

**LJH41 17.2.1990**

**Jean**

Q. ...what we're interested in in this piece of research is finding out what young women think and feel about relationships that they've had or might have in the future, or have had sort of thing; so could I ask you what's the most important relationship that you have, now? Any kind of relationship at all.

A. ... mum and dad. I don't actually have a boyfriend at the moment.

Q. Yeah? What's important about the relationship with your parents?

A. Well, it's pretty good, in that they're there. They're just... I couldn't think of anything else offhand, you know, a working relationship or anything... closest to me, I'd say my mum and dad.

Q. What about your brothers and sisters, you've got -

A. Two brothers, one sister. They're okay (laugh).

Q. Yeah?

A. Yeah. We're - we're a particularly close family. I don't say that we live in each other's pockets, but we're just close enough. We try and keep out of each other's way when necessary, but I would say we're just - we're just about right. We don't, you know, scratch each other's eyes out or anything.

Q. Yeah. Are they older or younger?

A. One brother and one sister is - they're older than me, and I've got a younger brother...

Q. And how much younger's the younger brother?

A. He's REDACTED years younger than I am. My sister's REDACTED years older, and my brother's about REDACTED months older than I am.

Q. So they're quite close, your older -

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. So do they - I mean, do they all live at home?

A. Yeah.

Q. Yeah?

A. My sister's thinking about moving out and my brother's gonna move out soon; and my little brother's gonna go with him.

Q. What will you do then - the whole thing's changed?

A. Your guess is as good as mine (laugh). I've absolutely no idea.

Q. Do you think you might move out yourself or will you stay?

A. I'm not tempted to move out just yet, 'cos it's so expensive in London -

Q. Yeah.

A. I just don't have the money. I can just see myself having a permanent overdraft, so - I don't like the idea of that.

Q. Yeah.

A. But then again, you're used to a setup at home, so... have to live with somebody else's... and ways and eating dinners on your own and nobody else to talk to.

Q. Yeah, it's difficult.

A. I find it difficult - I find it difficult on my own on Fridays... Fridays and so I might have dinner on my own. I don't really like it all that much... eat on my own, except if it's eclairs and things like that.

Q. Yeah?

A. (laugh)

Q. A secret eclairs eater.

A. Yes (laugh). I suppose I'll have to get used to it. But if I was the only one at home, my mum'd be more reliant on me to do things like... I wouldn't like to be the only one that does... the washing up -

Q. Yeah.

A. ... hoovering... me to do this and me to do that and me to do everything else, so I might just move out 'cos of that.

Q. Yeah, yeah. How do you get on with your dad?

A. Oh, I get on fine with my dad. He's alright. We get on pretty well together... I would think I'm his particular favourite. I spoil him and he spoils me, it's alright.

Q. Yeah. That doesn't cause any difficulty with the rest of them?

A. No (laugh). Well, LIZ's mum - my sister, my elder sister, is mum's favourite.

Q. Yeah.

A. And my little brother is everybody's favourite, you know... The only person that isn't a particular favourite, say, my elder brother.

Q. Why's that?

A. I don't know. He's a bit moody. He's not easy-going like the rest of us. It's just different for him; he doesn't particularly get on very well with dad. He can get on alright with mum sometimes... he'll just do the other thing, and he'll cause argu- - you know, he'll argue with my older sister. He gets on alright with - with JONATHAN, my younger brother, but he didn't up until, say, about three, four years ago... and he gets on alright with JONATHAN, and he gets on alright with me, that's because I don't take any crap (laugh). So he's not - I wouldn't say as he's mum's or dad's favourite, particular favourite. I mean, say like, I'm dad's favourite, but that's on the girls' side, but his overall favourite is JONATHAN, my brother. So even then I play a second in line, I'm not a particular favourite with anybody either... younger... you know, the middle kids.

Q. Yeah.

A. I'm not a particular favourite for a reason...

Q. Yeah. You feel a bit sort of left out... feel bad.

A. (laugh) I get used to it, not expect - I mean, put it this way, like my sister, she's mum's favourite, and whenever we say, look, mum, we all know LIZ's your favourite, she goes "... she's not my favourite or anything". I think yeah, yeah, yeah... (laugh). But everyone knows she sticks up for LIZ. But she'll get me to do anything that she wants done. I think, why are you - you know, you think, well, why don't you get your favourite to do everything for you? Like, say like LIZ, LIZ brings home yogurts, and she'll bring home the ones that mum doesn't like, so she knows that mum's not gonna ask for any of them, whereas if I bring some, I'll bring home the ones that I like which happen to be the ones that mum likes, so she'll get them. I said, "you should take them off LIZ, she's your favourite", she says she hasn't got any favourites... I get on alright with them.

Q. You said on the questionnaire that you've got a special girlfriend.

A. Yeah, KIRSTY. She's at university at the moment. She's doing history and - no, not history, sorry - she's doing art and English as a minor subject. I've been friends with her since - we used to work at a LIBRARY together, and I carried on seeing her and she me afterwards and, say like I've had problems, or if she's had problems, then we usually talk to one another about it. You know, things that you can't discuss with...

Q. What kind of - what kind of things?

A. Well, say like last year, I went through a really bad - I think it was last year - yeah, yeah, it was last year, it was between - either last year or the year before that, I went through a bad patch, where I was really depressed, and I was working alright, I think - you couldn't notice it more or less out of the work that I was doing, but I was really down - you know, I was - partly 'cos I was working somewhere... (laugh), I wasn't getting much money for it. I wanted to get out and - you know where you go through this bit where you just can't stomach what you've done so far, and you think, well, you know, that's not a very good list of things that you've done... getting really depressed about it... it was on my mind... work, and I was sick and I wasn't sleeping well, everything - everything was going wrong. And I couldn't get a job and I kept on going - I was with an agency at the time that I was looking for a job, and that didn't help, 'cos they were sending me to jobs that they knew I wouldn't take up - you know, how they always bump up the salary by five hundred pounds -

Q. Yeah.

A. - if you ask for a particular job - my particular field is accountancy work, and you say "look, I don't want anything to do with money whatsoever, I don't wanna handle money, I don't wanna see money, I think I ought to do just general - general accountancy work, all the adding and the battling on the calculator and everything like that, I do not want to handle money". And they kept on sending me for these cashiering jobs or these things, you know, that says "oh no, there's only a little bit of cashiering work in there". If there's only a little bit I'll touch it, but you get there and you find that it's fifty percent of the job, and you get really depressed and you keep on slagging off the - you know, ringing up the agency, slagging them off saying "look, don't send me for these jobs because I'm not gonna take them, if they ask for me tomorrow at twice the salary I'm still not gonna take them", and they carry on sending you. I wasn't getting anyway. It was about seven months looking, I actually took nine months... another job. I - I just got really depressed. Other things as well, just general, you know, at home -

Q. What were the other things?

A. I just wasn't satisfied with what I was doing... (laugh). I don't know, I just felt I was getting nowhere, and I couldn't - you know you get - I just went further and further down, and I knew I was going down 'cos I couldn't shake - usually you can just shake yourself out of it or, you know, you think "oh, it'll be better tomorrow", but it was getting no better -

Q. Yeah.

A. - and we had someone back at work, which demoted my position at work, 'cos I was kind of - while she - when I started there, she wasn't actually there, I didn't even know about her, and one day she appeared, and nobody introduced me to her, and then the next thing I knew, she was back, and she was a deputy to my manager. Now, in her absence, I'd been more or less deputy after a while, so of course it threw me back into, you know... And the whole system changed when she came back. Instead of having my own - you know, you - you regard these things as - as little, but they're of big importance; I had my own telephone ...

Q. Yeah.

A. - and I had to share it with her, and of course she wouldn't pick up the phone to answer my queries, but I had to pick up the phone to answer her queries, and that got me down. And - not KIRSTY herself, but - she - she's - I mean, she's really pretty and everything, and okay, I haven't been seeing a lot of her, but you know how pretty... I mean, she's so... she could have been a model for example, she's that pretty. And, you know, she spends - she's lovely and everything, but she spends a hell of a lot of money on clothes, which I couldn't even do to start

with. And she had, you know, she had guys falling at her feet, you know what I mean? (laugh). It was just all those things and it kind of just - it was kind of wrong timing, all these things come together and I just got depressed. There wasn't anyone at home I could talk to, and in fact I didn't even tell KIRSTY the whole story, I just told her about the work situation and she just did a little graph sort of thing: well, you're here now, she said, you've got a number of options - do you want to go this way or do you want to go that way? If you're going this way - it was rather like one of those - those graph charts they do, "yes/no" for each one.

Q. Yeah, sort of flow chart thing, "do this, then -"

A. Yeah, "do this if you don't want to do this".

Q. Yeah.

A. And I felt a lot better after that, after getting it off my chest and everything.

Q. Did you start doing any - going any of the routes?

A. Yeah, well... (laugh). I haven't done all of them because, after a certain point, I just reviewed everything, so this year I was going through certain aims; but I think the main thing was that - not only that, but I started getting more health-conscious, and - just on an impulse, I saw these tapes in HMV; you know the - the hypnosis tapes?

Q. Yeah.

A. Well, they've got... one side and the relaxation on the other. I bought one of those and this one was learn to relax like, and my brother, my younger brother and I, we were going over this thing, and I found that, say, like, in a couple of weeks, I felt a lot more assertive and I got a lot more... I got, you know, I had changed - changed... changed my perspectives. I said, look, you can do this, there's nothing that's gonna stop you from doing this, so do it. And at interviews I was more, you know - meek, not usually meek, but I was - I was more aggressive and assertive, and it had changed slightly. And - I mean, I couldn't notice it myself, but perhaps the interviews were getting better; and I got the job that I'm in now.

Q. Yeah.

A. It's like kind of - it was kind of... I mean it sounds like... but not for long, say about a week or so.

Q. Your present job's okay, is it?

A. (laugh). It wasn't up until recently, because the same situation's happened that it does at the last job. I'm actually a ACCOUNTANCY ROLE and I have a ACCOUNTANCY supervisor and I have a ACCOUNTANCY manager, and I have an accounting manager who then reports to the - what's his name? - SIMON, just call him SIMON, he's actually the financial controller. So it's - it's loads of stages -

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. Now, beforehand we used to - we didn't have a ACCOUNTANCY manager, so again I was being kind of -

Q. - put back one -

A. Yeah -

Q. Yeah -

A. - and even before her, I - I have a feeling - I don't think that ACCOUNTANCY ROLE is my kind of thing. I've done it and I don't like it, and you - if anyone - anyone phones you up, they're chasing something, they want money, they're not phoning up to ask you how - how are you; they might do it initially but you're thinking "yes, and what do you want now?" (laugh). And I was thinking of leaving, and I've still got it in mind, only that they're doing a slight

reorganisation and it might - it may be that in a few months' time, they may come up with a cashier.

Q. ...That'd be good?

A. That would be good, and that gives me more experience and it gives me foreign currency experience as well. And I can do (?)lotus; and I can start screaming at them that I want to do courses, which will give me more experience. The more experience I get, the better. And if ... everyone tells you, "ah, that's good experience for you", I think "why is everyone telling me it's good experience?", I'm rather dubious about their motives. If it's - if it happens that way, then I'll hold onto the job 'cos I don't want - I mean, I've only been in the job since May last year, so it's not gonna be very good on my copy book if I just leave after, you know, eight months or so, so I may just stay there. But if it doesn't happen, then I'll start looking around for... purchase ledger... purchase ledger clerk, and they expect you to become a purchase ledger supervisor or a manager. And that's as far as it goes in paying invoices. You don't move over to start - the transition from paying invoices to actually doing the main functioning of accountancy is quite difficult. 'Cos they think you can just pay invoices, they'll just stop thinking that you can do anything else -

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. - and therefore trying to get promotions that are more money and better prospects is a bit difficult, 'cos they'll just go up... purchase ledger or sales ledger, and you won't get into, say, management accounting or financial accounting, where the real money and the real prospects are.

Q. Yeah. Had you thought of doing anything different - entirely different, you know, sort of changing line or anything like that?

A. I have, but the thing is - I'm not saying I'm competent and brilliant at accountancy; I'd most probably be very good - this is not being big-headed, big-headed or anything, but it was apparent when I was doing my O-levels and my A-levels: I'm good at anything I put my mind to, which means if the job was, say, marketing or advertising, I'd be good at it. I'm Jack - well, Jill, rather, Jill of all trades. I mean I haven't tried anything that I haven't been able to, say, be average at. There are some things I know I'm pretty bad at, say like creative... couldn't write a poem in years, you know, decades or anything. No, I'm not that bad on the creative side, 'cos I can sew and I can draw and I can do embroidery and things like that, so I am creative, but it doesn't lend itself to poems and stories - well, that bit's gone anyway, that went with school. It's just that I'd be average or above average, depending on the job, what the job was. But then if you move out and you don't like it, you - it's difficult to move back in, 'cos I mean once you've moved out of accountancy, you know - "what's she become, say, a market researcher for?" and you go back into accountancy... foolish questions. Sort of like, when I first started work I was a library assistant, and when I go for jobs, they ask me "what did you spend time in a library for?". I'm thinking "well", you know, "done the work, for crying out loud"!

Q. Yeah. And that was a job anyway.

A. Yeah, it's a job, it pays money, you know, it - they ask - when you go to interviews they ask you stupid questions like, you know, "why do you want this job? Why do you think you'd be so brilliant at this job?", and I'm thinking, "I don't care if I'm brilliant" - you know, "you want me to be brilliant, but you don't care why I want this job, so just leave it at that" - that, I think, is the most stupid bit of the application form known to mankind.

Q. Yeah...

A. ... ask why - you know, you just - I'd love to be able to turn round, "look, I need the money; I think I'll like the job and that's that", and, you know, that goes down pretty well -

Q. ...

A. - stupid things like "oh, well, I think this'll be a great career prospect" and...

Q. - "I've always been really interested in variable work" -

A. Yeah, and you're not, you just have to say these kind of things. They know it's lies and you know it's lies, so... like that.

Q. Did you get on okay at school?

A. With the teachers or with the pupils?

Q. Either one.

A. With the teachers, very well. I did the work. I was comparing it with a friend, it was one I worked with, yesterday; she was a real hell-raiser, and I thought, God, I've led a quiet life... With teachers, I just did the work and - and, you know, they thought, you know, I could get places. They thought I could even go to university, but I wanted the money (laugh).

Q. I was wondering about that: yeah, you could have gone to university, couldn't you.

A. Oh, I'm not saying - yeah, I would like to have gone to university, I mean even now I'm thinking, "oh, yes, a nice B.Sc. would come in handy" (laugh), but it's four years out of the work market and I'm not inclined to agree with anyone who says that having a degree will put x amount of thousand on top of an A-level, because I think most employers want people who have experience rather than qualifications. It's the in thing now. So I'd rather get the experience, and get it - and get a degree while getting the experience. I mean it most probably means that I have to spend about three nights a week at college or something, but I'd rather look at it that way long-term, rather than four years away from the work environment, then come back and find out that - well, you know, a degree is very nice but we're gonna give you the same money as we give someone who's got A-levels -

Q. Yeah, yeah, I think that...

A. - and a couple of years' experience. And I think that's happening quite a lot. So - but I wasn't - you know, when I looked at it, I was thinking no, I don't want to do a degree, and there wasn't any degree that actually appealed to me at that particular time. Everyone said do sciences but I thought...

Q. What about the lifestyle, though, I mean -

A. What, drinking and boozing?

Q. - did that appeal to you?

A. (laugh) Well, the thing was is that it'd be more or less like school and college. And I got on alright with the teachers and I probably would have done so at college, and gone down, did the work and everything, and made sure that I passed the exams. But - I can't remember much about primary school, but junior school and secondary school, I wouldn't say I didn't get on with pupils but I wouldn't say I did - I wouldn't - I would not say I did get on with the pupils, put it this way. I did the work, didn't mess around or anything, didn't..., and that was not the kind of thing that was expected.

Q. Yeah. What, there were people who would be more sort of rowdy?

A. Yes. And - you just do it; it had to be done and, you know, you get somewhere by getting these exams and everything, so you just do it. And I didn't mess around and - and I knew my stuff and unfortunately (laugh) - well, fortunately, if I know my stuff I'm not gonna act the fool, I'm not gonna say, "oh, God", you know, "I know more than the boys, I must pretend to be innocent and stupid and everything" -

Q. Yeah.

A. I just told - you know, I didn't say look, I'm the most brainiest guy - I mean, brainiest girl there is. I just - if I knew the answer to a question, I said I knew an answer to the question. A lot of girls wouldn't say that they knew an answer to the question 'cos they fancied -

Q. Yeah.

A. ... or Kevin or..., or whatever their names were at the time.

Q. So do you think that put the boys off?

A. Well, I can't think of any other things that did (laugh). I never think I - when you - when you're like that you don't like - girls do not like girls who aren't girls, if you see what I mean, who don't use feminine wiles -

Q. Yeah.

A. And even now I can't be bothered to use - let's say, you know, you're mildly polite; I can't be bothered to use feminine wiles. If I'm intelligent you're gonna know that I'm intelligent. Like last week I was down in SOUTH LONDON and I... this guy opening a new bank account; and this guy'd given me all this spiel about insurance and everything, and I'm trying to act stupid like if I don't know all of this, and it's very very difficult for me, I just wanna say, "look here, you... I don't need to know about this 'cos I'm clued - 'cos I'm more or less clued up on ... matters" -

Q. Yeah. Yeah.

A. And I can't - it's not part of my nature to act stupid if I'm not stupid. If I don't understand anything, I'll say so. And, you know, it's "brainbox JEAN" or "oh, JEAN knows all this". And if you do know all of this, then people want you to help with their - their work, and, you know, you ask them - they ask you questions, you're supposed to go like that (click) with the answers. And I wouldn't have any of that either, because it's up to you to learn the answers, I'm not having you feeding off my information and my - me wracking my brain, so you can sit down and just write down all the answers. I won't do it at work either. If someone's stupid enough, I'll let them know that I think they're stupid enough. Well, ... I'm not saying it didn't get me very - I wasn't - I wasn't that popular, but, put it this way, I wasn't the first one that they - I was the first one that they chose if it was a competition which involved ... but I wasn't very physical -

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. So you know what it's like when you're the last person, near enough the last person, to be chosen for a game sort of thing, it's pretty, you know...

Q. Yeah.

A. Things like that, that hurt a bit. But then again, you know, if you come a hundred and one out of a hundred and forty in cross country (laugh), you're not gonna be picked for everything. I wouldn't - I wouldn't say I was very popular at school.

Q. Yeah.

A. The teachers knew me, and I got good reports and that.

Q. What about the relationships with the boys then, I mean did you feel bad about - well, did you have boyfriends when you were at school?

A. No.

Q. Yeah.

A. But I haven't had a boyfriend, full stop.

Q. No? Did you want to have a boyfriend?

A. Well, you know, the kind of "I've got a boyfriend" thing. Well, to be honest, it isn't a subject I've really talked about to parents or to anybody. 'Cos I said, you know, when I was talking about how I was really depressed, I didn't even tell KIRSTY these things.

Q. Yeah.

A. It's a bit difficult for me to talk about it now. But you read things like Jackie and all those girlie magazines, and you're thinking - you get to a problem page, and when you're about thirteen you're thinking - no, ten, you're thinking "ugh, boys!", and at thirteen you're going "... not so bad...". And you get to all these problems and the girls are going on about their problems with boys and, you know, "my boyfriend wants to kiss me" and "my boyfriend wants to have sex with me", I'm thinking, "well, that hasn't happened to me yet" - you're thinking that you get the same (?)train as everybody else, and that, say like when you get to sixteen, at thirteen you think that when you get to sixteen, you'll have a boyfriend that wants to go to bed with you and says "if you don't love me -" (laugh)

Q. ...

A. - "love me enough to go to bed with me", you'll think "oh, sod him!". And, you know, you get to fourteen, it hasn't happened, you get to fifteen, it hasn't happened, and you get to sixteen - and you think "well, what is it - there's something wrong here, you're missing the bandwagon", you know, everyone's leaping into bed with everybody else and you hear on the grapevine that say a girl called say, JANE DOE, for example, has been going off with some other guy in the sixth form or something -

Q. Yeah.

A. - and there's no difference between this JANE DOE or yourself, and you're thinking, well there's got to be something wrong. And then you go on and you go on and you go on, say like seventeen, eighteen, and then the older you get, you think "what's going on here, what's wrong with you?". And say like I got to the point where, say, say during the month it wasn't hard for me to say twice a month, do I think - you know, there's nothing there. But it didn't haunt me as much as it would - as it would when I was sixteen. But it - when it does it's in different ways. Like if I haven't got a boyfriend by the time I'm twenty, what's it gonna be like when I'm twenty-five? And what's it gonna be like when I'm thirty? And it's those ways that - like, you know, when you're - you know, you - when you're young you think, "oh, he's gonna come along sooner or later", you're not worried too much, and you think it's the spots on your face or - or that, say you're developing faster than everybody else, or that it might be that you're too brainy and they don't like - but when it gets - when you get older, it's different things. You think, well, am I meeting the right people, am I doing something wrong or am I too assertive or - you know, it's just different things. I'm not too sure.

Q. What do you think having a boyfriend would be like, I mean what do you want out of having a boyfriend?

A. (laugh)

Q. Is it the sex?

A. No idea. If you don't have one you don't know what's involved in it.

Q. Yeah.

A. I think it's a status symbol. I mean, I'm not gonna go around like, you know, showing off like a prize, you know, Indian tiger and things, "this is a boyfriend", you know, "I've got one at last". I most probably just want someone that's slightly closer than a friend. But I don't know - 'cos you'd have - I haven't had one, I don't know how further it goes than that.

Q. Yeah. Have you had boys or men who were friends, just friends?

A. I've had a lot of - not in the way that I've had girlfriends, but I've had a lot of men who I've associated with who I would call friends. But you know you have distinctions of friends -

Q. Yeah.

A. - and I never had one that would come close, say like women like KIRSTY.

Q. Yeah.

A. I've had ones that have been - you know, you could say certain things to, like the people who I work with, most of them - most of them are men and most of them I would call - I could talk to, but not about certain things, you know the kind of -

Q. Yeah.

A. - level that you go to, but you could say that of girlfriends as well and the level you go to, and that's as far as it will go. It's not that - I mean, say like if someone took an interest in it, I wouldn't even know how to handle - you know, you're supposed to know these things, for crying out loud, by the time you're - you're my age, you're supposed to go, you know, someone goes "... go out with"... go "what?"(laugh), or, you know, "I'm going to the gym tomorrow...", going " oh, yes, of course, I'll just - just do my..."; I mean, I didn't know what to do. It is a question of knowing what to do. Like, because I've never had a boyfriend, I've - if someone asked me out I wouldn't know what to do; if it was holding hands, thinking, you know, the first time - "what are you up to?"; I wouldn't know what to do. If it was, say, like French kissing the first date, I wouldn't know what to do. I just don't - it's - it's - it's - I'm pretty clued up on most areas, but this is one that, you know - you know, you can't just go into a bookshop and -

Q. And find out.

A. Yeah, take a book out on about, or get it in Sainsburys or something. You know, I wouldn't mind if they were in Sainsburys, you just ask for a refund or something - "take this one" (laugh)... I don't know about it so -

Q. Yeah. What about at school, did you - for example, did you get any sex education?

A. Yeah... go round saying "that was ninety-nine out of a hundred" or something like that. I think it started - sex education started the year before we did it, or that year, you know, we were in the first year of doing it. It was about normal things like pregnancy and how long, sex, but they didn't teach you anything about, you know, emotions or anything like that; they talked to you about puberty - you know, all the medical things that they - they tell you about, they don't tell you about any of the emotional things. And we had a test - I always remember there was one - there was this guy called MARK, he actually knew - it had a question like "how long does it take for a woman from gestation to birth?", no, from conception to birth, and he said "fifteen minutes", and the whole class just burst out laughing, you know... husband's just done it as a job, and fifteen minutes... (laugh). But I'm - it wasn't - it wasn't anything that I couldn't have covered in biology -

Q. Mm, yeah.

A. - and it wasn't anything that I'd learnt about beforehand and - and say, like, the diagrams they used were rather simplistic. You know when they use a half cut away of a body, I mean that doesn't tell you anything. Or the latch - was it the latch... where they had the ovaries and everything? You know, it doesn't mean anything to you. I remember being at the library, the library where I was working, and they brought out a book for teenagers about sex and everything, and I - they had pictures of the vagina and erect penises, and everybody, 'cos we were a really young crowd - everybody was looking at it going... and we were waiting for the first doctor to come and take this book out so that you all know who it was! (laugh). But at school I don't think the sex education was all - all that brilliant; I mean, we only had about an hour a week for about a term, so it was only so much you could learn. I mean you - you cringe when they started talking about things about periods, because they're the kind of thing that you don't talk about at home and you don't think that boys should know about...

Q. They were mixed groups you had then.

A. Yeah. It was a mixed sex school.

Q. What about at home, did they - did you talk about that kind of thing at home at all or -

A. What, sex and everything?

Q. Yeah.

A. Well, my mum just told me I could get pregnant (laugh). No, I didn't really. I mean, it wasn't exactly a taboo subject but it was this thing you didn't talk - I wouldn't say it was taboo in that if you said "sex", you know, your parents were descending like God himself -

Q. Yeah.

A. It was just that you just didn't talk about it. Like... programme on it, "Bouquet of Barbed Wire" - "ooh, we like that one!" (laugh). Bit of the old... in everything. Like when we were little, it was more amongst children to speak, and not even so much that.

Q. Yeah.

A. But we didn't really talk about it; mum just said, you know, VD and everything...

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. About sort of toilet seats, which we all know is a load of tosh now. But that was about it - that's all I remember.

Q. What about with your friends, have you talked about it with your friends?

A. Oh, no, ... talk about it with friends.

Q. Yeah.

A. I mean, if you started talking about that you'd get onto the subject of "oh, my first one was -", "oh, yeah, my first boyfriend was fourteen" and - you know, it'd soon get onto you and you think - you wouldn't have anything to contribute so it ...

Q. Yeah.

A. I mean I never really talked about it with anybody. It's just something - because sooner or later it gets onto the subject of "you haven't had a boyfriend" -

Q. Yeah.

A. - or so, you know, "what are you talking about?". You can't talk to somebody about sex if you don't know... I don't know, so it's just one of those things. I mean, we used to - quite a mixed bunch, they like swear words to do with it. I didn't know a lot of swear words. You don't swear at home, full stop... say bloody or blasted or (laugh)... swear words -

Q. Yeah.

A. - and I hadn't heard them at primary school, and so like when I got to secondary school and they were words that I - you know when it's a swear word 'cos you -

Q. Yeah.

A. it's different on the ear - and yet I'd never heard those words before. ...go home and tell your parents... (laugh) and things like that. You just don't hear those things. We used to have like - we used to have a - when I was about thirteen - used to have our own words that weren't swear words, like we used to say... for kissing or whatever... you know. But, as I say, like now, if my parents aren't there and something mega happens I will use a mild... but I don't swear in front of my parents and I try not to swear at all. I don't swear at work.

Q. When - when you had this sex education at school, they mentioned STDs and things like that, or did they mention VD then?

A. I don't think they actually did.

Q. Yeah.

A. I can't remember, 'cos - I think I would have remembered something like that. ...I suppose I would have called it VD because to everybody at school it was VD, I mean everyone still does now, I mean you can say STDs 'til, you know, you're blue in the face, but everyone goes "what's that?" - "VD" - and they go, "ah, I see!" (laugh). But I don't think they did, I think it was just - just reproduction and puberty, and that was about it.

Q. What about AIDS? Where do you think did you first hear about AIDS?

A. God, I don't actually know. It's one of those things that crop up on you, you just know about it. I think it might have been in the medical library that I was working at - but it doesn't register there. You just flick through, you know, you might be just photocopying something, and you see "AIDS", you think "what's that?" and you just look over it and "nothing particularly serious there". And then someone'd start to do this mega-stuff about AIDS, and then you realise - you think, oh boy!, and you think "oh, yeah, it's only confined to homosexuals", you know, "I'm not one of those" (laugh). And then they start saying, you know, it can get to heterosexuals too, and - I think the first concept that I really had was AIDS was a serious disease, was when I looked in "Any Nursing" video, and he was saying that - say, like gonorrhoea or syphilis, they're things you can get a couple of shots and that's it, it's gone; herpes, you keep that with you; and AIDS, this thing kills you, and then it kind of gets to you then. But no, it's not as... not at secondary school, nothing like that, I don't think they touched on any STDs at all.

Q. What do you know about AIDS, I mean what do you think...?

A. It's something I don't wanna get (laugh). No way! I don't know - I'm not thinking it's a God-fearing curse that, you know, all this - someone was saying that, you know, there's been this great big ... things falling on earth and they bring all these germs with them and -

Q. Oh, yeah.

A. - you just pick them up and everyone can just die... I don't know - I don't really think about it as such. I know - say like if - if I was going out with someone and they wanted - and, you know, we were thinking about it, I wouldn't know whether to use - to tell him to use - I mean, I probably would say, "look, you put on a condom" or something, but it seems insulting to the - to the person to think that they're not - I mean, you don't know, that's the thing; do you stop and say, "I'm gonna hurt your feelings, I'm gonna protect myself"?... how I protect myself -

Q. You think you -

(Tape Change)

Q. ... six months. Would you, yeah -

A. And you think, well, you know, you've been going out with this person and you - and you trust them at least a little bit, but it's your own life you're talking about here -

Q. Yeah.

A. So I - I don't know... I mean, I'd probably say, you know, or I'm hoping he would say or we'd both say... sort of thing.

Q. Yeah.

A. 'Cos you don't know, I mean nobody goes around saying, you know - when they ask you out, you know, "you might want to go to bed with me and I've been with", you know, "four girlfriends and three boyfriends and", you know, "I might just have a possibility of being with -", you know, "having AIDS", or something like that. You know, you don't tell them about your sexual history beforehand, unless of course you - you know, you're a virgin... "God, I haven't done it before". No - I would want to protect myself. I think they'll hopefully get a cure for it

soon, 'cos we're..., you know, in the sixties, you know, you had it, you know, you had it free and easy, you know; we're the ones that have to pay for it.

Q. Yeah.

A. Things like that. I just think I would like to - I feel I would protect myself, but I don't actually know. The only thing was, you know, if they came back - if they got narky and said, "look, how dare you think that I've got AIDS?", how are you gonna object to that? I mean, it's just like someone saying - it's like - you know, it's like an innate sense of trust, you know, like if you say - if my sister hands me a cup of coffee and I say "have you put sugar in it?"... have sugar. You know, she can say, "how dare you say that I don't put sugar in it?", 'cos I know - she should know that I have sugar. You know, I would feel pretty narked if she said to me "did you put sugar in - you've put sugar in this", okay - "course I didn't put sugar in it!" - it's that thing. I don't know what I would do. I just hope I would...

Q. Yeah. Do you think that people are worried about AIDS, young people? No?

A. No way (laugh). I mean, you can say all this AIDS crap and everything; when it comes to the crunch, I don't think a lot of people are that worried about it. There's not a lot of people who know someone dying of it - if you know someone dying of something, then it's gonna hit you, or, you know, you ...worry about chicken pox, but if you have chicken pox or something like that; but if you don't know someone that's dying of it before you start getting really worried... you know. Definitely all the fussing about it in the media, or like this environmental issue, you know, you fuss about it enough and it'll go away and nobody'll be worried about it again. Like even if say hundreds of people, you know, looking like Auschwitz, really drained and everything and lifeless, and you say "these are AIDS victims", but it's so far away from you, you just detach yourself from it. They used to have all these promotions about AIDS and say it kills, you know, they say "oh, these things'll save your life"; they say "AIDS kills you", and everyone listens to it, but... smoking, say "smoking can cause cancer" and things like that, "smoking causes cancer", "smoking kills you", then people'd listen to it.

Q. Yeah. You think if it was more dramatic they would -

A. Oh, yeah -

Q. Yeah.

A. - I mean - I'm thinking, because it doesn't affect me at the moment, because I'm not going around and - and, you know -

Q. - at risk -

A. Yeah, all these partners left, right and center -

Q. Yeah.

A. - I - I'm not worried too much about it, but if someone said it kills people, then I would - you know, I would just... Even now you hear the doctors say, you know, you can't get it from drinking out the same cup as AIDS cases or - or you can't get it by donating blood, or you can't get it from cuts, or, you know, minor cuts and bruises, I'd say I'm not having any of that.

Q. Yeah?

A. No way. Any cut I get - bandage (laugh). No... no... cuts with anybody.

Q. How do you think you do get it?

A. Well, I know how you get it, I mean I'm not saying that it's - I mean, I know that it's through sexual transmission or - what is it, drugs - if you share needles and drugs - but - I shouldn't really say this, but (laugh), working in the LIBRARY has given me a healthy scepticism of what HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS say, because they come up with one report and a couple of months later they contradict it with another report. So I don't believe that anything they say

about AIDS - okay, you get can it through doing naughty things sexually, and you can get it through drug use, but I'm not going in for any of those two. Now, I can expect in five years' time, saying - "oh, we were sorry about getting", you know, "people, saying that people get AIDS - don't get AIDS through (laugh) sharing cups 'cos actually they do". Well, I'm not having any of that, you know, if I know someone with AIDS, you know, "it's nice to know you but I'm not gonna know you". No, I wouldn't be that cruel, but I - I just have a healthy skepticism of what they say, that you can't get it through shared cups or - or through shaking people's hands. I mean, you just don't know when someone's got AIDS. And I'm not gonna go around, you know, with - say like with Michael Jackson's gloves...

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. But I just - I just don't believe them -

Q. Yeah...

A. - when they say it can't be -

Q. Yeah. That it could be spread by all sorts of different methods. What about the difference - what about HIV and AIDS?

A. HIV is when you have got - you've got the AIDS virus, but you haven't actually got the symptoms of AIDS, you're not dying or something, you've just got the virus -

Q. Yeah.

A. But you haven't - you're not dying from it. So, you know - I mean I - I think I know all the differences from it -

Q. Yeah.

A. - but I just don't trust the doctors... 'cos they - they hide anything that the government hides, doctors will hide. I mean I know... medical records -

Q. Yeah.

A. - so - I mean how do I know I - I mean I haven't but (laugh) how do I know I haven't got it? (laugh).

Q. If you thought you had it, would you go for a test, would you have a test?

A. Yeah, God. If I thought I had it - yeah, I think I would. If I thought I had cancer I would go for a test. You know, start mega-saving and go on trips round the world (laugh). I don't know. Well, they say it can blow up - AIDS can blow up immediately, or it could just stay stagnant for a long period of time, and then you've gone right back. So - but obviously mega-save and go round the world...

Q. ... Yeah... yeah.

A. Yeah, don't worry your head about, you know... But, you know, one year on the job and then say, look, die young, say goodbye... see every - every place I wanna see...

Q. What about safe sex, what do you think of as safe sex?

A. What, the safe sex campaign or -

Q. How - what would you - what would be safe sex as far as you're concerned?

A. Well, safe sex, it doesn't mean going to a party and then rolling up with somebody in the morning. I don't know, it's - I would think that I'm pretty moral (laugh); I wouldn't - I don't think I would go to bed with someone I didn't know. I wouldn't go to bed just like that. I wouldn't do it. It's like I can't swear all that easy, I can't lie all that easily, I can - I just couldn't jump into bed with somebody like that, or - I'd have to be mega-drunk to do that.

Q. You think you might do if you were drunk?

A. It's the only way I would do (laugh)...

Q. Do you drink?

A. Well, the thing is, though, I've got my own rules though; I don't drink more - if I'm out with somebody, I don't drink more than two alcoholic drinks, and then afterwards - say I'll have a Coke beforehand, and I don't - I have two alcoholic drinks, and then it's fruit juice or whatever afterwards, so there's no problem with getting drunk -

Q. Yeah.

A. So it's that way, so that cuts off that. Anyway, I don't like to drink without having food... drunk and everything. It's what you learn in biology... (laugh). But I think - for safe sex I would think is just not - just taking precautions. If you're gonna - if you're going to have sex, you have - you're protected - I mean, safe sex is not just, say, against AIDS, it's... against... pregnancy as well. Like you're on the pill, you know - you know; sleep around, you go on the pill. It makes sense. You don't think about it afterwards, you think about it before. And if you wanna sleep around you make sure the guy has a condom, so you protect yourself against AIDS. It's just common sense. You don't go around, you know, throwing it everywhere and things like that. It's just common sense, you just don't mess around with your body.

Q. Mm, yeah. Do you think - well, you were saying you think young people aren't worried about AIDS anyway at all. Do you think they're worried about these other things? Do you think people do protect themselves when they have sex?

A. Oh dear (laugh).

Q. - sexually?

A. I would think it's just plain common sense to protect yourself; but anyone who does not have an ounce of common sense will get short shrift from me, 'cos - you know, say, like, if you're walking across a road, it's common sense to look both ways before you step on it. So therefore, if you're gonna have sex, it's common sense to make sure you're protected. You can't bleat about it afterwards. It's something you can't bleat about, 'cos if you're pregnant you have to have an abortion. It's not like - I'm not saying that getting knocked down on the roads is easy, but say... just brush it... and just go on, 'cos sometimes you're in hospital. It could happen that way. Like sometimes you don't get pregnant, you don't get AIDS, so there's no - there's no worry about it. But if you are pregnant or if you get AIDS - well, who else do you have to protect yourself?

Q. So you think people have to take responsibility -

A. They have to.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. I mean, it's just - you know, okay, you can say that the government should inform people and everything, but once people are informed, that's it. It's up to you if you want to go around having unsafe sex.

Q. What about the double standard, do you think there's a sort of different set of rules about sex for men and women or -

A. ... using the wrong words ... call them post-feminists or feminists or whatever?

Q. Yeah.

A. ... I think it does exist to a certain extent, but I don't - I'm not too sure if it's - I think... sexual... but it's not as common as it used to be. I should think it's more in the working class, 'cos I - I mean I wouldn't know necessarily about their sexual problems, but I would know about the working class. That girls should be just doing itty-bitty jobs to have a bit of money, you know, in their savings account and everything. I should think because of AIDS the double standards have diminished on the sexual side, or I think it has anyway.

Q. Yeah.

A. I mean I don't - I mean I've got morals of the 19 - no, 1890s really; I mean, if someone wants to have sex before marriage, you can't stop them. A lot of people do it. But I still think it's wrong somehow. I think living in - together before marriage, you know, living in sin or whatever they call it, is wrong somehow. I definitely think homosexual practices are wrong somehow. But they're also things that are done, and I can't go around screaming "you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that", because you never know - I might be doing it. I might just have this dismissed the... thinking... rule.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. Or, you know, to have sex before marriage... But I mean, you know... (laugh)... you want to know before you get married.

Q. What, so you can't really condemn other people?

A. Yeah, exactly, if I'm - I mean if I'm inexperienced about it, I can't really condemn people for knowing, you know, something that I don't know anything about.

Q. Yeah.

A. I just think it's wrong.

Q. Does that come from religious convictions or any religion?

A. I don't go to church or - I don't go to church; so I wouldn't say - I have a strong faith. I do think certain things are wrong and these are all, you know, you say like sexually it's rather straight, but say like, you know, a bit of lying and a bit of cheating won't do any harm, but say like adultery or - because it's to do with the body and everything, and it's just respecting the body. And respecting yourself. Like if you get married, say, like, if I thought I was gonna get married, I'd have faith in my husband, I would say to my husband, "if you ever fall out of love with me, tell me so. Don't just stay married to me 'cos I don't want that. If you wanna go and have an affair with someone, don't do it -" - you know, if - you can't - I know you can love more than one person at a time, 'cos, you know, you have your family, you love all of them, you can't just love one person at a time, but say like if he had an affair, that would be it. I wouldn't want to go out with - you know, I wouldn't want to stay with anyone who had an affair. Well, I couldn't trust him. It's just basic trust. Once that's gone, there's not a lot left. Say like if a friend betrayed their - you know, my trust, I couldn't tell them - they would just go down in my - they would still be my friend, but they would just go down in my estimation. I wouldn't tell them everything. But I don't - I just think that, say, like, things like sex in - outside marriage, adultery, say it leads to illegitimate children, I just think it's wrong, I don't think it ought to be done. And if it requires, say, like, government incentives to make you get married - 'cos there aren't many at the moment, everything's to the benefit of people who aren't married, there should be, because the family's a very important unit. I mean I'm close to my family, I think it's very important... I know that not every family is as close, but the family unit should be supported 'cos it's worked for so long - what is wrong with society that it can't work now?

Q. Yeah. Do you think that you'd have children, if you met Mr. Right and got married? Would you want to have children?

A. ... I would have to have children. To be honest, I don't know what I think about - I don't mind children. When they get past, you know, the screaming stage they'd be alright... screaming (laugh). They'd be in grave danger at about two and a half or something (laugh). But I've never actually thought - because I've been single so long, I haven't got a boyfriend or anything like that, I've kind of not - not looked at that - that sphere -

Q. Yes.

A. I've looked at things thinking I'm getting on with my life, and -

Q. Yeah.

A. - so I've not really - It's kind of say like, if I thought about having children more, and Mr. Right more, then I'd be more disappointed with what I have now. So it's easiest for me to think of being single and going from there. But I mean, you know, as I was saying,... but if I got to the stage of about thirty-five and there was no Mr. Right and no kids or anything like that, it could just - you know, occur to me that I could have a child without getting married or something. But that would go against what I actually believe in now.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. So it's kind of like, you know, you can't have your cake and eat it and stand up to what you believe in; or you just say, well, you know, these are all very good, you know, all good and everything, but it's not the way it's going today. I suppose that's the way that I'm turning at the moment, you know, my beliefs are all well and good but it's not what's done today.

Q. Do you feel out of step like that though, do you -

A. Yeah (laugh).

Q. Yeah.

A. Well, put it this way: like, when I was sixteen, I actually wanted - do you know Marjorie Proops in the Mirror?

Q. Yeah.

A. I wanted to be like all those girls that like... affairs, you know "my boyfriend's having - wanting me to have sex with him, and I don't wanna do it, but there's my boyfriend", so you're thinking, you know, I'm out here, I'm lacking something, I've missed the bandwagon. And I do, 'cos I just think that a lot of people just go out for what they want, regardless of the cost.

Q. In a sense you could do that, couldn't you, you could just decide, well I'm gonna put myself about, sort of thing.

A. Yeah, but that's against what - it would be so much of a change -

Q. Yeah.

A. - I just couldn't do it.

Q. Yeah.

A. 'Cos say like ten years - you know, even if - a couple of years afterwards, or the day afterwards, I know it would be wrong for me.

Q. But I mean you could - it's not necessarily sleeping with people, but just going to places where you're liable to meet people or -

A. Yeah. I could cope with short-term... which would be within my beliefs, but say, if it got to a clash, I wouldn't know which way it would go.

Q. Yeah.

A. But I do think - you know, I do think that I am out of step with a lot of people, 'cos a lot... want to live together. Say like all the people who I work with, if they're not married, they're living with somebody else who they're having a relationship with. So, what can I do, you know, you go around saying "heathens!" and "Jezebels!" and everything (laugh). You can't because that's the way it's done.

Q. Yeah.

A. I mean they'll think you're pretty strange like if you go round saying, "well, I've got my flat and my boyfriend's got his flat", and they're thinking, you know, "why don't they live together?" - "oh, no, it's against my beliefs" - "yeah, oh yeah, you were born in the dark ages" or whatever. So I think I'm out of step there, but - I don't - I don't think I can change my beliefs that easily, or that I want to change them. 'Cos they're things that I'm happy with, I mean - I

wouldn't say on the Judgment Day I'm gonna walk through going "yah boo and sucks" (laugh), you know, so - 'cos I don't go to church and everything -

Q. Yeah

A. Well, it's not something I can - I can change.

Q. Yeah. Let me ask you another question. Well, what I was gonna say was, that you don't take risks, I mean when you say you go out, make sure if you're drinking you drink two drinks. So you don't take risks in that sort of area. Do you think there's any area in your life that you take risks?

A. Running across the road (laugh).

Q. Well, despite your example - it makes sense to look both ways when you cross the road.

A. I - no, I would say that I'm - I would say that I'm not a risk taker.

Q. Yeah.

A. I think things through very thoroughly before - it's just being keyed up on things, because the last thing you want to do is do something, thing I want to do is do something, and then find out with a little bit more thought, that it could have been done better. I mean I don't have many risks - there is a risk say like involved in - in choosing jobs, and there's a risk involved in choosing courses and things like that; I mean, the greatest risk I've ever thought of doing is - is jumping, you know, parachuting -

Q. Yeah.

A. I've love to do parachuting.

Q. Yeah. Do you think you would do it?

A. Oh, yes, I - I'm definitely planning to do it. 'Cos... day course, and - in parachuting or hang-gliding or anything, anything aerial, I'd just love to jump out of a plane going "...!" (laugh). 'Cos it's gonna come back to you sooner or later, and you could take risks, but just say it goes the wrong way, say like you have sex and you get pregnant and you have an abortion, that is risk-taking for the wrong way. It's - put it this way, it all comes down to common sense - ...(laugh) - oh dear... - but there's no point in taking risks if it's not necessary. It's like I won't - friends of mine try and get me to do running to improve my health, and I already go to a... I already go to a (?)rovers' class two nights a week -

Q. Yeah.

A. - they want me to do running as well. I think, well, what is the point of running if it's not for a bus or a train? There's no point! (laugh)... I get really - I get really het up about this, like there is no point in running for something, just for doing its sake. If you run, you run for a bus or a train and anything else can wait.

Q. Yeah.

A. I don't think I take a lot of risks, but I just don't see the point in taking a risk if it's not necessary. That doesn't mean to say that if - you know, Mount Everest was there and I wanted to climb up Mount Everest, I would do so. 'Cos I want to do so. It's just that I would think about it before doing it... go up like in a tee-shirt and jeans and say "right, I'm gonna - I'm gonna climb Mount Everest -"

Q. Yeah.

A. - "I'm gonna be the first one to do it in tee-shirt and jeans".

Q. Yeah.

A. I will do it, but I will think about it. If I - I think there are certain things you can't think too long about it; I'm not one of those people who will wait and wait and wait and think and think and

think. But I need to know everything - I need to make an informed judgement, I can't just go ahead with doing.

Q. Yeah.

A. That most probably means that I'm not the same as everybody else, and everybody else...

Q. ... yeah, yeah. You've got that desire, though, you've got that desire to jump out of the... yeah.

A. Yeah, definitely. I've always wanted to do it.

Q. Yeah.

A. I will do it.

Q. Yeah.

A. It's like, say - I went to - I was - am actually born here, but my parents were born in the West Indies. Now, say - I think I went in '87, I made the decision in '85/, '86, I was gonna go over to the West Indies to see my grandparents, my grandmothers - my grandfathers both passed away; once I'd actually got a decision there and I'd made a judgement, nothing's gonna stop me, I've made the decision, I'm gonna go; and, okay, it was expensive. I actually managed it in the November of the following year. But I saved up all my flexitime, all my Saturdays, and that's punishing, I tell you, 'cos you work - the money for Saturdays, and you work Monday to Friday the next week before you get another break, so you're dead beat by the time... And I went home. Now I went over on my own, first time in an aeroplane, overseas - you know, everything -

Q. Yeah.

A. - and, 'cos it was so set in my mind, there was - there was no way that was gonna stop me.

Q. Yeah.

A. It's just setting it in your mind that - ... I don't mind, I could go off to a holiday tomorrow, as long as it's set in my mind that I'm going off to a holiday.

Q. Yeah, yeah; how was the trip?

A. It was brilliant.

Q. Yeah?

A. I mean - okay, I'm not like my sister who goes out any time any place, and comes back any time any place; but I enjoyed myself. And I didn't have - 'cos originally, everyone that went before had an elder relative, except my sister who went on her own the year beforehand. I didn't go with anybody so I didn't have any relatives saying "you should do this, you should do that"... The only reason why I came in early is because I'm not very good at directions, as you know; I can follow maps but I'm not very good at - at knowing when to get off somewhere, unless there's a - a stop. In - in THE WEST INDIES where my parents come from, they don't have street lights like - like a lot of rural places here have street lights. Tough if you don't know the way. So therefore, I'm not that highly tuned that I know when to get off, or where I am if I get off the wrong place. And because of services of once an hour... well, what does it matter, when the next bus to come along -or walks anywhere if they don't know the place... (laugh). But it was brilliant, I loved it. I'm going for it again. In fact, I was thinking of going for a job over there that I felt I could have done, but in effect it was probably better that I actually came back. I wouldn't have stayed - you know, I would have got itchy feet. I would have said - I was over there for five weeks and... I was hoping the first week, I got settled in, the rest of the time - it was about one and a half - half a week before I was about to go, and I tell you I got so - not homesick, but you kind of thirst for English news?

Q. Yeah.

A. All you hear is Mrs. Thatcher or the Princess of Wales, and you think you can do without those two women any time of the day.

Q. Yeah.

A. And say like the weather - you know, it's raining in Britain, you think... London Plus (laugh). So it's not that I take - I don't take - I don't think it's not that I don't take risks, it's just that when I do it's more or less a judgement rather than a risk.

Q. Yeah, yeah. Thought out beforehand.

A. Yeah.

Q. What would you say is your image of yourself?

A. (laugh) What, my image or... image or - if I had to describe, you mean if I had to describe -

Q. - what you were like to somebody else, yeah.

A. I would say a pain in the ear sometimes. I would think - I wouldn't really describe myself to somebody else really. If I knew somebody that was describing somebody else to me... I couldn't describe myself to somebody else, I'd like to be thought of as, say, a good friend; I would like to be thought of as to be (?) permanent and - my brother would say I'm rather bossy... I find it very difficult to describe myself.

Q. Mm. Do you think other people have the same image of you that you have yourself? How would other people describe you?

A. God. They'd probably think of the same things that I was thinking of. I'd say the people at work would think that I'm more knowledgeable than I would think I am myself. And if I said something, they would be more inclined to agree with me; I can make them agree with me, I could... I would be able to - they would trust me, I would think, if I said I remembered seeing something, you can bet your bottom dollar that I did see it, it's just I can't put my finger on it now. I have - I have a very good memory. I'd say that I think I have a good memory. I think my family think I'm a pain in the ear, but... all of them... And I argue too much, argue... My mum would most probably say I'm pretty helpful, but I think she'd have reservations..., 'cos it's usually at a price (laugh), argument. I don't know - I don't know how they would describe me. I think that's most - as much as I can say.

Q. Mm, yeah. But some of the bits that you think are important to you, you think they'd see in you as well.

A. I hope so. I wouldn't mind being - I mean, when I was little or younger, I wouldn't have minded being different. I wouldn't have minded being impulsive and - I don't know, I wouldn't have minded being more impulsive, but - and - physically slimmer and everything, longer hair, not wearing glasses.

Q. ... do something about; you could grow your hair, you could get contact lenses -

A. I know, but I can't - I have this fear of putting anything in my eyes, and they're very sensitive anyway 'cos I've had... disease in the past. You see, I'm working on some of it, but there are other bits - I mean, you can't do anything much with this hair, I mean it's not been that much longer than this.

Q. You do the aerobics and taking your health seriously.

A. That kills me, the aerobics (laugh).

Q. Yeah.

A. I haven't done it - I haven't done it since I was - since I left - since the third year at school, that was when I was thirteen. The exercise I did at school wasn't anything great anyway, and I thought this year... I actually did it beforehand but I had a slight knee injury, so I had to get... support, knee support, and I thought this year, this is it... wanna get fit... running or crap or

anything like that but you're gonna get fit. So I actually... I've been going since late January, probably about three weeks ago now. But I tell you, the one - the stuff that we had on Thursday, it nearly - I thought I was gonna have a heart attack.

Q. You have to be careful with that stuff, don't you?

A. Yeah, well, I - you know, okay, if I get a stitch or anything I just stop and get my breath back. But say like, if you're doing a leg one, those are killers, absolute murder. But I know... well, nearly ten years... I've done a little bit, but I mean the last sort of exercise - well, say like in a squash court, and that about five years ago; so I hadn't really done any exercise since, well, thirteen. It's a long time to catch up on -

Q. Yeah.

A. - so I know it's gonna take more than, you know, a couple of months before I feel the benefit. It might even take a whole year. But I want to get there... going (gasp, gasp), you know, sitting on Streatham Common... going "God help me!"...by the time I get to Wandsworth Common sitting there going (gasp); I want to be able to run up the stairs and get on a train and still be able to, you know,... conversation.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. So there are - you know, I've got a plan for this year, you know. My brother's motto is it's the 90s, it's 1990 and it's time for change -

Q. Yeah.

A. - so I've got a list of things that I want to do by the end of this year, or at least start by the end of this year. I've set up one of them... and I'm doing it. I'm changing my bank account, I was looking at all these things... "right, get it all organised, and any changes will be swift and sure". And the second one is that I'll start driving lessons, but I can't really do that until it gets a little bit lighter in the evenings and I'll be able to see where I'm going... cars. And then there's also improving my health and losing a bit of weight. The first one (?)feeding the second. I've tried to do it beforehand, but my parents haven't been all that supportive... supportive.

Q. ... forcing you to eat food?

A. They don't force me... but they'll say, you know, it is kind of - like if I'm - you know, I like eclairs, right, I mean I like the stuff, right, but my parents - you can't eat it in front of my parents, 'cos they just look at me and say... say, "yes, I know I'm getting too fat but I happen to like this". And it's actually bringing yourself off it, and I find it's easier to do it if I'm doing exercises first, and I can feel the changes already. I'm not diving into, say, chocolate or chocolate cake and things like that, it takes time. I realise it takes time. But nobody else realises - it takes time to stop eating Mars bars and - and Big Macs and everything, because they're all over the place. You can't go into - you can't pick up a paper and not pick up a chocolate as well. I'm not saying I do that but I'm just saying you have to go to the same places to buy a paper as you do if you want to buy a chocolate.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. So it's kind of habit-forming.

Q. Yeah.

A. So it takes time to do it and I do realise - I give myself a whole year and... sport and I think, this is what I want to be of value this year, and I'm gonna motivate myself each month and do something and see where I can go from here. Like once I've organised my money finances - I'm not saying I'm... finances... January, February, and then going through... because, you know, March and April, and then I'm gonna do driving lessons April and, I say, like, May and June. I will tackle one thing intensely at a time but how the other one's-

Q. ... yeah.

A. Yeah.

Q. Yeah.

A. Building up. Say, like, organise my money finances and then do aerobic classes at the same time. Once I've organised my money finances I can have the driving lessons, 'cos it'll be light in the evenings. Once I've started the driving lessons, I can review what I'm doing with my job...

Q. Right.

A. I mean, there's already one course that I've looked at that I'm gonna do, I'm gonna do it - I'm gonna try and get my firm to pay for it. If they don't - well, they'll have to (laugh). 'Cos it's cheaper for me to do it at the college than it is for me - for them to send me away. And... "look, I'm supposed to get one course a year; are you gonna pay for this - this course?". And there's other things I can just carry on doing. Well, I haven't done so many, I've only done about five or six. I didn't overwhelm my year and think I have to keep on, "I haven't done this and I haven't done that" -

Q. Yeah.

A. So next year I can say like - look at the health bit and say, "look, I've got myself fit or reasonably fit; instead of doing aerobics I could do swimming classes instead"; "I've done driving lessons, save up for a car" -

Q. Yeah.

A. And carry on from there.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. And say like, September this year I've got - I want to take an AAT course - it's the Association of Accounting Technicians course - because I haven't got - if you do a full degree course it's four nights a week, from half six to half nine-

Q. Quite heavy.

A. Yeah, it's quite heavy; and I know that, because I live in Streatham, the course is in Tooting - now, a lot - now, geographically speaking it's not far away from Streatham, but there's no direct bus or train or anything to get you from one to the other. So - if I do the AAT, it's about two and a half nights, and did it for the first year, perhaps by the end of the first year I'd have enough money saved up for a car, so I can transfer into doing the degree course.

Q. Yeah.

A. Or there may be a part-time day course, or they may sponsor me for a part-time day course, or ... there might be more opportunities over the next year.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. So I'm still keeping my...

Q. That's right, yeah. Well, it sounds like you've got very reasonable plans together here. It should inspire me to sort myself out (laugh).

A. Well, it's taken a long time because I mean - I was sick of doing the same thing, I was doing a lot of the same thing, in 1989, and it didn't work out right -

Q. Yeah.

A. - 'cos I wanted to change my job and everything, and that didn't work out exactly right.

Q. Well, it sounds as if you've got it well sorted for this year.

A. Oh, yeah. Well, I hope so. I want to go - I want to go at the end of the year and say "yes, I've done this" and then next year be pleased with what I've done.

Q. Yeah.

A. Like it is too easy to come back home and sit down, watch EastEnders and do nothing, and carry on like that.

Q. Yeah.

A. But I can - I know I can get more done this way.

Q. Good.

A. The only thing is, you know, it doesn't leave me enough time to go around and meet members of the -

Q. - opposite sex?

A. Yeah (laugh).

Q. I don't know, maybe if you're doing all these courses -

A. Well, I've tried doing courses beforehand. The thing is, is that, I think after a certain age, after you leave school or college, actually meeting people your own age is a lot - so much more difficult; 'cos at school and college you're automatically with people your own age -

Q. Yeah.

A. - but if you start working - I'm not the youngest person there but I'm nearly the youngest, and, as I say, everybody else is - actually the youngest person, she was twenty - no, she was nineteen, sorry, a week back. She's actually living with somebody; and the guy's divorced and he's got two kids and he's twenty-eight. And trying to find somebody else - I mean I'm not going around, you know, searching for... beady eye or anything, but trying to find somebody else your age and the same interests and everything else is very difficult. You can't - I couldn't do it at work, say for example, 'cos everybody else is - is so much older than I am.

Q. Yeah.

A. And, of course, if you have a relationship at work and you break up or something like that, it causes problems. I've been -