BRITAIN AT WORK INTERVIEW WITH JOHN OSWELL
BY DAVE WELSH 19TH JAN 2011

DW: So tell us about when you left school. What was your first job?

JO: Yes, my first job on leaving school at fifteen. I left in the Easter of 1962, and my first job was an apprentice printer. Unfortunately I only made three months in that job as my hands were allergic to the printing ink, so I had to duck out of the apprenticeship, much to the disappointment of my dad. He always wanted me to have a trade of some sort. He more or less arranged for me to go into the apprenticeship so I wouldn't say that he wasn't best pleased. He was an understanding man, he was a good man, he was an ex-miner…had some really good strong roots and he understood that I could no longer pursue printing as a career anyway. I've got to say that I wasn't too disappointed because I didn't really like it that much but I was prepared to stay on for the full apprenticeship anyway, and I probably would have gone into a good job but anyway. The job that I started off as was a compositor and I'd have been redundant at about twenty eight years of age because that was all done differently. I can't remember how much it had changed but I think it was all done on a screen in the end. But I came away from that and I went to work for a firm in South Ruislip called George Whiley's – they produced gold leaf and some other imitation stamping foils, without going into too much detail, it was a family firm. I was employed as a lathe operator and I doubled my money – when I worked as an apprentice printer I was earning two pounds ten shillings a week! Which is £2.50 in old money, of that I gave my mum one pound...I can't remember now but she got more than half anyway, but it didn't worry me – I was just…you know…I was at work and I was one of the men wasn't I - I suppose.

DW: And this was when?

JO: Nineteen sixty two. So, anyway, I got a job as a lathe operator for George Whiley's, it was actually cutting these rolls of foil. I couldn't explain what the job was because that sort of thing just isn't made anymore and it would be difficult to explain to somebody exactly the details of the job without showing them. But it was a smashing job! I doubled my money to five pounds a week and I thought I was rich. My mum took more money obviously than she took when I was a printer but I didn't mind because I got fed, watered and I had a roof over my head and it was a very tactile, loving family that I'd come from anyway. So it wasn't a problem. I worked there for four years, I think, from the age of about fifteen and I can't remember now…fifteen and a half probably till about just after my nineteenth birthday. I changed jobs while I was there, in the same company, and I started driving a big van there because somebody left and they had no one to fill the job and it was an important job and they asked me if I'd be interested and I said yes. I'd just got a licence and I fancied that little bit of freedom and it was still a good job, good company to work for.

DW: How many people worked there roughly?

JO: Yeah, I was just trying to think about that. It's singly owned by one man named Cecil Wiley. I think that there was probably…there was three factories actually – there was one in Whitfield Street in London, that's just off Tottenham Court Road and there was two in South Ruislip…and I suppose all up there was probably about two hundred and fifty employees. That's a guess now. My memory's pretty good but I think probably around two hundred and fifty. But it was just a lovely, lovely place to work…the people were nice. Even the management were just…nice people. It was

just a really nice place to work. But anyway, I left there at nineteen in nineteen sixty six because I wanted to do something else really. I wasn't really getting anywhere there. I was still driving a van although I enjoyed that - it was a nice job. I was well looked after, but I wanted to do something else. And at the time I was living in Stanmore which is in Harrow and I got a job working for Kodak. I worked there…I worked at the Harrow factory from nineteen sixty six until nineteen sixty nine. So that was another four years.

DW: Was it easy in those days to just move from one job to another?

JO: Yes it was. You could leave one job in the morning and get another one in the afternoon. And that's exactly what I did. I left George Whiley's on a Friday morning and by Friday afternoon I had a job at Kodak! It was that easy – it was unbelievable. But there was so much work around it was the boom years after the Second World War, you see, and everything could…grown up from the war because…I can't remember the phrases that were used at the time. So perhaps my memories not that good but it was a boom time for jobs, housing…all sorts of things and yes you could literally go from one job to another in the same day; and I actually did that on that Friday in…I think it was around June time of nineteen sixty six. I remember I worked at Kodak for about a month and the nineteen sixty six world cup was on in this country…

DW: I thought you'd remember that!

JO: …that's how I remember it…

DW: Up at Wembley of course…

JO: That's right…yeah that's right…

DW: …and some of the games…

JO: ..and some of the games yeah…and yeah I watched some…

DW: Were you a football fan?

JO: Yeah I was a football fan…I'm a Queen's Park Rangers season ticket holder…I have been for a number of years…I've been going there for forty one years. That started when I moved from north London to west London…I don't know how it got into that but I love it there, it's a lovely ground…I watch football…it still is…well obviously I'm still a season ticket holder…but it was a great ground in the sixties when I started going there and it's still the same now.,,,

But my days at Kodak were quite interesting. I worked inside…in a warehouse driving a forklift. I still wanted to get on though. I still wanted to do something that had some skill. I thought that I had…at least some part of my brain that was useful. These days it's just full of useless information! But then I thought it was useful. I kept applying for other jobs within the organisation and there were loads of them in the labs and places like that but I didn't seem to get anywhere and in the end I moved on to their motor transport section from the warehouse that I worked in and that was based out at Hemel Hempstead so I'd done some driving in the previous job so I thought. well I'll go back to that and we'll see where we go from there. The money was okay and I moved to Hemel Hempstead with the job…but I didn't like Hemel Hempstead. It's a cold and damp place in the winter, and I don't know what it's like now, but I know how winters have changed but I suffer from arthritis a little bit…I

didn't know it at the time but that was having an effect on me then 'cause it's osteoarthritis and it was discovered when I was sixteen but that's…nothing too much to worry about but it did curtail an amateur football career unfortunately, but anyway, that's what can happen sometimes. Because I was growing and I had osteoarthritis in my right knee it was causing my knee to swell up and be painful after training midweek. I was at Harrow Town Football Club which is now Harrow Borough when I was sixteen but I didn't progress because my knee was just too problematic. But it didn't stop me working and that was a main thing, so I was still able to earn a living so I just pressed on with that. And I worked at Kodak on the motor transport section delivering all sorts of photographic equipment on what's called a round. And that round was in the City of London and it took in the postmarks EC1, 2, 3 and 4 and North 1 which was the Islington - Highbury corner area. Very very interesting job. Met some really nice people, some lovely studios. Most of the studios mainly did advertisements for television programmes, magazines…the television one that comes to mind is the Dulux one with the Dulux dog…that studio was in St John street in EC1…think that is…it's a continuation of Smithfield Meat Market. That was one of the studios I used to deliver to and our numerous other ones and some, I'm afraid, that used to do pornographic magazines but I never got involved in any of that! I just used to deliver the photographic equipment that they wanted.

DW: So this is all the old fashioned photographic…

JO: That's all black and white stuff. Yeah that's right yeah.

DW: And the film that they would put in cameras…

JO: Yeah. Yes but it wasn't only that it was developing agent...it was cine cameras, projectors, cameras…all sorts of film…chemicals for developing – I've already said that – but it was all sorts of stuff. It was anything to do with photography basically. But some really nice studies and a lot of them were basement studios and you looked at them and they were in decrepit old turn-of-the-century buildings especially some of the ones in and around the back of Fleet Street which was an interesting place because all the newspapers then were in Fleet Street and I used to do them all because they were all on my round and some of the magazines like Weekend…Titbits that's two that I can remember or Reveille that was anther one – they're not around anymore – they're not in publication…but…interesting and you'd go down into these photographic studios in these really decrepit buildings and you walked through the doors and it was a different world. It was just totally different. You wouldn't think that you were in old parts of London basically because the studios were all modern, well decorated and they had modern furniture, well what was modern in the nineteen sixties anyway – now it's retro furniture isn't it?

DW: Quite glitzy?

JO: Yeah in some cases yeah I suppose it was but I mean a lot of entertaining went on in those places so they had to be quite smart. Plush furniture like leather sofas and chairs which weren't in houses in those days unless you had an awful lot of money. Now it's relatively easy to buy leather furniture isn't it for your house.

DW: I suppose this is part of, in the sixties, a big expansion of glamour, photography, celebrities…you know like David…

JO: …Bailey

DW: …all these little firms must have been based around all of that?

JO: Yeah there was loads of them. We used to do anything form eighty to a hundred drops a day. I mean they were one after the other because the City is only a square mile and we used to do all the four postal areas. There was two of us on the van and you could do eighty to a hundred deliveries in about five or six hours. It wasn't as bad as it sounds. I mean your up and down a lot of stairs and you know so it wasn't a slack job but, I mean, you had to sort of work at it but yeah…

DW: Parking meters were not quite coming in…just started coming in but not very widely so parking wouldn't be like it would be today. And of course no congestion charge….

JO: No that's right. That wasn't there it wasn't in existence. It wasn't problematic. I think parking meters were first introduced around nineteen fifty eight…fifty nine but don't quote me on that…but no there wasn't an awful lot in and around the City anyway. They were there but they would ignore our van because they knew that we were only going to be there for a matter of minutes anyway. And you get used to seeing the same people because your there every day Monday to Friday. So you know it has a side to it that is not there anymore. You see regular people and you end up nodding at acquaintances with some of the traffic wardens as they were called [then] [laughs]. They're now called parking enforcement officers but…so it was interesting and I'm just trying to remember how much I earnt. I think I was taking home after tax and National Insurance…I wasn't paying a lot of National Insurance probably because my wages weren't great…I think I was probably taking home about seventeen pounds a week in nineteen sixty eight…sixty nine…I also got some expenses for some parking meters that we had to park on and we got a small meal allowance as well for every day so I think I got another ten bob a week for that which today…in today's money is about fifty pee and that was for a week but…

DW: Was that for a forty hour week?

JO: That was for…that was more than that actually, it was five day week – Monday to Friday. It started at seven o'clock in the morning and we didn't finish till seven at night. So it was a twelve hour day. That was sixty hours a week and we didn't work all day though. There was a gap in the afternoon when we used to finish work and then we used to just park up somewhere for maybe an hour, hour and a half – have a break and then toddle off back to the main warehouse and load up for the next day's deliveries. So on a Friday night for instance we would load up Monday morning. That would be all there waiting for us. So that was that. I think it was about seventeen pounds a week plus they got another ten or eleven shillings a week expenses and that was ok. And then, I'm just trying to think where I was then; I didn't like Hemel Hempstead and that's where I was based so eventually I thought well I need to get another job and move back to…probably where I came from in north London instead of working in Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire. And eventually that's what I did. But I got married first and I was, just trying to think, I think I was twenty one at the time. I got married at twenty one. My wife, same age, twenty one. And we got a flat in, back in Stanmore. Not far from where my mum and dad lived. They didn't live there any longer. They'd already retired and moved to a bungalow in Norfolk. And I'd moved into lodgings. I was only there for about nine or ten months until I'd got married and all this was at the time when I was still working for Kodak on the motor transport section. Got our first flat in Stanmore. I think the rent was…I think it was about five pounds a week – something like that. Shared bathroom…had our own toilet but we had a shared bathroom and we had the top part of a big house that was converted. It was quite a spacious flat - for five pounds a week anyway it was pretty good. Eventually I left Kodak and I'd got another job, quite easily, working for Express

Dairies the milk company that were owned by, I think it was Northern Foods then…or it may have been a hotel group. I haven't got a clear memory of the owners now…Metropolitan Hotels…sorry that's who owned…it was Grand Metropolitan Hotels who owned Express Dairies then. It was later on it was Northern Foods. So I got a job working for Express Dairies – still driving. And I'd more or left settled in to earning my living as a driver and I moved on to driving milk tankers which again was a good job with much more money than I was earning at Kodak. The only difference there was that I had to work seven days a week. It was a seven day a week job because cows have to be milked twice a day unfortunately and so there's no Saturdays and Sundays off…you get days off in the week but it worked on rota system – one day you'd work Monday to Friday and the next week you'd work Tuesday to Sunday or something like that…I can't remember how it all worked now but it was sort of like a rolling week. You got two days off a week and two long weekends every six or seven weeks. Wasn't a bad job – difficult in the winter when the snow was down – going out to farms and picking up milk...but the money was good. My money had gone from about twenty something pound a week to about thirty…so I'd given myself an increase straight away. And by this time my wife was pregnant and our first child was born while I was working at Express Dairies - I'd just started there and…she had our first child – my oldest son who's now forty one. And we moved out of the flat just before my son was born and we moved into a small house where we paid some rent, I forget how much the rent was, I think it was about eight pounds ten shillings a week which is eight pound fifty now but it wasn't a lot of money really for the size of the house. It was no longer a flat…it was a two story house…in South Ruislip because I worked in South Ruislip – I wanted to work locally so that I wouldn't have to use a car to go to work. I was trying to cut down on expenses…my wife was no longer working, as she was when we first got married, so I needed to cut back on expenses. So I wanted to live somewhere local so that, while keeping a car, I didn't have to use it for work. And that's what happened…I rented a house in Ruislip Gardens and I was working in South Ruislip so it was quite close by so I could get to work without using the car. I worked for Express Dairies for…from nineteen sixty nine to nineteen seventy two when my daughter was born…my second child. And my working life took a turn that I had never experienced before when fell out with the person that I was working for because he'd made a pledge that I could take some time off when my wife had the baby…we didn't know it was a girl – but it was a girl…I asked if I could have two weeks off…my two weeks annual holiday and he agreed to that…let me know nearer the time he said…as near as you can get it…so that was what happened and he then said that I couldn't have the time off and I was a little bit stymied then because we didn't have any help other than my wife, myself and my youngest son who then was only about three I think so…quite small…so it was imperative that I had some time off at home with my wife after she had the baby so I walked out of the job and that's the only job that I've ever left acrimoniously and I said well 'I'm leaving…I'm gonna take two weeks holiday and if the job's still here when I come back…it is…if it isn't…well I'll find another job' because that's what you could do then. Other jobs were around and by then I'd obtained a class 1 heavy goods vehicle driving licence so I could get a job almost anywhere really…even if it was a rubbish job I could still earn a wage and still support a family so I wasn't too bothered so I just walked out. A week or so later after my wife had had the baby and things had settled, I went back and…

DW: And this was a time when paternity leave was hardly…

JO: …there wasn't any. And I think the only sort of maternity help that was around then was, I think, mothers that were working at the time they got pregnant and had to leave their jobs…they got a payment for eighteen weeks I think it was. Can't remember how much it was. My memory isn't that good. If my former wife was here I

think she could probably tell you but I think it was for eighteen weeks. It was to soften the blow basically. But paternity leave…no there wasn't anything like that at all…I mean you just have to try and do it around your holidays and just hope for the best if you couldn't get any help but that was my predicament at the time anyway. But I went back after a week and spoke to the branch secretary because by then I'd also joined the Transport and General Workers' Union which is now called Unite…and that was my first foray into the trade union movement.

DW: What made you join the union then? You said that your father was a miner so I suppose he would have been in the National Union of Mineworkers. Was there an influence in your family about trade unions or did it just come from something else?

JO: I think there was probably an influence in my family. I was influenced by my dad's view on politics. He wasn't a Labour voter but he certainly wasn't a Conservative voter. Where he came from which was Hednesford in the midlands in and around Staffordshire…he was actually a Liberal…he liked Joe Grimmond. But his take was that the Liberals would never ever form a government again and how right he was. So yes…although he was a Liberal at heart he supported Labour and I just picked it up from there…so, I mean, I've been a Labour supporter ever since. I'm a Labour party member and later on I was a Labour Councillor so I've never forgotten my roots. My dad was a miner and he did other blue collar work as well but he also had a pub at one time…it was his own pub as well he owned it…it wasn't owned by a brewery it was his own pub. But he was still the same man. Very well mannered and never ever ever…in my life anyway…I never heard him swear. Never heard him swear because he was a gentleman although he was a miner…and you think, well, you know, rough and ready but he wasn't. He was quite the opposite really. I don't know how he ended up down the mines but he certainly had no intentions of staying down there and he didn't – he said to me: 'when I first went down the mines, my first day at work' he said 'I thought to myself straight away: I'm not staying down here – don't like this' and he didn't like it and he eventually got out.

DW: So TGWU was the first time you joined a union?

JO: That's right yah. I always wanted to be a member of a trade union. At Kodak there was no trade union movement there…they are absolutely anti trade union and they always have been but it's an American owned company anyway and they tend to be a bit like that but anyway. And also Express Dairies at South Ruislip was a closed shop. You either joined it or you didn't have a job and that was allowed then – it's not allowed now…but I was quite happy to join so…there I am talking to the branch secretary about my job and he said to me 'Do you want your job back?' And I said 'No I don't actually'. I said 'because while I've been away….I got another one!' It was that easy and it was. I suppose it was just the boom time after the Second World War. All sorts of things were going on in the building industry and everything. It was a real boom time and I got a job working for a company in West Drayton called Sabian Co and God! Doubled my money! I'd gone from about thirty pounds a week to sixty pounds a week driving an articulated skip truck. But it was a specialised skip truck. There was only one of its kind in the country. It was an exhibition trailer that was made for an HGV/industrial exhibition somewhere in London a couple of years previously and this company Sabey's, which was another family owned company, picked it up and started using it. And it could lift absolutely enormous freights, but anyway. I got a job working for them, driving this articulated skip truck and I loved it. It was a great job. It was dirty and dusty but I didn't care 'cause I was earning sixty pounds a week and people at that time, on average, doing sort of blue collar work were earning, sort of, between, I don't know…twenty eight and maybe thirty eight pounds a week and I was earning sixty pounds a week.

DW: In ’73 I was on nineteen...twenty pounds a week working in a hospital…

JO: Yeah…it was…I went to work there in nineteen seventy two that was, when my daughter was born and I didn’t stay there that long because I had an amazing chance to go and work for a really good company…which I thought was a good company at the time. But I worked for Sabey’s for…

DW: Where were they based Sabey’s?

JO: They were based in West Drayton which is in west London. It’s in Hillingdon where I still live. And I was living in Hayes at the time…I had moved from Ruislip after I left Express Dairies. I’d moved from the rented accommodation in Ruislip Gardens…my wife and I were given a council house, a two bedroom council house in Hayes and we lived there for five years from nineteen seventy until nineteen seventy five. That was the year my dad died. Aged seventy five - he was born in eighteen ninety nine so I suppose he was down the mines in nineteen thirteen ‘cause he left school at fourteen. So in nineteen thirteen he was a miner.
5hrs

So I was working at Sabey’s while living in Hayes which is the next town to West Drayton where Sabey’s was. And I was earning this good wage and it did us a favour because it allowed us to move away from some really tacky furniture that we got second hand and you know what it’s like when you first start up in your very first proper home that’s actually yours, well as long as you pay the rent anyway and we managed to buy some half decent carpets and some nice furniture and we were up and running basically. But I only worked for Sabey’s from about June nineteen seventy two to…up until, I think it was October nineteen seventy two. One of my neighbours worked for the Esso Petroleum Company and he asked he whether or not I would be interested in working for one of their contractors driving fuel tankers – heating oil, paraffin and that sort of stuff…no petrol…maybe some auto diesel loads but no petrol…Esso had drivers, you know, that were employed by Esso Petroleum Company would do the petrol. So I said… rather like my job at the moment so I’d need to know what the job entails. So he said…to cut a long story short he got me an interview with one of their contractors. And I went along for the interview to see what the job was and it was Monday to Friday, some Saturdays sixty five pounds a week so that was another five pounds a week on top of my sixty pounds so I thought ‘this is getting better and better!’ There was some overtime involved in that – there was no overtime working for Sabey’s but because you got paid on what you did at Sabey’s but I was always earning somewhere around sixty pounds a week. But this job was sixty five pounds a week but there was some overtime involved. But is didn’t make any difference because I wasn’t working any longer days or any more days so I thought ‘I’ll give this a try.’ So I did, and I went from being a skip lorry driver to a fuel tanker driver and that changed my life basically. I worked there from…I worked for this contractor from October nineteen seventy two until January nineteen seventy three and, so that was what three months, four months, something like that and I got laid off because it wasn’t…it was what they call a ‘poor winter’ - the work dropped off for contractors and he had to let two drivers go and because I was the last one in I was the first one out. So I lost that job and I was bitterly disappointed but better things were to come.

DW: And this was the time of the three day week and the Heath government…

JO: …No that came later. That came a little bit later…we can get to that yeah…and come back to that. [laughs]

So January nineteen seventy three I'm out of work for about ten hours I think.[laughs] I left that job that day because I had no choice but the next day I got a job working for a company in Hayes again that made s
steel fabrication that strengthened concrete. Horrible job – I absolutely hated it. The money wasn't very good and the hours were awful and I didn't like the job at all but I had to take a wage home. I had to put money on the table because I had two children to feed. So I took this job. I can't remember what the money was but I think it was only about thirty eight pounds a week so I'd gone from sixty five back down to thirty eight…It was a big drop. And I can remember one stage being so short of money with rent, electricity and everything else…I think I wrote to my mum, my dad and said: ' do you think it's possible that I could borrow some money because I can't pay all my bills'…you know and I explained my job situation. My mum and dad weren't on the telephone. I wasn't on the telephone at the time because it was an expense that we just didn't want and my mum and dad certainly couldn't afford a telephone – all they had was their old age pension. My dad didn't have any private pensions or anything so it was cutting costs to a minimum. So my mum wrote back to me and sent me a cheque for some money, it wasn't a lot, it was only about six pounds, but that was about all I needed. Six pounds - I mean it's an unbelievable amount of money these days – you can go and buy two cups of coffee these days and it can cost you five pounds fifty…and yet six pounds then paid a quarterly electricity bill and that's the difference between then and today. But that bailed me out. I never got the chance to repay my mum 'cause she died. A bad time really and…I'm just trying to think about the time scales but…I was working for this steel company anyway and they were…it was a horrible job…I hated it. And I only lasted six weeks. I just couldn't stand it.

DW: Was that because of the nature of the job itself?

JO: Yeah it was the nature of the job and I was all over the country and I had to spend nights out and my wife didn't like it and I didn't like it and….I just didn't like the job. It wasn't the driving, I mean I had a smashing truck…but I just didn't like the job. There was just something about it that I didn't like. It was easy getting to work it was a little walk up the road, you know, it didn't cost me anything to go to work. I only lasted there six weeks…and a friend of mine had a haulage company, in Hayes again, and he said 'look, I've got some work for you if want it and it's permanent' but it was terracing. Tarmaccing roads and driveways and stuff like that. It wasn't what they used to call 'handlay' where you did it all with a shovel and a fork – this was onto machines where you just tip the body of the vehicle up and it poured out onto a road machine and the road machine pushed the truck along and it laid the road sort of underneath the machine and as it passed over there's your brand new road. And the money was quite good. The money was, if I 'd wanted the job, the money was between about forty and sixty pounds a week again so it was creeping up so I took it straight away because I knew the guy anyway, it was in Hayes, and I thought 'I've got to have a go at this' because I quite like the sound of this and I did. I liked the job. The job was ok. It was a bit dirty but it didn't matter. That sort of thing didn't matter because I'd always got my hands dirty in some way, shape or form anyway. So that was ok. So I'm now working for Talbert Transport in Hayes – road haulage and thoroughly enjoyed my time there and earned some pretty good money but again I didn't last very long. It was only from…about the end of February maybe when I started there until June when one of my neighbours who worked for Esso got me the job originally on the contractor who was working for Esso. Knocked on my door and he said 'John,' he said 'Esso are taking on some drivers…' he said ' you interested?'

so I said ‘Cor yeah absolutely!’ I nearly took his hand off. So he said ‘I’ll arrange for you to have an interview’…and that was what happened. I got an interview in early July in 1973. I went along for an interview and they offered me a job so I accepted it straight away, went back and told my boss at Talbert Transport on the tippers you know doing the roadlay and stuff and that, that I was leaving because I’d got offered a job working for Esso Petroleum, and it’s just something that I wanted to do ‘cause I’d been contracting and everything else and, he was quite upset that I was going…and the only guy that’s ever turned round to me and said look ‘I’d like you to stay’…but I said ‘Look I’m sorry Roger , I can’t it’s an opportunity that I don’t want to pass up.’ The point about Esso was that it was a secure job. I offered a private pension, sick pay, good holiday entitlements and everything else, and it was a good job, and it WAS a good job. So in the July of…no I’m sorry it wasn’t the July it was the June…In the June of nineteen seventy three on the twenty six of June I started working for Esso Petroleum and that was the rest of my working life. Working for Esso Petroleum, it was…about twenty three years…or twenty four years, something like that, with the contracting…and it was a wonderful job. I loved it. I loved going to work on a Monday. Other people say ‘Oh Monday’s come round again, I can’t stand it.’ I used to love it! I couldn’t wait to get Sunday out of the way and go to work on a Monday. And I worked day work for three months, for the first three months and then I’m on shift work and then I did shift work for the rest of my working life and enjoyed that as well. The money wasn’t as good. It was, the day work period for three months I was only earning thirty two pounds a week. There wasn’t a lot of overtime about so I dropped an awful lot of money but the job was so good I couldn’t leave it because of the long term…the long term benefits, pension at the end of it, private pension at the end of it sorry and sickness benefits you got paid when you were off sick and all that sort of thing and the holiday entitlements were quite good. Didn’t have to work bank holidays or Sundays, just Saturdays, well I’d worked Saturdays since I’d left school anyway so it didn’t bother me at all, I was used to that yeah I thought it was a normal part of the working week. My dad always worked a Saturday so I just thought it was normal, and if I had to do it again now I’d still probably think it was normal because it’s ingrained in you I think. But anyway. I worked for Esso petroleum from nineteen seventy three until nineteen ninety five and I had in that time, I earned some quite good money. Started off at thirty two pounds a week…went on to shift work and that went up to, I think it was forty nine pounds a week, which was quite good money then. And that was when the three day week hit us in…it wasn’t in that ear it was the following year in seventy four. Yeah it was early, in the winter of seventy four, we had the three day week, oil was rationed, petrol was rationed, power stations were shutting down for hours at a time and…it was knocking out the electricity. I mean I can remember that. I can remember going home and the house and the street would be in darkness. And my wife would be sitting there with the candles because, well we just went out and bought boxes of candles, you know, and…it was quite interesting time really, the only trouble was we had an electric cooker at the time, that weren’t too good! If we’d had a gas cooker we’d have been alright, yeah, cause…but we could of lit the gas up and got around that. That’s right yeah. I can remember people doing that back in the fifties and sixties, sitting in the kitchen with the gas oven on and the door open and getting some warmth…especially in a biggish kitchen. My mother in law used to do that. Yeah the three day week.

DW: And did it affect your working hours or have an impact on your work?

JO: No. Only in terms of volume delivered because what they did was, because petrol was rationed, instead of taking six thousand gallons to one garage to deliver we might only take three and a half or four thousand. So we still had the same amount of deliveries. The volume was less that was all so we still worked a full week. We didn’t have to drop to a three day week like a lit of people did so in that way I was

lucky and I never ever complained about it. Never complained about what was happening at home with the electricity going off and things because I was still working five days a week and I was grateful for that. I can't remember how long that lasted now. It was a few weeks. Yeah I think it was a few weeks and then I think the miner's strike happened and that brought Heath's government down didn't…

DW: Yes he called a general election. Who rules the country? And they said 'Not you...'

JO: …Not you mate, I'm afraid. [unclear] it was the miners and didn't they pay for that later on? And moving on from that. Of course I was still in the trade union and I had been through my time at Express Dairies…I'd lapsed when I worked for the steel company and my friend who had the haulage company but I made that back up. I made that back up, I can't remember how I did that…

DW: And in those days you had a union card didn't you. Was this still when you were paying your dues every week or was it being deducted from the payroll?

JO: Paying our dues every week. At Esso it was also a closed shop. It was a closed shop at Esso, the parent company Exxon in America hated it but they couldn't do anything about it because this was Esso Europe you see, it was all the same company but it had different arms. And I worked for Esso Europe basically but yeah it was a closed shop so I was slightly lapsed when I went to work there but I sorted myself out with the branch secretary, pay my back dues and I was ok. And in all I was a trade union member for thirty five years, I only stopped because the branch that I was a member of, it folded because of lack of membership because so many oil companies switched to contractor operation in fact I don't think there's any oil companies now that employ their own drivers its all contractor. There was no incentive for contractor drivers to belong to a trade union because they weren't closed shops any longer it wasn't just Esso it was all of them it was BP, Shell, Mobil, Texaco, Total all of them that you can name

DW: And when did that change start to occur?

JO: That started in the early nineteen nineties. I can't remember who was the last company to go all contract, it might have been Shell, I'm not sure, but even the company tat I worked for, Esso, they went to all contractor drivers in the year two thousand. So they actually could have been the last but I don't know I wasn't working for them then…I left in nineteen ninety five under some difficult circumstances

DW: Going back to asking you about the union branch…was it held outside of work time, where did you have meetings, how many people, what sort of issues would come up?

JO: Ok. We used to hold our meetings in the back room of a pub in Stanwell Village called the Wheatsheaf. Yeah, and cor they were rowdy union meetings they were 'cause everybody wanted to talk about all sorts of things and really what they should have done was had a clear agenda and stuck to it but they just couldn't 'cause everybody there they started shouting and bawling about this, that and the other and I can't remember what the solid issues were at the time but for us I think it was about probably terms and conditions, running times 'cause all our jobs were timed you see. They were generous generous times, for instance if you had a load of heating oil on a thirty two tonne articulated tanker that take to say our Hemel Hempstead depot which fed smaller tankers which did household heating oil and stuff like that, you'd get something like four hours forty to do that. Well in reality you could do that in

about two and three quarter hours so that was a generous schedule so you basically got that one hour and a bit off . So if you did a couple of loads like that in the day, you'd finish work two and a half hours before you should, but you still got paid you see. So you still got paid your ten hours for a ten hour day. So that was quite interesting but our union meetings got better and better. We had actually…our branch secretary when I went there was very very trade union orientated…wanted everything done by the book, and rightly so. The branch chairman was appalling, he couldn't control a meeting at all, he didn't know how to keep members to an agenda and, you know, it was quite funny sometimes but they got…there was three of them, and I can't remember what the other guy did…oh he was the treasurer…I won't name names because it doesn't matter....they were ok, they were ok people really it's just that they were old fashioned, they'd worked for Esso since the nineteen thirties and they saw things in a different way than things were becoming or starting to happen in the nineteen seventies, you know, it was just changing. The job was changing.

DW: You were a new generation of drivers weren't you?

JO: Well we were, and because in nineteen seventy three they've pulled the first barrel of oil out of the North Sea and that changed everything. The job changed overnight and in actual fact it was in decline overnight, because what happened was when they discovered the oil they also discovered natural gas and the two went hand in hand, you couldn't…I don't think you got one without the other, there are gas fields on their own but in the main it was oil and gas. So that was discovered as well and the decline in gas oils where people were switching to natural gas, and when I say people I'm talking about industry basically, our gas oil deliveries dropped off in the next, what from nineteen seventy three I suppose, in the next seven, eight, nine years…probably by something like sixty five percent. And that was an awful lot. But the companies didn't mind 'cause all of a sudden they were getting this oil out of the North Sea and…their on-costs were not as much as they were shipping it around the world in tankers. And in actual fact there was so much coming out of the North Sea that the Exxon corporation sold off some of their ocean going tankers because they didn't need them anymore and the quality of the oil that came out of the North Sea was so good that out of a barrel of oil…a barrel of oil is eleven imperial gallons by the way, out of that barrel of oil the quality was so good they were getting more auto diesel and more lubrication oils out of it and other chemicals that they needed than they were getting from some of the Middle Eastern oil. It wasn't of such a good quality. So what came out of the North Sea was a really good oil. It was a lighter oil. So there wasn't so much, if you like, rubbish left at the end of the process of…the refining process basically. So without going into too much detail and that, because I can't, I knew loads about it years ago but once you move away from the industry you do tend to forget I'm afraid…and it's just a shame really but…but I know that the quality of North Sea oil was very very good. Other parts of the world, I think Venezuelan oil's not bad as well, I think it's Venezuelan oil is a good quality oil as well, I think it's Venezuelan, but anyway. Russian oil is rubbish! Don't let anybody ever tell you that it's any good 'cause it isn't. It's rubbish. But anyway, it's oil and we are an oil based world I'm afraid so…but the trade union meetings, yes…these three guys that we had that were on the top table in our place they got ousted within a couple of years and we had, the guy that got the trade union leader's job, in our depot anyway ended up on the NEC. He's not here now 'cause he's retired…his name was Tony Cooper and he's well known throughout the industry, and he's well know throughout the trade union movement especially in Unite and as was the Transport and General Workers. And he was a good guy from the Isle of Wight and he knew what he was doing. And our trade union meetings mainly…the main agenda I think was probably the terms and conditions of the job, how the job was going. We

had a few strikes, but only a few. The longest one I was involved in, I think, was about six weeks and that was in nineteen eighty three. So I'd been there ten years then. I'm afraid I cant remember in detail what our trade union meetings were about then. It was only later on when I became the branch minute taker that I can remember some of the detail. We used to get an awful awful lot of correspondence from people that were on strike across the country asking for donations. Our branch had quite a bit of money - so we always used to send something like twenty or twenty five pounds. We never used to send them hundreds of pounds because we weren't that rich and there was a lot of people writing to us asking for donations, yeah, because they knew that we were quite a good branch at giving, especially through the miner's strike in nineteen eighty four…eighty five – can't remember exactly. We gave them quite a bit of money and they caused us quite a lot of problems when they picketed our gate and shut us down, and injunctions were taken out and threats of arrest and everything by these guys from the National Union of Mineworkers. They were mainly up from Kent – felt really sorry for them but it wasn't anything that we could do other than give them money. What we wanted to do was stop oil supplies to oil supplied power stations and things like that but we were stymied because we knew that if we did that then management would take over the control of pipeline-fed because a lot of stuff is pipeline-fed you see – technology was changing, was changing to a degree that - there have been pipelines in the UK for a number of years but they were doubling, trebling and quadrupling, just laying pipelines because it was cheaper to put fuel through pipelines than it was to send it by road, rail or any other means. And it was just cheap, you know, it was like a ha'penny a gallon or something like that…but the on-costs for road and rail it's quite expensive so you can't blame them for that I suppose it's technology isn't it. But it put people out of work unfortunately but…

DW: How far did you drive? Were you delivering to quite a way out of London or just locally?

JO: Yeah, I mean our boundaries going north were just this side of Northampton. To the west it was places the other side of Oxford – Farringdon. Farringdon was the furthest west we used to go. The furthest south we used to go was Brighton and you can't go any further than that 'cause you're in the English Channel. And the furthest east we used to go was London obviously, but right down the centre because the other part of London was done by our Purfleet depot which was on the river down in Purfleet. We didn't touch the city, we only went as far as…we did cross the river, certainly went into south London but it was going east, I'd say probably the city, just outside the city, this side of the city – Holloway, once you get down to North One Islington we stop there basically. And Old Street and City Road was a sort of a boundary, we didn't cross over that. So that was it going east so it was quite a big area with an awful lot of service stations in it, but it wasn't just the service stations there were hospitals, schools, government buildings, all sorts of jobs. Eventually all those were taken away from us and they were done by contractors and all Esso drivers did in the end was their service stations. When I first started working for Esso in nineteen seventy three in my depot we had two hundred and eighty two drivers – when I left in nineteen ninety five we had forty seven, shifting more litres out of the gate than those 282. Vehicles were bigger, we were doing more work, motorways – the M25 just opened everything up. Just opened it all up - it gave us so much access so much quicker. The M1 got better, the M4, the M40 were better roads and the M23 going south down to Brighton and all that sort of work around there, right across the south coast s far as….certainly from Brighton, Hove down as far as Worthing, and then that was our boundary finished then and from there on going west was done by a terminal down at Hythe. Where were we – talking about trade unions…

DW: Well this is the era of Jack Jones…

JO: No Jack Jones had gone…the guy who was…just trying to think who our trade union general secretary was, it was the car worker…the Ford guy, can't remember his name, think he just died recently of cancer I think…can't remember his name…he worked at Ford Motor Company, he was ok., d'ya know I have terrible terrible trouble now remembering who the general secretaries were, innit awful really innit, I remember Jack Jones yeah and this other guy who, I can't remember, and then eventually of course we had the black guy er Bill Morris., and who was it before him, I can't remember who it was before him now, Welsh guy…but anyway, in our depot…we weren't militant we were just sensible. In nineteen eighty three we had the same senior steward Tony Cooper, from nineteen seventy five, nineteen seventy six right the way through till nineteen ninety four, something like that. So we had some different shop stewards but I was eventually elected as a shop steward in nineteen eighty three until nineteen ninety one which was a period of eight years. I was also a trade union appointed safety rep, so I know or I did know quite a lot about the oil industry, put me somewhere else and I'd be totally lost probably although basic safety is common sense…so anybody can sort that out. It was in our terminal so it was all related to that. Nineteen ninety one we basically were sold out, a directive had cone from Exxon in the United States that they wanted all trainee trade union agreements scrapped. They didn't want anymore trade union movements and activity in their terminals and they were instructed to offer us as drivers, and the plant operatives, staff status. This caused an awful lot of controversy, this was in nineteen ninety one, three years earlier in nineteen eighty eight they closed our workshops down and made all our vehicle fitters redundant and they put it out to contract using the same premises which was actually on our terminal. Some of the mechanics moved across to the driving staff but it didn't really suit them. Some of them went to the airport…Heathrow airport refuelling, they didn't mind that. And some of them just left. But they were good guys and we relied on them and one or two of them were personal friends of mine that I used to play golf with, when I played golf, drink with and y'know just knock about with. But anyway, that hurt us quite a bit as fellow workers, I suppose, comrades, call us what you like. Nineteen ninety one they offered us this staff deal. It was a good deal too money wise, in fact it was a very god deal money wise but I didn't want it and a lot of my comrades didn't want it either. We didn't want our trade union agreements scrapped. We liked them because they gave us an awful lot of protection. And it meant that we could no longer negotiate anything at all. Anything at all. And they could do exactly what they wanted. We knew that there was something going on behind this and I'll get to that.

DW: Was it a way of de-recognising the union then, was that what lay behind it?

JO: Yeah, that's right yeah. It was, it's part of this union bashing. They tried it in the states years ago and they succeeded to a degree. They smashed the teachers union to bits and that was what they wanted to do here; they wanted the trade union movement out of the oil industry basically. Certainly out of Esso Petroleum and the Exxon cooperation they just wanted rid of it all together. I think its called a quality circle. I think it started in Japan I think but I don't know too much detail about that – I saw something once on my manager's desk that I wasn't supposed to see and I was trying to read it upside down and I didn't get very far 'fore he came in but it was something to do with that…yeah funny times.

DW: So called quality management?

JO: Yeah but it was called equality circle but it was unclear Big corporations like Honda, Nissan, Toyota. I'm not saying it was them but it was those sort of companies y'know.

DW: It became the flavour [of the times]

JO: That's right. Get rid of the trade union movement. They're causing too many problems y'know and we're giving them too much and we want more and we shouldn't be giving them y'know something every time we want something 'cause that's basically what you did. You negotiated a deal. We'll get something - what do you want? Well no we're not gonna give you that – look you give us that and we'll…y'know and it just went on like, not quite like that but not on that sort of theme…

DW: You say you became a shop steward and you were also driving a tanker. How did you do that? Did you get time off as a steward?

JO: Yes we did. Part of our trade union agreements with the company were that we would get so much downtime, can't remember what time they called it now. We'd get so much downtime for trade union activities. We actually had our own little office in the top end of the canteen. We had a massive big canteen, 'cause a lot o' lot o' people worked there when I first went there in nineteen seventy three, I mean not only two hundred and eighty two drivers but there was probably about thirty five mechanics and there was probably another hundred and fifty contractors as well so this canteen was massive. And they never ever downsized it they just took tables and chairs out [laughs] as people didn't work there anymore! But we had this little office built in the corner with our own phone and filing cabinets and everything and it was smashing. So everyday we would get….everyday one of the stewards would get an hour and a half to do trade union activities and we did that on a rota. So yeah we got time and we used to have joint meetings with management once a month. We didn't work that day we just went in later in the morning in civvy clothes and we went to a conference room with a big table and we got tea, coffee and we got a little bit of lunch and stuff like that and we got basic hours for that day. But it was about the business – it was about the business to the terminal. Not other terminals we weren't interested in other terminals, they did their own business, but the trade unions were the same across the UK and Northern Ireland and Scotland as well. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland…the trade unions' agreements were exactly the same. A lot of smuggling went on in Ireland across the border between the Republic and the north but I don't know whether I should have said that [laughs]

DW: We can always cut that out [laughs]

JO: Well it did. It did. And the Garda knew it and the Ulster Constabulary [knew about it] but couldn't do anything about it. But I think they…I don't…I'm not saying …that goes on now, it probably doesn't actually because it's not as easy now to do that. But…some of the stories that we heard - a tanker would disappear for three or four days and it would turn up empty – y'know things like that and the guy say 'well I parked it in there y'know and when I came back it was gone!' Y'know…I mean I don't know what happened but y'know all sorts of things like that happened. Yeah we used to get some shop stewards time, I can't remember what they used to call it now, ain't it terrible…

DW: Time off for trade union duties…

JO: For trade union activities yeah but we had a terminology for it, and I told you I got a mind full of useless information now I can't remember the proper stuff…

DW: And did you have mass meetings in that canteen with members?

JO: Yeah when it was needed we would have it once a year when we had our pay negotiations. Our anniversary date was in November. So negotiations would start with management around July. They'd have five or six meetings with the senior stewards it wasn't all the shop stewards it was just the senior stewards sitting down with the management and a deal would be thrashed out. And by November there would be an offer on the table. We always rejected the first one…it was just a matter of course we always did, even if we knew in the end that we would probably accept that or most of it, I wouldn't say in part I'd say probably ninety percent of it but there was always a deal in the end that was acceptable to both parties I think. Because we were sensible we weren't militant. we were called militant our terminal but we weren't . But anyway we were just sensible people that knew what we were doing basically. So we would have a mass meeting and the senior steward old stand up and he'd say what the deal was, he said 'this is what it is' and he'd go through it and he'd say 'you will now get this, you now get that' and what we were always trying to do was get certain payments that we used to get, 'cause we'd get a list of payments on our payslip, I wish I'd brought one with me actually 'cause I still got an old one from the nineteen eighties that I kept, but you'd get your basic pay at the top, then you get your shift pay, then you'd get your, some other allowance, then you'd get something else, I can't remember what it all was now. And it all totted up, but your pension or your pay was only taken from your basic pay but in the end we got some of these other payments put into the pension.

DW: You were consolidated?

JO: Yes. So it enhanced the pension. Those are the sensible sort of things that we did and we got it. And that's why the Esso pensions now are quite good. I mean I've been living on one since nineteen ninety five. It's not brilliant but it ain't bad. It's not as good for instance…it's not as good as, well say, the Police pension, if a policeman's done thirty years. And it's not as good as some airport workers' pensions that are retiring now but when I got it in nineteen ninety five it wasn't bad. And it's gone up every year. Still goes up. And this, I mean one year I got four and a half percent increase. So the bigger the pension, when you get your percentage, y'know the bigger the increase you see. So we managed to do that as part of negotiations and we were trying to do things like that all the time, trying to make it better for the guys that we represented so that when they did eventually retire, whether they got to sixty five or whether they were allowed to leave early as a lot of them did over the years because they…well they scaled back their…well not their operation but their drivers anyway and others, plant operatives and others as well, even from the shipping side of it, over the years quite considerably, well they got decent pensions you see. And the jobs market was getting tighter, it wasn't as easy to get jobs so if you couldn't get a job well you still had your pension. If you did get a job well you had your pension as well so you could be quite well off. So we did things like that and we got to the stage in nineteen ninety one where Exxon and Esso Europe wanted trade union movement out. And they were some sticky times. It almost split our depot from being quite a unified workforce into fractions [sic] that could have been at each other's throats but didn't quite get to that.

DW: How did they try to do that?

JO: Well what they did was, over a period of a week, on the day shift they would call in one group of guys into a meeting room and say: 'This is the offer that we want to make you…' and they'd go through the offer, and they say '…but you have to give up…' y'know there won't be anymore trade union agreements it will be the Blue Book, what's called the staff book, and that's what you will now work to, you won't work to the Grey Book which was what we had. Y'know on the railways I think they had a yellow book or something like that you see, but the agreements in it, stuff that had been thrashed out years ago and that was either improved on or eroded over the years but anyway, that's what they were doing, then as the night shift came in over a period of a week, they'd take, y'know group of them in…

DW: So it was divide and rule?

JO: So it was divide and rule yeah course it was. They always done it like that. But it was what they did at our depot that stuck in the craw really but I'll get to that. So what they did was, they did that over a period of time until they'd got everybody, so that everybody knew what was on the table, what they were facing and they were doing this across the country in every terminal and every small depot. And what happened across the UK, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and in every other depot in the UK or England anyway, they all accepted this deal. The only depot that didn't accept it was ours, West London Terminal, not because we were militant, because we were sensible, we knew what this meant…

DW: We were the only ones, there was about, I think, I can't remember how many of us there was then, it was more than forty seven then, I think there was probably about sixty then. There was about sixty of us and they said 'Oh well it's this west London militancy' but we weren't militant, we knew what this meant, we knew what the long term, they wouldn't do anything for maybe eighteen months, two years maybe three years but then they would start, gradually whittle away at us and our terms and conditions, 'cause a lot of it just went from there to there you see, we kept an awful lot of it. In fact in some ways we were better off, but in other ways we were going to be worse off. We were the only depot left standing basically and unbeknown to use the shop stewards, we had a meeting with management one day and they said: 'Well we're not gonna have the meeting today in the conference room upstairs, we're all gonna go down to this place in Guildford, we're gonna sit down in a pub, we're gonna have a nice lunch, we're gonna have two or three drinks', and we did that from time to time anyway. They took you out of the working environment because sometimes it was better to do that. Phones wouldn't be going and things like that y'know…so we didn't see anything unusual in that. Unbeknown to us, what was happening on that day was that three big depots: Hythe, Purfleet and, I think it was Birmingham, were having their vote on that day and they wanted us out of the terminal so that the shop stewards couldn't pick up the phone, phone us at West London and say 'well this is what's happened here.' And we couldn't say to them: 'Tell your guys not to vote for this, because this is what we think is gonna happen…' and then put the phone down. By the time we got back, about four o'clock in the afternoon, it was all done and dusted.

DW: And this is before mobiles really isn't it?

JO: That's right. That's right yeah…I don't think there was mobile phones. However saying that we had phones in the ca – we had the Vodafone network. We were the first company to have phones in cabs, on lorries in other words. We were the first company to do that. And they were all remote. Little speakers so you could just press a button and you could talk to whoever it was. You didn't have to pick the handset up so it was hands-free yeah…I'll never forget that but oh forget that…so that was all

done and dusted while we were down in Guildford havin a, I don't know, a chicken salad lunch I suppose and a couple of beers I suppose, I don't know. [unclear] 'fancy getting turned over by these bastards' I couldn't believe that we got turned over by…but anyway we did and then of course they had to get at us you see so it was divide and rule again. They kept getting these blokes up and, you know a little group at a time saying 'look y'know the problem is if you don't sign this eventually they'll just close this place down and the work 'll go there…' it wouldn't, it wouldn't 'ave ever 'appened because ours was the first depot that was on pipeline…the pipeline's going into Heathrow Airport ok, pipelines through West London Terminal which is over in Stanwell go under the road up into Heathrow Airport…

DW: But you were strategic weren't you?

JO: Absolutely. Yeah but management could control that. A lot of it was automatic anyway. But it was [a] strategic depot ok so that's why…it was always 'we gotta sort this lot at West London out…' but anyway, in the end the guys just gave in. They just collapsed. And in the end there were two of us left. Me and a guy named Freddie Cavanagh, who was [a] shift worker with me, he was a driver and we're on the same shift pattern for years so we were together all the time and both of us have a tremendous sense of humour and the same sense of humour. We see humour in everything. Even when you're not supposed to, y'know so we got on really really well. And in the end there was just the two of us left – we wouldn't sign. And they couldn't believe it. In the end the guy from Human Resources – it wasn't called Human Resources then, I can't remember what it was called there now, but it's Human Resources now; he called us both into the office; he said 'look you two plonkers' he says 'you really have to sign up to this' he said because 'if you don't' he said 'they're gonna sort you out' he said 'they'll have you out of here' he said 'they will sack you'. 'They will find something' he said 'that y'know you really gotta…' So we said 'yeah ok, well we'll think about it' and we did. We gave it some...we knew that in the end that we would probably have to put pen to paper and…and it was, it was a signature saying that you accept, y'know what's in front of you. And Freddie and I left this office, we were both on nights that week, we'd just gone in when they, just gone in…reported for work, when they called us up and I said to Freddie afterwards, I said 'look', I said 'they're gonna get us Freddie ' I said, y'know I said 'at some stage' I said ' it might not be for a year' I said 'but you and I won't survive just on our own contract y'know with the trade union agreements' I said, and we were both still shop stewards, Fred was a shop steward as well you see, up till that point. `Nah I know' he said…'I'll go and sign' he said 'and you make them wait 'till tomorrow.' So I said 'alright then'. So anyway Fred went back up and he signed so the other guy said…'what about Oswell ' he says 'is he coming up?' he said 'No he's told you to piss off' [laughs] Perhaps I shouldn't have said that! So anyway, the next day I went in to work, and they left me alone that night and I finished about four o'clock in the morning, anyway went home went to bed, got up – just had a normal day, and then went to work again…got in there about five o'clock. [unclear] he said 'you got to go up and see the boss' so I said 'ok'. So I went upstairs so he said 'John' he said ''ave you thought anymore about, y'know this deal…you're the only one left now…Freddie's signed and y'know its all sealed…it's just you…y'know you're gonna 'ave to do this don't ya?' So I said 'Yeah…I know that…I've had a think about it…I've got some problems with it…but I'll sign it'. So I did. So when I went down stairs I saw Freddie, he said 'Oh Ossie …alright…did you sign up?' I said ' No.' [Guffaws] Winding 'im up and he looked at me, he said 'aah…' he said; I won't tell you what he called me! Anyway, I said 'Yeah I did Fred, really…we're all done and dusted now mate.' So that was that. It was ok for a while. They left us alone for a while but they gradually started getting at us…the first thing we got was computers in the cabs. We got computers to go with the phones and these computers they recorded absolutely everything except what

you said. And what you did in the morning was you turn up for work, you picked up this computer and when you went to your truck you put it into the docking station and you pressed one of the buttons and your work would come up for the day. Then you just put your first load in and then you just went off and you loaded and you went off and did your job. But it recorded your time, your speed and everything. Although we had tachographs, it recorded everything. So eventually what they did was they whittled down the job times from the information they got from these computers. Now if we'd had trade union agreements they would never have got those computers in the cab. They might have pt them in there…

DW: But with safeguards though?

JO: Yeah that's right with safeguards. Or they might have put them in there but we wouldn't have used them. We would have just taken them off the docking station and just put them on the side. So they'd have got no information at all. They would have had to have taken everything from the tachograph which they'd already done previously anyway. I mean they'd gradually whittled away some o our times over the years. Can't blame them really - because their view of it was: there's some fat on every shift and we're gonna take it basically, and they did in the end. You can't blame them. It just makes them more efficient and it's a competitive market, especially when Sainsbury's, Tesco's and the likes were getting into the fuel market. And they were really really worried about that. The big oil companies were really really worried about that because we used to, at our…meetings with management, the shop stewards and the management meetings, we used to get a sheet every month of our sales. Our sales percentages…certainly across the UK compared with Shell, BP, Total, Amoco, Burma, all the lot…and Esso was always nineteen or twenty one percent – the nearest one was Shell and they'd be down to about fourteen or fifteen so we were at the top. Better company, better delivery system, better terminals, it was better everything, better drivers probably, I don't know. But we were the top oil company. And right at the bottom…there'd be something like Tesco's or Sainsbury, I can't remember now which one it was, it was one of the…I've got a feeling it was Tesco and they went from like 0.5 %right up to 11% at one time. They were going past Burma and Amoco and all this and that was the last I remember because we didn't do it after that but they'd got up to 11%.

DW: They were the new players?

JO: Yeah supermarket percentage and it was…all of them actually…but Tesco had he biggest share of that at eleven percent and Esso were getting really really worried. They're not worried now because now they're in cahoots with Tesco and you see these Tesco Expresses well it's Esso Tesco, it's an Esso station with a Tesco shop. That's how they got themselves around it and that's why the prices now, well there's hardly any difference in them, whereas prior to those agreements, Sainsbury's, Tesco's were two or three pence a litre cheaper than Esso, Shell y'know whoever so they got around that, which, I think they were probably always gonna do but, our job in itself started to get whittled away to a degree that we were now working Sundays, which we weren't before and then eventually it was Saturday night and Sunday night, which we never ever did and all bank holidays that meant Christmas Day, Boxing Day, Easter and we never ever did tat, we didn't work bank holidays unless they offered us some overtime and we decided that we'd do it, we'd say 'Yeah we'll give you six drivers – how many do you want?' and they say 'we want eight' and [we'd] say ' alright we'll give you eight then.' Y'know and things like that. But the money was pretty good, I think, when I finished in nineteen ninety five I think I was earning about thirty five thousand, something like that. But it was 40 pence in the pound rate so, I can't remember what I was taking home now, about sixteen

thousand I suppose after – and it was the top end of National Insurance payments as well, so while it was a good top end, the potofmen could have been an awful lot better…

DW: And would it be the case that the depots that were eventually going to very much local agreements rather than national…because you said earlier you could go anywhere in the country and your agreement would be the same?

JO: Would be the same. Yeah.

DW: Obviously that's what's happened everywhere you go – like on British Rail – one agreement covered every single job.

JO: That's right yeah. Exactly the same as.

DW: Now you got train operating companies doing their own…

JO: Yeah that's right. It's all been hived off hasn't it. But yeah, I mean, right across the UK, and that Includes Northern Ireland as well, the staff book was exactly the same. There were some good things in it, I mean, there were some things like, I mean the holiday entitlement went up and the money went up as well. I mean the money was really good. And the holiday entitlement went up and you'd get time off for being a school governor, which I am and I have been for nineteen years…we used to get some time off for that. If you wanted to be a magistrate they wouldn't stop you doing that. And if you wanted to be a councillor they wouldn't stop[you doing that. But…they weren't too keen to give you too much time off for that – they would expect you to swap shifts and all that sort of stuff. But from time to time if you couldn't swap your shifts because of your driving hours and if there was a clash between the driving hours, because one week you had to have thirty six hours off…One week you're only allowed to drive thirty six hours and the second week you're only allowed to drive, I think it was forty seven hours, something like that, then you had to have so many hours off. So if that sort of clashed y'know with your rest-time, driving hours, then they would expect you to change your shifts if you could, but if you couldn't because of the clashes then they'd give you the time off. But they did it reluctantly. But it was in the book. And you could quote the book at [them], say 'Well the staff book says that…' 'Yeah…ok…alright then…we'll give you the time.' Si there were some bits and pieces, I suppose that were quite good.

DW: And those agreements were going…

JO: What the trade union agreements?

DW: Yeah the agreements that formed the basis for this…

JO: Yeah they all went. They all went. Because everything was incorporated in this staff handbook. All the payments that we got, y'know your…basic rate and everything else – they were still there. Shift payment was still there. Other bits and pieces were still there, I can't remember what they were now. So that basically stayed the same. But it was our basic pay that just went up, so pensionable pay was better, y'know. So there were some advantages, but eventually there were other things that just weren't as good, I mean you didn't have any say in negotiations, you didn't have any say in terms and conditions, y'know that all went. So it was…quite hard-nosed really…

DW: You said you enjoyed being a driver. What was it about that job that you enjoyed, say, compared to working in an office…

JO: Yeah. I think it's because you're out and about … I've more or less worked outside in some way shape or form since I left school, except for the short time that I worked in the printing industry and probably a couple of years when I first went to work for George Whiley's in South Ruislip where I operated a lather for about two years. But from then on I was outside in some way shape or form. It was either…well its probably behind a wheel of a van a lorry and then a bigger lorry and so there's an amount of freedom with that, that not quite please yourself but you're left alone basically. And it's a responsibility I think because what they're saying to you is 'There's a job - go and do it' and you're doing it on your own. You're going somewhere and you're doing it. If you work in a factory and someone says 'Look we got to do all this work on a lathe and that, it's got to be very precise, in other words it's precision engineering, something like that, then you could be constantly watched to make sure that that is exact because it's got to fit something that's exact – might be an aeroplane part or something like that – d'you see what I mean. So I think there's a…people say 'Oh yeah well lorry drivers are ten a penny' well actually they may be ten a penny but they do a job, and they do it on their own, and there's a responsibility that goes with that.

DW: And is there a pride in that would you say or has that changed now for drivers?

JO: I think that there's still a pride in it…yes I think there is. I think there are some twits about…the way they drive anyway. You can't be a twit and drive a petrol tanker, it doesn't work like that because, certainly for Esso Petroleum, we were quite well trained and towards the end of my time there, my employment there, every two years we were retrained by somebody from Rospa. And they would take you out in a vehicle - say 'Ok let's drive to this job and I'm just going to see how you drive', and they would do a written report on how you drove that vehicle and sometimes you looked at the report and you think to yourself 'I didn't do that did I?' It wasn't dangerous it's just that you'd miss something…what happens is you can slip into bad habits if you're not careful. So this sort of retraining every two years was actually quite good because what it did was it made you a better driver. And most of the guys that came off of the tankers, petrol tankers anyway, were very very god drivers. They're very observant and they drive their cars well as well – because it's ingrained in you; it's part of your training; you do things that other drivers may not do. I'm not saying that other drivers that drive cars or whatever are not good drivers or are not as good as…but they don't do…

DW: They don't have to be aware of the same things that you had to be aware of?

JO: Because they haven't had the training , yes that's right, and they're not aware of certain things, y'know. They're not trained to look for certain things y'know like people walking along – well do you they think they could be going to cross the road and there's a car coming out o' that…from between those two houses reversing out y'know on its drive way toward the road and give it a little toot on your hooter to let him know. Anticipation and things like that. People in cars don't necessarily look for that…

DW: No – they certainly don't [laughs]…

JO: No y'know they don't. And some people in cars when they're driving they don't see motorbikes. They don't see pushbikes - I mean I cycle – they don't see you sometimes; y'know it's actually appalling. But yeah and it wasn't that, it was meeting people as well; people that own service stations; people that are licences in service stations; people that work in service stations. And you would just talk to them really,

pass the time of the day while you were offloading because someone always had to be in attendance because you couldn't offload without a petroleum certificate. They had to know what they were doing just like you had to know what you were doing. So there was always two people while the tanker was being offloaded. So there was a conversation went on y'know and it's just meeting people and that's something that I've always enjoyed; talking to people. I think that's probably why I've agreed to come here and do this today. That's why I was a councillor for fifteen years. I means I've done radio interviews for the Times Online after a Labour party conference in two thousand and five or six in Manchester. I've done radio interviews for students at colleges - they just wanted to know about the Labour Party and what I thought of y'know the government and things like that. So it's that side of it as well I suppose…and o' course it's the job. I think you've got to like the job. And of course you're earning a wage, which you've got to do haven't you, to pay the mortgage and feed your family.

DW: I also wanted to ask you about being a shop steward and what motivated you to take that position. In my view the job of a shop steward is pretty thankless really because whatever you do for people you get flak. People rarely sat 'Thanks for that'. What do you think being a shop steward for you was all about and what made you want to do it – and for quite a long time wasn't it…

JO: Yeah for eight years. D'ya know what I don't really know. I remember being asked if I would stand in the next elections that were coming up in our depot in 1983. Because in 1982 we lost a lot of staff through early redundancy; through reorganisation - and three of those were shop stewards. They all went so there was a void. And what they wanted was people with experience that other people thought could do the job, that other people thought could not only do the job but knew what they were doing. And…when I was asked I thought, *yeah I think I could probably do that*. We had an active social club at Esso. I was a secretary there for two years and that was a thankless job. And I was also the treasurer for a year and that was also a thankless job [laughs] but I enjoyed it. And I enjoyed dealing with people at the same time and basically that's all your doing. You're dealing with people but they're your own work colleagues that will come to you with complaints that they've got or if someone has said '…look I didn't get paid for this because this happened and that happened, can you see what you can do about it?' And y'know it would be about all sorts of things and then, I don't know really, I don't know - I just thought I could do it. And I thought *Yeah why not? Why shouldn't I do* this? I always wanted to be a member of a trade union anyway – I always supported trade unions - so…why not sort of put myself in at the deep end? And that was what I did…and I swam ok. And I tell you what: I really liked it. And in the end, what happens is, people have an amount of trust in you, y'see. And they'll only trust you if they know you know what your doing, so…but it's what you learnt.

DW: And I wanted to ask you about joining the Labour Party and later on becoming a councillor. You mentioned militancy in your work time, and in the seventies and eighties there were lots of different political groups and so called revolutionary groups - were you ever attracted to other political groups?

JO: No. No. No. It's always Labour Party for me. Always was. I can't remember when I joined the Labour Party. I didn't join until probably the early nineteen eighties but I haven't got a clear memory of it. I suppose… I could find out, but I haven't got a clear memory of it.

DW: It's interesting if it is because that's the time when there's a lot of change in the Labour Party…you got the SDP leaving the Labour Party and then you got Tony Benn and you got militant in Liverpool. The labour Party's areal combustible…
JO: Well it was yeah. I think it probably still is but it's just quieter combustible now. Then it was explosive combustible. But…I can't remember, I actually…got friendly with a guy who worked for British Airways on their motor transport section, he used to pick pilots and…stewardesses up from hotels, y'know when they stayed over and take them back to Heathrow and put them on… He used to do staff transport basically and it was basically pilots. He was a member of the party and he had been since the seventies. Two years older than ne. And I got friendly with him and we used to drink in the same community centre and he was talking to me about it one day and said 'Look…you're a shop steward…you always vote Labour…you've supported the party since you've been y'know a trade union member for years…why ain't you joined the party?'... And I said 'yeah you're right' so I did. And that was the start of it. And I was active in the party right up until I was elected on the council in nineteen ninety five, I only retired this year. But that was only because of certain circumstances. I could have stayed on . I would have got re-selected and I would have got re-elected in my ward. Because…well I 'd been in that ward fifteen years and I worked bloody 'ard. Years ago. Not so much lately because it's got an awful lot better but I wasn't working anyway so I had the time to do different things. But it was still working it was still a job. People say 'It's not really a job'. But it all depends how you do it. You can either give it loads of time or hardly any time at all. It all depends how you want to commit yourself to it. And if you…represented a deprived ward which I was – it had pockets of deprivation. It's not hard to work three and a half days a week doing it. And I mean three and a half days and that was what I did. That was without meetings in the evening as well, but I wasn't working so I could put loads of hours in…I enjoyed it. Steep learning curve and it's quite good and now I know loads and I'm not doing anything. But anyway.

DW: So as a trade unionist and a steward the next step traditionally has always been the Labour Party. And you're applying the same things as a shop steward into the ward…you're still dealing with people's problems.

JO: Yeah, it's interesting. When I first started, when I first went on the council it was daunting. I wondered what I'd let myself in for. I got to say, in all honesty, I mean in all the years I've worked in industry and with…management, working for the biggest corporation in the world 'cause that's what the Exxon Corporation is, it's the biggest corporation in the world – it's now Exxon Mobil, they've joined y'know, so it's still the biggest – that didn't frighten me. But this did. It frightened the life out o' me for about three or four weeks. I honestly thought to myself *God what have I got into* and I got talked into doing that as well. Got talked into joining the party 'cause that was a natural progression, then I got talked into putting myself up for selection for this bye-election where a guy had died of cancer and he was actually a friend of mine. We used to have a few drinks y'know and that, so I knew him quite well and he died of cancer and there was a bye-election – it was a quite safe Labour ward. And I lived in the ward for a few years but I'd moved to the next ward over…and I still knew a lot of people there, and a lot of people knew me because of the work that I'd been doing in the community centre, 'cause I'd done voluntary work as well for a few years. So I knew a lot of people so…I got talked into that. He said: Look…you want to be a councillor…let's get you up and see how you get on with the selection' it would be a good experience anyway 'cause what happened I got selected! There was three of us at the selection for the seat and I got selected. So this guy…well he said: 'Well you're gonna get elected now – it's a safe lot' so I thought to myself *great* y'know *can't wait* but when I actually got there Dave - God it frightened the life out of me. When I read through my first report, it was a housing report, [laughter] yeah the chief

whip said to me 'Well what committees do you want to go on?' I said 'Well what was Chris on?', the guy who died. He said 'Well he's on ours' And I said 'Well if there's a gap there – put me in there; let me see how I get on.' When I read the first report I couldn't make head nor tail of it. Didn't know what any of it meant. I thought *What is this, what have I done, what have I let myself in for?* And I thought: *Ah God*. And I looked at it anyway and I thought to myself *No this is* [unclear], so I just took the report home and I was looking through it and then I started to sort of get the hang of it then. And it just got better and better reading it and it got easier and it does take – it probably takes a couple of years to actually get into it, to understand how bureaucratic it is and how the system works y'know and it's still bureaucratic, it's just not easy at all. Local government is so complicated because it's bureaucratic when really it could be so simple. However I've got to say that since, certainly Hillingdon has been in the system that they're in, they didn't go for directly elected mayor they went for Leader and Cabinet system, it's been made a bit easier because one cabinet member, say the cabinet member for Planning, Transportation and…what does ours do now - he does Planning, Transportation and Environmental services, can make decisions on his own. Y'know and that is so much easier because he just looks through the report and he says 'Yeah I'll sign that off…I'll sign that off…NO…redo that…I want to see…that changed and that changed. So y'know that's been made easier. But now it's almost a dictatorship. Well it is in Hillingdon anyway 'cause it's Tory run anyway, y'know what I mean. I…y'know people's political persuasions are their political persuasions so I've got my own opinion obviously…but it is y'know it is a little bit dictatorial in Hillingdon. But…y'know…so it's been made a little bit easier but yeah it frightened the life out of m Dave it really did. I though *Oh dear* - but it got better. Then in the end…it's like water off a duck's back in the end and of course the longer I was on and I got selected an re-elected every time, so in the end I was on the Hillingdon Labour Group anyway. I was one of the senior Councillors and so I got party leads on committees and I was group chair for six years. so I quite enjoyed that. I understand how to chair a meeting…'cause I've watched it through my trade union years. I've watched it go on…I learnt on the job yeah. So I understand how that works and I know what a chairman's role is. A lot of people don't. But I understand…but there's been better chairs than me. I've seen them. There really is some really good chairmen about. But, I mean, people have said to me: 'Oh God, you've been the best chair we've had for years'…but I learnt on the job.

DW: Who was your MP is it John McDonnell?

JO: John McDonnell yeah. We don't always see eye to eye on a lot of…a lot of…John's ideas basically…but on others we do. I mean I've worked with John before, well since nineteen ninety seven. I mean I was on the council before John was the MP. But I've also got other friends that are MPs: Virendra Sharma of Ealing and Southall and Parmjit Dhanda who was the MP for Gloucester for two terms but he lost his seat in the last general election last year. I've met Gordon Brown and about one or two others so it's been interesting. It' been an interesting time. I don't think I would have changed any of my working life other than that period of working for that steel…fabric reinforcement…fabrication. If I had my time again I would have never have gone there. I would have cut that out. I mean I don't suffer from depression but that really could have sent me over the edge.

DW: There was one other thing I forgot – you mentioned that you've been a Health and Safety rep. Could you talk a bit about being a rep and what kind of issues came up for you? Because this would have been in the time….the Health and Safety legislation was coming through in the seventies and by the eighties there was a lot of stuff to know wasn't there? All sorts of regulations and…

JO: That's right. Well you have to realise that this was in the time when I worked for Esso Petroleum in the oil industry so it was all, basically it related to that and that alone. So I was a safety rep from nineteen eighty five to nineteen ninety one - that was six years. And at the same time I was a shop steward from 1983 to '91 which was eight years. Doubled up on the two [jobs] yeah. And we used to have safety meetings and we got time for that as well we were allowed time for that as well from management as well as our shop stewards time as well. Basically what that was, was there was four safety reps in our terminal. We had a section of the terminal that we each had to look after. My section was loading racks where the petroleum was loaded and any heating oils. So it was the loading racks and the tank farm which was these great big storage tanks that you see and the pipelines and that was my section. And what else did I have in that? I had a cat plant, a cat plant is where they turn petrol vapour back into product so nothing is lost. And that came on stream in the late eighties. That was with bottom loading systems - prior to that it was all top loading systems with open lids; straight in the too of the tanker bodies and the vapour would escape down the sides and it would just float across the ground and dissipate into the atmosphere. That no longer happens. Vapour recovery is now installed, and has been installed in all depots probably since, I'll say at a guess, well say nineteen ninety, just to put a cap on it, so probably for the last twenty years vapour recovery's been in operation. Vapour is recovered, it goes through a system into a cat plant – that's turned back into product. So there's no waste anymore. No vapour should escape into the atmosphere. So basically all I had to check was the loading racks to make sure there was no leakages, everything was properly signed, anybody loading had proper safety equipment on – hard hats, toetector boots, uniform which was fire retardant for obvious reasons – although, touch wood, in my time there weren't any fires. There was prior to my going there when a few drivers died 'cause the racks caught fire. But that wasn't a good time.

DW: Did you go on a training course to be a Health and Safety rep?

JO: Yep. And I did fire courses. But let me…to finish off what I was responsible for as far as the tank farm was concerned – that was just an inspection to make sure the pipelines that were going into the storage tanks weren't leaking. I wasn't allowed up onto the tanks to check the lids. Petroleum tanks have floating lids - not a lot of people know that - so that as the product goes down in the tank the lid goes down with it. So there's no oxygen in there because to start a fire you have a triangle: it's oxygen, product and ignition. So no oxygen – you don't get the fire; you don't get ignition . Because even if you do get ignition it would be too rich to ignite. So I wasn't allowed up on the tanks but you could inspect them from the outside and that's all they want you to do. And around each tanks you had something called a bund wall. So if there were any leakages it wouldn't come out past the bund wall. Obviously if the tank collapsed and it had ninety five thousand gallons in it, it would come over the bund wall 'cause the bund wall was only about four foot high. And I think that's what happened in Buncefield. When they had the Buncefield disaster, the product actually came over the bund wall and so it was everywhere, it was all over the place and vapour of course was prominent - it was in the atmosphere and that was what caused the explosion and the fire. So my responsibilities was basically that: just to make sure that all the operating equipment was not leaking, was properly labelled, that everything was working as it should be - without people knowing how a loading operation worked, it would be difficult to explain but loading isles were suspended on gas so that you could move them about. Without the gas they weighed - they were so heavy you just couldn't pick them up basically. So there was that as well. And it was just things like that – yard surface, make sure that there's no holes that people walking across couldn't twist their ankle y'know or break their ankles, y'know things

like. It was simple stuff really but it had to be done. You had to do it. You couldn't just walk away from loading racks and not visiting them for three months without checking y'know for certain things. It was pretty easy stuff really - run of the mill stuff. I enjoyed that as well. And training course yeah that was done in the T&G Centre down in Eastbourne. And the shop steward's courses we had those down there as well. They were pretty boring actually, I found them boring, but the training for safety reps that was really really interesting. But we didn't only deal with petroleum we dealt with scaffolding and ladders and stuff like that - that was what made it interesting because it wasn't just about our industry. And they said 'Look supposing you've got scaffolding on your depot because their doing some work you need to know about it' because if you're a safety rep you need to be able to look at that scaffold and say 'That doesn't look right tom me' d'ya know what I mean, so we did scaffolding as well. but it was made interesting by the guys that used to present it, what are they called tutors, because they knew what they were talking about and they were really interesting. I found them interesting. I found the safety courses – I loved that - they were brilliant. And the fire cuouserse. We used to set fire to tankers and then put them out but they were done in a controlled environment. We had an old tanker in our depot right over the back in an area that was non longer used. No danger to anybody or anything. You'd have a bunch of guys that would go in the morning and they knew that they'd be on fire training and you'd do that for the day. So this was part of working life so it was a diversion really from your normal job and it made things interesting. And there are different types of fire extinguisher, for instance and they all do different jobs. And so we would do something where we had to use all five of these fire extinguishers and we would be taught how to put a fire out 'cause it's not quite as simple as you think. And I can tell you a really funny story, which I'm going to because it was part of my working life, but I'll only do one. But I won't do that just yet. But remind me about BCF Halon and I will tell you. What BCF Halon does - I don't think they use that anymore because apparently…is it carcinogenic? Yeah carcinogenic that's it. But what we did was on one fire course we had this old tanker. So we opened the cab door. The trainer would start a fire inside the cab. He'd shut the cab door and *poof* this fire would take off. And he'd say 'Right what I want you to do now is open the door and put the fir out'. And you use this green one which was your BCF Halon y'see. So what you did was you opened the door a crack and you fired off, and it was only a little one like that, but it was so efficient, it's only a little y'know about that size o' that cup y'know, the width of…but it was about that tall , green, black trigger on the top. You fired it into the roof , y'know the ceiling of the cab and what it did was: all this stuff just came down like that and smothered the fire and just put it out. And then you just shut the cab door y'see…give it another good burst and shut the cab door. I was out on a job on the night shift, I was in Battersea – we had a depot down in Battersea and we used to deliver bulk heating oil for smaller tankers to take to houses and y'know little buildings where they go round the back o' people's houses and fill their tank up for their central heating. They'd do all little jobs like that, that you couldn't get big vehicles in. It was called a bulk depot. We had one in Battersea down on the river. Nice little job it was. Anyway, I came out of there one night…I was on nights…it was in the summer. It was about half past eight at night. The sun was going down but it was still a lovely summer evening - blue sky it was just delightful. It was lovely and warm. And I went around the roundabout at the bottom of Wandsworth Bridge Road – I used to go…over Wandsworth Bridge to go back along Wandsworth Bridge Road towards Fulham to go back to our terminal and there was an old Hillman Imp. Yah remember those – y'know the rear engine cars. And it was just at the bottom of the bridge, trying to go my way and it was on fire. The guy had got out and there was all smoke coming out from the bonnet which was at the back 'cause it was a rear engine car. I didn't really want to drive past it because I had an empty vehicle and an empty petrol tanker or a tanker that's had product on is more dangerous because it's full of vapour y'see. With a loaded tanker you're

probably better off but I didn't want to take a chance, part of the training anyway it said try and avoid something like that if you can it's like the old tarmac layers that used to go on with the road burners with the flames - they used to burn it all off before they laid it. They're supposed to turn that off- so let a petrol tanker go by y'see. Whether that's still applies now I don't know – but anyway that's how it was. Let me just have a sip of this tea mmm lovely. So this Hillman Imp is on fire so I stopped put my handbrake on I got out and I picked up my bcf halon which was in all cabs and we had another extinguisher on the back of the trailer a red one which had foam in it. I gotta think about this; was it a red one? Nah let me come back to that it might not ha' been red now thinking about it. No it wasn't it was blue. Dry powder. It had dry powder in it. It wasn't a red one with foam. Red is water. Picked up my green BCF Halon – so I went up to the guy and he's standing there with his hands on his head and I said: 'Your car's on fire!' [laughs] y'know obvious. He said 'I know…and I don't know what to do!' And he'd popped the bonnet and he lifted it up 'cause I'd seen him do that before I get there and…the oxygen all rushed in…and it went *boof* up it went and he slammed it down again. So I said 'Ok mate' so I just lifted it up slightly and I just gave it a squirt of this bcf halon and just left it or a minute, lifted it up again, gave it another squirt and then put the lid back down, left it for another minute or so, picked it up and the fire was out. But what that was – this guy had panicked. When he saw the smoke and he probably smelt it – I can't remember the details now – but obviously knew there was a fire, he stopped his car and he just turned the ignition off, he'd got out and he'd gone round and it's a good job he turned the ignition off I suppose really, but he'd turned the ignition off but he'd left it in gear, left it in gear - I don't know what gear it was in but this fire had taken hold quite a bit actually more than both of us probably thought that it had in the back o' this car. but it had damaged the electrics and what it did was it shorted out the starter motor so as we stood back and everything was still hot and it was melting still - shorted out somehow the starter motor shorted out or the wiring leading to the starter motor from the ignition shorted – the engine started up and the car took off without a driver 'cause it was still in gear. so now this Hillman Imp is going *bbombbombbombbom* and gradually picking up speed. And I saw it going away and I thought *ah no* and I said this guy I said 'You're car's got a mind of its own mate - you better get it after it!' Well he took one look at his car and anyway he run off up the road and he managed to catch it up, but these are the sort of things that can happen and that happened in my working life and I've never forgotten that. But from that, I mean he rescued his car and he got it into the side and I just drove on by and I went back to my depot. When I got back I went to see my supervisor before I loaded my next load and i told him what happened and he said 'You drove your tanker back?' so I said 'Yeah'. He said 'You're on a reprimand John' he said 'because' he said 'once you use that bcf you need another one that's full up…that is not for other vehicles…that is for your vehicle…that is not for other motorists that is for yours'. Well I didn't know this. So then I had this incorporated into the training because that was never ever part of the training. I said 'Well Ted' I said 'look does anybody know this 'cause I dint… that's never been part of the training' I said 'But I tell you what when I see the next shop steward…' 'cause I wasn't a shop steward then - this was in the nineteen seventies - I said 'I'm going to have a word with him…im gonna get this put in the training package' and I did. It was put in the training package. I got reprimanded but I got off 'cause it wasn't in the training package. I said 'look y'know this is a win win for everybody' so they took the point and they said 'look' what was I trying to do mate? Y'know help the motorists out. Good samaritan…apart from that. 'Did you want me deriving an empty tanker past a y'know a car on fire? Well not really…y'know...you could o' gone…could o' done…I said 'yeah could a' done but didn't' That was what I did. Anyway y'know we got around that so y'know it's all part of your working life isn't it – things happen y'know, I mean there were some funny things over the years but…All in all that was the best job I ever had. It was the longest job I had. It was

most of my working life. I enjoyed working for Esso Petroleum. Basically they're a goof company. They do look after their employees. They always looked after me. It was just sad that really that I had to go in 1995 because I was involved in a bad car accident. I wasn't driving I was a back seat passenger and it wrecked my back and that was sixteen years ago. my back has recovered slightly since then but it will never ever fully be the same again so I couldn't do heavy industrial job ever again anyway. And I couldn't do my job anymore so they medically separated me with a private pension so…it wasn't all bad I suppose really. I didn't want to leave at that time I wanted another four or five years and then hope for early retirement instead or that I got it at forty eight instead of about fifty two/fifty three.