about those kind of things in the interview and er, they were, they didn't want that. They didn't want to, you know, they just wanted, like I said before really, they wanted people that were gonna toe the line and kind of

kowtow to the history of art in a very conventional way and develop an arts practice that was very much a part of something that had gone before. And I was trying to do something very new. I thought. And quite radical in that way. And um, and then I found Dartington. And um realised from the blurb that, that, that they were doing something very different there and um. I think it was only by accident really that I found out about that particular course and um. Yeah, by that point, this was 1988, and I'd been applying for, to colleges for probably about five years at that point, trying to sort of do something with my life and kind of er looking for something that also was gonna help me cope with all the mental health issues that I had.

Um, I think I'd sort of realised by that point that, that um any hope that I had of it just going away, it wasn't going to happen. And um I knew that I was never going to get any kind of successful support through the conventional mental health services. And um, I'd, I helped myself a lot by doing a lot of therapy. Um finding um ways of getting therapy and counselling cheaply. At that time co-counselling was quite a big thing, kind of peer support.

A: Yeah, I know it well.

C: And also um so that I was quite embedded within that network and also I was lucky to find a succession of counsellors, some very good, some not so good, um who were prepared to um take people on on a sliding scale and er. So that was one of the key things that kept me out of hospital really. And music was a very important thing to kind of um enable me to sort of cope with some of the more aggressive aspects of hearing voices and having hallucinations and just generally coping with a brain that would, was um, would um kind of bite back. I guess is a good way to put it! It's um, I, I learnt not to trust myself and, and I guess I kind of developed quite a strong sense of humour. And those things were, both those things in combination were really er essential aspects of coping with some of the more difficult kind of relationships I had with my mind. Um, so um you know kind of so singing was really important um, particular lines became like a mantra, um there was a line from a Suzie and the Banshees song um that went something along the lines of 'my brain's out of my hands, there's nothing to relate, impulses quite meaningless in this cerebral non-event'. And that would be like a chant um that, you know, enabled me to kind of fight back control from the voices and from the more abhorrent kind of aspects of dealing with the illness. And um, it's just stress really, it's just stress and um kind of the after-effects of having had such a difficult childhood and such a difficult kind of growing up.

And, and so um yeah those were the things that enabled me to, to function. Insomnia was very bad, that was one of the, that was one of the most er difficult er things to cope with, just being of such a nervous disposition and um being unable to control that and that leading to nights and nights of not being able to sleep so you know I'd be dreaming awake a lot and hallucinations would just come at me from nowhere, you know just walking down the road or sitting in a café or whatever and um it wasn't easy but I managed, I managed it without um the intervention that I knew would just be, you know, I really didn't want to be locked up and given drugs and ECT that were just going to fuck me up even more. Um, I, I'd seen, I'd seen what

their drugs had done to people and I'd, and I didn't believe them. I don't believe them, I don't believe psychiatrists, I don't believe psychiatry, I think it's a sham and a disgrace and I don't understand why society hasn't been knocking on those doors and saying for fuck's sake, you know, people are human beings, they're not experiments for you to do the fuck you like with, you know, I, I find it, it's just criminal really, it's absolutely criminal that um psychiatry's been allowed to get away with so much for so long without any comeback.

If you looked into it, there, there's a whole history of Dr Shipmans within, who've had careers within psychiatry, who've killed people mercilessly without any compunction, and without any fucking comeback at all. And, my mother was murdered by Dr Norton, you know when I say murdered, it was manslaughter um, he fucking slaughtered her. There was no, he had absolutely no moral decency about him at all, he just didn't give a fuck, it took me something like two, three years to get to see him. And when I did manage to finally after lots of letters and phone calls consistently over a long period of time um the first thing he said to me was 'I've got five hundred patients in my care. What gives you the right to take up my time?'

And so I very kind of calmly and rationally said well look, my mother's on such a high dose of drugs that um she's living life as a zombie. And um if there was some way of kind of measuring the dose of largactyl that she's on and bringing it to a level where she has at least some functionality and you know is able to get some enjoyment out of life rather than just being completely doped up into to a ridiculous zombie state and um. Um you know it was, it was, it was, it was her request, it wasn't difficult, it wasn't asking anything of him that was um out of the question.

A: What was her request?

C: That, that, that they look at the dose of largactyl that she was on and bring it down to a point that she was able to get some enjoyment out of life. Um, I mean she was completely unable to function at all in, in the state that they kept her on. She was getting like fortnightly injections. So she had no, she had no choice over it at all. And the bastard took her off everything, like that. He just took her off everything. Um, this is, this was at this point you know she'd been on er psychotropic drugs, neuroleptics for about, something like fifteen plus years. Um and he just took her off everything suddenly, knowing full well that she would immediately go into a huge relapse. And he, he, it was a total vindictive punishment. And um the effect of that was that she lost hope um and she had another (kind of ?) hospitalisation, the dose of drugs went back up again, they didn't monitor the levels of red and white blood cells, the.. Neuroleptics work by stopping the body's ability to produce white blood cells. That's one of the main nasty effects. And that completely destroys the immune system and um er and so she put on huge amounts of weight um she couldn't get any exercise, she was just completely zombified um and um and she died of a coronary atheroma.

A: What?

C: A coronary atheroma. Atheroma. The heart attack, the specific type of heart attack. And,

you know, I couldn't say categorically that the bastard planned it but he, he made sure it happened. Um and he you know just fucking evil nasty piece of work, I mean you know one of those kinds of people who've got such a tight arse there's, you know, you just see that there's no, there's no human being there at all. Words fail me.

A: You covered that?

C: Covered that.

A: Back to Dartington.

C: Back to Dartington, yeah.

A: Did you have an interview?

C: I had an interview at Dartington that was, that was very, very different to any other interview that I'd had and they were um very, very welcoming and very interested in, in um the kind of, the kind of social aspects of the art that I was making and the kind of um and the, very interested in the fact that it was about um you know connections with psychology and the connections with er developing a practice that had some kind of, of um direct relationship to the functions within society. And the course was called Art in the Social Context. And so it was um a mixture of, of fine art practice and community art practice that they were looking for, er students who had done art in um community spaces and the fact that I'd done art in mental hospital was kind of like, put me in, very much on the list of the kind of person that they were looking for. It was a completely unique course, there was nothing else like it in the country at all. And um er and the ethos rather than it being about the history of art, it was about the history of images and deconstructing the ways that imagery impacts on society and so, you know looking at the infiltration of advertising with fine art images and those kinds of things were, were at the core of the course, really fascinating kind of studies in how kind of the systems of patronage within fine art worked historically and how they'd developed. And so how. What art got to be called art and what art didn't, got left behind and why that was, those kinds of things, it was, John Berger was very big on the booklist, um and Susan (*Sontag?*). And um it was, it was everything that I'd been looking for.

And er it was, yeah it was brilliant. Um it was um just to make the connection, it was while I was there that my mum died. I think I was in the ummm second year. Er the summer of the second year that she died. And um, so I was, yeah it was brilliant, we had, we had twenty-four hour access to the studios, painting studios and um so you know there was no restriction, once you kind of got into something you could just keep going, there was no nine to five. Um it was very open and um you know and there was a real, real creative buzz about the place, it was um, the it had a music course and a drama course and all those kind of different disciplines got mixed up a lot, kind of. Students kind of making things happen and this, yeah, it was a lot of fun and um, bloody interesting, it was really stimulating. And I made lots of paintings about

dreams and visions and hallucinations and I, and I, I started keeping a diary of, of all those um visual experiences and um looking into the, the history of um kind of mental image-making and you know looking at some of the philosophy behind it, dream imagery and the, looking deeper into the kind of psychology and the ideas about spirituality and all those kind of aspects of it.

And um, yeah it was bloody brilliant. And I, I um made lots of very big paintings and um wrote a, a um, part of the degree was, because it was an honours degree, so you had to write a dissertation, um so I did a dissertation about the, that was kind of look back through different art movements that kind of explored the psychology of image-making. Obviously surrealism was big part of that um, dadaism, but looking at other cultures as well. And um, and relating that to my own experience and um, it was kind of okay to be quirky there. That was kind of accepted, they didn't want to encourage you too much! But equally they, they, they er, they weren't dismissive or, or, or judgemental. Some very good tutors there and um..

Yeah, so I started making these big paintings that also looked at the history of psychiatry and and its kind of relationship to um um kind of older, earlier forms of, of um societal control, um and well, the kind of, the correlation between psychiatry and and witchcraft and the, the treatment of witches and the, the kind of the similarity, you know if you were um things occurred to me like how, if you were, like the ducking stool, the way the ducking stool was used so that if you were um deemed a witch, if you were um put under, under, underwater and drowned, then you..

A: She was innocent.

C: She was innocent. But if she lived..

A: She was a witch.

C: Then she was a witch. Or he was a witch. And would be killed anyway. And the correlation of that to um if you admit to having a mental illness and take the drugs and get zombified to hell then, then you're in recovery. Um you know even if you get tardive dyskinesia or aphasia or all the other direct atrocious effects of medication and.. But if you resist the medication, if you say no, I'm not mentally ill, that means that you are mentally ill. And they'll, they will give you even worse treatment to, to, to control you um. And er um it was great to have the freedom to make all these big paintings that kind of expressed those truths, Um. And um, yeah, three brilliant years.

Um, might take a short, just a short pause.

A: Yeah sure.

A: There we go.

C: Just need to attach the microphone.

A: Oh yeah, that helps.

C: So there's, at this juncture there's at least three paintings that I'd quite like to talk about. But leave that to a further session.

A: You'll be able to remember what they are?

C: Oh, yeah, yeah I know what they are. I'd like to um, to insert that at this point um, so um. So I was at college and um, um had a um what was a kind of very short-term relationship and um kind of very passionate affair. And um as a result of that had a son um and sadly me and his mum actually split up um before he was born um, but that was like a wonderful event as well, I er, I was so in love with Sam and it was such a completely new and different feeling to anything that I'd experienced before and.. It was really beautiful, it was really, really absolutely fantastic, I was head over heels in love with him and um, you know, it was a big shame that me and his mum weren't together but um equally kind of um taking um, some child care responsibility for him from, from, from the first few weeks onward, it was tremendously important and I was really lucky to be living in a household with a family with two other young children um who loved having a baby around. And um, er there was, there was a great atmosphere in the household. This was in Totnes um, just down the road from Dartington College and er, and I felt very privileged. I was incredibly lucky to have, to be there and so, it was the first time in my life that I kind of knew what it was to be complete in a way I never had before and um and um yeah I was really lucky to be alive, lucky to be there and er it was, there were really good years.

And um, um I, I um, by the time that I left Dartington I felt that I, I'd really started to um bring kind of the illness under control. And, and just having that, being in such a wonderful environment and having the support of that college really changed my life. I mean it was hard, my mum dying during that time and um, er but equally, I mean it gave me the strength to, and resilience to move on, to find some determination to do something that would.. felt right and to give something back to society, you know, that was um from a point of really thinking that um I was never going to be able to hold down a job or to work at all really, I found new strengths that gave me um a path that opened up, other paths were opening up in a way that I'd never imagined could or would happen er and um and I came back to London and um floundered a bit initially um but then the really important thing that happened was that Survivors Poetry had just started.

Literally at the same time I was coming back to London. Ninety-one. And um the um and of course several people that I'd known previously from the Campaign Against Psychiatric Oppression and Survivors Speak Out, Frank Bangay and Peter Campbell, were, were both founder members of Survivors Poetry. And so I kind of had a, a kind of community there that I kind of walked into and um, er,. And there was such a, such an edge to Survivors Poetry in those initial years that it kind of went from being a kind of very small um organisation to having huge

membership and groups flourished all over the country and in virtually every city there was a new group kind of starting up every other week. And um and there was a real kind of sense of um peer support for people coping with mental health issues that, that um was, was a bloody fantastic thing, you know and I mean it was um it came from um a real will to try and make things better for a lot of people and um it was intensely creative period and um we held um monthly gigs at the Hampden Community Centre in King's Cross and then Camden Mind opened their doors to us and um we used their premises to run workshops every..

A: Camden Mind?

C: Mm. Every er every other week. And er and um, um one of the um one of the things that I'm most proud of having done actually was to um co-edit 'Under The Asylum Tree', which was an anthology that we put together under the Survivors' Press in um - 92 I think it was and er um that was a wonderful project to work on and um I really got to know Joe Bidder at that point, who was fantastic mentor actually, he was very very supportive of me and um you know, he was very encouraging and um kind of um I had periods of homelessness at that time as well, but Joe really helped me through that time and I managed to get a job, kind of couriering for pizza firm, kind of managed to save up enough money for a deposit on a flatshare and things, things did turn around.

And um and Joe was very much there for me in terms of you know, kind of encouraged me, wasn't always gonna be like this, kind of helped me through that. And er, there was a whole network of people at Survivors Poetry that built a real sense of comradeship and um sense of kind of beating the system really, you know, not, not having to kowtow to the demands of the mental health system. And taking that out, I mean Frank was wonderful, he er he, he kind of spearheaded the work we undertook to take survivors' gigs and writing workshops into mental health units and day centres and, and you know we really did give people hope in a hopeless situation. It was um, it was really wonderful, you know, kind of fulfilling and um creative and just um terrific thing to be part of. And um, um, and so it was during that time I, I was with Survivors' Poetry as well I was also um teaming up with other artists through that network and we, we were putting exhibitions on in libraries and I, I had a jammy bit of luck that um I was doing all kinds of odd bits of work um and I had a gardening job. With um, working for a woman who um was quite wealthy and had a connection with a gallery in Portobello Road, The Real Art Company. And um, and she got me an exhibition, a solo exhibition, like a month-long solo exhibition. And er, and we had lots of poetry, spoken word events in the gallery as well through the duration and, I think I gave an artist's talk at one point as well and um, you know it was just sheer kindness really, gave me a break, er and um that was a real, that was a real high point in my life. And, and er yeah I was kind of very lucky to have fallen into that network of people and be part of that movement um. And of course it, the , it led to my involvement with the London Disability Arts Forum. Um Diane Pungartnik, she um, she wanted, she saw my work um and she wanted to put it in the Disability Arts In London magazine. And she um, she was very encouraging um at that time, she subsequently realised of course that I , that I was a prodigy of Satan, and she changed her mind about me! But.. So I got to learn about the

London Disability Arts Forum. And um that was kind of novel thing to me, I'd never thought of myself as a disabled person um, but equally I could see how my life story you know was largely a sort of kind of experiencing discrimination and um and being marginalised. And um that um, you know, I had kind of, you know in going to college, that was the first thing that kind of gave me a break and a chance to um to do something with my life that, it took a bloody long time to get there and I, I kind of hit a lot of walls. And I didn't stop hitting those walls really, you know. trying to um get out of the poverty trap and the benefit trap was a really hard struggle and um and then, then I met Kit Wells.

Who took over the Disability Arts in London magazine from Diane Pungartnik. He um, he reviewed the show at Portobello Road and he um, he was a canny sod, he purposely um gave it a very bad review, he was testing me he wanted to find out what sort of person I was. And so um, so I think I wrote to him to kind of express my displeasure with his review, which I thought was completely missing the point. Um and. So he responded by saying why don't you come and meet and we'll go for a drink and we'll talk about it. Which I did. And um that was the beginning of um a very good friendship. I um, I mean he, 'wide boy' sums Kit up in a nutshell. Um and so you know Damien Robinson, the Deaf artist Damien Robinson, she um was working for the Arts Council with um Wendy Harpe. So Damien, she was part of the um er she was one of the Disability Arts Officers at the Arts Council at that time and she um she instituted a system of mentorships for disabled people, you know kind of recognising that um that pathways into work were very different, it was very different for disabled people, but the kind of er the usual lines of entry weren't, er, as straightforward. And so this kind of mentoring bursary, mentored bursary was a way of addressing that and giving disabled people a chance to um to develop careers in the arts.

And so um. And so LDAF had one of these um, kind of like an apprenticeship really.

A: It was.

C: Apprenticeship, yeah.

A: It was described as the apprenticeship scheme. Liz Crow was in charge of it.

C: No, it was Damien Robinson, Damien Robinson yeah.

A: It may have been Damien's initiative, but I thought Liz was running the apprenticeship scheme for them.

C: No, no I don't think so

A: My mistake.

C: No Liz was in the, she was in the West Country then. She might have been running

something in the West Country. Along those lines. But not in London.

A: Don't worry about it.

C: So yeah, so Kit encouraged me to apply for the post. And um, and to my amazement, I got it. And um er you know it was, it was an opening that I never expected in a million years. And I just dove into it and really relished it, you know. It was the first time in my life that I could see an opportunity that was really going to give me something that I could get my teeth into. And, and, and develop skills and be good at. And you know give me a kind of sense of confidence, self-confidence that I was desperately looking for. Everything in my life up to that point had just been a kind of, another kick in the teeth really. Um and er so it was, it was fantastic. And of course, you were there. Start of several very good friendships.

A: I was your mentor.

C: You were my mentor. Indeed. And er, and that was, I learnt a lot from you and from Kit and that year was very, it was great. And then of course um I, I got to befriend Ruth Bailey and er we had a year of joint editorship er and she was a treasure to work with, absolutely wonderful. We had the most fantastic conversations about art and disability and um and very very warm personality and um it was a kind of environment that I could function, having that. It was really important having that kind of friendliness around, I mean, you know the London Disability Art Forum was not always a barrel of laughs. But there was a kind of core kind of sense of, of kindness and support and and um that I, I could never, I could never have done that job without that. I would have, you know um you know I've always been pretty fragile really, um but have managed to um find inner resources and strengths through that fragility and um..

And the determination to just keep going, you know, not to be put off by the knockbacks that come from time to time and um, it had always um to work, to be a journalist had always been an ambition from childhood. When I was quite young I kind of, with all the problems that I had with memory um I found that writing things down, keeping a diary was extremely important. And the idea of being a journalist and being able to use writing and the love of writing as a way of making a living was, had always been there, um I never for a second thought it would happen um but suddenly, you know, um London Disability Arts Forum gave me the opportunity and I was very grateful for it actually.

They were good years, you know. I was there for six years and of course made a very good friendship with Joe McConnell. Who was um kind of a very good influence and supportive person through those, through that time. And um, yeah I miss Joe, The last year, the last few years as you know have been quite difficult for Joe.

A: He came to my birthday party.

C: Yes. Sian said. I spoke to Sian. That's great. I think she had to give him quite a lot of encouragement in order for him to go. He's still pretty shattered I think. Joe McConnell was

always a really good laugh. He had, he had ways of telling a story that would just go beyond the realms of surrealism and er he, his kind of canny sense of people er and kind of getting to the core of people in a way that was kind of naughty but, naughty but not unkind, but bloody funny. He's got such a gift, he's got so many gifts really and er, you know he was very good with Disability Arts In London magazine, with kind of all the computer related stuff that I knew nothing about, how can we develop some IT skill and some kind of graphic skills um he was he was teaching graphic design at that point, he was teaching, running courses for disabled people, I can't remember the college but um he er, oh god, after I'd been at Disability Arts in London magazine for a while he, he sent me one of his students to kind of get some work experience with Disability Arts in London magazine. And um she was atrocious. I remember I sent her off to interview, oh god what's his name, he was the director of Graeae at that point..

A: Ewan.

C: Ewan..

A: Marshall.

C: Marshall yeah. And she had no understanding of disability politics at all. And she completely wound him up. Not sure that Ewan ever forgave me for that. Um, but um it was, it was um disability arts was everything that I had kind of dreamed of getting involved in, really. It, it, it you know, finding this caucus of disabled artists who, who were making work that um, that challenged discrimination, that kind of talked very eloquently um and often with great humour of the kinds of barriers that we face as disabled people. I felt like I'd found a home, really. I'd found a community, a family that um I um could relate to and could feel at home with and um the aims of disability arts at that time in the 1990s were very, there was a very powerful sense of um kind of doing, doing something different that was challenging the status quo and um largely it was kind of cabaret, that was really the main art form, but there were, there was kind of openings for visual artists as well. And I um, was it Sian Williams, I'm not sure? I got invited to be part of one of the LDAF group shows at the Diorama um that was called 'How We Like It'.. Which was a kind of statement that was really challenging the medical model and the.. Challenging the medical model and the charity model and that sense of you know if you're a disabled person then you know you are to be pitied and looked after, to be patronised. And um and I met Nancy Willis. She was, she had some work in that exhibition, was it that exhibition? She had a group show. Um she had a solo show at the Diorama round then. And there was, there was a lot of kind of similar themes and er, and also techniques um that correlated between Nancy's work and my work and er it was great to meet the artist who kind of really kind of just intuitively understood some thing very deep about the work that I was making. And kind of understood it on a feeling level really. That was the kind of symbiosis between Nancy and myself that was really important and um I also, it was quite a steep learning curve for me because um I struggled with that title, 'How We Like It'. Um because in terms of the mental health system, I didn't like it. And, and I think um, and it wasn't about patronisation. Mental health survivors weren't patronised, they were - tortured.

And so there were very different kind of concerns and um the um the kind of, my experience and the experience of other survivors didn't quite match the social model of disability. And um that was the real quandary er and but also something that I found really interesting on a kind of ideas level and something that I kind of wanted to explore further. And I just er..

(Session ends.)

Track 7

(Stuff about setting up)

Right, you were going to say about these two pictures

CH: Yeah, so , oh lord. Sorry, my poor brain

ATS: That's okay.

C: Yeah, this is, this going back to when I was um thirteen or fourteen, which was kind of er a time of um one of my first major kind of psychotic episodes um and um I er I came to believe that I was invisible. Literally. Invisible and that um, um that there was some kind of energy that was preventing me from being seen or heard, that I was a kind of um alien. Er and um and this kind of feeling came over me and became more and more oppressive and um and it um I think I was hearing voices quite a lot and was kind of very disturbed and I think as happens a lot when people are in that psychotic state, you kind of, you're doing everything to present to the world as if there's nothing wrong. Um and er, so I continued to go to school for instance. Um but became increasingly isolated and em non-communicative and em at home and at school.

I was in a pretty disturbed state of mind and um um and so I um er I did two, two water colours that I've still got today that um were me expressing what it felt like to be in that state of consciousness. And um they were really very pivotal in um kind of unlocking a language, a visual language that allowed me to objectify my mental state in a way that um created a bit of distance so there were two, these two paintings, one was a kind of, it was um a self-portrait of, of me as this invisible consciousness. And so, so to describe it, there was a, a sort of muddy colours, the sea and the sky and on the left and the right there were two kind of um tubular glass containers that were, that were, that were hanging by chains from an unknown point above. And um, and these were both two, and there was nothing inside the glass because I was inside the glass but I was invisible so there was nothing there. Um and these, these containers were kind of representations of the consciousness that had overtaken me and um I can't quite remember why there were two, it was about kind of em an attempt to bring something tangible into reality, because I was so lost and was trying to find myself. And it um was quite a simple kind of A4 size, A3 size? watercolour painting and um um so I, so I did that and then, there was another painting that followed that that was a blue self-portrait that was much more um arranged and studied and in which I thought about all the different elements of my life - family and school and colour, sport and love of art um, the love of the Beatles and the artwork that went with Yellow Submarine, which was, which had just sort of come out I think at that, around, no it was earlier than that time, doesn't matter forget that.

And em and so I er I did the self-portrait from a photograph of myself at the age of eleven, and it was, the photograph was an accidental photograph that um, you know I was playing with the

camera and it clicked very close to my face so the whole of the photograph is my face and so I painted myself from this photograph and um and used this kind of ultramarine blue which kind of linked with Hinduism and kind of an interest in Eastern philosophies that was, that was emerging, I did this when I was fourteen, so it was quite simplistic in a sense, um but it kind of followed on from the invisible painting in that it was, it was kind of me going beyond that sense of just being this invisible consciousness to, to, to reflecting on all the tangible things about my life and who I was and um those two paintings were absolutely, it was like unlocking this, unlocking a door to a kind of secret chamber where suddenly the kind of potential and the possibilities of, of, of what I could do with this language were, were endless and, you know there was a depth and a richness and a sense of something that was just, and I'd found it, I'd found it through, through going through this psychotic episode. And um it was really the foundation of all of my art practice, it was the driving impetus um to, to create and express and to allow these kind of realisations and understandings to, to um manifest and um I thought there was, there was some pretty brilliant about doing that that um er, yeah, it was pretty amazing really that there was something inside me that was kind of like, knew that something was wrong and responded to it in a very clever and intuitive way and um and what, you know what that was, it was a kind of consciousness kind of um writing itself in some way, I don't know if there was a chemical process that was going on as physically, inside my brain, but certainly at a spiritual level it was pretty damn amazing. Um and em, so I just, I needed to describe that really.

A: That's good.

C: I think, I think I did an okay job there. So, so um the last time we spoke I mentioned that there were three paintings in particular that I wanted to talk about.

(Pause)

So there were three paintings that I mentioned that I wanted to talk about in some length and again... this is going back to um my time at Dartington. Which I think I'd talked about before in some detail, so that was between '88 and '91 I was at Dartington. Er and that was the kind of the one period in my life where I had the kind of freedom to make large canvases, six foot tall paintings. I've never had a situation where I've had that luxury since, since then. And um and also the time to just kind of really er let the art take me where it needs to take me. You know there was, those three years were a kind of window in that I've not managed to recreate that same kind of sense of freedom to be creative in the way that I really kind of cherish and so the work was very, there was a political edge to a lot of the painting that was was, er that was never really picked up on, I think with the tutors at the college that, I think they were a bit scared of it to be honest, because I was exploring things that were really very challenging. You know I was reading people like Umberto Eco and Foucault as well as the kind of the anti-psychiatrists, Szasz and Laing and so on. There was a sense in their writings that, the Umberto Eco book was called 'Travels in Hyper-reality'. He, he, he talks about how you know we have this conception that we're living in a, in a modern liberal, intellectually intelligent society where we've achieved a level of education, but in reality there are echoes of ways of thoughts and action from the

middle ages that we're still living out and psychiatry has er, a key function of psychiatry is to keep the battens down and ensure that there's this very narrow band of consciousness in which we exist as a society and that anyone who kind of breaches the boundaries of that very narrow band are quite severely penalised. And er often the people that kind of fall into that are um people, you know, on the edges of society, people, the people to whom kind of functioning in a capitalist society um is, is not such an easy thing and you know the asylums came into being in the sixteen hundreds and er they were a means, they were built and created as a means to get all the mad bad people off the streets and then, then it was the nineteenth century when that became medicalised and all of these kind of names were pulled up out of a hat as diagnoses for different states of consciousness. And um they were then and are now too random. Ten psychiatrists diagnosing a single person will come up with ten different labels um and that's not just me saying that, that's kind of like um I recently heard that being said by the, the um head of psychology at East London University. It's, it's not a science, it's very, very bad science. And psychiatry gets away with pretending that it's a scientific study and it's all hocus-pocus.

And it's used to oppress people in very very very bad very difficult ways, you know um it was really interesting reading Louis Quail's book about his brother, Justin. And he talks about how Justin is um charged and punished for destruction of a cigarette er and for um you know he's, he's given, he's got all of these charges against him and it reads like something from, from the seventeen hundreds. Um you know person caught on the road as a vagabond on the road, destitute and you know imprisoned for being on the road without shoes or whatever. And there's a litany of stuff that the police have charged Justin with, that reads just like something from three hundred years ago and er and it's it's come about because of austerity measures that all the places Justin can go to to be safe have been closed down. All of the resource centres and day centres that were central to his world have gone. And um and so he continually kind of gets into these situations and you know he's the, he's a really nice bloke, he's a bird-watcher, he loves nature, he writes poetry and he paints. He's a very sweet man. But if you read his criminal record, you'd think he's an axe-wielding dangerous individual that you would have to be very wary of because of the way that the police in particular, because largely the way that things have transpired you know, something like ninety, eighty, ninety per cent of what the police are having to deal with are people with mental health issues. On the streets because of, directly because of austerity, so many people are homeless now and because so many people are destitute and desperate, desperately ill from, from being in such difficult circumstances which would drive anybody mad.

And um it's all so kind of covered up, that's a very long introduction. *(Laughs.)* And um I probably need, probably need another drink actually.

(Break)

So um how's that, squeaky noise.

So um, so I embarked on making work, making these big paintings that um, that kind of described a reality of visions and dreams and hallucinations and kind of contrasting those with

the, contrasting reality of those experiences with a psychiatric approach to understanding those experiences. And so um so I did this huge kind of six foot painting called 'The Nightmare' that, that was the product of, um a recurring dream and sort of kind of hallucinations in which I saw hundreds of people locked up together behind bars en masse and left to rot, left to die, um incredibly oppressive image and, and so I kind of wrote in to the canvas kind of, a written creative response to kind of persistently being put through a consciousness persistently putting me through this, that there was this kind of burning political question of um what do you do with those individuals who fall foul of this very narrow band of consciousness that you're allowed under the you know capitalist society where um everything's so controlled and so, everything's got a kind of mediation of its worth, monetarily, you know, labour um and, and consciousness becomes a commodity and that's the system.

Um. And so this painting's really, really very much about um you know challenging what it is that we've created that the world that we live in that we think is the only way the world can be um and which is destined continually to lead to kind of um horrendous conflicts that leave people's lives in a desperate state and what do we do about that, do we really see, you know, our consumer society as the apotheosis of um everything that humankind aspires to? Isn't there something better, isn't there something more? And um um yeah, it was, it's a very powerful painting. And um a very strong message and it should be in the Tate now. *(Laughs.)* But it isn't!

Um so the other, one of the other paintings I wanted to talk about er had a very long-winded title. This is a painting that I call 'The Jealous Psychiatrist' for short. But it's full title was 'The Jealous Psychiatrist, His Animus and One of His Wicker Dollies on the Dialectical Conveyor-belt of Reason and Unreason'.

(Comment from A. Laughter and indistinct comments.)

So again the painting was very much kind of linking um the, linking witch trials and the attitudes of fear in consciousness that led to the witch trials, linking that to the way that psychiatrists condemn um certain forms of consciousness because they don't understand it in the same way that, you know, women were condemned as witches. Because the society as a whole had become so embroiled in the fear of this invisible god that, you know, they had to manifest a way of expressing that fear and it led directly to the persecution of people across Europe and, and psychiatry has a very similar function in that it holds and contains the fear and manifests, controls it by disabling people with drugs. And treatments that are given over as cures but in fact are just ways of stopping the brain from functioning.

The chemical cosh, as it's called, you know it's locking people up by stopping their brains from functioning properly er and um .. Um, yeah, it's a kind of slow death really, isn't it. I think that neuroleptics are terrible drugs um and it's a win-win for the system because the pharmaceutical companies make huge amounts of money out of it and the, you know, the way that psychiatry has developed In more recent year, it's got to the point of, you have a drug and you test that

drug and you see that it behaves in certain ways, it does certain things to the human brain. And then, what you do is you invent diagnoses that fit the way that this drug works so you, so you create a market for your drug. And that's the way that psychiatry has functioned in the last ten or fifteen years, it's, obviously it's come from America and, and it's grown globally, certainly, you know the English-speaking world um the number of diagnoses has increased hugely um nothing to do with mental illness, um it's all about selling drugs. The madness, the real madness is that as a society we think that's perfectly okay. And it's utterly, utterly criminal.

And, you know there are certain big-name people who, who rage about the injustice and the corruption and the, the terrible, the fallacy of allowing this to continue, but even they don't seem to stop it, you know people like that Norwegian chap, Peter um, he, I can't think of his name he runs a kind of world-wide investigation, a body that investigates medical practices um and he's written, I'd need to look it up..

So 'The Jealous Psychiatrist', is, I think it's quite a comical kind of image really, it's quite a kind of caricature and it's got very strong mediaeval references um and um and and shows an individual being, being victimised by being injected with um a dozen or more depo injections of, of neuroleptics. And of course the, you know, things have changed a little bit, the more brutal approaches that psychiatry made um you know thirty-forty years ago er, where they were, took people's organs out, removed, a big practice was to remove people's dentures, to remove people's teeth, um that they removed, over years they removed, you know the kidneys and internal organs um as a cure for mental illness and that doesn't happen so much now, ECT is still used, but it's very much a modified version, but um, there's, there's still a very strong element of punishment to, to the drugs that psychiatry doles out and to the way in which um the, the kind of, the double standard that, it's kind of like, you know um, back in the seventeenth century, you know if you were accused of witchcraft um and sent to the ducking stool, um you know if you drowned then you weren't a witch, if you floated then you were a witch and you'd be killed. And similarly, if you admit to mental illness then that means you're on the road to recovery and um and you'll get given drugs. If you deny the fact that you've got a mental illness then that means that you're really mentally ill and you'll be forced to take those drugs. So you don't win either way. And um 'The Jealous Psychiatrist' is kind of playing on that fact and, and the way that um, you know, psychiatry is a political function to control people to ensure that everybody's a good consumer.

Um and the other painting that I wanted to talk about, 'The Brickmen', is very much on the same theme.

A: Question. Depo you referred to, and I came across it in that book. What does it mean?

C: It's a way of giving medication. Needle. Um rather than by tablet um you inject the neuroleptic into um someone's bloodstream. And it's called a depo injection because it's um, it's set to release into the bloodstream bit by bit so you don't get the whole impact of the injection all at once, it's over time, so typically um, typically somebody who historically um

doesn't take their tablets will be given a depo injection where they've got no choice but have the drug administered um.

A: That's enough. I want to pause.

(Pause.)

C: So 'The Brickmen' was a poem that um was very much kind of influenced by T.S.Eliot's 'The Wasteland'. It's kind of in that metre. 'We are the brickmen, the slick men..' It had the same rhyming structure as The Wasteland. And so the painting was kind of constructed from the poem and er, typically I did with all the paintings of dreams and hallucinations and so on, I'd storyboard the, I'd do a storyboard of the sequence and then find a way of encapsulating this kind of moving image into a single frame. And so, it's quite typical of my work to either come up with a piece of creative writing, a poem or a piece of prose, and to storyboard an image in response. Also for the artwork to be created the other way round, where I've got a strong image and then create a piece of prose or poetry that, that connects with that image and then gets painted into the canvas, that was kind of, that's still kind of the basis of what I do today really, the words and the art are very much interlinked and 'The Brickmen' was another in that series that was a kind of reflection on the political state of society and the, the kind of aggressive way that capitalism kind of creates the society in which we are, we are held bound to be consumers in order for the system to work and to perpetuate itself. You know, those people that aren't good consumers for whatever reason, for health or disability or whatever um become worthless parts of that system and um consciousness is reduced to this very materialistic kind of idea of um monetary worth um above everything else. That was kind of the basis of The Brickmen, what the image of is, the kind of series of kind of um macho police characters, controlling and really um keeping, you know keeping people in a state of oppression and victimisation. And I guess the same is true for communism as well. In the way that it kind of manifested um. And um I think under communism societies reached... a critical state very quickly. And I think under capitalism the same process is happening but we've reached that critical state in a slower way um and I think you know the shit's gonna really hit the fan within the next twenty years and the, the consequences of the way that resources have been exploited and the way the people have been exploited are going to reap their rewards. I think that's, that'd, kind of seems to me to be fairly inevitable.

So those are the three painting I wanted to, to in my rambling roundabout way. So I think we got to the end of the nineties? And we were gonna, I was gonna start talking about...

A: I'll tell you where we've got to. We'd got to when you were at DAIL with Kit.

C: Oh right, yeah. I can talk about that for a bit.

A: I don't know if you want to talk more about becoming editor of DAIL itself.

C: Yeah.

A: You mentioned in passing.. So round about there.

C: So yeah, um, so I'd been involved in helping to set up Survivors' Poetry. And from that I got to know LDAF and, and.. I remember how it happened. I had an exhibition and um and, I think I might have talked about his, I had an exhibition that Kit reviewed in DAIL magazine. And he was, he was goading me really. And um kind of, so I got into disability arts and I really got it. I really got the sense in that this was art about real stuff in life. And not kind of pandering to some pretentious fancy. It was art that had real stuff to say about life. And so I related to disability art immediately, very very strongly, um people like Nancy Willis and her um, her drawing and installation and paintings of the babies in the um unit at Hammersmith Hospital, the, I can't remember what the unit was called.

A: The Premature Baby Unit.

C: Premature Baby Unit. Um and and the sense of how those images related to her life, as a woman with um, quite severe impairments um and you know I was really deeply moved by a lot of the work that I saw. And deeply kind of satisfied on an intellectual, in an intellectual way as well you know, um things like um er Tony Heaton's um, what did he call it when he had the kind of triangle of collecting tins, threw his leg at, I can't think of the name of it. You know there was something very humorous about that,. But it was also very real, about knocking over the hierarchy, about challenging the hierarchy, challenging the..

A: Can we go back a little? I know what we're talking about but can you describe it for the reader, describe what the work was?

C: Er, yeah, I can't remember the title.

A: I'm not absolutely sure it had one, but I can always check with Tony, I can always put it in.

C: Yeah. So it was, something like 250 charity, red charity collecting cans It was a seven foot high pyramid of charity collecting tins. And er which was kind of created as sculpture, but then there was a performative element in which Tony threw, the artist threw a false leg at this giant pyramid and it all came crashing down. Um and you know it was, it was Tony Heaton in a very humorous way expressing his anger at the way that the charities have taken hold of disabled people's lives and, you know, are telling us what's good for us. Um without any consultation with us as to um what we see the situation as. And those slogans, 'Nothing About Us Without Us' and um 'Piss On Pity', were, I kind of connected very strongly with the humour and anger that were at the foundation of those slogans. And I felt very strongly that I'd er, I'd come into, as editor of Disability Art in London magazine I felt very strongly that I'd come into, come into something that I was really meant, a place that I was really meant to be. And that it was something that I could really get my teeth into and really help to you know help to kind of steer um in a way, in a sense to certainly help to evolve, I wanted to see more art in an arts

movement! You know, typically at that time in the mid-nineties disability arts at its, in its early stages, was very much run by people who weren't that interested in art really, which always seemed a bit of an anachronism. Um so I was, I really wanted to find out about the artist and to write about them and to write about their work and to find ways of supporting their networking and getting Arts Council grants and challenging access um in different ways and um, yeah, I kind of think Disability Arts In London magazine did a pretty good job really um and we sent out 5,000 a month? Five thousand of the newsletters every month got sent, got mailed out all over the country and um, er it really felt like being at the heart of, you know a lynch-pin at the core of the movement and I felt very privileged to be in that place and um.. It was brilliant! I mean, it was difficult in lots of ways, um it was challenging for me personally, but that was a good thing too, you know I kind of enjoyed the challenge, um as much as anything you know it was the challenge of how do I as someone with a history of mental health issues um fit with a movement that is largely run by people with physical impairments. And there was always that um um disconnection really with mental health in that the, the political heart of the survivor movement was very much about challenging sense of there being a mental illness at all, challenging the fact of impairment at all levels, um whereas disability arts was very much about um kind of accepting impairment and um challenging the way, the barriers that society placed in front of the individual for being different, for having a different body to what was seen as the norm.

There was, there was a kind of very, on an intellectual level there was very much a disconnect there between the survivor movement and the disability arts movement. And I, I reconciled that to myself through seeing how, how disabling the treatments that psychiatry dishes out are. And how people under mental health get disabled by attitudes of, from professionals right down to, you know, receptions from everyday people. How probably in some ways um it, mental health it's, it's kind of there is the biggest amount, bigger amount of discrimination against people with mental health than er any other impairment group. Because, um, because it's invisible, because there is no real scientific basis for understanding what happens with consciousness when consciousness kind of takes on these other forms um and, you know it, if it is an illness of any.. If it is an illness, it's an illness of consciousness. Which is something that scientifically we know very little about as a, you know as a species. It's, it's um, consciousness is something that scientists have always sidelined because it doesn't know how to quantify it, doesn't know how to um get to, get to the essence of it because it's, because it's very intangible, although it's obviously very real because we know that we're here in a way that other animals don't know that they exist, don't reflect on the fact that, that they're beings in the world who have an impact on the world and can relate, you know relate to nature and are in relationship with nature.

We're the only animals that do that, because we have consciousness . But the one thing we don't understand is what consciousness is. So that's really, you know that's really critical, it's really at the core of the dilemma, core of the conversation, what the fuck is consciousness, who the fuck are we. And who the fuck is someone over there, because they're in a position of power and they've got money and status to tell me that, you know, because I'm on the street and

have nothing that I'm mentally ill. You know, fuck you! It's utter bollocks, it's about power relationships. It's not about illness, it's not about scientific medical fact, it's bollocks um. I've lost my train of thought now. *(Laughs.)* I got a bit carried away there!

I was talking, I was talking about, yeah, the dilemma that I found myself in that you know, I'd found this position and I loved learning about journalism and I loved kind of doing all those different journalistic tasks and um and you know learning about technology as well, it was all, you know it was all real grist to the mill. And um but I was, I was going to, you know, I was connecting with people from the Direct Action Network um and going to demos and um all of that. But I think people very much saw me as um a non-disabled ally. I don't think people really understood my sense of myself as a disabled person. And I was, I was struggling with that too, I was struggling to, to kind of understand what that sense of identity was about. And um, that was interesting in and of itself. And er um I, I think um er, I think well subsequently in the early kind of, the early two thousands, it became clearer and clearer to me that I, that um, I had a physical disability impairment as well, I got diagnosed with M.E. in the early two thousands um and realised that that was largely a result of having been on Lithium for years and years, and the impact of Lithium, and I think it's coming out more and more now, how, how harmful Lithium, which was kind of very, which was like the wonder drug of the um eighties, it was the new wonder drug that was going to cure mental illness. And now thirty years on..

A: Can we go back? When were you on Lithium?

C I..

A: You haven't been sectioned, ever, have you?

C: I haven't been sectioned.

A: So how did you..

C: As a day patient. I've been a day patient at different times. At different times in my life um and so have been, I've been on, I've been prescribed psychiatric drugs um, majorly anti-depressants, um I've been prescribed anti-depressants by GPs from way back, from the um from the early eighties really. Um and then there have been intervals where um I, I've had to go and see a psychiatrist and have been um put on different sets of drugs. But typically, er, all of the drugs that I've been prescribed have made all of the symptoms a whole lot worse. The only exception to that um has been um, has been Valium, that's the only drug that has relieved the anxiety and the brain fog and the er, the you know the oppressive feeling, physical feeling that comes with M.E., um Valium's the only drug that has any lightness or relief about it. Every other drug without fail has just made, made it a hell of a lot harder to function and, and has increased all of the symptoms in really quite horrible ways. And um you know, I take these drugs I think well you know when I've been in desperate straits, it's kind of like you'll try anything. And um, so you've got this person in a position of power telling you that this is going

to help you um or even cure you um and so you think well I've got nothing to lose, life is so difficult because of the state that I'm in and it can't get any worse, and then you take the bloody drug and it does get worse. So you go back to the doctor or the psychiatrist and you say this isn't working, and they say oh you have to keep taking it for two months, six to eight weeks or else it's not going to work properly, it takes that amount of time to work properly, so you think aohhh, I'll carry on down this roller coaster that I know is going to kind of spit me out and throw me into the shit. And that's what happens, time and time and time again. Just doesn't work, don't bloody work, um so you just er, you just find other ways really, of coping with it and, and um, that's just how it is um

I've been very lucky I think in that I've managed to forge um a path that means when I'm having difficult days or a difficult week um I don't have to get out of bed um, I can, I can get on with the work that I need to get on with from, from my bed. And that, you know I think that's a very privileged position to be in really um I'm, I'm very very lucky, I think you know for a lot of people, a lot of people are really struggling financially because that option isn't there and they're much more disabled by society, think you know there's an irony in that, that um in terms of disability it's the lived experience of barriers, I've managed to forge a path in which the impact of those barriers is very much mitigated and um, yeah that's um, that's no little thing. I'm very very lucky. I'm talking of course about um kind of what happened around two thousand, the end of, the um, the beginning of two thousand I left London Disability Arts Forum. I left, left editing DAIL magazine and um, er kind of a shame really in that um financially the magazine was in a very healthy state and was, was um something like a third of the running costs were being, being covered as earned income from advertising. And I worked hard to achieve that and that was quite an achievement for a free magazine that went out monthly and um, that was proving its worth to the Arts Council in you know matching what they put into it by a third. And that was a pretty big thing. Sadly it floundered after I left, which was a great shame. That was the one thing that kind of, what it could have been.

But um, I er, it wasn't long after er I'd left LDAF and DAIL magazine. I think, conversations were very facilitated by Joe Bidder er Joe was such a, Joe was so key to um everything that I've done really actually. You know he was, he, you know he was a terrific mentor kind of, he really, he was the one that encouraged me to kind of move on into working for LDAF, he thought that was a brilliant move. And he saw what I was doing with the magazine and always gave me loads of encouragement. And then critically, when I left and he was very involved at that time with the Arts council's access, quality..

A: Disability Monitoring Committee

C: Disability Monitoring Committee, that's right. And so he put me in touch with Kwabena Gyedu, who was the, he was terrific he was the Arts Council's, he was the Disability Officer at the head office, the National Office it was called then. So through Joe, um, I started having conversations with Kwabena, probably sort of about early 2001 about um how the Arts Council wanted to continue the kind of work that DAIL was doing but they wanted to produce something

that was online. They saw that as the way forward. And um and Kwabena saw that as the way forward and um in conversation I realised that the potential of online as a way of linking people nationally and internationally as a way of um er creating um access to artists and access to work being created within the performing arts, within the visual arts and within literature um. There was a limitless number of possibilities that it was, something that um was going to grow and grow. And was um, I was very, I kind of went into those meetings with Kwabena thinking you know I'd really like to do another print publication but was very soon in complete agreement that online was going to be the way to go. And that the positives about online far outweighed what you could do with print. Um.

You know print has more gravitas to it and online's kind of more ephemeral in that sense that the potential for access that those concerns kind of outweighed print really. I think the potential for creating access for um and kind of disseminating disabled people's voices um holding conversation about disability, a constructive conversation about disability identity and what that means was um was huge potential for creating something online. So er I, I was absolutely delighted that the Arts Council, you know saw something in the work that I'd done to that point that, that they were willing to back and um, we had some false starts with Disability Arts Online because it was originally a part of a, a wider umbrella of arts-related online platforms which um, which floundered because of the um, um I've forgotten the name of the word for it now, the kind of, the architecture, they call it architecture um for the content management system, which was, was um, it wasn't set up in the way that, that um was easy to manage. And the project just kind of fell apart. So Disability Arts Online then became part of um, became a section on the Arts Council's website for a short while.

Um and then um, this all happened between 2002, 2003 and then in 2004 we became, Disability Arts Online became an independent um organisation and I'd set it up as a, I set it up as a company um limited by guarantee and, a not for profit company limited by guarantee. Um which was very easy to do and er, er and it's kind of grown from there really, from 2004, it's just um, um built and built, it's been through three different um three different manifestations since then and it's just got better each time. It's taken a long time to build the company because I didn't, I didn't really have, I didn't, the Arts Council kind of skilled me up to a certain level, but I didn't have enough skills to carry an organisation as a, you know Chief what do they call it CEO, Chief Executive Officer, Director or whatever. I didn't really have the skills or, I didn't have the mental, I didn't have the mental stability to be able to kind of carry something um every one of those tasks that you have to do in order to maintain a business, um, I found very debilitating and so it was, it was a real relief er to kind of let go of that in 2009 um and It um unfortunately the wrong person took it on initially. But they didn't stay with us for very long. But um we came, we came within a hair's breadth of um going down, Disability Arts Online came within a hair's breadth of going down in 2009. And then Trish Wheatley took it on in 2010 and um she's just run with it and has been absolutely brilliant and kind of helping to develop the concept of Disability Arts Online and as well as the business and to, to kind of er grow its status and footing as a kind of leading National Portfolio Organisation of the Arts Council. I'm very proud of what's been achieved, really. It's pretty damn good and er um and you know all those same

things that I enjoyed doing with Disability Arts in London magazine I continue to enjoy doing now, talking to artists and and kind of getting them to talk about their work and showcasing that work and creating discussion and creating a dialectic, creating a dialogue rather, um around um around work.

And, you know, it's just been an incredible journey, meeting some of the most amazing people er like Mat Fraser, for example and seeing Mat perform in mainstream productions of Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels, doing his kind of, seeing him doing his um freak show, seeing him do all of his cabaret stuff, um and rap stuff and seeing, watching him build a career and come on to play Richard III at Hull Truck Theatre, which he did in summer and, just brilliant artists, you know um, people like, in visual arts people like Aidan Moseby, you know, kind of from his first outings as a text artist, using up text to, to kind of ask questions and framing it as a piece of art, and seeing him going on, making, he's making work about the relationship of the weather to mental health um and he's um er got himself an M.A. in Curation and you know is challenging the, the fact that Disability Arts has never had a curatorial bone in its body and it's time that um curation becomes a key thing to the development of the um disability aesthetic within the visual arts. I could go on, there's loads of artists I could talk about, it's just brilliant, I don't know what more you want me to say I need another cup of tea.

(Session ends)

Session 2

Track 1

A: One, two three, four.

C: That looks like it. Yeah, I can see the levels going up there.

Track 2

A: That's looking alright.

C: Yeah, does the level sound about right? In fact that's good.

A: Just tell me about how you got back to your own work or got into it. I don't feel that we've been away from it but...

C: Um so kind of I suppose back stepping a bit and I'd made some inroads with 'Dreaming the Absurd' and had um a solo show in West London, the Real Art Gallery in Portobello Road in the um, that would have been about '92 I think. And er I think it was through that that um Dianne Pungartnik became aware of my work and wanted to feature some of it in DAIL magazine. And that was my introduction to LDAF. And um so then had kind of, there were quite few different group shows at that time, mid-90's and um often the same work going to different venues as part of different group shows. I had work in 'How We Like It', which was an LDAF exhibition at the Diorama in about '93/'94. And um so I got, so the work was still sort of travelling and being seen and being er, being appreciated, I think, but um it, I exhibited with Survivors Poetry quite a bit as well, they had you know the exhibitions in libraries and community centres and things like that. And um but then when I kind of got that opportunity through Kit to, to work on the magazine with LDAF that kind of took me in a different direction and I didn't stop drawing, I didn't have the space to paint, that's always been an issue is having the space to make a mess and to be able to you know and studios being so expensive, renting a studio is enormously expensive. And I never quite had the, enough money to be able to paint. And so I carried on drawing, I did illustration work for Mind magazine. What was it called? Not All in the Mind. Um Mind had a print magazine and they commissioned me a few times during that period in the sort of mid to late nineties. About three or four times they commissioned me to do illustrations for them.

And so, so I carried on drawing but I, there was, there was so much to learn about publishing and um computers and software and you know the internet was starting to become a thing and email, there was, there was so much to learn and um the demands of meeting the deadlines for a monthly print publication meant that it, it um, I always found that making artwork with serious intent isn't something that you can just turn on and off. You know I have to get into quite

specific mental space to be able to kind of pull up the ideas and to make them work. And um and that requires quite a lot of, psychologically it requires quite lot of time and um , and it requires the right environment. That's the other thing that's always got in the way of the artwork is that having the right environment to work in, I was so lucky when I was at Dartington because the environment there was, was such a creative firmament and there was such a wealth of encouragement and interest and you know that it was um, you know it was very much part, you know it was the most creative period in my life, because it was the right environment, it was the right um space, it was the right kind of conditions. And um that's, I would say that's the main thing that's got in the way of me being an artist is having the right conditions in which to be able to really develop what's going on because it, it means getting to quite a deep level, psychologically and um emotionally.

So the kind of becoming a journalist kind of took me away from that, you know there was constantly too much on my mind anyway to really kind of be in a space to um develop those ideas that were unfurling through the period at Dartington and the following years when I was exhibiting quite widely. And um I sort of, it just sort of went on the back burner really for a few years and then into the 2000s um I, I um I continued to have exhibitions here and there um but um the amount of energy that it was taking to get an exhibition together, even to get work together for a group show, um it, it just wasn't the amount that it needed. The reward just wasn't enough to really kind of sustain that. It sort of um, it..so kind of what happened really um was that I carried on drawing but not in a studied way so I was I guess drawing really more as a form of therapy and um as having a very ultra-nervous personality and has always meant that I need to be doing something with my hands. And so from a therapeutic point of view drawing has always been a really important expression of that nervous energy.

And so, so the drawing really just took on a different mantle, the artwork took on a different mantle, it was, I kind of lost the impetus for making work that I wanted anybody else to to necessarily see. And, and, and um and also at the same time kind of through that period, through the second half of the nineties um I was very intensely involved with Survivors Poetry. And that was, that equally a really kind of um strong ferment of creative energy. And so I was writing a lot and trying out different styles of writing and reading different poets and mostly writing for performance at that time and then I edited 'Under the Asylum Tree', the poetry collection, the illustrated poetry collection that was part of, it was one of Survivors' Press's first publications. And I co-edited that with um oh gosh a woman called Jenny. And Joe Bidder, God bless him. *(NB: Recorded editors at National Poetry Library are Jenny Ford, Colin Hambrook and Hilary Porter.)* It was quite interesting actually, what happened with that, cause I, I took all the drafts and all of the illustrations that we had and we'd kind of formulated a rough idea of four different sections of the book, four different themes that helped bind poems together. And I took everything and I took myself off to North Wales. I took myself off to a place called Penmaenmawr which is on the North Wales coast between sort of East of Harlech, East of Bangor and Penmaenmawr had been the place for a very significant strong Penmaenmawr psychic childhood event where I saw angels, I spent a night with an angel in a caravan in Penmaenmawr when I was ten, around the time that everything was really breaking

down in a quite significant way. And um and this angel was a very powerful and nurturing presence and so when I put 'Under the Asylum Tree' together I decided to go to that place. To find that it had a motorway running through it! But that was fine, I, I camped in the caravan site in the kind of camping/caravan site where we stayed when I was a child. And um and I spent probably about two weeks there, kind of on the edge of Snowdonia, the foothills of Snowdon. And um er and worked in cafes and kind of places I found that were, that I could just sit with all these papers and put it together. And..and it worked. And 'Under the Asylum Tree' won a Mind Award and kind of went into a second edition and it was um a really pivotal moment in my life that.. Kind of, it was it was such a huge achievement. And um, and it was kind of like the moment where I kind of thought, 'I can do this, I can create something that, that has um impact and it, you know, is valued and and has a kind of cultural collateral.'

And um so I think without having done 'Under the Asylum Tree' I would never have had the confidence to start Disability Arts Online. And so it...

A: Can I interrupt you there, that sounds like a good point to break off. Do you want to tell me about 'Under the Asylum Tree' and what it was and kind of..

C: Okay. Um. So er I think there were probably about forty or fifty poets who got published in 'Under the Asylum Tree' and it was, it was really a calling card for Survivors' Poetry that um survivors of the Mental Health system had something valid to say and were valid artists in and of their own right beyond this kind of community arts therapy sort of banner that survivor arts gets dismissed under. It um er it had work that was kind of professional and had um that talked about experience of mental illness in all sorts of ways, in a very nuanced way, that largely criticised the way that, the way that the sort of pathologising of people going through mental distress. And um the ambivalence of really calling it an illness. Because if you call something an illness then that implies that there's a cure. And it's just the way that people's brains work. And people's brains work in different ways. It's not necessarily that they're ill, it's that fitting in to this very narrow capitalist society is not something that all people can do. And the definitions of that get narrower and narrower and narrower. And the, who you're allowed to be becomes more and more constricted in the society that we live in. And it's not an illness, it's the bloody society that's fucking ill. It's this kind of insistence on valuing everything and everybody in numerical terms, it's a nonsense. And it also is an abomination to consciousness. And that is the kind of pinnacle around which it turns, because we don't know what consciousness is. Because we don't know what it is scientifically, we choose to dismiss it.

Rather than valuing the contribution of people who are experiencing consciousness in different ways we just throw them in a dustbin and put the lid on it and say that's an illness. And so 'Under the Asylum Tree' was about opening that out, in very real ways without, you know, without being, without it being um, without contriving something. The way the book came together was quite organic. There were people published in it who were quite famous, and very experienced, people like Billy Childish, and there were people published in it who um spent

their whole lives in psychiatric hospitals and had never been published before and had never performed before . People like Justin, whose surname I've forgotten. Um so it, 'Under the Asylum Tree' was also about our kind of cutting through that kind of bullshit about what's amateur and what's professional and you know, if it's good, if it speaks to you then that's, if it resonates on an emotional level about important issues, about human condition, then, then that is it, that's the value that you put on it. And um it felt like we'd done, we'd created something that was bloody good and that really challenged a lot of the myths about mental illness.

A: Good. Thank you.

A: And then..

C: And then. And then. I carried on writing, I carried on drawing but I really just sort of for myself. I moved to Brighton and um when I moved to Brighton I lost that creative connection. There wasn't quite the same, there wasn't quite the same thing happening in Brighton creatively. There was a poetry scene, but it was all quite cynical and quite competitive and really the anathema of where I felt comfortable. And so I kind of, I lost, I lost that um that support of having peers around me, that I kind of could share stuff with and um, that's also not, there were pockets, there were one or two people that I kind of clicked with. Lee and the 29th of July club. There were about, I think at one stage there were about twelve of us, all of whom were born on the 29th July, who kind of would see each other from time to time. Paul is still quite a close friend. And um Paul and I were born on the same day. So there were pockets of places to kind of share that creative um stuff but not enough and I lost a lot of confidence in, but I kind of gained confidence in being able to produce stuff, I lost confidence in my own abilities to produce stuff as an artist. And for me art and the words have always gone together. They're inextricable, the drawing comes out of the writing and the writing comes out of the drawing. That's always how it's been for me.

And um so it took quite a long time and it wasn't until 2011 and I got encouragement from Stevie Rice...

A: For the tape, can you say who she is?

C: Er, Stevie Rice was, she was a Shape officer actually, she was a Shape officer in the late nineties, early 2000s, I think. And she went on to set up DaDa South.

A: Did she encourage you?

C: She encouraged me to, to um to put an illustrated collection of my poems together. I wanted to say something about the um I kind of needed to express something about how difficult the journey had been. And the, the struggle to get a roof over my head, to find a place that was safe, that felt like home. I think, you know in many respects home was never a home and it wasn't a place of safety. And so through the seventies, eighties, nineties um it sort of

slowed down in the 2000s, up to that point for decades I'd been moving house for up to thirty times a year. Constantly, you know like every month it was somewhere else. And so that's why the collection got called '100 Houses'. And um I think in many ways it's quite an angry collection of poems. And quite a darkly illustrated, just kind of expressing my sense of, of anger at the world really for not seeing what a genius I was. And not realising that, you know, that it, you know society didn't need to make it so hard for me. It was also me working out how, you know, how I'd constantly left-footed myself right through my life, how I'd brought all this stuff on myself as well.

Um It's quite reflective in that sense. I think it's quite balanced in that it's like, you know, um, I, my um survival mechanism was not to believe myself. And if you don't believe yourself, then your ego doesn't get a chance to develop in a healthy way. And everything is your fault and you can never be at peace with the world because the world is constantly telling you no. And you don't have the right to say yes. Or actually, more importantly, you don't have the right to say no. I'm not going to put up with that, I'm going to have this. And so um I was easily swayed, it's how I ended up kind of in this, this, such a um oh what's the word, itinerant um, you know, I kind of was like a refugee in my own life really. Um. And I got down to Devon, you know, in 1990 and I thought ah this is a clean break, it's a chance to leave that cycle of constantly moving house behind. And it didn't happen. I still found myself perhaps moving, perhaps less but still six, ten times a year through those years I was kind of in different accommodation. And um all this precious art work that I had to carry with me everywhere as well. It kind of, you know, felt like one of these mythological cartoon characters who carries a house on their back. It was a bit like, it was a bit like that.

And um so '100 Houses' was a kind of em a um a kind of a bit of an outpouring of that, a kind of reconciliation with the past and it was, it was a drawing of the line in the sand between what had gone before and what the future was gonna be like and I'd kind of in that sense kind of facing up to quite a lot of things. And um it's, it's um, its very raw. As a collection it's very, the poems are very raw in terms of er how well they've been honed. And the, and the illustrations are also likewise quite raw, they're, the drawing is largely much looser, much more kind of expressive and physical and um still quite detailed but um it has more of a visceral quality to it. And um it was, it was a good moment, having kind of having something solid that, you know it sort of um, exhibitions are so ephemeral, you know they happen for a week, two weeks, you know if you're lucky a month. And then they go away and it's as if they didn't happen. But with a book you've got, you've got something solid that you can kind of refer back to.

And er so I was you know, Stevie was fantastic for um kind of helping me to kind of get myself back into valuing that creative space that um, that I could be creative and make work with limited resources in terms of the conditions for making artwork that it didn't need to be so um, I didn't need to put so many things on myself to stop the creative process, you know I need a studio, I need the space, I need peace and quiet all the things that I was telling myself I needed in order to be creative, the work constantly getting in the way.

And so '100 Houses' was a bit of an outpouring of the frustration at um having been through a decade where I'd really not done much creatively for myself at all, that it, cause that's the other thing, when you're just doing stuff for yourself it's like well, you get to a point where you think I'm not showing this to anyone and I'm just keeping it to myself and what's the point, it's just gonna sit in a cupboard till I die and then it's gonna get thrown away. Um. But at the same time having that really strong need to be creative as well. And so um '100 Houses' got launched in Brighton Dome. I had some of the artwork on display in the kind of foyer/bar area. And um created a soundscapes, recordings, they were, actually they weren't soundscapes, that's the wrong word, they were recordings of the poems but I'd written in some audio-description and some context. And um and I think people found that really powerful. Maria Oshodi got very upset I seem to remember. But yeah, it was a good thing to have done.

And um at that time, that was also around the time that Trish came on board with Disability Arts Online. I'd been, Disability Arts Online had really felt like a burden a lot of the time, certainly 2005- 2010, it increasingly had felt much more difficult trying to keep it alive. I just didn't have the skills to manage something that was gonna become what the Arts Council needed it to be in order for them to consider carrying on funding it. And so demoting myself and allowing someone to come in who did have those skills was a really good decision. And so it took, having Trish on board took a lot of the stress off me and gave me space in which to reconnect with the creative side myself.

And so, um so I carried on and um in 2013 um I managed to get a Grant for the Arts to put the next illustrated poetry collection together. And um with the money that I got from the Arts Council I got John O'Donoghue to mentor me. And John was great at er getting me to write in different ways, getting me to use rhyme, which I'd never before felt was something that I could do. You know, I think, I think oh, rhyming poetry is a bit like water colours. It's like the place that people go to first when they think 'oh, I want to write poetry' or 'I want to paint'. People think that poetry is rhyming. And people think that painting is water colours. Not realising that watercolour and rhyming are actually the hardest to actually craft to a point where it's art. And so with my poetry I never thought that I was good enough to be a rhyming poet and so John encouraged me to explore and to kind of um um to write in lots of different ways and 'Knitting Time', which was the collection that I got together with the Arts Council and because I'd got Waterloo Press on board as a publisher and I'd got Outside In on board as um a place to exhibit and launch the work. So they were really strong partners that that um er were necessary in order for the Arts Council to feel that it was something worth funding.

The other thing that John O'Donoghue did was to encourage me to er give the context to the poems and so there's a middle section of the book which is a memoir. It's kind of condensed, it's about three thousand words I think, a three thousand word memoir. But the book is largely a homage to my Mum. And a kind of um a kind of again a kind of following on from 'Under the Asylum Tree' it's that um it's a valuing of consciousness and being in its own right. We dismiss people's lives, we dismiss people because they don't quite see the world in the way

that they're meant to see the world. And so their experience of the world becomes diminished. And 'Knitting Time' is the kind of a repositioning of that and a kind of um a challenging the notion that mental illness is all about torment and all about illness. It's you respect it's, it's a different, there's another narrative that is actually much more healthy that um, and much more nuanced that needed to be understood. If science is going to get anywhere, if the science of the mind is going to get out of the middle ages, then it needs to embrace consciousness as a valid field for scientific research.

This kind of chopping off of the head and the body and kind of looking at what this neuro-transmitter is doing and that neuro-transmitter is doing, it's a nonsense because the head doesn't exist on its own in isolation without a body and all the other organs. It's fucking stupid, you know, you can see how, it's to do with the way that medicine in the West has, has evolved. And the kind of specialisms have got more and more detailed. So we know what's happening with nervous system and we know what's happening with the lymphatic system and the nuances of, know how to cut people open and take out a damaged liver and put another one back. Um. But this sort of cutting everything up into um, it's, it undermines the importance of consciousness as a, something that's, it just gets left off of the map. And actually it's all that we are in many respects. Without our consciousness we are as, well, the consciousness of other animals, the consciousness of plant life and is um undeniably there but it's a much, it's consciousness at a much lower.. It's a problem with language isn't it, 'cause you're kind of, it's all about hierarchy, it all becomes about hierarchy when, and we naturally fall into this trap of talking about human life in terms of hierarchy. And it, it um, it's not, it's a construct, we've constructed this, it doesn't have to be like this, we don't have to understand the world and our place within the world in this kind of constructed hierarchical manner. And, you know, we have self-reflective consciousness. Which is fucking amazing. But we don't know what it is.

And that's what 'Knitting Time' is about. And it, and it's about our connection with the elements and our connection with nature and um it's about valuing the fact that that we're nothing without appreciation of that connection with nature.

A: Did things progress or change artistically from one to the other? Did you move on?

C: Um so yeah. So as John O' Donoghue supported me combing the poetry and really working on it in a really quite studied way and making it the best it could be, so the drawing techniques that I'd been using for quite some time also became much more polished and um in a way, it was a drawing technique that I'd um developed in the '90s really, but then um had become much looser um but with, through 'Knitting Time' I um found another place for it and, and um it also, so a lot of the drawings are direct illustrations of the poems, taking specific images in the poems and visualising those. I think in my poetry it's quite visual poetry, uses a lot of imagery and so drawing out that imagery was kind of a, a positive step. Um and also, also as part of it, as a kind of full project I got back to painting and print-making in a smaller way, but I got back to some painting and printmaking. And um and I think using different media also helped the drawing, cause I was kind of thinking about the drawing in um and kind of using different tools,

using paint brush and drawing with a paint brush, you know with the lino cuts drawing with a, a blade. And so, yeah I was really proud of 'Knitting Time'. It's a beautiful book.

I want to see if I can convince Simon Jenner to republish it. I think, I mean I'd be prepared to put some money and get it reprinted. If I can find the money to get it reprinted I'd like to do that. Cause we only had, I think it was 150 printed and it was very kind of constrained by the grant and um, but I'm hoping he's still got the proofs there, somewhere. Get another lot printed it would've, I would have sold loads. I um. So it's quite personal work, quite I suppose it falls within that um what's loosely labelled as confessional poetry. And um that's where a lot of my poetic influences come from, that's where, Sylvia Plath and Stevie Smith and Ted Hughes and um Thom Gunn comes to mind. Those poets that write very personally but also there's a thread of nature that runs through a lot of their work as well and connection to nature and um. So I'm happier with the art work. It doesn't have to be these big statements that 'Dreams of the Absurd' was, the kind of big four foot by four foot, six foot by four foot paintings.

A: 'Dreams of the Absurd' is a collective title for those ..

C: 'Dreams of the Absurd' was the collective title for the works that I was making from Dartington and through the nineties, from the late eighties to the late nineties.

A: You called it 'Dreaming the Absurd'. Or is that a separate thing?

C: That's a separate thing.

A: What's that?

C: That is a poem. 'Dreaming the Absurd' is a poem, the kind of collective work was 'Dreams of the Absurd'. Um.

A: Do you want to tell me about the poem, as you mentioned it earlier? 'Dreaming the Absurd'?

C: Yeah. It's, it's, 'Dreaming the Absurd' is a poem that has kind of followed me from the, it was written probably in eight., in '90, in 1990 it was written. And it's, it's the poem that has followed me right the way through, that has become a bit of a party piece and um it's something that I really enjoy doing. It has elements of song and elements of movement to it and it's fun. But it's also quite deep. And it sums up everything that I've been saying actually about consciousness, about our relationship to consciousness and the nonsense of kind of valuing our lives numerically. Pythagoras didn't get it all right! And um yeah it's kind of short and concise, it's quite concise, but also very, very, every line is very considered. John O'Donoghue was quite appalled by the line that goes 'There's a bureaucrat in the toilet of my mind/ He's counting the faeces I've left behind'. He didn't want me to keep that in. But to me it's, it's

actually really important because it's, it may come across as a bit base but that's what we are, you know we are just animals like any other animal and um and we all eat and piss and shit, that's you know that's, um if we didn't do those things we wouldn't be alive.

A: Coming back to 'Knitting Time', you had an exhibition of those pictures didn't you?

C: Yes. Yes.

A: Was that something that..

C: They've actually been exhibited quite a few times in different places. But they..

A: Was that something that was part of the plan for the project from the beginning?

C: Yeah. The Arts Council want to see that you've got this partner, this partner, this partner. And that you've got so many other creative people involved in it. And um and so very generously Mark Stein at Pallant House Gallery gave me the opportunity to exhibit in the Education Space at Pallant House Gallery and to, and to launch the project there. And to um work with Outside In to produce a series of workshops which were about um working with grievous moments in our lives, working with grief in a creative way. Which was very much, which was also an essence of what 'Knitting Time' was about, it was about kind of, accepting um accepting the grief that I'd been living with for so long, grief about my mother and about what happened to us and, it's also that thing where if you're someone who's had a difficult life then society doesn't give you anywhere to talk about that. You don't get a chance to learn to talk about who you are, because those things, those experiences can make you who you are. But it disavows you from, people don't want to know, you're not supposed to tell people about this stuff. You know, it's like admitting that your life is totally worthless and that you should be dead. And so that puts you in a very very ambivalent relationship to the world.

And so it was like 'Knitting Time' was a kind of coming, a kind of , don't like saying, can't think of the right expression, not coming to terms, but a kind of it was an evaluation of that and an embracing of that. It was an embracing of that it was okay and that I didn't have to feel that my life was under a cloud. And that I didn't have to worry about other people's perceptions, that I could accept myself for who I am and what I've been through and what I've come through and that that was a good thing and um and that I had something really valuable to offer the world as well, that's, I think a lot of my life has been about the struggle with that, you know, having grown up from childhood with a sense that I didn't have a right to be here. That then puts you in a position of well, what is it that I can give to the world that I can also value for myself and feel, you know, that I have an important contribution to make.

A: One other thing I wanted to ask you about is the point at which you started to use colour with the pictures. Do you want to tell me what happened there? I remember your pictures as being these really detailed pen drawings but black and white. And then you started colouring

them and introducing.. Tell me about how that all came about.

C: Yeah, okay, so um..

A: Not looking at that too much because the tape can't see it.

C: So the process was really, that was coming back to painting, I always liked using very bright colour in my painting and contrasting., contrasting bright colours and um doing that thing where you create a kind of three-dimensional sense to a two-dimensional plane by making warm colours sit behind the cold colours, that really gives a power and a force when you contrive, it's that illusion and it's something that I've done a lot in the painting but I don't know how I do it, but when it gets there it's like really pleased with having done that thing and so, so with the drawing, it's kind of pen and ink and it was, a lot of it was really about struggling to find the right medium to start to put colour back into it . And also quite a few years I was very focused on the, the power that a black and white image holds and Rachel Gadsden, Rachel was always very kind of encouraging of the black and white and she, she encouraged me to, to try my hand at working with white on black, kind of reversing the process. Although with the Rotring pens, with the drawing pens, the white ink is very chalky and it clogs the pens up really quickly and, so I kind of never quite really took that to where it could have gone.

So I just kind of um they remained black and white for a long time, through the '100 Houses' period. '100 Houses', that was published 2011, 'Knitting Time' was two years later, was in 2013 and it was also about monetary constraints that publishing a full colour illustrated book is hugely more expensive than black and white. So I resolved to keep the, keep the drawings black and white for the purposes of the book and then once, once they were digitised, that then left me free to colour them. And that was I suppose the decision because 'Knitting Time', the yellow, the kind of very bright primary yellow was quite important to 'Knitting Time' because it was the colour of, the colour of a wool that was quite significant to my Mum, to knit with this very bright yellow wool, that's why in the 'Knitting Time' illustrations when they got coloured the knitted boats were coloured yellow, because that's a connection to my Mum and kind of search for joy, I think. Yellow's one of those colours that has a kind of, it has that ambivalence, doesn't it, because it's kind of heightened joy but it's also a kind of dark despair, it's also the colour of suicide. And so, yeah, so it's in, that's an important thing. And I think, I think all of that work would have been coloured from the get-go if there wasn't that constraint of having to reproduce the illustrations in black and white for the book. (1:14:54:3)

So it was, it was also, it was also, I think with '100 Houses' was kind of a bit locked in to the anger and it was important to express that anger and of course you know and the flip side of that anger is suppression and I didn't feel like colouring the drawings. But then yeah but then it became quite an important thing to do for 'Knitting Time'. I've enjoyed exhibiting that work in various places where it's gone up. And the illustrations in 'Knitting Time' were kind of purposely had a 1950s feel about them, I was kind of looking to get a 1950s feel because that was the sort of time period, 50s and the 60s was the time period that I was referring back to a

lot in the work. And so it was because of that it was quite natural to go back to using, using coloured pencils, using Caran d'Ache coloured pencils. Which I guess never felt like a serious medium to use. But then I discovered the water colour pencils that you can, so you can use them as coloured pencils but then you can also, they'll also dissolve in water so you can, you can paint them as well. And then you can blend the colours. So yeah, it's fun.

A: Alright is that it? Or is there anything else that you feel we've missed?

C: I was, on the phone the other day I remember saying, asking you did I tell you the ultra-mad story of my birth.

A: Your birth?

C: Mm. We were talking about um people's birth stories, I can't remember how.

A: Julie had a whole lot of detail.

C: Yes, that's right, it came out of a conversation about Julie's work, that's right. And um so I don't know if this will be a poem but it was..

A: Try it and we'll see.

C: Yeah.

C: My Mum was brought up a Catholic and like many Catholic families she was one of nine kids, seven sisters and two brothers, three brothers. Ten kids. And she rejected the Catholicism but she was looking for, looking for something else in this kind of spiritual whatever, unfolding, she was dealing with all the shit of having grown up during the war and I'm pretty sure that there was some serious sexual abuse went on that was very much a kind of, at the core of her problems, that never ever got out, that she never found a support to work through that stuff. And so she turned to Jehovah's Witnesses at the time of my birth and she said that I as an old spirit had come to her during her pregnancy to tell her that the Jehovah's Witnesses had the truth. And that she'd received some message that this was the path that she needed to go down to kind of resolve all these deep-seated emotional issues that were kind of clogging up her life.

And so, so she projected a lot of this shit on to me as a young child, which was a kind of very, on the one hand it was like I was this kind of, felt I was very valued and very much held on a pedestal. But equally totally fucked. And that, I mean, that's the story in a nutshell. But there were other kind of elements to it where all these other characters came into play that were kind of very much on a spiritual dimension and were sort of invading our space and I think that they were, that it was, it was a kind of suppressed grief there that there was something that happened that was deeply grievous that kind of got locked up in all this ridiculous

shenanigans, kind of spiritual kind of bollocks really. And, yeah, I'll never know now. I've carried that sense throughout my life and that kind of, and I guess 'Knitting Time' was a chance for me to kind of redress that. And explain something to the world and to myself in, you know, much more balanced and nuanced way. I think that's it.

A: Okay.

Ends.