

Chapter 6

Career End & New Opportunities: 1990 to 1999

The Urge to Draw and Paint - Increasing Mobility Problems - RAF Scampton -
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Disability Issues - A New Challenge as a Full Time Artist - A Change of Priorities

The Urge to Draw and Paint

The urge to paint and draw seemed to be growing again. About six months after we returned to Lincoln, as the days grew longer, I would get up very early on some mornings, at about 4.00 o'clock, drive into Lincoln with my pens and sketch book where I would find a suitable spot, such as at the bottom of Steep Hill, before settling down to draw. It was always a wonderful time of the day with the dawn breaking in the quiet city centre and with no other people around, or so I thought. On the second morning, an elderly lady brought me a cup of tea, at about 5.30. She had seen me the day before and had wondered what I was doing; she thought that I might enjoy a nice cup of tea - which I did! On each visit I would draw for a couple of hours, return to Scampton for my breakfast, get changed and then go to work. It was a good way to start the day, in a relaxed frame of mind, before tackling the various challenges of managing a complex, technical project.

Increasing Mobility Problems:

We settled into our new married-quarter at RAF Scampton, the twentieth different house that we had lived in since I joined the RAF. Because of her arthritis, Phyl's knees and hips were becoming more painful and she was finding it very difficult to walk. By now we both had regular visits to separate clinics at RAF Nocton Hall Hospital, just south of Lincoln; for me to see the Neurologist and for Phyl to see the Rheumatologist. For several years Phyl had been told that she was too young to have replacement joints, because they only lasted for about ten years and new joints could be replaced only once after that. However, the consultants then decided that they would have to do something, as she was almost immobile and the pain was constant. They confirmed that her hips would be easier to replace than her knees, so it was finally agreed that they would replace her right hip first and then see how she could manage. In September 1990 Phyl was admitted to RAF Ely Hospital, in Cambridgeshire, and stayed there for ten days; she

was out of bed and exercising within the first few days and the dreadful pain disappeared immediately. Little did we know it at the time, but that was to be the first of many operations to come in the next fourteen years. It was at that stage, because of our restricted mobility, that we both noticed how difficult it was to for us to go into normal public buildings, such as banks, shops, cinemas, theatres, restaurants and pubs, or even to board trains and busses, because of entrance steps. Our comments to various staff members or managers didn't appear to be taken seriously.

In the spring of 1990, we decided to have a quiet holiday on the Greek island of Lefkas. We flew from Gatwick and had a very relaxing two weeks, where I enjoyed plenty of drawing and some water-colour painting, which was a change of medium for me. Because we needed to "travel light" I decided to take my small water-colour paint box, a couple of "travel" sable brushes, my drawing pens and a spiral-backed 140 lb. Winsor & Newton Watercolour pad. I don't know the correct name for my "travel" brushes, but the ones that I bought, several years earlier, worked in a similar way to an old fashioned fountain-pen; the end covering the sable brush was pulled off and slipped onto the other end of the handle. When I had finished painting the brush was washed in clean water, shaken dry and then the top was replaced to protect it until arriving home, but then remembering to open it to allow it to dry naturally. It all worked very well and I had several sketches to work from when we got back home. On one particular day we were out walking when a thunder-storm broke; we quickly gathered a few wild flowers from the grass verge, put them in a glass on the balcony and that kept me busy painting for the rest of the day. Normally, I never paint flowers, but I enjoyed that afternoon and it has prompted me to paint flowers, occasionally, since then. We were sitting in a small village one day, painting, when a small group of children started to gather around to watch. After a while, one of the mothers came over and started talking to us; she said that one of her daughters was really talented and had painted some exciting pictures when she was small. However, after her daughter started school the teacher "taught her how to paint properly". She then explained that, from then on, she was really sad because her daughter only produced the same square houses and lollipop trees that everyone else in the class painted. I wonder how often we accidentally destroy natural talent by misguided "teaching", such as that. Most of our holiday was spent wandering through the olive groves and along the small valleys, but sometimes we joined coach tours, or

travelled by boats to visit neighbouring islands. We returned home feeling refreshed and ready for work again.

By now, I was having greater difficulty walking any distance, even when using two walking sticks, and Phyl was having similar problems with her worsening arthritis. We both found walking particularly difficult when shopping in Lincoln, mainly because there were very few parking places near to the centre of the city. I then discovered that people with severe mobility impairments could apply for an *Orange Badge* (subsequently to be replaced by a European "*Blue Badge*") and the badge allowed those people to park in special "disabled" car-parking spaces, or on double-yellow lines, closer to the shops. After making enquiries, I was told to apply to Social Services and so I arranged to visit their Lincoln office. When I arrived at the building the reception area resembled a huge hall, full of people who all seemed to be talking at the same time. Eventually, my name was called and I explained why I was there, only to be told that I must apply for some type of disability financial aid before I could be considered for an Orange Badge. By now I was feeling quite frustrated and explained that I didn't want any extra money – I just needed to be able to park closer to the city centre because I couldn't walk properly. There was an immediate hush as everyone seemed to turn and look at this odd person who didn't want money! The person that I was talking to then suggested that we went into a smaller room, to discuss the matter further, which we did. I was then referred to my GP, and also to an independent doctor, and eventually I received my Orange Badge – without the money! That was my first encounter with disability issues and I never dreamt that it was just the beginning of what was to become, for me, a very busy decade on this new topic.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, during the two year period from 1989 to 1990 I had been co-ordinating a survey of birds, on behalf of the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS), on as many RAF Stations in the UK as was possible. The surveys varied from Station to Station, depending on the number of people available and the amount of ornithological experience on the individual Stations. There were four main reasons for carrying out the surveys and they included the following: 1. To gather information for MoD Site Dossiers; 2. To rejuvenate the RAFOS Site Dossier Scheme, which had been dormant for a number of years; 3. To forward any relevant information to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), for their New Breeding Bird Atlas; 4. Finally, to stimulate and encourage RAFOS

members to participate in field surveys. It was an interesting project and we collected information on 249 different species of birds recorded on 101 RAF Stations in the UK, of which ninety Stations took part during 1989 and 1990; the eleven other Stations included records from previous years. Copies of the twenty-one page detailed report were forwarded to the RAFOS Library, the MoD Conservation Officer, the BTO and to each of the 101 RAF Station Commanders.

TRRU, RAF Scampton:

By the time that I arrived at the Tornado Radar Repair Unit (TRRU), at RAF Scampton, the Foxhunter radar had been fitted to Tornado F3 aircraft, but there were still some significant technical problems with the radar. In addition, a major upgrade of the whole radar system was about to take place. In the months before I arrived at the Unit, RAF technicians had been posted to the TRRU and they had been working along-side the civilian contractors, learning on the job. I had been at Scampton for just one week when I took over Command of the TRRU, on 1 December 1989 and, as planned, the contractors' work-force then moved out - with the exception of one of the managers who remained for continuity. It was an amicable hand-over, but the parting words from some of the senior contractors were somewhat disconcerting as they wished me luck, saying that I would need it, because if they couldn't make the TRRU run effectively then what chance did I have. That didn't worry me, as I do love a challenge! Over the next few weeks we reviewed the layout of the workshops, and the equipment in each bay, before deciding to move some of the major test rigs into a more logical sequence. We also started to draw up detailed plans for the major radar update that we were soon expecting. There was a very good team of dedicated Senior NCOs and RAF tradesmen on the Unit, which was essential if we were to be effective in carrying out the tasks ahead. The modification programme started on time and we worked closely with the contractors to resolve problems as they were identified.

On 2nd of August 1990 we all had a real shock and the tempo of work lifted immediately. Iraq invaded Kuwait and "Operation Granby" was announced, which was the lead-in to the first Gulf War. The Tornado F3s were to be used for real for the first time and we were asked to have the updated, modified radars ready for use. Immediately, we went onto a 24 hour shift system, working seven days a week, with each person working twelve

hour shifts. We kept-up with the work rate set for us, delivering the modified radars to nearby RAF Conningsby as soon as they were tested and serviceable. In the early hours of 16th of January 1991 operation "Desert Storm" took us to war with Iraq. I can remember it quite clearly because it was a Saturday and it was to make a significant difference to the rest of my life. In the afternoon I was called-out by the Duty Supplier because there was a modified Foxhunter radar ready to be delivered to RAF Conningsby, for the Tornado F3 aircraft, but they were having problems organising the special transport to deliver it. It took all afternoon before the radar was safely on its way and I left the building through the supplier's door. By then it was dark, but I headed across the car-park to where I thought I had left my car. The next thing I knew was that I was lying by the kerb with a very sore ankle; the duty supplier must have heard me call-out as I hit the ground and she quickly came to my aid and lifted me to my feet. With some difficulty, I managed to get to my car and drive home. Phyl took one look at my leg and called for the doctor, who confirmed that it was broken and he told me to report to the Accident & Emergency department at Lincoln County Hospital. We were due to go out for a meal that evening with the Officers from Engineering Wing, so I decided to ring their CO, Bob Owen, to give our apologies for the evening. The next thing that I knew was that Bob arrived with his car to take me to hospital and about six hours later, with my leg in plaster, I was given a pair of crutches to use. I tried to explain to the nurse that I could hardly walk, even before the accident, and that the crutches were of no help to me. The nurse was obviously very busy and just kept saying that I would get used to them very soon if I just tried a bit harder. We gave up, borrowed a wheelchair to get me to the car, and then set off home. Phyl opened the door to peals of laughter as Bob and I struggled down the path, with arms wrapped around each other; she must have thought that we had called into the Officers' Mess on the way home for a few quick drinks! Bob brought a mattress down from upstairs and made-up a bed for me in my temporary new bedroom, in the living room.

That, as they say, was the beginning of the end. I hired a wheelchair from the Red Cross and was sent home on sick-leave for a couple of weeks before returning to work, using the wheelchair. We knew the Senior Medical Officer very well, as Roger Matthews lived next door to us, and he had a long chat with me. He warned me that, because of my severe mobility problems before the broken leg, that he would be very surprised if I ever walked again,

even after the broken leg had mended. I accepted that bad news from a person that I trusted and respected, but hoped that he was wrong. Pending the final medical outcome, I was keen to clear any outstanding work and to keep the Foxhunter radar modification project on target, particularly with the Gulf War in full swing. But the wheels were starting to turn for the end of my career. I was given medical examinations at RAF Hospital Wroughton, in Wiltshire and at the Central Medical Establishment in London.

I was finally declared unfit for further duties on the 9th of October 1991 and was told to clear my desk immediately and to go home, on sick-leave, pending formal decisions on my future. It was awful; I felt almost like a criminal when that final message arrived! However, we had to get on with life and we then urgently started to think about a new home to live in. We were living in an RAF Married Quarter on the Station, which we knew we would have to vacate as soon as I left the service. Although we had an empty four bed-roomed house in Suffolk, it was not suitable to convert for my wheelchair so we decided to sell it and to look for somewhere new. I was formally dined-out by the Officers' Mess and was also dined-out by my fellow officers from Engineering Wing, which was a very special evening for both Phyl and me. Unknown to me, Bob Owen had compiled a book and produced a "*This is Your Life*" event during the dinner; he did a marvellous job and I hope that my fellow officers weren't too bored with it, but we had a wonderful evening.

It was now even more obvious that we needed a bungalow to live in and that it would have to be close to where we were living, just from a logistics point of view of looking for a new home now that I was in a wheelchair. The funny thing was that we had both decided that when we eventually retired we most definitely wouldn't come back to Lincolnshire! We must have looked at more than twenty bungalows, ranging from the Humber in the north of the county to the Wash in the south-east, but we couldn't find anything suitable. We then started to consider either buying a plot of land to build a new bungalow, or converting an old property. The idea of converting an old house had always been in the back of our minds, since our first house in Albany Terrace, but this time we agreed that it would have to be a more attractive long-term solution. It didn't take us long before we found that there was very little land being sold and the few building-plots that we did find were totally unsuitable, for a variety of reasons. We then heard about "The Old Coach House", in the village of Scothern - of the earlier *Bottle & Glass* fame. It was advertised as being suitable for conversion. Phyl's cousin Di lived in

Ruskington and her son Nick had just set-up a new business as a builder. We discussed our needs with Nick and he came with us to look at the old property in Scothern. The title of "The Old Coach House" was an advertising ploy to make it sound more attractive; it was in fact the old, derelict "Reading Room" in the grounds of the yellow-brick "Old Vicarage", built in 1865, and once used for parish meetings and possibly for the original Sunday-school meetings. Like most big, Victorian vicarages, it originally had a very large garden and the incumbent would walk the length of it to emerge into Vicarage Lane, on his way to St. Germain's Church. However, the bottom of the garden had been sold off, several decades earlier, to be replaced with new bungalows in the old garden and new houses in Vicarage Lane. It was quite clear that the Reading Room, or The Old Coach House as it was now called, would not be suitable for us to convert, but we discovered that a speculator had bought the Old Vicarage and had divided the remaining garden into four plots, all for sale. The first plot was for the Old Vicarage, which had already been sold and was being converted into a Residential Home; the second plot was the Old Reading Room, which was unsuitable for us; the third plot was half of the remaining garden, next to Church Street, and that had been sold to build a four bed-roomed house; that left the final plot, like a small island surrounded by the other gardens. We were told by the agent that if we were interested in the last plot then we had to make a decision before the end of the week or we would lose it!

Neither of us like making instant decisions, particularly when they are very expensive and they are long-term ones, but we took the plunge and bought the plot, and then worried for the next couple of months as to whether we had been too hasty! We soon got to know Neil and Sue, our new neighbours to-be on the grass plot next to us, and Phil and Pat, who bought The Old Coach House and who were ready to convert it. We were all producing our building plans at the same time and we agreed to share the cost of the communal drive that all three of us would use for our respective properties. I decided to design our own bungalow, as we knew exactly what we needed and I wanted to be certain that it was going to be wheelchair friendly. We agreed that we needed a lounge, dining-room, kitchen, utility-room, a bathroom, a painting studio for me, three bed-rooms - with the main one having an en-suite room, with shower and toilet, and finally an integral garage. As soon as I had drafted my plans we asked Nick to give us an estimate for the costs to build it; he obliged and after the initial shock we then

went back to the drawing board and I decided to work backwards - from what we could afford! Phyl took one look at my second attempt and said that we couldn't possibly live in anything that small, so it was back to the drawing board again. Eventually, we came up with a good old British compromise, by dramatically decreasing the size of my painting studio and cutting down on room sizes elsewhere.

At that stage Neil telephoned me to see if we would like to see the plans for his house, which he had just received. We went to see them the next day and then realised that all of the main windows in our bungalow would be looking straight across at the back of Neil's house, with eight of his windows looking back at us - so it was back to the drawing board again for a forth attempt! I then turned our plans through 90 degrees, and the only window of any significance then facing Neil was my painting studio, which now also looked out onto the drive up to the bungalow, with a bonus of having northerly light to paint by. Nick asked his Architectural Technician to produce the detailed drawings for planning and building approval, which were subsequently granted. It was a very interesting time, particularly during the building phase in the middle of winter, with mud up to our knees - and in my case axles. It was also a worrying time financially as we were having difficulty selling our house in Suffolk, and no one could tell me what my final pension would be, because I was being prematurely discharged from the RAF. However, we eventually managed to get an expensive bridging-loan to buy the plot of land and a staged-mortgage with a building society for the bungalow build.

RAF Headley Court

One evening I happened to notice a program on TV about a young boy who had a new type of calliper fitted to each leg to help him walk; that got me thinking - if it worked for him, then why not for me? I was really struggling with my wheelchair and found that I couldn't go very far before my arms gave up, and I certainly didn't want anyone pushing me in it. I then heard about the MoD Rehabilitation Unit, at RAF Headley Court in Surrey. It took me nearly two months to persuade the authorities to consider me for a course of rehabilitation, but I was eventually admitted just before Christmas, on the 10th of December 1991. RAF Headley Court was originally a stately home, but was used during WWII to rehabilitate aircrew that had been injured; the authorities had noted that aircrew recovered more quickly when

they were in pleasant surroundings, which Headley Court most certainly was, than when they were in hospitals. After the war Headley Court remained as the RAF Rehabilitation Unit. When I arrived I was made welcome and a tailor-made program was drawn-up for me. The main aim was to build-up my upper body strength so that I could independently use my wheelchair; the second aim was to see whether it was possible to walk again, using the new type of callipers; a third aspect was to accept my new condition and then to make the best use of my remaining faculties. My daily routine started with breakfast and then down to the swimming pool for an hour of supervised workout. That was probably the most important part of the physical program as the buoyancy allowed me to exercise my legs and the continuous swimming helped develop my arm and chest muscles. From there I would have at least one hour in the gym; that again was to help develop my upper body strength. There were then a variety of workshops and computer lessons to help develop new interests. I spent quite some time in the printing section and produced personalised business cards and letter heads. I also tried my hand at wood-carving and we still have our "Beech Cottage" house sign next to the front door that was produced in my final weeks.

I had used a computer key-board at work for many years but had never had my own personal computer at home. By the time that I left Headley Court I could certainly see the advantages of a PC and I have used one ever since; I now wonder how we ever managed without one! Having said that, I'm afraid that I still use only two fingers to type, but I have managed to produce this book even with that limitation. Although I hadn't been able to drive since my accident I hadn't given it much thought, with so many other things going on, and Phyl would drive when we needed to go out. That subject was raised by one of the Headley Court staff who explained that my car could be adapted with hand-controls so that I could drive again. They arranged for a driving school to bring an adapted car for me to try-out and after two lessons I was declared fit to drive. I then arranged to have my automatic-car adapted, to fit hand-controls to operate the brakes and the accelerator, and I was soon driving again - more good news. They also explained the advantages of the Motability scheme, where a suitably adapted car can be leased, which I subsequently joined.

Another very good regular session at Headley Court was in a small gym where we were given special coaching on using wheelchairs; I wasn't aware at that stage that there were so many different types of wheelchair.

The technical advantages of a fixed-frame wheelchair far outweighed the advantages of a folding chair, particularly if the user wished to remain independent. By the end of those special sessions I could manage a "wheelie" and then rotate through 360 degrees by balancing on just the two rear wheels. This was not about showing off, but was needed in the real world when trying to independently negotiate roadside kerbs, steps or rough ground. I have had three different fixed-frame chairs since leaving Headley Court and I treated myself to a new light-weight one in 2004, at a cost of £1,500, but it was worth every penny. I keep that new one in the boot of my car at all times as it is so light and easy to strip down and then to reassemble by myself: independence is very important to me. I also have a folding wheelchair that I use in the house because, occasionally, I need it if the fixed-frame chair can't fit through other people's doors or into other people's car boot, such as the times when I'm not allowed to drive myself to the hospital. The calliper design and build took much longer than was anticipated, but when they eventually arrived I practised using them every day, getting a little further each time; unfortunately they were not a suitable long-term solution as I found that the wheelchair was much safer, faster and more comfortable to use as I became more fit.

Perhaps the most important part of being at Headley Court, certainly for me, was mixing with all of the other people who were there. There was a very wide range of injuries and the people that probably made most impacts on me were those with head injuries. It wouldn't be right for me to go into details about individuals, but it certainly helped to put my own life into some sort of perspective. There were all sorts of ranks and characters there, from all three Armed Services, and we had some good healthy and friendly banter between us. One of the guests while I was there was Terry Waite, who had just been released from his ordeal in the Middle-east, and I was very impressed with his quiet and friendly nature. I think that we all gained so much by being together and by helping each other. The clock was ticking-down all of the time that I was at Headley Court and after just over three months I had to return to RAF Scampton, in April 1992, to start a resettlement course and my terminal leave from the RAF.

The Beginning of the End to a Long Career

Over the previous four years I had been having regular medical check-ups at the RAF Central Medical Establishment in London, because of my increasing mobility problems. During those visits I also asked the doctors why a patch of skin on the back of my left hand kept bleeding, for no apparent reason. I had wondered whether it could be some form of skin cancer, but each time that suggestion was made it was immediately discounted by the doctors and there was no further action from them; their decision was accepted by me as, after all, they were the experts. However, after I returned from Headley Court my hand was bleeding again and I saw the Senior Medical Officer. He agreed that something was wrong and said that he would make an appointment for me to see the RAF specialist consultant. Bureaucracy then took over and my SMO was told that it was not possible for me to be referred to the RAF consultant because all of my medical records had been sent to RAF Innsworth, pending my release from the Service. He then referred me directly to the NHS hospital in Lincoln where they confirmed that it was a Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC) and that it needed to be urgently removed. I was admitted to the Leicester Royal Infirmary where they removed the BCC and then covered the large exposed area with a skin graft from my right thigh. I smiled when the surgeon commented on the size of my medical file; he said it was just the sort of thing he liked to see as it contained only one sheet of paper - my RAF Medical file was at least six inches thick at that time, but it was still being held by RAF Innsworth! On subsequent visits to Leicester, for routine checks on the skin-graft, they removed several other BCCs from my legs. At that stage we had no idea that the BCCs were to have major ramifications in the years to come.

As well as Phyl having difficulty with walking, her arthritis was also significantly affecting her hands and she could hardly close them at all. Once again she was referred to consultants, but this time she was admitted to the NHS hospital at Harlow Wood, near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire, where she had operations on all eight fingers. I must confess that I was devastated when I walked into the ward after her operations and saw her sitting-up in bed, with two bloodstained bundles of dressings on what appeared to be the stumps at the end of her arms. I kept my composure while I was there and, as always, she was cheerful. However, I cried most of the way home and even now, after all this time, the tears still well-up every time that I think

about it. Naturally, it wasn't as bad as it looked, but I just wished that someone at the hospital had explained to me what they were going to do and, more importantly, what to expect to see after the operations. In the long-term the operations didn't make much difference and she still has major problems using her hands, but every little helps. Phyl was also having problems with her left shoulder which kept dislocating quite regularly and, during the check-up visits after her hand-operations, she asked the doctors if there was anything they could do about that. Within a few weeks she was back in hospital where they put a screw into her left shoulder and that is still working quite well, with no more dislocations since then. During the last few traumatic months of my service with the RAF, Phyl and I both had wonderful support from three families in particular at RAF Scampton: Richard & Margaret Gowing; Bob & Ann Owen; and Roger & Lynn Matthews, for which we will be always grateful. All three couples were posted from Scampton shortly after I retired, but they have all remained in touch with us since then. I was prematurely retired from the Royal Air Force on the 8th of June 1992 and a new chapter in our life was about to start.

My initial plans were to take a Fine Art degree course at the new De Montfort University in Lincoln, but after initial interviews I was told that it would not be possible because there wasn't any suitable access at the university for my wheelchair. Obviously, I was very disappointed and added that to my list of things to try and improve in the future. Incidentally, a few years later the university had an advertising campaign declaring that "access for all" was now available to students, so I wasted no time in asking which courses I could attend in my wheelchair. After a delay of several weeks, it transpired that their advertising referred only to "intellectual access" and not to "physical access"! In those first few months of my early unexpected retirement, I was also trying to think about how I was going to pay-back our bridging loan and to pay-off the mortgage, as the chance of someone of my age getting a job in the middle of Lincolnshire, and in a wheelchair, was proving to be somewhat limited, to say the least. I still had a strong urge to paint, and thought about running a small picture-framing business from home, which would help me to frame my own paintings as well as probably providing an income. That was one of the reasons for designing such a large painting studio on the first plan for our bungalow. My brother Richard lived in Bingham, in Nottinghamshire, and after he heard that I couldn't enrol for a Fine Art degree course in Lincoln he told me about a new Art Centre that

was just being opened near him, at Calverton.

I did some investigating and found that the newly opened Patchings Farm Art Centre was a family run business, with galleries and a picture-framing service, and that they also ran a series of different art courses, at all levels. I explained my circumstances to them and we managed to arrange a four-week resettlement course at Patchings, just before I left the RAF. I didn't know it at the time, but Patchings was to go to fill a lot of my time in the next ten years, so it is worth explaining a little about that remarkable family business, run by Liz, Chas and Pat Wood. Liz was an oil-painter, with a Fine Art degree, and had taught art at school for many years. She then decided that she wanted to do something different with her life. Patchings Farm was being sold-off, so Liz decided to buy the farm-house, with the out-buildings, and converted them into a restaurant, a shop and an art studio where she held classes. The remaining thirty-five acres of adjacent farmland were still for sale, so Liz then persuaded her brother Chas to give up his career and to bring his wife Pat and their daughter Rachel to join her in the business and to buy the rest of the farm. The main area was then developed, with three large car-parks and a new tarmac road leading up to a large Scandinavian wood-cabin that was to be used as the main pavilion for art-classes, with living accommodation attached for Chas and his family. The main grounds were also landscaped and included a newly made lake, with a replica Monet Bridge over it, and ten small painting gazeboes scattered around the grounds to give different views of the gardens and lake. Over the following years they also bought the two adjacent houses, when they came on the market, and developed those into more art galleries, artists' workshops and bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

When I discussed the possibility of my resettlement course with Liz, I thought that it may give me the chance to learn something about picture-framing. In the end, we agreed that I would attend Patchings everyday for a month and that I would sit-in on what ever course was running each day; Liz would set me extra work to do if there were any slack times. She also warned me that she would be constructively critical of everything that I did and that she did not give out bouquets and false praise, which suited me fine as I believe strongly that is the best way to really learn. The month passed all too soon, but I had been drawing and painting with all types of medium and I also enjoyed the company of the Club members when they were painting. Liz gave me a good debrief when I was about to leave and she stressed that I

should not consider going into the picture-framing business, but that I should concentrate on painting in oils. I took that advice and have been painting in oils ever since and have thoroughly enjoyed it, as you will hear later. When I got back home, Phyl could see how much I had enjoyed Patchings and she persuaded me to join Patchings, as a Club Member. The organisation was unique, but I suppose it ran in a similar way to a Golf Club, where one paid an annual subscription and then used the club facilities on offer. Club membership included at least one painting day and a painting evening each week, life-classes, weekend painting excursions and sometimes short art holidays to Paris, or other places. We also helped with the running of the Patchings four-day Art Festival held on the second week of June each year. It was a long return journey of about eighty miles from Scothern to Patchings each time, but the company was excellent and the advice was always sound. It was the companionship that was most important thing to me at that critical stage, as we were then living in a new village where we knew nobody and we never saw any of the people that I worked with after we left Scampton! We puzzled over that for quite a while, but then reasoned that perhaps my old work colleagues didn't know how to react to someone that they knew at work who was now a permanent wheelchair user. It was a similar experience to the way that many people react to bereavements - they probably don't know what to say, so it is easier to look the other way or to cross the road to avoid speaking. Whatever the reason, we decided that they had the problem, not us, and we would just have to get on with our new life and make new friends, which we soon did.

There was one amusing exception to the lack of visitors from RAF Scampton. About two years after we left Scampton there was a ring from the door bell and we were surprised to see our ex-neighbour, who was the RAF Padre. We invited him in and had a good chat over a cup of tea, but it seemed odd that he had just turned up so suddenly after all that time. Eventually he explained that he had been posted to Northern Ireland and we told him that he would enjoy the warmth and friendliness of the people when he arrived. He then got a little flustered and explained that he had already been on a short preliminary visit for a few days and that he had been introduced to quite a few people while he was there. It then transpired that he had been invited to a reception at the Armagh Library, which was also the home of the Dean of Armagh. During a conversation with the Dean and his wife they asked the Padre where he was living at present, so he told them

that it was RAF Scampton, in Lincolnshire. They then asked him how Peter and Phyl were - the poor chap wasn't to know that he was talking to one of my cousins! We assume that he must have had an attack of conscience and decided to pay us a visit as soon as he got back to Lincolnshire. It was very nice, and brave, of him to visit but he was the first and last person that we saw from RAF Scampton.

The first year in our new bungalow, named Beech Cottage because of the large Beech tree in the garden, was pretty hectic. The rear garden-bed was raised, behind a brick wall matching the bungalow, so that I could manage it from my wheelchair. The theory was good, but in the end it wasn't practical because I couldn't even reach half-way to the back of the flower-bed from my wheelchair, but at least we could look out of the bedroom windows and see the flowers easily. The windows in the kitchen, dining room and lounge all looked out onto a lawn, with a fairly wide herbaceous border on the far side of it. The border stretched from the rockery, under the beech-tree near the lounge patio-window, to beyond a mature yew-tree near the kitchen window. We had a paved-patio, with shrubs in pots between the patio-window and the rockery. From the lounge we could see most of the birds that visited the garden, with over twenty-five different species recorded each year. Originally, we set up compost bins in the far corner of the garden, for recycling kitchen waste, etc. but soon found that we couldn't manage the garden on our own so we hired a regular gardener, who visited once a fortnight, and kept us looking smart. We had a brick-porch built over the front door and during our first summer a pair of swallows built a nest there and raised five young. As an aeronautical engineer, specialising in sophisticated guidance systems, I still marvel at the ability of small birds, like those swallows, to navigate accurately between England and Africa twice a year. That original nest remained in our porch for about six years, but although the swallows never returned, each winter up to five wrens would huddle into the nest each night to keep warm. We could open the door and put the porch light on, but they would just pop their heads out of the nest and watch us. However, as soon as we stepped over the threshold they would immediately fly out into the garden and then return to the nest after we had moved away. Well, that was the normal action, but one evening one of the wrens flew straight into the house, so you can imagine the pickle that Phyl and I were in trying to coax it back outside again. We did manage it in the end, by switching off all the lights inside the house and then switching on the outside

lights to attract it back into the garden.

In the meantime, I was gradually organising my painting studio. I bought a large desk and a couple of filing cabinets but, as the studio gradually seemed to be getting smaller, we started to reorganise it again. I fitted rows of shelves around the walls and fastened brackets to the wall on which to hang my "in-work" oil canvases to dry. Soon after that it started to grow small again, so David Lingard helped me to fit permanent work-surfaces around the room, making sure that I could get my knees underneath from my wheelchair. After more discussions with Phyl, "we" then made another decision and my Personal Computer, which had sat in the dining room, was moved into a corner of the studio. I soon got into a regular routine and would go straight into my studio after breakfast to paint, often remaining there until late evening – with breaks for meals.

A New Start and Involvement with Disability Issues

I started looking for a job, but after several unsuccessful weeks I was advised to make an appointment to see the specialist who dealt with unemployed people with disabilities. The appointment was duly made with the Disability Officer, but I was frustrated and annoyed when I turned up for the first interview to find that there were three steep steps up to the main door, but there were no hand-rails and no bell to call for assistance. I eventually managed to shuffle up the steps on my bottom and asked a passer-by to lift my wheelchair up the steps. After waiting for sometime in the lobby, I was eventually invited into the Disability Officer's room, where he greeted me with a broad smile, from behind his large desk, and asked if I had a pleasant journey. You can probably guess how the interview went, but it was agreed that all future meetings were to be held in a different building, which I was assured would be wheelchair friendly. At the next meeting, in a different building, I parked my car in the disabled parking-bay, next to the front door, and took my wheelchair out of the car and reassembled it as usual, by sitting on the edge of the car-boot. After getting into my wheelchair, I then discovered that I had to wheel it down the main road and round the corner, against the flow of the traffic, before I could find a kerb low enough to climb-up onto the path. The interview wasn't much different to the first one, but at least there was a new dropped-kerb outside their front-door within a few days. At least "they", whoever they were, were now listening and doing something about it. It was at that stage that I thought that there must be lots

of other people with the same frustrations and that it should be more effective to have several voices working together to improve these day-to-day problems for all people with disabilities. At about that time I had two unexpected visits from the War Pensions Regional Department, who were far more helpful than the local person that I had been seeing in Lincoln. One of them concentrated on welfare issues and was interested to hear that I had taken up painting regularly; he was responsible for organising an annual painting exhibition and he said that he would be in touch before their exhibition the following year. By that stage, it was becoming increasingly clear that I would not find paid employment in the area, so I decided to allocate about sixty hours a month to non-paid voluntary work, as I felt that it was important to keep myself active and involved with other people.

When I first started to go out in my wheelchair Phyl always tended to be with me, as she did the driving until I had the car adapted. Public transport was out of the question, as it was impossible to get the wheelchair onto a bus and we rarely needed to use a train. If we did need to travel by rail, then we had to book several weeks in advance and then had to report to the railway station at least half-an-hour before the train arrived, which was a fairly strong deterrent. On one of my return-trips from Lincoln to London, I was travelling by train for a meeting that took all day. As usual, there were only two wheelchair spaces on the London express so I had to book my ticket several weeks in advance to make sure that I could travel. When I arrived at my seat there was already a lady with Cerebral Palsy sitting in my place, but she also had a ticket for that seat, so I waited in the corridor. When the conductor arrived he said that he would move her because I had booked my ticket before she booked hers! I told him not to move her, as she obviously needed the space the same as I did, and suggested that he found another solution. I waited in the train corridor, between Lincoln and Grantham, and was then escorted off the train and up to a first-class carriage where the staff had been hammering-away at a seat to remove it during the journey from Lincoln. Naturally, the first-class passengers had not been happy with the noise, but they were extremely supportive when the circumstances were explained to them. On the return journey we had to change trains again at Newark station, but a coach had been laid on to Lincoln, as the normal train connection had been cancelled. I joined the other passengers, but was told to wait on the platform because wheelchairs were not allowed on the coach, so I assumed that some other arrangements were

being made for me. After waiting for some time I eventually found a member of staff and was told that I just had to wait for the next train as there was nothing that they could do about it. I sat on a very cold, wet platform for nearly two hours until the next train arrived and was angry at the awful attitude of the staff, as well as the organisation, for treating a passenger who had bought an expensive ticket in such a disgraceful way. That set me off on another project - to improve public transport for people with disabilities, but it was to be a few more years before we started to see the first fruits of our labours.

One of the things that struck both of us when we first went out in my wheelchair was the attitude of the people that we spoke to. If we went into a shop, or anywhere else, I would explain what I needed; the person that I had spoken to would invariably reply to Phyl and ignore me. The general attitude of "Does he take sugar?" was certainly alive and well. We also found that many of those people who did condescend to talk to me would make a point of speaking very slowly and loudly, to make sure that I could understand them. At other times, if I was on my own in a shop, it was amazing how often I would be totally ignored while other people, who came into the shop after me, were quickly served. Obviously most of those people could see the wheelchair before they looked at me and had made inappropriate decisions on how to respond. You will probably have gathered that I'm now approaching the important subject of disability awareness and equality training. It is the fear of the unknown that worries most people, but if those fears are addressed the barriers are almost immediately removed. As a starting point on this topic, I have never asked to be treated any differently because I'm in a wheelchair; all that I expect is to be treated politely and the same way as everyone else. I am still the same person that I've always been, it just happens that I can't walk any more.

In the meantime, I discovered an organisation called *AccessAbility Lincoln* that had been formed in 1987 to help improve access for people with disabilities in Lincoln. The original founder had stood-down, because of his progressive illness, and the organisation was no longer as effective as it had been. I was soon invited to join them and gradually became the Treasurer, Secretary and finally the Chairman. Our main remit was to work with the Local Authorities to improve access to public buildings for people with disabilities and to draw the council's attention to any shortcomings that we found. It wouldn't be possible to cover all of the details of our work in this

book, but a few examples are worth mentioning. One of the first large projects that we took-on was access to the Central Library in Lincoln. The main front door to the library had steps up to it and was not accessible in a wheelchair. The alternative was to negotiate the dustbins at the side and back of the building and then to knock on the back door, next to the children's library, in the hope that someone would hear us and let us in. Once inside, the Reference Library was up two more steps and it was inaccessible to wheelchair users. That wasn't acceptable, but we were repeatedly told that it wouldn't be possible to alter it because it was a Grade II listed building; that was a tune that is still played, even today, in some circles - but it isn't true! We persevered and eventually we were asked to work with the County Council planners and the County Librarian for the conversion of the library; the new work started and the library was closed for about two years until the work was completed. The final solution included a level main entrance, through double automatic-doors, and full access to the new reference library. There was also a discrete, curved ramp up into the old Reference Library which had been converted to become a Community Room for meetings, with facilities for hanging painting for art exhibitions. The final result was excellent and is a wonderful example of what can be achieved, if the will is there.

A few years later I visited the new National Library in London when it was opened to the public. Apparently, it was the largest public building to have been built in Europe for over a century, so I was looking forward to seeing a prime example of good access in a modern building. It was a real disappointment, with disabled access through the porter's gate-house, at the rear of the building, and then through a series of doors that were too heavy to open from a wheelchair, without help, including the door into the toilet for disabled people. I left them with my comments and I understand that most of the problems have now been rectified, but it would have been so much cheaper to have got it right to start with. That was to be a major problem that we were to encounter regularly in the future. I suddenly felt quite proud of the work that Lincolnshire County Council had done with our Central Library in Lincoln. It was at that time that I was asked to take part in the last BBC radio programme of "Does He Take Sugar?" when the reporters visited Lincoln and the interview took place in the Central Library.

In 1992 the Royal College of Physicians published a new booklet "*A Charter for Disabled People Using Hospitals*" with a recommendation that all

NHS hospitals study it and implement their findings. As a result, I was invited to join a newly formed "*Disability Advisory Group*" in Lincoln County Hospital and we were very fortunate to have Janet King as our very effective Chairperson. The group flourished for several years, implementing many overdue changes which included more accessible toilets, more variable-height couches in consultants' rooms, some higher arm-chairs in waiting-rooms, better visual signs for people with poor sight and a minicom telephone service for people with hearing impairments – to name but a few. Some time later, we also sponsored disability awareness and equality training courses for members of staff, run by people with disabilities from a county charity called the "*Lincolnshire Association of People with Disabilities*" (LAPD), which you will hear about soon. In 1995 the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) decided to carry out a survey to see how effective their Charter had been, but they were disappointed with the national response as only a few hospitals, such as Lincoln, had taken it seriously. As a result, they set up a national team to revise their Charter. Lincoln County Hospital was invited to take part and was tasked to quantify the effectiveness of their disability awareness training. We all knew that it was effective, particularly from the positive responses from staff that had joined the course as sceptics but left being converted, but it was not quite so easy to scientifically prove it! However, we developed an effective procedure and, as a joint-Chairman of the sub-group, I gave our presentation to the RCP in London which was accepted in full. I was then invited to be one of the four speakers at the national press-briefing for the launch of the *New Charter*, at the Royal College of Physicians, in 1998.

A few years earlier, in 1994, I became aware of a two-day conference, to be held in Chester, called "*Access Europe*". The prospectus and speakers looked very interesting, so I recommended that Lincolnshire County Council and / or Lincoln City Council send a representative to learn more about this subject and to see what other Local Authorities were doing about improving access for all. They said that they couldn't spare anyone, but asked me to attend and to report back to them. It was an intense, but stimulating two days and I forwarded a detailed report to both Councils, with strong recommendations on what we urgently needed to do in Lincolnshire. The three recommendations were: 1. To co-ordinate the work of the numerous disability groups working in Lincolnshire, to avoid duplication of effort; 2. To provide a central database for the easy dissemination of

disability information in Lincolnshire; 3. To develop an overall strategy for disabled access to the Lincolnshire countryside. In November 1994, I was also asked to be the Chairman of a newly-formed "*NHS Wheelchair Users Group*", with the aim of improving the service to the wheelchair users in the northern half of Lincolnshire. Unfortunately there was no budget allocated to the task by the NHS Trust and we were not allowed access to the c7,000 wheelchair users, for reasons of confidentiality. Naturally, it was difficult to ask wheelchair users what they would like to improve if we weren't allowed to talk to them! However, after much hard work we did manage to produce some good results and eventually, after a couple of years, the Trust allocated some staff resources to help us.

Meanwhile, I was finding it increasingly difficult to find wheelchair friendly places to visit in the countryside where I could carry on with my hobbies of bird-study and painting. After talking to over 35 different organisations and individuals associated with the Lincolnshire countryside, it was clear that no one was working on this issue, but they all thought that there was a need to do so - except they were all too busy to do it themselves! In 1995 I decided to get involved and during the next three years I visited over 150 countryside sites in Lincolnshire, including over one-hundred of the *Lincolnshire Trust for Nature Conservation* reserves, and forwarded simple recommendation for improvements to the appropriate organisations. Details of the sites were also entered onto a new county-wide database called *LINNET* (short for "Lincolnshire Network"), set up by Lincolnshire County Council which was available to the public across the county. In most cases very little money was needed to improve access significantly, even if the access was fairly limited in scope. The wardens at two particular venues, *Whisby Nature Park* near Lincoln and *Gibraltar Point National Nature Reserve* near Skegness, were most receptive to the recommendations and they both made significant changes to welcome people with disabilities.

Another county organisation that I heard about was *Disability Lincs*. With a title like that it seemed as though it was just the organisation that I had been looking for, so I rang them up to find out how to join. I was asked my age, but their response to my age was totally unexpected. I was told that I was far too young to be considered, as there was a waiting list of people to join and the youngest acceptance age for most of the sub-branches was seventy! I was also told that people couldn't just join as individual members;

the best way to become a member of *Disability Lincs* was to join one of their craft-groups and gain membership that way. It appears that the organisation had been formed to provide companionship for elderly people, who probably lived alone, which was a commendable idea. I didn't know that at the time so I asked for a copy of their Constitution and found that suitable groups could become affiliated to *Disability Lincs*, thus gaining membership by that route. Therefore, I registered the *Wheelchair Users Group* and now had my foot in the door. It wasn't long before I was asked to be the Secretary for the northern half of the county and was then nominated to be a member of the Executive Committee of *Disability Lincs*.

After just a short while it became clear that it was an organisation that "looked after" disabled people, and it was mainly for people who had acquired a disability through being elderly. As there was no other county organisation with a general "disability" title I thought that it was time to try and modernise it and to have a wider remit to include younger people, particularly those with a disability, on the Executive Committee. That suggestion brought a torrent of horror from one senior committee member who asked whether I was seriously proposing that disabled people should sit on committees and make real decisions! I began to wonder what century I was living in, but I took the offensive comment on the chin and kept my powder dry. At the start of the next meeting, another member of the Executive Committee said that he was delighted to have me on the committee. Good, I thought, at least someone had gone away and thought seriously about what I had said since the last meeting. That thought was very short-lived as he then explained that the annual fund-raising campaign was about to start. He said that they needed more people like me, in wheelchairs, to hold the collecting boxes in Lincoln High Street because people felt sorry for them and gave more money; he also asked me if I had any blind friends with guide-dogs because they also did well! I'm still not sure whether I was more embarrassed than furious; it confirmed my initial thoughts that there was a long way to go to try and get them to understand the harm that they were doing to the cause of many disabled people. In my experience there is always some good that comes from even the most awful events, such as that one. I was determined not to sit in the High Street with my "begging-bowl" but I was also aware that we did need to raise funds to assist those people that really needed help. It was at that stage that I realised that I could probably use my painting skills, by selling my paintings to help to raise money for charities, and I have been

doing that ever since.

I was also approached in 1994 to see whether I would be willing to stand as a Trustee for a new organisation that was just being formed, called the *Lincolnshire Association of People with Disabilities (LAPD)*. I declined and explained that funds for voluntary groups were very limited and that there was already an organisation called *Disability Lincs* in the county. It soon became clear that they knew how that organisation worked, but they wanted an organisation that would help people with disabilities to become independent rather than just being looked after. I agreed with their sentiments entirely, but persuaded them to put the new *LAPD* on hold while we tried to develop *Disability Lincs* to cater for a wider range of people. Over the next two years we worked extremely hard to that end, which included being a member of a sub-committee of the *Disability Lincs* executives, to produce a new draft Constitution. Although they could not fault our new draft Constitution, the Executive Committee refused to present it to the AGM and it was suggested that if we didn't like their current way of working then we should leave and set up a new, separate organisation.

I felt extremely sad, but it was clear that we were getting no where with *Disability Lincs* at that time so, after a delay of two years, the *LAPD* was formally set up in 1996. I became one of the founding Trustees, drafted their Constitution and, in 1998, I registered the *LAPD* with the Charity Commissioners. When it was initially formed, all of the *LAPD* Trustees, and the small number of paid staff, had some form of disability and a strong desire to improve things for all people with disabilities in Lincolnshire. We continued to try to unite the two county organisations and joint meetings, in 1998 and in 1999, were held regularly between *LAPD* and *Disability Lincs* to try to achieve that aim, but to no avail. Incidentally, in 2004, both organisations were co-located in the same building in Lincoln, so let us hope that this will help to finally unite them and to share their scarce resources, including funding. Probably the most effective *LAPD* activity during my involvement with them was organising disability awareness and equality training to a wide variety of organisations, including schools, businesses, NHS Hospitals and Local Authorities.

In the mean time, the news about the work that the *AccessAbility Lincoln* group was doing, to improve access within the city, started to travel around the county. As a result, we were increasingly being asked for advice on access issues from across the whole of Lincolnshire. We were keen to

help, but it was clear that the increasing voluntary work-load was becoming unacceptable. At that time there were access groups in four towns in the county, but they never met together, or formally exchanged ideas. Therefore, in 1995 / 1996, with the active encouragement of the "*Access Committee for England*" who were based in London, we formed the "*Lincolnshire Access Forum*" and I was asked to be the founding Chairman. The number of Access groups then increased to ten, with groups being based in each of the main towns in the county. The *Forum* met four times a year to share ideas, with the following four main aims: 1. To improve access to Lincolnshire County Council buildings; 2. To promote the introduction of accessible busses and trains in Lincolnshire; 3. To improve access to the Lincolnshire countryside; 4. To improve access to areas in Lincolnshire not covered by the existing groups.

One of the first things to be raised at a *Access Forum* meeting in 1996 was a comment from one of the outlying towns about the poor facilities at *Shopmobility Lincoln*; I knew nothing about *Shopmobility*, but agreed to investigate. It was a nationwide scheme where people with disabilities could borrow powered wheelchairs or scooters to help them to do their shopping, or any other business, in city and town centres. The facility in Lincoln had been set up in 1991, as a temporary measure, in the toilets of the Tentercroft Street car-park, but they only loaned out a few poor-quality manual wheelchairs. Without going into too much detail, the facilities were truly awful and they were the worst in the country. It became increasingly obvious that *Shopmobility Lincoln* was a source of embarrassment to a great many people in Lincolnshire. We then started an intensive campaign to move the *Shopmobility Lincoln* location to the central Bus Station and to build a new, more welcoming reception area.

There was also an urgent need for *Shopmobility Lincoln* to provide powered wheelchairs and scooters for loan and to combine it with the separately run organisation *Lincoln Dial-a-Ride*, as they both served the same basic customers. No matter how hard we tried, with written reports, a visit by the local MP and letters to the City Council, all that we received from the Council Officers were negative comments on our proposals for the new *Shopmobility Lincoln*. Eventually, after taking advice on how to proceed, in 1999 we raised several thousand pounds to commission an independent consultant to investigate the problem. His final fifty-six page feasibility report confirmed everything that we had said about our dreadful *Shopmobility*

Lincoln facility and he came up with the same recommendations that we had already made. The report was presented to the City Council in October 1999, where it was positively accepted, and at long last they set-up a Working Group to introduce the new facilities, which I was invited to join. From then on things started to change, but it was still a long, slow progress. Eventually, on the 18 April 2002, the Princess Royal opened the new combined *Lincoln Shopmobility and Dial-a-Ride*, next to the city bus station, and we had achieved another hard-won success.

It was interesting to note that we had consistently pressed hard for increased car-parking spaces for customers, adjacent to the new *Shopmobility Lincoln*, because we knew that there would be a huge demand once it opened. However, the Council Officers still kept telling us that it would be a waste of money as there wouldn't be a need for so many spaces. In the end, we won the argument and the Council were soon telling the press that they had exceeded their two year target for *Shopmobility Lincoln* customers - within the first six months! Why is it that some people just wouldn't listen to us seriously for all those years? Probably it was because we were seen as just "unpaid volunteers" and assumed, therefore, that we were not capable of making rational professional judgements and recommendations.

It was only after I had been involved with this new type of voluntary work for some years that I stopped to consider why I had become increasingly involved. I realised, for the first time, that I had never knowingly met anyone with a disability during the whole of my working life. Initially I worked for the Forestry Commission, which meant that we had to be very fit to do the physical work. I then spent thirty-four years in the RAF and, because of the job specification, we had to be fit to remain in the Service; hence my early retirement as soon as I became a permanent wheelchair user. Moreover, as Servicemen we tended to be posted to new areas every three years and then we were encouraged to live on-base, in rented married quarters, so that we would be readily available for military tasks, exercises or security duties. In addition, most RAF airfields tended to be in remote areas, near small villages. Therefore, for a mixture of all of those reasons, we tended not to merge with the local community as much as other civilian people would. Another major difference that I noted was that some people acquired a disability later in life, like me, whereas other people were born and were raised with theirs. Surprisingly, that appeared to be a significant factor. As we got to know and respect each other we found that it was easier

to talk about our different backgrounds. A fairly common feature that was stressed to me by many people with a disability from birth was that they had been brought up in a culture of being told what they wouldn't be able to do, because they weren't "normal". That had the effect of making many of them under-confident, with low self-esteem, and hence they were unlikely to speak up for themselves in later life. In my case, having had a very full and active life, particularly with travelling around the world and coming from a Service background, I had a very different perspective. The first-half of my Service career was as an electronic technician, responsible for maintaining intricate equipment, and making quick decisions in a hostile environment; the second-half was as an engineer in charge of complex projects, analysing problems and then finding solutions. In addition, as a Senior Non-Commissioned Officer, and later as a Flight Commander and then a Squadron Commander, I had been responsible for the welfare, management and motivation of a large group of people. It was a combination of that experience that I was now using to try and improve access for all.

I was involved with disability awareness and equality training for over fourteen years and found it helpful to give examples of four different models of disability, to get those attending courses to understand the topic. Most people tend to identify with at least one of those examples and it appears to help them with their understanding of the topic. The "Religious" model is the first example. Most cultures through history have used a religious model of disability, usually (but not always) viewing disability as some form of punishment for evil behaviour or even as the embodiment of evil itself. I thought that this old-fashioned concept had died out years ago, but it was only fairly recently that a nationally recognised sports manager had to resign over his comments in this vein. If it was true, then I wish that I'd known about it when I was doing "whatever it was", because I would have tried to enjoy it more while I had the chance! The second is the "Medical" model. The medical model of disability sees disabled people as having problems, or as being problems. The model assumed a need for disabled people to be changed, improved or made more "normal", often through treatment or intervention. The focus with that model is on lack of ability - on what they can't do - and there is an assumption that something must be done. That is sometimes also known as the "cure or care" model, which fails to recognise that most people with impairments are not ill and do not need medical assistance or care for most of their lives. That model removes the choice

from the disabled person, leaving decisions in the hands of the professionals rather than in the hands of the disabled person. That was brought home to me with a “bang” one day when I was quietly explaining to some Social Services carers about encouraging people with disabilities to become more independent. They were horrified and became quite hostile, as all that they could see was a possible decline in their future careers!

The third is the “Tragedy” model. The tragedy model assumes a person has an affliction and is deserving of pity and care from those in society who are “normal”. As we saw above, some organisations seeking financial donation to their particular charity often use that strategy. Fortunately, the portrayal of negative attitudes and images is gradually being replaced by more positive messages. This tragedy model is based on the erroneous assumptions that people with disabilities are not capable of looking after themselves, and are not capable of making choices about how, where or with whom they wish to live. Sadly, that appeared to be the model that I came across the most during the 1990s and, disappointingly, it was prevalent in many charitable, voluntary organisations that saw their role as “looking after those poor people”, but things are starting to change. I would be one of the first people in the queue to help anyone in real need, but we need to be very conscious of not jumping to conclusions and offering help too quickly.

The final example is the “Social” model. The social model of disability is a far more liberating one. This looks at the environment to see what can be changed to allow a disabled person to take part on equal terms with non-disabled people. More importantly, this is the model chosen by many disabled people. It argues that disability is a consequence of the environment, discriminatory policies and procedures. In other words, the disability is caused by the way in which society responds to people with impairments, overlooking their needs and excluding them. I passionately agree with that model and often use a typical day in my life as an example. Although I can’t stand or walk anymore, my wheelchair effectively becomes my new pair of legs and I manage to wash and dress in the morning, make breakfast and wash-up afterwards, before driving my adapted car to go shopping or to attend meetings. Lunch-time may be spent in a café or restaurant and in the afternoon I will probably visit an art gallery or museum before driving home to help make dinner. We may then go round to the pub for a drink or, more likely, I will spend the evening painting in my studio or

reading a book. On Sunday morning we will attend church and then probably have Sunday lunch in the pub, before going out to either study the birds in local woods or to sit and paint. I believe that covers the typical activities of most non-disabled people and I have not needed any help to do any of those things. That is, providing that the places that I visited had no steps, that the entrance was wide enough for my wheelchair to pass through and that I could move around to the same areas as everyone else. I hope that you will see that my mobility impairment doesn’t stop me joining in normal, everyday activities providing that the environment is right. It is also worth pointing out that if it is easy for someone in a wheelchair to move around, then everyone else, including elderly people, parents with young children or someone with a temporary impairment will also find it easy. A typical everyday example is to just sit quietly in any High Street and watch the number of people using the automatic door into the bank or large shop, labelled for use by disabled people; the vast majority of people will use the automatic door because it is so much easier than struggling with a conventional large door, particularly if carrying shopping. If we get the environment right then everyone is a winner!

Other projects that I became increasingly involved with were accessible public transport, access to the countryside and the *Lincolnshire Voluntary Sector Network*. We worked closely with Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) on all of those topics and after several years we started to see some significant changes. By the end of the decade LCC and Lincolnshire RoadCar won a national award for introducing a network of accessible busses that linked up with each other across the county. Moreover, after a long and heated debate, over whether it was the responsibility of the transport provider or the Local Authority, the County Council agreed to install suitable bus-stops that were wheelchair accessible and the Minister for Transport visited Lincolnshire when the first one was built, at Langworth, a few miles north-east of Lincoln. In addition, Central Trains introduced lighter, less-steep wheelchair-ramps, made by “Portaramp”, which they carried on each train, making access to trains much easier for wheelchair users. Improved access to the countryside is still an ongoing project, but there have been several very good examples of improvements. Sadly, in my opinion, the voluntary sector still isn’t working together as closely as it should.

A New Challenge, as a Full-time Artist:

As soon as we moved into "Beech Cottage" and settled down, I began to paint in my new studio. In the past I had to find a vacant space in the house if I wanted to paint, usually in the dining room, but that meant clearing away as soon as the room was wanted for something else, or if we were expecting visitors. I now had the luxury of having a room all to myself where I could paint without interruptions, and where I could leave it in a mess from one day to the next without getting into too much trouble! I continued to work in oils, on canvas, and soon started to buy loose rolls of canvas, with a range of several sets of wooden stretchers, so that I could decide on the size of canvas that I wanted for each new painting. I first exhibited one of my paintings at the annual Patchings Award exhibition in 1992, and continued to exhibit there each year for the rest of that decade. In 1993 I submitted two paintings - *Scottish Highlands* and a small painting of *Monet's Bridge, Giverny*, for the "National Open Exhibition for Artists" at Patchings: both paintings were selected and both were sold. Although there were 960 paintings in the exhibition, my small *Monet's Bridge* was one of the fifteen paintings selected for illustrating the Souvenir Catalogue, so I felt very honoured.

In 1994, about a year after the visit from the War Pensions Welfare Officer, I had a telephone call from him asking if I remembered who he was. He then apologised for not being in touch before and asked if I had a painting to put into the next exhibition. He then apologised again and said that the painting had to be in Nottingham by the following day! As it happened, I had almost finished a small oil painting - *Parry's Court, Sleaford*, and so I finished it off that night and arranged for my brother Richard to deliver it the next day, because he worked in Nottingham. A couple of days later we received an invitation to the opening of the exhibition and so we decided to attend. The organiser hadn't mentioned anything about a competition, but I was both pleased and very surprised to find that I was presented with a silver cup as the winner of the first prize for my painting.

Earlier in the year we had spent some time in Sleaford looking for subjects to paint, to recall some happy memories, and *Parry's Court* was high on that list. That same year, North Kesteven District Council decided to hold a painting competition called "*Not a Constable in Sight*". The subject was to be a painting of the historic Cogglesford Mill, on the River Lea. As

that was one of our memories from our courting days, it was already on my list of other places to paint, including *St. Deny's Church* and *The Vicarage*, so I finished the painting of *Cogglesford Mill* and entered it into the competition. There was a prize for the best painting as well as a competition for the best "Peoples Painting", selected by the public, followed by a touring exhibition of the twenty best paintings. The exhibition was displayed in Cogglesford Mill for several weeks, before going on a tour of the county and I was again pleased and surprised to find that my painting had been awarded "*The Peoples Prize*" as well as being included in the touring exhibition.

I also started to attend Life-drawing classes, run by Jill Nadin, in Lincoln; sadly, Jill died suddenly a few years later, but a group of her students decided to meet together regularly and the Nadin Group was formed and is still thriving. As the decade moved on, we started to travel again, and many of my paintings were based on those holidays. To make the layout of this book flow more easily, my wheelchair holidays are described in the next chapter, but there will be occasional references to some of those holidays when I'm talking about my paintings. In 1995 Ruddock's art shop in Lincoln held their first "*Landscape Painting*" competition and so I entered a large oil painting of the *Hortobagy, Hungary*, painted as a reminder of our Hungarian Great Bustard expedition, which won the first prize of £150 from Winsor & Newton. Later that year, encouraged by my progress so far, I took the plunge and submitted a large pastel painting of *Harvest Time, Lincolnshire Wolds* in another national competition, "The Laing Art Exhibition" and I was delighted when it was selected for hanging in their Midlands Exhibition, in Birmingham.

After our holidays in East Africa (you will hear more of that in chapter 7) I decided to work on a series of Safari wildlife paintings as a way of holding-on to some of those wonderful memories. Although I'm quite an experienced ornithologist, I rarely paint birds as they don't usually inspire me as subjects, possibly because they can end up looking like the illustrations in field-guides used for identifying birds. I want something more "alive" in my paintings and, in general, while birds are beautiful and full of interest they seem to lack the lively characteristics which I'm looking for when painting. Like everything in life, there are exceptions and vultures certainly came into that category. It was fascinating to watch them and they certainly had lots of personality in the way that they jostled for position in their pecking order. I couldn't help but smile as they waddled around and eyed each other up and I

had some sketches that seemed to capture their moods.

Crowned Cranes were also worth painting because of their beauty and gracefulness. Naturally, we came across all the usual mammals of East Africa, as well as the birds, so I built up a range of paintings that included Elephants, White Rhinoceros, African Buffalo, Hippopotamus, Zebra, Lions, Cheetahs, Giraffes and an assortment of Antelopes as well as a group of Crowned Cranes. In 1996 I held my first "one-man" exhibition of fifteen paintings at Patchings, including eleven from my Kenya Safari collection. That same year I heard about another annual, national competition with the theme of "*Paint a Wildlife Subject*" (PAWS). I decided to enter my oil painting of *Crowned Cranes* which was selected for the "Exhibition of Finalists" and was also awarded a Certificate of Merit. The following year I entered again, with a painting called *Masai Mara Giraffes*, from the Masai Mara National Reserve. That was also selected as a finalist and was awarded a Certificate of Merit.

While we were looking at the paintings in the exhibition on the preview night, in St Albans just north of London, we overheard a group of people discussing my giraffe painting. I feel quietly annoyed when some people use those occasions as social events where they can show off their "superior" knowledge to anyone who is listening. The gentleman, or person, on this occasion was holding forth in a very loud and "cultured" voice, telling the room that my painting was certainly not from the Masai Mara, because he knew it very well, and that it was obvious to anyone who cared to look hard enough that it was from Whipsnade Zoo! I bit my tongue, resisted the temptation to respond, and then Phyl and I moved away with a smile. Snobs! Luckily, we don't seem to come across many of them in Lincolnshire, or further north. At about the same time we found a wonderful wheelchair accessible farm and accommodation in Cumbria where I could sit and to paint regularly, just north of Bassenthwaite Lake. In 1997 Reg and Joan asked me if I would like to leave some of my paintings of the Lake District with them to exhibit in their self-catering apartments at Irton House Farm. I left ten paintings with them, all painted from the farm. Most of them were in pastels, which I found easier to use than oil paints when on holiday, and they proved to be popular with other visitors and guests.

The following year, in 1998, I held my first one-man exhibition at the new Community Room in the Lincoln Central Library. It was called "*Paintings of Lincolnshire & Other Favourite Places*". There were fifty paintings in the exhibition, including oils, pastels, pen & wash, watercolours and a new

Limited Edition Print of "*Steep Hill, Lincoln*". For several years I had been toying with the idea of producing Limited Edition Prints, for three main reasons: firstly, because they are much cheaper for customers to buy than original paintings; secondly, I enjoy sharing my paintings with other people, particularly if they can't afford to buy expensive paintings; thirdly, by limiting the number of prints, in my case to 200, they become more special than general prints because each one is checked, numbered and signed by the artist. The first decision that I had to make when considering a print was what subject to paint; naturally, if there were to be 200 copies then it would need to be a popular subject and so I decided to paint a scene from Lincoln. As there were already lots of prints of Lincoln, because it is an attractive city, and as most of the prints were taken from watercolour paintings, I decided to produce mine from an oil painting. The next decision was what place to choose in Lincoln, as I wished to discount all of the scenes that were already in print.

I just happened to be working on an oil painting of Lincoln's Steep Hill, working at the north end in the corner of Castle Square. As the canvas was only 16" x 20" it was fairly easy to carry from home and to set up on my portable easel. I tend to work from life whenever I can, and then to continue to work in my studio in-between visits. As the painting progressed, I was amazed by the number of people who asked if it would be for sale when it was finished. It then made me think that this could be the painting that I used for a Limited Edition Print. I made more enquiries and all the professional artists that I spoke to advised me to choose the best quality printer available, to make sure that the prints were of first-rate standard. To cut a long story short, I found an excellent Fine Art Printer in Lincoln and we agreed to have 200 off-set lithograph prints on good quality, satin finished card. The rest, as they say, is history and I used my first exhibition in the Lincoln Central Library for the launch of my *Steep Hill, Lincoln* prints.

As it was my first local one-man exhibition I was quite apprehensive, particularly as the Lincoln School of Art had recently been taken over by the arts department at the new University in Lincoln. I found lots of art student coming in and out of the exhibition and my heart began to sink, as I thought that they would be telling their fellow students about this really old fashioned way of painting. However, as the days went by I was amazed by the number of positive comments from the students. One particular student interrupted a conversation that I was having with an unknown professional artist. He

thanked me for putting on the exhibition and then said that he was quite angry because he had just finished his Fine Art Degree, but felt that he had just wasted his last three years; I felt very humbled. Other artist that I had been talking to suggested that I concentrated more on pastel work, as that would help me to "free-up" the way that I worked, because the colours were mixed on the painting surface rather than on a pallet; I took that advice and they were right.

On another occasion, I noticed a young lady who had been in on previous days looking at each painting very carefully. Eventually, when no one else was in the room, she asked me if I was the artist and I introduced myself. I was then taken a-back when she asked me why I didn't live in the real world, so I asked her to explain what she meant. It was rather sad, but she said that all my paintings were cheerful-looking and made her feel happy, but the "real world" was full of awful things and was not the way that I had shown it. I agreed that there were lots of bad things in the world, but the reason that I painted was because I wanted to reflect all of the wonderful things that surround us and to share some of my happy memories. She didn't say anymore, but the next day she came back and asked if I would be willing to give a talk to a group of people from an organisation associated with manic-depressives. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to follow-up on that request, but hopefully she went away with a new outlook on life to share with her colleagues. The two-week exhibition was an outstanding success and I enjoyed sharing my love of painting with many new acquaintances, as well as selling eighteen paintings, which helped to buy more paints, brushes, canvases and frames. Later in the year I was asked to exhibit with two other artists at Patchings; the theme was "Work in Pastel" and I had eighteen pictures in that exhibition. I also had an exhibition in the Grantham Guildhall Arts Centre Gallery later that year, with twenty-nine paintings, which was also successful.

In June 1999, at the time of our 40th wedding anniversary party, I held an exhibition of fifty paintings in the Patchings Pavilion. The major painting in that exhibition was the largest oil on canvas that I've ever produced: "*Lincoln Cathedral, from Castle Square*". It was a commission, from someone who had already bought several of my oil paintings in the past. As a rule, I prefer to work on subjects that I choose to paint, rather than accepting commissions. However, if people have been generous enough to buy my paintings, and enjoy them, I sometimes make exceptions. The only

stipulation is that I must visit the place or subject to be painted and I will only carry on if I feel that I really want to paint the subject. In addition, I insist on painting it my own way, and if they don't like the result, then I will be happy to keep the painting, at no cost to them, and to put it down to experience. As I only paint for pleasure, and any profit that I do make goes to charity, I can afford to take that risk. That scheme worked very well for me, and I have never had a commission that wasn't happily accepted by the client - even when Phyl hoped that they would reject the paintings, because she liked them!

In the case of the *Lincoln Cathedral, from Castle Square* painting, the sponsor thought that he wanted a painting six feet by six feet. We discussed the location and he took my advice that a painting five feet by four feet would look better in the space that he had in mind. Luckily, I had bought a large "Masters & Dunning" studio easel, as it wouldn't have been possible for me to paint with a canvas that size in Castle Square - particularly with our Lincolnshire winds! The easel was extremely versatile, and it could hold the large canvas comfortably, but I did have to keep turning the painting upside-down to reach the top, while sitting in my wheelchair. The painting took me a year to complete, and by then I didn't want to part with it, because so much of "me" was in it, but a promise is a promise and my client was delighted with the result. Just before it was delivered I had a thought; the Limited Edition Prints of *Steep Hill, Lincoln* were very popular so, after discussing it with the new owner, I decided to have 230 prints of the *Castle Square* painting as well; that way I could still retain some of the pleasure of the painting for a few years and I could also share it with many more people. I have almost lost track of the number of times that I have painted Lincoln Cathedral, but every one is different. It is such a beautiful building, with so much history, that I'm sure I could paint nothing else for the rest of my life and still be learning about it.

I have often been asked the same four questions: First, what do I find to be the most difficult stage when I paint? Second, how did I learn to paint? Third, what methods do I use to paint? Finally, how long does it take to produce a painting? I find the most difficult stage is just before I start, as I need to know clearly what I hope to achieve. I usually choose a subject that brings back happy memories; I then paint it to help me to remember the time or place more vividly in the future. There is no finite answer as to how I learnt, but it's an accumulation of experiences dating back to school days,

visiting art galleries, reading, watching other people work but most importantly by setting myself a target, having a go and then striving to improve each time. I tend to use the same method each time when I'm painting in oils: first, I make a detailed pencil drawing and keep altering it until the composition looks well balanced on the canvas; I then paint the whole canvas in one colour, usually Burnt Sienna thinned with a low odour solvent such as Sansodor, which helps me to confirm the balance of the lights and darks in the painting before going any further. That initial stage is then left to dry before starting to build up the colour across the canvas. Composition is very important to me, as the final painting will never look right, however carefully it is worked, if the balance is wrong. Similarly, the initial drawing stage must be right and I must understand the structure of whatever I'm painting. In general, most of my oil paintings take at least three months to complete, but that's because I leave them to dry-off in between working on them, to prevent the colours from becoming muddy.

I always have several paintings on the go at any one time. Sometimes I return to old paintings and then re-work them if I can see ways of improving them. I work from life whenever I can, but often return to my studio to work before going back to the original scene. At times it is impossible to paint live, such as on when on East African Safaris because of the wild animals, the heat and the dust. In those circumstances I use my sketch books and camera. I have no hesitation in using my camera to help me, because my brain is not capable of remembering all of the details in front of me and the chances are that the sketch will not have all the information that I may wish to check on later. In the case of the large painting of *Lincoln Cathedral, from Castle Square* I took many photographs, but I found that I still had to keep going back regularly with my sketch book to make more notes, because looking at the photographs didn't seem to help me to understand how the various parts of that wonderful cathedral were built or carved. By the end of the decade I had produced about 250 oil paintings; many of them were given-away as gifts to relatives or friends, but the profits made on those that had been sold were distributed to many local charities.

A Change in Priorities:

Towards the end of 1999 I was writing several reports, for various voluntary organisations in Lincolnshire, when I realised that I needed to

spend far more time at home with Phyl, because she was so unwell. Gradually, over the next few months, I started to ease-off on my workload with all of those organisations and to hand over my responsibilities to other committee members.

Earlier in the year I had been in contact with the Community Operational Research Unit (CORU), at Lincoln University, to ask for their advice on how the voluntary sector could become more effective. They suggested that I should write a comprehensive report so that they could use that as a trigger to help us. It was at that stage that I decided to include all of the reports that I was already writing with an overall report looking-back over the achievements of the previous ten years. My major concern was the huge amount of time expended by unpaid volunteers, responding to questions and surveys requested by Local Authorities, and then the apparent lack of interest or action from those authorities to our recommendations. There was a definite feeling that we were being asked for our views in order to "tick their box" rather than for them to really listen to what we said. I was conscious that the title and the content of the report needed to be positive if people were to be encouraged to read it. In the end, my 105 page illustrated report was produced as a spiral-bound A4 booklet, which included over thirty colour photographs and eleven separate annexes on specific topics such as: examples of poor access to recently completed building projects in Lincoln; the Shopmobility Lincoln project; the Lincolnshire Wheelchair User's Group; access to the Lincolnshire countryside; and disabled parking facilities in Lincolnshire. Over thirty copies of the report were formally distributed, including copies to each of the Local Authorities and MPs in Lincolnshire, as well as a copy to each of the organisations referred to in the report.

There were five specific recommendations for improvements in Lincolnshire, summarised as follows. First: That CORU be authorised to research more effective ways of improving communication and real involvement between Local Authorities and the voluntary sector on all new building projects to ensure proper "access for all". Second: That Lincolnshire County Council finds ways of encouraging the voluntary sector organisations, funded for people with disabilities, to work more closely together to avoid duplication of effort and to become more cost effective and efficient. Third: That Local Authorities and Health Authorities nominate Access Officers for key departments to find ways of improving communication between

themselves and the voluntary sector, particularly on issues affecting people with disabilities. Fourth: That Lincolnshire Health Authority ensures that all Hospital Trusts under their control, and possibly all Patient Care Trusts, introduce and budget for effective Disability Advisory Groups. Fifth: That Lincolnshire County Council resolves the problems associated with the issuing of Disabled Parking Badges, and parking for people with disabilities, by co-ordinating activities between themselves, other Local Authorities, the Health Authority, the Lincolnshire Police Authority and the voluntary sector. Additional copies of the report were forwarded for the reference / research sections of Lincoln Central Library and the University of Lincoln Library. As the report was to be used as a potential source document for research in the future, it was given the following somewhat lengthy title: *"Comments on the Effectiveness of the Voluntary Sector on Disability Issues in Lincolnshire: 1989 - 1999"*. I was tempted to include the word *"Ineffectiveness"* in the title, but decided that it may sound too negative! The report helped to draw a line under my decade of work on disability issues, so that I could concentrate on helping Phyl more at home and to focus on new paintings. There was a good initial response from the report, but only time would tell as to whether there would be any effective long-term action taken on the recommendations made.

We were now set to make a fresh start at the beginning of the new millennium. However, before we jump ahead to that stage, the next chapter will describe some of the wonderful holiday experiences that we had, after I became a permanent wheelchair user. We still find planning holidays very difficult, because of the accessibility issues, but we have proved that it is certainly still possible to have exciting and unusual holidays in a wheelchair if they are carefully thought about in advance.

