

Interview with Tony Griffin at home, 15 November 2012

Neil Young interviewer

TG = Tony Griffin (interviewee)

AG = Andy Griffin (interviewee's oldest son)

RG = Rio Griffin (interviewee's youngest son)

NY = Neil Young (interviewer)

NY: So first of all, it would be really interesting for people to hear how you first got into athletics in the first place?

TG: Initially, I started off at it, about thirteen or fourteen years old at school, like most school kids do. But I got into weightlifting about fourteen with the aim to help my coordination initially but within a few months I had developed quite good muscle stature so I then realised that weightlifting was the one. Apart from helping my coordination – which it did – I began to get quite a nice physique and it progressed from there. The athletics progressed obviously in school. I took part in regular competitions and began to win events and then [inaudible] ... so I was selected for national competition at a very early age – say fifteen – and again I went for national competitions, doing the similar events – Indian club, javelin mainly but also other events like football [inaudible] ... but all these events were suited to my health. My training was geared to those events and I got better and better, from strength to strength and before I knew it I was in the British team getting mentioned in the business all over the world.

NY: So, who, kind of, supported and helped you in the beginning when you were first getting into sport – what support did you have?

TG: I think my PE teacher was the main one [inaudible] I had just started school in Tonbridge in Kent and the PE teacher used to be a semi-professional footballer – so he became a PE teacher. And he kind of taught me because I was the smallest guy in the school virtually at the time – I loved playing football and he was a footballer himself and he began to give me different sports at different times and he was always supportive of me at that time. Plus he was involved with the CP [cerebral palsy] sport at that the time, which coordinated sport and movement: I got involved through him really.

NY: Was there anyone who inspired you to take up athletics or was it all within yourself?

TG: I used to go to a boarding school in Tonbridge called [inaudible] School and Geoff Capes came to visit us – the shot-putter – and when I saw the sight of this man and what he could do with a shot put I thought “I can't do that but I can do most of the kind of sport he is involved with.” He brought someone called David Bedford who was a ten thousand-metre runner, to our school as well, and we got...athletes [inaudible] and I thought “Well, why can't I be one?” and that was more the starting point and then took part in school sports, starting throwing javelin and things like this and I thought “Why not?” I was quite good at – or I thought I was [inaudible]

NY: I think people would be interested to hear, how much the cerebral palsy had an impact at

that point and where, I guess, it has been an advantage to you, and when it has been difficult?

TG: I have cerebral palsy – I still have cerebral palsy – but fortunately I am only slightly affected by it because my particular brand of cerebral palsy, if you like, is called athetosis, which is slight involuntary movement of the limbs. So I could move all four limbs, like a “normal person” would, inverted commas. So when I went to the gym I would train with normal, everyday people. I didn’t consider myself to be disabled, to be honest, even though I was. I didn’t consider myself to be. And I was as going along my whole life with that view, within a matter of months. So I knew having cerebral palsy doesn’t necessarily restrict what you do in life: it’s up to you how far you go and what you do. Just the same as any able-bodied athlete, it’s a matter of what you put in you get out. You overcome your disability to a point and then you become athlete next. And that’s basically what I did. I just came and trained. More and more I put into it and I got more and more out of it. My coordination improved ten-fold at least and I became better physique, I felt better as a person and that was it really.

NY: Some people would say, in general terms for people with all kinds of disabilities, that sport can be like physiotherapy or rehabilitation – is that how you would see it, yourself?

TG: Initially yes, I just didn’t think for myself, other people thought so for me. People introduced me to weightlifting for example – they didn’t tell me they were introducing to hand-eye coordination, they told me they were introducing me because I might enjoy it. I think that anybody who takes part in sport – able-bodied or not – you’ve got to enjoy what you do, that’s the first and foremost thing. I did realize quite quickly that all these different exercises were aimed at coordination, especially the [inaudible] and I got control of it, more and more control and I could see what I was doing and yes it is a form of physiotherapy but ultimately you are aiming to becoming an athlete just like any other able-bodied athlete. And that’s what I was aiming to become and that’s what I became.

NY: So, you have talked a little bit about your progress from local to regional to national – did that happen quickly? What happened?

TG: Relatively. As I said previously I was thirteen or fourteen in school sports days and in those days there weren’t as many competitions as there are today. I went to the school sports day, I kept winning against the people I was put against – all done through a classification system to make sure the playing field was level and you are competing against the same type of disability as you have. But I kept winning – that’s the whole point – and I went from regional to national quite quickly but from fourteen, within two years I’d had gone from regional sports to national sports and then international sports within two or three years I was at that level. But in those two or three years I was training quite hard – not seriously hard because I was still young and I was enjoying what I was doing, I was enjoying competing at these different sports, that was the main point.

When I got to international field I was sixteen for my first international. The attitude began to change slightly because I realised if you are going to win against these people you’ve got to start putting it in, if you like. I realised, at that point, I began to train probably harder and more sustained and I took it from there. I went to my first international in 1976 and a boy from

Bolton – a sixteen year-old boy from Bolton in them days didn't go very far in the world to be honest. It was a working-class town now and then and I was going to go to Monte Carlo – or just outside Monte Carlo – in international competition representing England. So to be honest it was a dream for a sixteen year-old boy and I lived the dream if you like. I went there and won gold medals in my events. I didn't know if I could win gold medals. I came away a gold medalist and I was then put on a train direct at the time, direct to Monte Carlo going all along the coast of Italy via Rome. I saw all these flights and countries that I would never have seen normally, apart from being involved in sport and I think that was the surprising point for me. After that things followed on – you've still got to train – you're only as good as last sport, your last competition and that's true in any sport. And that's what I was – champion – at sixteen year-old. I came back from Rome on the train, on my own [interruption]

So, we had a sixteen year-old boy who was just outside Monte Carlo [inaudible] in his competition. Sixteen year-old boys from Bolton in those days did not go anywhere. It's a working-class town and I was just outside Monte Carlo – one of the hot spots of the world – at sixteen. I'd just won two gold medals in my first international competition. I was becoming an athlete of world stature and then I travelled then the coast of Italy, through Monte Carlo, all down the south coast of France – we next stopped there – and we stopped at a place in Rome for a few, well for two weeks actually. I then travelled on me own, on the train from Rome, right the way to Bolton. I hadn't seen me mother for about four months because I was [inaudible] expected the competition to have ended. She was sat in the kitchen. We had no mobile phone. "Oh" she said: "where the hell have you been?" Well that was it, after four months I came home. "Life's great".

Basically my mother was the inspiration behind the boy who won medals from '76 to '86. As a small boy she could have took the easy route and done everything for me but she didn't. I couldn't tie my own shoelaces but rather than tie them for me she would make me do it even if it took an hour and eventually I could do everything that any 'normal' person would be able to do for their age. She pushed me all the way to do sport. Every step of the way she was behind me saying: "do this, do this" so ultimately she was the one that made me what I am today. After New York, my big Paralympic Games, unfortunately she passed away. At that point all my medals – in my emotional state of madness, whatever – I put my medals in with her because she was the one who created the whole atmosphere in the first place and that was that.

NY: OK, I thought it would be useful for you to talk however you want to about the history of your participation, given the huge number of medals that you won, and which things stand out. You don't have to talk about everything but key highlights for you.

TG: Well, I am a world-class Paralympic athlete – which is what I was for a ten-year period '76 when it started and '86 when it finished. '76, as I mentioned previously, it was in the south of France – international Games, I won my first major gold medals. At the time the major competitions were like every two years – it may have changed now but in them days it was every two years that you actually got a major competition. So in '78 I was in Edinburgh. I got the same gold medals. I took part in different sports at some point [inaudible] gold medals, so for example in Edinburgh. I don't know how because the second day that I arrived there was like an aerial assault course and I decided to go on this aerial assault course and jump over the river

thing on a rope. And I'm in the middle of flight, a lot of trajectory and "boom" I came out with a broken ankle. Strapped up quite for the rest of the week – it seemed it was OK – but when I went through, they took the bandages off and the pain kicked in and I realized that something was not right. Then again I wanted to keep it in those Games more than anything else so I bandaged it back up and carried on. I won a Gold in that particular Games in the twenty-five metres. I'd never swum because it wasn't one of my events normally but I thought: "I'll give it a go" and I did get the gold in the twenty-five metres. I got beaten in the fifty metres by the guy who I beat in the twenty metres. But my ankle was badly swollen, bandaged up all the time, and I had to play football for GB team: and that is the one that I wanted to take part in, the football. At the time because I was an eighteen year-old lad I wanted to play football. Well, I strapped it up as tight as I could and stand up and played football. We won the gold medal as a team in '78 and after those Games on the way home I got picked up in somewhere called Knutsford, which is on the M6, and when I was going home I went to the hospital which is where I found I'd fractured my ankle. So for the whole of the game I had a fractured ankle and still won the gold medal. So I was not aware of that but that's what happened and looking back it's just incredible. I don't how I shut the pain out and then I played football but I just [inaudible]. Fantastic.

After '78 we were in 1980 in Gits in Belgium. Again the same events – Indian club, javelin, football; I also tried cycling but I got whipped if you like in that but I did get my three gold medals – javelin, Indian club and weight-lifting. And once again I came home but – this is where the difference is then to now – I think medal winners today from the Paralympics are going to get far more recognition from the press and media and be put forward for the stars that they are properly. In them days nothing really seemed to happen. The press would print what they had to print, the TV companies would cover what they had to cover to keep the athletes happy but in general nothing really major happened. Whereas 2012 I think has changed the perception completely. I think we are going to see Paralympic stars being treated exactly the same as Olympic stars, or not too far away. The likes of Jessica Ennis for example – they will get in their reference – Pistorius, Oscar Pistorius – he's getting in articles. This is what I like to see because these people put all the work in round the teams. They train just as hard, if not harder, because they have to overcome their disability first and then become an athlete second. But they are being treated as athletes first and disabled second, which is what it should be.

I lived happily, that said, but after 1980 which was my main event, which was in New York. I really loved going to New York – eight months before I got there. I approached a gym in Bolton called Bolton House Studio. My mother actually went in and spoke to them all and said: "My son is doing this, he needs somewhere to train. This was the best gym in Bolton at the time – ultra modern, first rate. And the guy said: "send him in". I trained there for approximately eight years free of charge in the best gym around. And I lived there. Every day at six in the morning I would [inaudible] waiting for the gym to open before work, and after work back there and [inaudible]. But for six months before New York I got myself into probably the best shape I have ever, ever been in my life at twenty-four year old: I was just all muscle, no fat whatsoever. And I thought, I was going to New York, the preparation had been done, the hard work had been done and I was going there to in medals and ultimately that's what I did [interruption].

So in 1984 I was twenty-four years old, I felt I was in the best shape of my life and I was ready to

win medals. That's what the training had been done for and now I was [inaudible]. So, we travelled to New York from Gatwick [inaudible]. I got off the train and we saw concord next to the plane. I never realized how small concord was in comparison to a jumbo jet – but it was there right next to the plane, so I took a picture of that, out of the window of the plane. When we were flying to America British Airways make a cake saying: "Good luck to the Great British team" and it was a fantastic journey – I'd never been to America before and I was looking forward to getting down to business. We arrived at the Olympic village – well shortly after we arrived at the airport, we got to the village, all the security was there – their guys came inside the buildings carrying rifles [inaudible] on TV really. But we got a few days to settle in and get ready for business. I went there to win the weightlifting, that's all I wanted to win, to be fair. That time I was in the best shape of my life, I had been training regularly in the gym, and that what I wanted to win. I believed I would have won it, but I didn't. I got a silver – no excuse. The guy who beat me happened to be in a wheelchair. Now, I don't know if it's been a couple of years since they looked into that particular case but in all track and field events they were getting people who had similar disability but in this particular event, weightlifting, it would appear like they evaluate and that was it. This guy was in the same weight as me but his body weight was more often waist upwards because he was in a wheelchair and his legs were not like mine. So, I'm not making excuses, I wanted to win it. But I don't believe, at that time, I could have lifted any more or have been in better shape than I was so I was unhappy at getting second. But second in the world so I thought to myself: "second in the world" not happy but I went to New York that day – Empire State Building, looked at the top and phoned my mother to tell her I had won my first medal. She guessed I was unhappy with getting second but like I say, it's second in the world what do you want? So at that point I thought of course she is and I got ready for the next two events – javelin and Indian club.

I went to Indian club first of all and drew this German guy – [inaudible] the same guy, I can't remember his name – I think he was called Stefan or something like that. I threw the first club about forty odd metres and the German team made a complaint because I did not have my membrane on properly. So I thought: "OK, fair enough" if they [inaudible] when it happened. But my second throw it went just short of fifty metres and that was the one. It was a world record and that was it. The guy threw all six throws. And that is the furthest I had ever thrown I think up to that point in that event. So the training beforehand must have paid off. I was the smallest guy there – five foot nothing. The German guy was five foot ten and he just didn't get anywhere near me – well, having said that he was four metres behind which is quite close but not close enough: and that world record to my own knowledge was never broken by a class 6 man, which is what I was. I was mis-classed six in the world at that time and I don't believe that the record was broken. But it's not done by class 6 anymore – it's still done as an event but not by my particular class [inaudible]. So that to my mind means that I will always be a world-record holder – whether that be fact or fiction I do not know – but nor will it ever be.

Then the javelin came along and so did the German and we had six throw apiece. He was pretty close to me to be honest but not as far – he was about an inch and a half down on the final throw. I just did my throw, just let it go and it beat the world record [inaudible] I thought: "well, **that's the world record**" because they stuck the thing in the saying world record. So he had got one more throw. All the [inaudible] it's like an anti-climax at that point. He had his final

throw, he didn't do it so I knew I had got my gold medal again and that's what anti-climax is – it's jubilation and triumph in that minute and then you think "it's over, gold medal in the bag, it's done" and at that point you wait for the medal ceremony and you have to ask them and then once or twice you go up, it's very emotional really but you keep it together. And you realise at that point that you are number one at what you do in the world – all the training has paid off and that's that.

The final competition, the very final competition, again was in 1986 in Belgium [interruption]. So 1986, as it turned out it was my final competition, final major international competition. I went to Gits as the defending world-record holder and double gold medalist and Paralympian. So we travelled to Gits by ferry and coach [inaudible] and got preparation for competition, getting focused on what you've got to do and beat whoever is in front of you. That is the whole idea, whether it be Paralympian or Olympian you've got to beat the guy in front of you – no matter where he's from, what country he's from. That's the aim of the competition and that's why I did it again.

I did Indian club and javelin – again the same events – but I didn't get anywhere near my old world record but still – funnily enough no-one seemed throw as far as in New York. I am not sure if it was the climate, or what, or training or what but none of us in Gits in Belgium didn't throw as far as all that but I still came on top of that German again. And that's the last time I ever saw that [inaudible] a blond, blue-eyed German but he got beaten by British boy from Bolton. That's 1986 – I was hoping to go to Florida in 1988 but it didn't quite transpire for whatever reasons even though I was double gold medalist and world record holder – for some reason I didn't get there so that's why I decided to call it a day and start families etc. and now I've got quite a few kids to contend with.

NY: I know when we were talking...

TG: [Two different interruptions] 1986 was my final competition. I was a double gold medalist. I came back to Bolton and went back to my usual job. I was hoping for better things to happen but obviously they didn't so I carried on working and then met the woman of my dreams. I retired from athletics and we have our children. Now I am fifty-two years old, I have six children, a beautiful wife and my son is northwest boxing champion – so I think it runs in the family [interruption]. So in 1986 I retired from international athletics, I went back to work in the civil service but I was then nominated and received the national and regional sportsman award from the civil service. Which to be fair was quite an achievement in itself in those days because I wasn't an Olympian, I was a Paralympian and that time it was very hard to get proper, official recognition and this was official proper recognition that I got from the civil service, nation-wide and regionally so I was well pleased with that actually [interruption]. I was [inaudible] at that time to receive this award. They took me to London [inaudible] I met the chairman of the board – he presented me with this glass ball thing – and [inaudible]. After then I just kept on working unfortunately but that was what Paralympians did in them days. These days I'm glad to see it's changing – what we should see is we won't return to work but we are doing other work outside work, one that we are paid for [inaudible] awards for being the top sportspeople that they are and I was [interruption].

Since the introduction of the word 'Paralympian', in the last five years the attitude in Bolton,

my hometown, has changed dramatically. Suddenly they had realized they had a star who had not been recognised and in the last five years I have been truly recognised by my own hometown. Five years ago I received a sportsman of the year award from Bolton town presented by Sam Allardyce – Bolton Wanderers football manager at the time, now he's the manager of West Ham of course. And from then on it has been accolade after accolade. There was a statue at Bolton Reebok, which is Bolton Wanderer's football ground. And all the famous personalities from Bolton are on this statue. I am also on this statue. I will show you this picture of the statue itself. It's not a very good picture but I think there are one hundred people on silver plaques on this statue and I am one of those, along with Amir Khan along with Jason Kenny – all of Bolton's Olympians and Paralympians together which is what I have always been campaigning for and is what I think should happen from now on.

Also, because of my fame in Bolton I have got invitations to many black tie events with other stars were there, among them Mike Tyson and this has extreme relevance because my son is now a boxer and I took him along to meet this world famous superstar Mike Tyson. So that would not have happened if I hadn't been a Paralympic star myself in Bolton – I simply wouldn't have gone. But to take my son – who is a boxer – to meet someone like him along with Tm Witherspoon, he was there an' all, another world heavyweight champion beaten by Mike Tyson as it happens. But they were both there chatting and joking together and my son met those two guys and I think it's inspired him to do what he's doing now. He's the new northwest champion hoping to become national champion next Tuesday week. I think I have rubbed off on him in saying how he should train and how he should not train and you get in what you put out – I mean you get out what you put in – having instilled it over the years – and I think he is on the verge of making it into boxing big time.

So I have been involved in sport since I was about twelve or thirteen years old. I believe that sport is essential for every young person to get involved in some shape or form. They may not all become Olympic champions or Paralympics champions but they will become fitter, healthier young people and more capable of dealing with life's ups and downs. So my children are involved with sport. My son, I got him into athletes at around the age of thirteen or fourteen – he did it for two years – middle distance running, steeplechase etc. but I realised that no matter how fit he became he didn't have the natural ability that some of the other athletes had. So I decided to make a switch when he was sixteen to boxing. We both decided to have a go at this. At first he didn't really want to do it but he with some persuasion from me he tried. I didn't think he was training like he should so I kept persisting that he get involved and eventually he started thinking, seeing my way of thinking. I would say to him: "when your friends are in the pub at eighteen drinking and they want you to be there doing all that – don't do it – they'll be doing that in five years time. If you do what I say now, you put the training in, and succeed. When they are from an office or wherever they're working you'll be travelling the world from being really successful in sport.

And when I went to London this year for the opening ceremony at fifty-two that is when the penny dropped for Andrew. I came back from London and the attitude had changed completely. The training had been put in like it should be, eating the right food and doing everything that you need to do like going to bed early and doing the runs. And now after all this hard work he has been the northwest champion for his weight at 57kg – he's two fights way

from being English national champion and he's certainly putting the training in. I believe that I've instilled this in him and I hope he succeeds in boxing and I think he will if he's got anything to do with me.

NY: I just wanted – it's great you talking about this – but I also wanted to just ask how does it feel to see him, what feelings does it bring up for you?

TG: [struggling to find words]

NY: Because you look very proud.

TG: Well yeah out of the ring but when he's fighting it's very tricky because I'm going to [inaudible]. My adrenaline is going as much as his – they can't see but I know when you're in that ring you're on your own – the one the gladiator Marcus, when you get in that ring you've only got yourself to defend, you can defend yourself, you've only got you in that ring. I wouldn't do it. I stepped in the ring once and got sparked out, my heart sank and I thought I'm not going to do that, and I retired and that was it for me. So to see him do what he does I mean it's incredible really – they're all modern day gladiators really [interruption].

NY: It is very interesting because of when you were involved in the Paralympics and they were at a very different level and got far less attention and recognition. Why would you say that the Paralympics are important as an event?

TG: I think, first of all, the introduction of the word 'Paralympics' was the starting point for future Paralympians to be recognized as stars the same as their Olympic counterparts. Prior to the word Paralympian being introduced they were called the International Games for the Disabled but at some point the word disabled [inaudible] and that word has been a stigma for the public to swallow for as long as I can remember. That word is the word that stopped me being as rich and famous as my Olympic counterparts are i.e. Sebastian Coe – he competed at the time as me, won the same medals as me and we're worlds apart in terms of recognition. However, if I was to have my time all over again with the word Paralympian used I believe that today's Paralympians will become future superstars and be recognized as such by the country. Pure and simple because the word parallel to, not disabled, parallel to the Olympics or Olympians so they are being compared to and as such they are athletes first and disabled second whereas when I was competing it was the other way round disabled first, athlete second and the recognition did not exist because of that fact in my opinion.

NY: I am interested because I hear that you are really generous to the new, the Paralympians who are getting all the attention and obviously you were involved in 2012 in your own role. But is it difficult as well to see this recognition that it would have been lovely for you to have back then?

TG: Oh, I mean yeah, looking back when I came back from New York I was expecting to be put forward as a star like any other Olympian. The fact is it didn't happen and today's Paralympians will go out and get that recognition: London 2012 that's the best place for the Paralympic superstars to take place. Looking back, yeah, I would like it to have happened to me but I have had more recognition in the past five years because of the introduction of Paralympian and subsequently 2012 my own involvement I believe that I am now a star in my own right in Bolton

at least so I am not complaining. I campaigned for years for our Paralympic athletes to be stars and to be treated as such. Not just recognized but to go on to get in their own companies and get companies to work on the stigma attached to the disabled because these people are athletes first and disabled second. I may miss the boat but I am part of that legacy and that suits me fine.

NY: And do you want to maybe talk about your involvement in 2012 itself?

TG: In February this year I was contacted by the Paralympic Association with a view to taking part in the opening ceremony. They said it was at height and I read the email and I ignored it at first – I thought, well: “height [laughs], I don’t like heights”. So that was a point of worry but I thought: “It’s the opening ceremony, I’ve got to do this” because this is the last time I will take part in a major competition at a Paralympic level, even though I am not competing I’m taking part on the biggest show piece on earth so I said “yes, I’ll have a go”. I went down for an audition in London to audition, they put me in a harness, came back [inaudible] came back down to London a week later and they said “yes, you’ve got the part, we’d like you to come down for two months training”. [Inaudible] which I did, I took all my own annual leave taking time off. I spent eight weeks going back and forwards from London – Bolton to London every day in training for eight weeks to do this training. [Inaudible] all the training I had done in the past, four hours trained and then I came back to Bolton at night. So I really pushed myself to go for it again, to take part in this competition, well not a competition, take part in this worldwide event. And after eight weeks training we auditioned again and I was told I had the part. Unfortunately at this point they had to do an accreditation check. Now this seemed a bit strange but you see what happened I failed the Home Office accreditation check. As it transpired after weeks and weeks of [inaudible] the problem it transpired that the Home Office had made a mistake and got the wrong person – someone with the same name as myself, same date of birth as myself but [inaudible] so it cost me six weeks of potential training to take part. Once the mistake was realized the Home Office changed their mind and LOCOG really pulled out all the stops to get me a part that I could really accept. So I went back to London for the final two weeks of training in the harness and I took part as one of the five other Paralympians, in the air, at the Olympic Stadium carrying the golden javelin.

When I walked out on the evening it was cold and you could see the little wires in the sky which clip to you and take you up in the air and the ear piece it says: “you go up in twenty seconds” and I thought “here we go again”. I got the same buzz from that just before a competition; adrenaline kicked and focused on what I had to do just like going back in time for me. It was like twenty-five years ago, before an event everything disappeared; I focused on winning the medals and that was all that counted: this was the same. The fear of heights had to be dispensed with first of all which I was pretty scared about but I know I had to do it it’s a mental thing. And they took you up on a wire line [inaudible] and four different Paralympians who did different events twenty-five year ago, in the air in front of twenty thousand people. What more can you say? The highlight, the pinnacle of a career that lasted ten years but went quiet – this will never happen again in my lifetime – and to be involved in it was something else but I got the chance because of my Paralympic past and this is what happened.

NY: So could you just say a little bit more for people who don’t know what you actually did

when you were in the air, just to describe what you were doing?

TG: Basically we had five Paralympians in the air in the air in a harness, simulating the actual event that they won medals in Paralympic Games from the past. I carried the golden javelin in the air because I was a gold medalist in javelin. We had a judo man who won a silver medal in Barcelona; a wheelchair tennis player – she won medal in tennis and a wheelchair racer [inaudible] she was an officially recognized Paralympian but we're all in there together [inaudible] simulating what we did twenty-five years ago or whenever it was, whatever sport we won medals in that's what we're doing in the air and it was tremendous. I saw myself on TV going in but on the way I had to hold the javelin, which is like seven foot long, and do back somersaults with it – and you should try doing a somersault with a javelin thirty metres in the air when you're scared of heights. And that was it – I did the two somersaults and I waved my javelin to the crowd every time I did it – yelling and screaming. I couldn't see anything because of the lights behind the panels, they had their lights on so you can't see the people but I could hear the noise and all the smoke. The atmosphere was just unbelievable it was electric. And that changed my year put it that way.

NY: And also, you've been involved locally, in doing stuff [interruption]

TG: As I said to you previously I missed six weeks training because of a mistake by someone at the Home Office or whoever it was, cost me six weeks training [inaudible]. I was supposed to carry the Olympic torch on 24 June in Leeds. This didn't happen because of the same mistake that I mentioned because the torch had already been carried there was no going back so I missed that particular well community event really and I was absolutely gutted at the time. But once the mistake was revealed to LOCOG, LOCOG pulled out all the stops to make sure that I carried the Paralympic torch which I would say put me more in touch with myself anyway. This torch represents England at Stoke Mandeville lighting the cauldron. There are four torches – England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. This is the English torch and this is the Paralympic champion that lit the cauldron at Stoke Mandeville with it. Another proud moment in my life to go to the Opening Ceremony – what a year this has been 2012 for me [interruption].

As I said the last five years have transformed me as a Paralympian: I have been recognised by my hometown but I have also been recognized by my country – finally. Two years ago I received an invitation to the Royal Garden Party from the Lord Chamberlain; he dropped us the invitation for myself, my wife and two of my children. We all went to Buckingham Palace very smartly dressed like everybody else at the Palace, we had the usual cucumber sandwiches and were treated like stars. Inside the Palace very nice day, the sun was shining, found ourselves with cakes and very posh people, I thought: “oh my goodness we're here” but honestly it was because of what I did in the past. And I said to my children: “were over eighteen year olds from Bolton, so to do to Buckingham Palace with their dad I'm sure they were quite proud of me. Nothing was said but I am quite sure they were so what an experience for them and what an experience for me as a father to take them there, again because I am a Paralympian and always will be.

NY: OK I want to ask you some question looking forward now because in some ways you are part of the heritage of the Paralympic movement of this country, right, in terms of you have

an expertise and an experience looking back that lots of people don't have. So I am really interested to hear, like, what would you have to say to young athletes in general – obviously young disabled people who, you know, what would you want to say to them about getting involved in athletics or following that?

TG: I mentioned school visits that I do as a Paralympian and my message to them, to parents, is: “get your children involved with sport” whether they have a disability or whether they have not got a disability”. Sport is for all and I think children should get their children involved at an early age. How it happened for me it was possible physiotherapy at first but I started to like sport and when I do my presentations I show them my pictures of me with various Olympic stars, Paralympic stars in front of these children, these students: “be in involved with sport and you can travel the world the same as I have”. You may not be always top class athletes, students for example they could become physiotherapists or doctors. But you could still be involved with sport and travel around the world with the British team treating athletes. So travelling with those who can help through sport, not [inaudible] just be involved and that's what I tell people when I visit schools. At their age they can do anything they want to in life and the parents that have got disabled children: “Look at me I have five or six children and my life is brilliant really and there's no reason anybody's who's got a disability shouldn't have the life I have had, have the children I've got. I consider myself to be as normal as a normal person is and there is no reason why any disabled person shouldn't be the same – or a disabled child or student – can do what I've done. And my message is simple: “go to your sports clubs, take part in local school sports days. Anything can happen with the right mental attitude and the right support of parents, teachers etc. I did it so why can't you?”

NY: Great. So it is interesting to me to also hear, and I think it is important to not ignore this part of a lot of people experience discrimination.

TG: I agree.

NY: Would you say that you have experienced discrimination during your life or within the sporting arena?

TG: Probably. Discrimination – where do you go with that word? You're not going to get away from the word discrimination. Attitudes and perceptions change over the years and they have changed dramatically but people get discriminated subconsciously by people, people don't realise that they're actually doing it and whilst attitudes can change it is still happening today. I remember once I came back from a competition. I went to a town hall in Salford and sign in to reception like a normal reception would be and I left my car outside. Beside me this guy was sat behind the wheel. I heard this loud posh, posh old lady say: “oh he can drive” with such amazement and I thought: “are all these people on the same planet?” and this is what some people are faced with. At the time – twenty five years ago – I couldn't believe it was happening then and I am still sure some people still have the same attitudes today but hopefully it's being got rid of bit by bit and as I said before I think 2012 has changed the perception of the public completely. I went down there to watch the Paralympic Games and there was two to three hundred thousand people going to watch these Paralympic Games every day – that is a huge turnaround and whilst discrimination will always be there the attitudes towards us are getting [inaudible] rather than [inaudible] so, I think it's getting there but it's got a long way to go yet in

terms of media and press but we're getting there – what more can you do? The Paralympic movement this year has took off – so let's keep it flying.

NY: And kind of adding in to that, where do you hope the Paralympic movement will go next and what will happen?

TG: At this time the Paralympic movement is obviously moving forward from 2012. Ideally, in my opinion, I would like to see the Games merged into one – competing at the same time same place. The logistics of that I am not sure about and I don't think it's going to happen in the near future but ultimately I can see no reason why it shouldn't given the public's acceptance of Paralympic athletes I see no reason apart from time and maybe a few adjustments to be made why they couldn't compete in the same stadium at the same time with the same coverage. I hope that's where we're going and assume we will get there one day but the powers that be must decide and recommend it to members in the next ten years for sure I feel [inaudible] in the next ten years because that is what I would like to see happen. That would be the ultimate recognition of Paralympic athletes. Oscar Pistorius took part in the Olympics – the first time a Paralympian [inaudible], I believe – in future I would both Games to be merged together and I see no reason why it couldn't happen if you were trying hard to make it happen.

NY: Great. And I thought – you have spoken a bit about what you are doing now about doing motivational speaking and going out and speaking to schools. I thought it would be helpful for people to hear how the children respond to you, the teachers, how your audience responds to what you have to say.

TG: I do school visits up and down the country and as you can imagine the response varies from school to school but as yet ever single school I've visited so far the response has been overwhelmingly in my favour. I have never sat down before and signed a hundred and fifty autographs and had queues of students queuing round waiting for half an hour to get a picture with myself [inaudible]. I took twenty-five pictures to school thinking maybe I'll sign a few autographs. The teachers who I was working with came back with one hundred and fifty and said: "you'll need these" and every one of those children, all the students, [inaudible] they all thought I was a superstar. I've had experience to such an extent that I'm about to believe it myself and when I go to schools now, each one is different, but they treat me like a normal, every day star like, for example, David Beckham. They give the same response and the thanks and appreciation is amazing to see kids. There is a school I went to, for example in Essex down near where I carried the Paralympic torch – [inaudible] take my home movie in it – [inaudible] and a mother came over and her camera hadn't worked – would I mind doing it again for her – and so obviously I took [inaudible], five-year-old little brother was there, let her hold the torch, helped her, had my picture taken, all smiles, superb – it's unbelievable the feeling I got out of that, but that's what happens.

I'm inspiring people, I know I am, but in the Paralympian I am getting treated like an Olympian in my village and this is the whole point. I didn't know what to expect, I thought maybe a couple of people would start laughing or taking the mick, whatever these things can happen in schools, but they didn't. I was shocked myself to be treated with respect which is a seven letter word and respected is what these Paralympic athletes deserve respect. I mean I get it now and I am sure in the future I am sure I will get it all.

NY: And I wanted to just ask a couple more things. The first one what do you hope for your future now, like looking forward?

TG: So what does the future hold for me is the question. I know I am a recognized Paralympic star in Bolton and I believe that [inaudible]. I want to carry on with my school visits and I hope to one day to be recognized nationally but who knows. I am a family man with six children – my children may go onto to do things that [interruption]. So what does the future hold for me? I think my children are the future for me. My own son is a boxing northwest champion. All my children participate in sport. I intend to get every single one of them in some shape or form. Hopefully this little guy may be a footballer, who knows? I hope to get some sort of national recognition at some point and I believe this is on the cards at the moment. So that's it really. What does the future hold – you don't know do you but I am a star in Bolton and I hope for recognition nationwide before I am finished doing the Paralympic movement [interruption]

So what does the future hold for me? No one knows what the future hold but I am a Paralympic star in Bolton, hopefully I will become a national Paralympic star in the future. In my head my children are my future. They will become like stars possibly if I have anything to do with it. And this little boy here could be a footballer and my other son is a boxer. Either way me future is bright from my past experience as a Paralympian [son Rio jumps up] Are you off eh? Are you going to stay for a bit? [laughter] Tell me your name.

RG: Rio

[Little chat back and forward with TG, RG and NY then joined by AG]

NY: OK, So. Here we both are. I thought it would be really nice because you were talking a lot about Andrew before [mobile interruption] OK I thought it would be really interesting for you maybe to talk – given you already – about I don't know, about what your feelings are, what your hopes are for Andrew given your history and stuff in athletics and what Andrew is doing and then Andrew to have a chance to say about the impact of you on him.

TG: Well Andrew is twenty years old. When I was twenty years old I was travelling the world on the international scene competing. So obviously as a father I want my son to do things I've done. And I've pushed him so far very hard to do what he's doing today – boxing – and now he's doing it all his self off [inaudible]. The training is being done, the hard work's being done. The pushing by me has all been done and now I want him to have the success I've had, travelling the world like I did. Obviously he's two fights away from being English national champion: should this happen well who knows where it might lead? I think he possibly be picked up by the selectors possibly for the next Olympic Games. I mean anything is possible but should that happen that would be a highlight for me having done it in the past myself. And obviously as a father again I want him to be a successful boxer.

NY: And Andrew how has it been for you having the support and what's it like...

AG: Pressure [TG laughs]

NY: ...having a famous having a famous Paralympian as a father?

AG: It's all pressure really but you just got to train hard and do what you got to do really to win. To win fights it's all about training. If you don't train you don't get an outcome in your fights

and I've realised that because last season wasn't really a good season for me but I came back this season realising what I had to do what I needed to do and just realised I must train. But it's pressure with family when you've got people pushing you, people wanting you to do stuff, do well and win fights it's a bigger pressure but you've got to stay focused.

NY: And what are your own hopes?

AG: Well to be national champion really. I've come all the way. Basically I was in national champ, regional champs, which was northwest. I won that and then to become a national champion would be even better but you've just got to take one fight at a time really.

NY: And you talk about there being almost like a pressure of your Dad's achievements. What are the positive sides of that as well?

AG: It's a great feeling really, getting in the ring after all this hard work that you do, getting in the ring and winning a fight. It's a great feeling because you know you have trained hard for it you've done well for it and you know you deserve what you've got really through the training and what you've done.

TG: As I said previously boxing these days are modern day gladiators. When they are in the ring they are on their own, man against man. As a father to sit there and watch my adrenaline is going more than his, I'm probably more pumping than his but obviously the winning feeling at the end, that's what it's all about. I have never liked losing in all that I do. And when the winning feeling is there I know what's going through his head. When he gets the winner Andy Griffin now he's got I know what it feels like, you just can't beat it. It's just like scoring a goal for a professional footballer. That's why it's all about winning not losing. No one remembers a loser and I want him to be a winner.

AG: That's why Dad whose made it in Paralympics, it's like, it puts a pressure line on me to focus on what I'm doing to get where I want to be, to where my Dad's been. I've travelled around been places and done things in different places. So boxing in my eyes, stepping into the ring to fight to win for what I want to do, it's hard but it, like I said, it all comes with the training. The amount of training you put in gets to what the outcome you get and to have a Dad to push you that far and then to realise that I've got to do it all myself at certain points, it's mad but you just get there at times and you train hard, focused and then you win and it's a great feeling.

[INTERVIEW ENDS]