

## **Interview with James Brown at home**

**Interviewer Klara Janicki, November 2012**

### **What brought you to sport?**

*I got involved in sport initially by the age of five, and I guess you wouldn't really call it sport, but my mum took me cycling on the roads which is probably quite an unusual thing and maybe unexpected for somebody with only five percent sight but I had demonstrated that I was really interested in riding a bike - and my sister who was older than me, she didn't have her stabilisers off her bike yet, but I did. Because my mum saw how keen I was she took me out riding. We lived in a really quiet area – a tiny seaside town, so roads were quiet and safe. But I guess just the fact that my mum didn't place any limits on me, so she didn't think: oh he can't see therefore he can't ride a bike, she was the first one who took me out actually - and I just wish she was still alive, because she would have loved to have been in London, she loved London.*

*Like I said it wasn't really a sport, but it was independence I suppose, my first touch of independence and a bike has always been my mode of transport. I explain to people that riding a bike on the road is actually much easier than walking along the footpath from a visual point of view, because the road is so much more organized and the pavement is confused as you don't know which way people are going, back or forward, toward you or away, and you have bollards and kerbs and chains and stuff. The road is so much more organised environment. That is why my mode of transport is the bike and the train.*

*I suppose my first experience of sport was when I went to school at the College for the Blind in Worcester. In the September of my second year when I returned after the summer holidays my best friends said: oh we are doing the Hyde Park Fun run in three weeks time, and I've entered you in it, I thought well, OK, and we trained for three weeks and that was my first experience of running. And I suppose I did quite well in it and it just went from there, I just got completely hooked on sport after that.*

**I know, that cycling is not the only sport you are devoted to, so can you give some kind of timeline as to how you got into sports?**

*I was 13 when I did the fun run in London, by the age of 15 I was I suppose quite good on the national visually impaired scene, I hadn't done anything internationally by that stage. We had an opportunity to go skiing with a school in Aviemore in Scotland, and of course I really enjoyed that. I was lucky enough to get a good instructor, and the following year I wanted to go again, but there were limited places and they said: well if you went last year you can't go this year, but by the way of consolation, if you want to go to Norway and do cross country skiing, then you can. Of course that was a brilliant opportunity. And of course I did, and again, I guess with the running background and with a knack for technical sport I picked it up quickly enough, that I was actually selected to the British Paralympic Team, after one week on skis. And my second week on skis was the World Championships the following year in Switzerland. That was 1982; 1983 I did the European Athletics Championships in Bulgaria, where I had been built up to win. Everybody's expectations around me were that I would, because all the evidence suggested that I should - and I didn't!*

### **How did it feel?**

*I was absolutely devastated. It took me years to get over that failure. And I am sad that I wasn't better prepared for the various outcomes, for winning or losing. It was a shame, but I guess I made it up for the following year – New York, the World Disabled Games in lieu of the Paralympics in 1984. I got two gold medals and set the world record for the 800m, and also competed in the Winter Paralympics that same year in Austria. No medals, but I guess for somebody from a non-snow nation just even to get to the top ten was quite an achievement. So that was probably my most successful year in terms of medals, records and stuff.*

*Then I finished school and decided that in order to be better at skiing then I probably ought to go to live in Norway, which I did for a year. I really enjoyed that and I still have great friends there. I went to school there, what is called Folk High school, which is a place, a number of them in Norway, where young people go between school and university or school and military service or whatever. We studied sport and music and stuff - well actually I skived off the lessons most of the time so I could do as much skiing as I could. At university then the following year I was getting*

*to a very high standard in running, so as well as being at kind of the top in the visually-impaired world, I was getting to be quite good in the non-disabled world. And to me that was potentially a big achievement. I ended up having to quit running because of a back problem which was directly related to my sight impairment. Because when I was studying at a desk I had to sit bent over, with a pen in one hand and hand magnifier in the other. It's not the way we do it nowadays, but that's the way we did it then. It put a lot of pressure on my lower back and I am actually only just recovering from that, and it caused me to give up running.*

*I was incredibly depressed after that for a few months, until some friends persuaded me to go to watch the British Student Triathlon Championships in Wales (Aberystwyth). They said, bring your bike, so you can ride around the course, just to watch and spectate and support us, which I did. And I don't know if it was a conscious plan on their part, probably wasn't, it just transpired, but in the pub the night before, we got chatting to somebody and my friends who I'd gone with, my fellow students, said if we can get you a wet suit do you fancy taking part? And stupidly I said yes, so I did, and I beat all the rest of my university team and finished in the top ten and thought oh yes, this is a sport for me. And that was of course an open competition it wasn't Para triathlon, as it is called now, which is only just really being invented. The first Para triathlon to appear at the Paralympics is going to be in Rio and I am maybe thinking about having a go. So that was my introduction to triathlon. I didn't look back; I did it for about 10 years, competing all over the world on a quite high level.*

*I never actually told the organisers of events that I took part in that I had a sight-impairment, until the World Championships at Nice. Nice was a massive race, 3 miles swimming in the sea, 100 miles bike, 20 miles run. I arranged to do it with one of my fellow students as a guide and I thought I'd better tell the organizers we are doing this. But as soon as I did, they said sorry we can't let you, can't let you take part. There were quite a lot of phone calls and faxes*

or whatever they were at these days between their solicitors and mine because I refused to accept their judgement. The solicitors really came to loggerheads and I thought we need a different approach to this. So I went down to the race office the day before the race, and said, look what is your problem, what are you worried about, why do you not want me to race? They said, it is a very difficult bike course and we had 45 accidents last year, actually more than that but 45 people ended up in the hospital. Very twisty in the mountains, a lot of crashes and so on. And I said well come on and watch me riding. Which they agreed to do, and I said take me to what you think is the most dangerous part of the course, which they did. Luckily, my guide and I had sussed it out the day before, and we'd practised it and we'd identified the point that we thought they would choose and they did. And I rode by myself without the guide and they were trying to keep up with me in an open-top sports car, and I was going around the bends quicker than they could. The chairman of the organizing committee was quite a posh bloke and I distinctly remember him saying once they didn't catch up with me, he said something like, if you're blind you're like that chap who plays pinball on the film. So the deaf, dumb and blind guy sure plays a mean pinball. So they let me race, and I did OK.

After that I did some events that were more suited to my ability which were really shorter ones; like in Chicago I finished in the top 30 out of 7000 competitors and I think maybe there were 120-150 professionals at the race. So I was quite pleased with that result, it's probably one of my greatest achievements. I guess I kind of retired from sport for a while from about 1994. I did the Winter Paralympics in 1992 in Albertville. I'm quite proud to the fact that I brought the British team home in third place on the first leg of the relay against all of the other snow nations. I always enjoyed the cross country relay actually because it is quite an aggressive race and I like head-to-head combat, you know, that really motivates me. I raced with a guide in front. I had one particular guide who I always did the relays with, he wasn't quick enough to do longer races with me, but we always did the relays which were only about 5k together. He and I would set off. (It was a mass start which is unusual for cross-country ski race; normally you are just

*skiing at one minute intervals against the clock) So we would set off with sticks flying and lots and lots of shouting between me and him, and the other guides and the other skiers, a real battle to a kind of fight for position.*

*I really enjoyed that trip actually and then I kind of gave up. I don't really know why but well I did. It wasn't a conscious thing, I just stopped. And round about 2000-2001 I decided I was putting on the weight and getting a bit bored and I thought I'd take up swimming because I could do it during the winter, didn't have to go outside, I could do it any time a day, didn't have to depend on anybody else, I lived near a pool, so it was quite obvious. I started going swimming in the public sessions at half seven in the morning, whenever the pool opened. Started off in the middle lane, progressed to the fast lane, and then got quicker than the other people in the fast lane; and then I had to overtake them and got frustrated because there were crashes with people coming the other way, and they got frustrated with me - actually got quite annoyed. And one of them pulled me to the side one day (after they'd told me where to go) and suggested that maybe I should swim with the youngsters on the 5 o'clock in the morning sessions, because then I'd get a lane for myself. I did that, had a coach obviously. We were swimming against people of a very high standard and really progressed quite quickly I suppose. In fact, I made the qualifying time for the Beijing games in 400 freestyle but I didn't go. It was a bit of an accident. I was getting a bit excited about the times I was doing and I lived in Ireland at the time, and I phoned the Irish Paralympic swimming manager and said: what's the Irish record for 400 free for my sight category. And I had broken it, but not only that, they said to me: oh well actually you've made the qualifying time for Beijing. But like I say, it just wasn't the right time in my life to go. Kids were young and I was having lots of difficulties personally and I just didn't need all the pressure of taking part in the Paralympics at that time. So, I pottered with my swimming for a bit.*

*Then I moved to England, got in touch with an old university friend on Facebook (and I think it was actually really just*

to see if I could, just how good is this Facebook thing? Can I find people that I've lost touch with?) I got in touch with this guy Pete, invited him down for the weekend, and as we were chatting late one night, and he said, why don't you come up to Wales and do some mountain-biking? At that stage of night of course you would agree with anything. So I went up to north Wales and I think I explicitly asked him just to take me around the flat track around the lake, because mountain biking wasn't something I had done before. I was pretty scared. It's really unusual I suppose for me to think that I can't do something. But I suppose there's a good reason as well because I can't tell the difference between 6 inch drop and 6 foot drop, and although I've got a good all-around vision it's very blurred. I have got good core perception but no depth perception, so I didn't want to go riding around a track where there were going to be big drops and jumps, and things. But anyway after a couple of minutes he determined that we were going to go round the track with the jumps and the drops, with him guiding me and giving me instructions, he knew it really well he had been working there for a couple of years. And I was completely hooked on mountain-biking after that. It actually also taught me a lot about relationships and trust, because I discovered that with somebody who was really, really good at what they did, they could enable me to do something that I thought I couldn't do.

I came back home, joined the local cycle club, pitched up there and said: hi, I'm visually impaired but I can do mountain biking if you guide me. Two or three of them said ok, we are up to that. So I taught them how to do it and got to the point where I didn't even have to make specific arrangements for a Saturday morning, I could just turn up, and there was always somebody who was willing to, "I'll shout for you today", or whatever. And I guess after about 2-3 months of that (and then I started riding to work as well, cross-country. Living on the edge of Cotswolds here it's quite challenging ride, like 1 in 3 hills) I started realizing that I was quicker than most of the other riders, certainly on the climbs, and I thought, well, London is coming, it would be rude not to have a go. I had a tandem in the attic which I took out and I persuaded one of the guys that I was riding with at the time to pilot the tandem and we took part in a

*couple of the British National Para-cycling series, and again did ok in that.*

*I the had - I wouldn't say a choice, but I had a decision I suppose - to approach either British Cycling or Cycling Ireland; and I had heard that Cycling Ireland had an existing endurance tandem squad, whereas British Cycling were focusing on sprinting, the track riders, on the velodrome, so I made the approach to the Irish team. Born in Northern Ireland I am eligible to compete for either GB or Ireland, and thankfully they took me on, and they said: well if you pay your way to come to the first World cup event we will see how you get on. And I did and I beat all the rest of the Irish riders and was immediately leapfrogged to the front of the queue for London.*

*And yes, as they say, the rest is history. So that is the full lowdown of my sport history. I've actually got much fitter than I expected, thanks to great coaching, nutrition and sport science and medical support. I am probably fitter than I was even when I was in my twenties, which surprises me and I just think, where can we go from here? I have managed to achieve this level, and I am thinking I would love to do another winter games. So we have the Winter Paralympics in two years time in Sochi in Russia, and it would be lovely to do that, and triathlon is appearing for the first time in Paralympics in Rio 2016. I might as well have a go at that.*

*I have started running again. All the training that I have been doing in the gym has corrected my long standing back problems, mostly to do with kind of strengthening my core. I am very excited about it - what might happen in Rio, whether I get there or not, I don't know, but I hope I can. I think I can make the standard, so I am pretty excited about that.*

### **What does sport mean to you?**

*Initially when I took up sport it was a means of my proving myself, because I felt disabled, I knew I was different. And I used it as a means to prove myself to the world. I don't know if that worked. I was pretty immature and arrogant at that time. So instead of focusing on forming relationships and having friends I just focused on maths and sport, maths and running. It was a difficult time growing up through school and university. I had a very difficult time at university actually (I still have nightmares about it) I chose the wrong one, because I could get into one of the most academic*

*courses in maths in the country, I did. But I really should have done something more vocational, I regret that actually. But I didn't know any different. But what does sport mean to me now?*

*I have done a lot of work on understanding myself over more recent years. I was lucky enough to have worked with somebody who did something called a values elicitation exercise with me. I worked on what is really important to me on a result of that. It's a really cool thing to do actually, because when you work out what's important for you; and for me in order I have 'discovery' as my top core value, then 'excellence', then 'fun', 'trust' and 'love'. So it really helps me to understand why I do sports. So I don't have 'winning' and I don't have 'recognition' in my value set, but I do have 'discovery' and 'excellence' and 'fun'. And when I realized that that is the reason why I did sport it enabled me to accept myself a lot better and I understand why I did it and understand why I got the outcomes that I did and why I behaved the way I did in the sporting environment. So now I am much more comfortable with myself and my sport, and of course you know, it would be nice to have my time again with a more mature head and the more mature approach that I have got now. But hey ho, that's life, everybody goes through it. I guess I am just very thankful and very lucky that I have managed to pick it up again, and get back up to a good standard. And I am very excited by the way the Paralympic sport is going.*

### **How much time do you devote to training?**

*I don't train right now actually because we are in a bit of recovery phase after London. But leading up to London I was probably actually training about 15 hours a week, maybe 12, 12-15. So that would be 3-4 hours some days.*

*As far as training goes, at the moment I am not doing a lot, I actually only trained about twice this week, 2-3 times, but in the run up to London I was doing, 12+, 12-15 hours a week of actual training. The other thing you have to take into consideration is the stuff around the training: just getting yourself organized, sorting kit, nutrition, recovery time, and added onto my two jobs. It really was a big challenge actually, just to fit in the training, and of course the one thing which suffered, which I didn't do, was recovery. So the athletes who are full time, they do the training, but then they spend most of the rest of the day on the sofa just recovering, which is what your body needs. But I didn't get a chance to do it. I would love to be able to. But then again I get bored, I do have to always be busy. I'd love to find the balance - the right amount of work, and the right amount of training and the right amount of recovery.*

### **Could you compare life of Paralympian Athlete to a non-disabled professional sportsman?**

*There are quite a number of full time Paralympians actually. Because I came into cycling quite late and because I just started two new businesses, I couldn't really devote myself full-time. I didn't have any immediate results to justify funding to be a full-time athlete. There are number of athletes on our cycling team that are full-time and I am a bit envious of them in a way but in another way actually, immediately after a big competition like London, or the World championship in LA back in February, I can come back and immediately focus again on work, and it is actually a really good way of recovering from the games. It kind of makes you realize that sport isn't the only thing in the world, and that is a good realization to be able to have. After London we did a week of crazy, crazy media stuff, it was limos, hotel suites, television studio, aeroplanes and prime ministers and stuff for a week (and that was all back in Ireland. I was required because I was competing for Ireland in London to travel from London to home in Stonehouse via Dublin, which I wouldn't have done if I hadn't got a medal) I was secretly planning just to sneak off quietly and come back home. But we got the medal and kind of felt obliged to do the whole media thing. It was madness for a week, but we eventually ducked out of it and flew home back to the kids. There was actually one day in the first week back that I had a quite a shock, I was actually terrified, I didn't want anybody to speak to me, I guess after all that attention after going through Dublin airport with thousands of people there, who wanted to see the medal, wanted to shake your hand, people that you have never met before, wanting autographs and photographs, and everything. It was just a real contrast to that being back home again. I was so pleased to be able to walk down the street and not have anybody approach me, and be able just to focus on work. So I am actually quite grateful that in a way I am not full-time. You know, at the end of the day sport isn't the be-all and end-all. And I wouldn't like to be in a position where it was. I like to have variety in my life, I do like to have a lot of things going on, on the one hand whilst I would maybe be able to perform better if I was full-time; I think I would get a bit bored to be honest. I like to have work, it means a lot to me.*

### **What do you consider your biggest achievement in sport and life?**

*My biggest achievement is my family definitely, I've just got the most amazing kids and wife, we got engaged less than 24 hours after we met, because we both knew that we could make a great family together, and we did, luckily. Sports-wise, it may seem odd, but my biggest achievement is somebody else's achievement. After university I went back to my old school, the College for the Blind in Worcester, to see whether I liked teaching. I always thought I wanted to be a teacher, but I loved the school so much I just couldn't get enough of it, so I went back and worked as a*

*volunteer, started off just doing general support around the place. They had a scheme for volunteers and they had overseas students to come and work there, so I became one of those. But I quickly recognized there were a bunch of potential athletes who were not receiving the coaching and support that they needed in order to be able to achieve what they could. So I worked with half a dozen of the kids, who had the potential to be top sports people, coached them and actually acted as a guide runner for two of them. I have got enough sight to be able to run by myself, also enough to be able to guide somebody else luckily, but I suppose the fact that I'd spent seven years at the school learning the local roads, I was able to take two of the runners, one at a time obviously, totally blind guys. One of them in particular was really interested in the middle distance events that I had done well, so I coached him and guided him, and worked with him over the course of the year and then went to the World Youth Games for the disabled in France, in Saint Etienne. I was the middle distance coach for the team, but also Darren Cook's guide-runner and we thought he might do ok, and he actually won his first race which was the 800 metres and we put him into the 1500 metres as well. Because there weren't enough totally blind youngsters in the race, they combined all the sight categories together so he was running against the unguided partially-sighted runners. I remember to this day the realization on about the third lap that we were going to catch the American runner, who was running without a guide, and I said to Darren, "I'm gonna stop talking", (because one of the things you do as a guide you give a kind of a commentary on where you are in the field and I could see enough to realise that we were capturing the leading runner) and I said to Darren, "I'm gonna shut up because we're going to take this guy by surprise". And we overtook him on the bend coming into the last lap, and won the race. We also decided to do the 400 metres which he won as well, and in fact he took six seconds off his personal best for 400 metres. He completely astonished himself and me; I had to let him go on the finishing straight because I couldn't keep up with him. And it's just sad, that he hasn't been able to continue running because it's very hard for blind runners to get guides of the right standard, I will still keep in touch with Darren but that was definitely my biggest achievement, guiding him to his three gold medals in the World games.*

**Was there any inspiration for you during your sporting career?**

*I had two teachers at school who were a big influence on me. Not so much by their example, but just by their support. It was a boarding school in Worcester, and at the weekends there were two of the teachers who just seemed always to be there for me. If I wanted to go and run or train at a session in Birmingham, which was a 40 minutes drive, they were just there. They really enabled me, and I am just so grateful to them for that. One was the PE teacher, and one*

*was a guy who was employed at the school to take kids out on adventure activities and stuff. And even if it was just me and one of them in the school mini bus driving to Manchester for a competition, it would still happen. They were the guys that really got me to where I got initially.*

### **Are you an inspiration for your children, are they into sports?**

*My son is into cycling but cycling of a different nature, he spends most of the time upside down. So he does dirt jumping and four cross and those kinds of things. We haven't actually ridden the tandem together, but we might come the summer. He is pretty talented and very strong. Alice our daughter - sport isn't one of her things but she is very interested in the story. I have just started to do talks in schools about... well on the face of it about my sport, but I turned it into something completely different. It is more a conversation about the kids themselves and their potential and their interests and values. And Alice has been working on it very closely with me, doing all the multimedia, and thinking about what the message will be, how to deliver it and the content of the presentations that I have been doing. So yes, she is interested from that perspective and incredibly helpful actually. She is able to tell me what she thinks kids of certain age would want to hear or would be interested in or how they might respond to certain messages, so that has been very helpful in terms of setting up these presentations.*

### **Tell me something about this project**

*I have been almost bombarded with requests from schools since the end of the games in London. Of course there was a lot of attention on the Paralympics and I guess I know a lot of people who work in schools and many, many of them have said to me, could you come in and give us a talk. But because I've already got enough jobs, I turned down those requests mostly. But my old university friend who got me into mountain-biking, that is 4 years ago, and then from there on the road to London, he asked me to talk at his school and I couldn't say no because, it was because of him, that I ended up getting in to London in a way, so he asked me to go to do the talk to his years 9<sup>s</sup>, 270 of them, called "Be the Best you can Be", part of a personal development programme that they are doing. And I thought well, given the title, and given that it is him, I guess I've got to do it the best I can. And I put a lot of time into it and, as I said, Alice, my daughter, helped me. And I am just back from North Wales, where I actually ended up delivering the presentation four times over the space of a day and a half to four different audiences, biggest of which was the Year 9 group 270-280 of them, but also they had a parents coffee morning on, so impromptly I was asked to speak to the parents, so I did a bit a summary of the presentation to them.*

*What I decided to do really was to talk to the kids about what is important in life to them and to allow them and to give them a permission to acknowledge that what is important to them is theirs. Their values are personal and important and that even though our Western commercialised capitalist society would lead one to believe that celebrity and money and recognition ought to be everybody's aim and values that actually that isn't really the case and that the person who has a value set which is more based around love and trust and support, helping others and friendship, that those values are as valid if not more so, than the ones that we think we've been taught by the media are the important ones. So being the best you can is about first of all knowing what is important to you, knowing what your values are, and secondly consciously and consistently doing stuff which honours those values.*

*That gives people permission to understand that those who choose to work in childcare, for example, or working with adults, working with people in those apparently undervalued jobs, it gives them a permission to understand and accept that those jobs are just as important as being a business leader. And I think that it's quite a cool message in a way. And I think the kids thought that too. Because so often people who work in the caring professions are undervalued, but actually, there is this kind of unspoken thing about, well, we do this job because it is worth doing. But I think once it becomes explicit and people say I am doing this because it is honouring my values, and I know what they are, and I am recognizing those (it may not be financially rewarded in a way that it ought to be), but at least when you know and are able to be open about the reasons that you are doing certain things in your life, then it makes it all more understandable. The other thing about understanding values is it's very helpful in terms of being able to recognize what upsets you and why you get stressed about stuff. I've had some difficult time, mental health issues and so on, and once I began to understand why I was going through those things, what was happening, who I was being with and why I was getting stressed, it suddenly made sense when I realized that my value of fairness or trust was being compromised by somebody else and that was what was stressing me. It enabled me to suddenly make sense of it all and actually to turn the curve and move away from where I was. I mean in sport I don't have the value of recognition and I don't have the value of winning and that is maybe the two of the things you might expect a sport person to have. But I do have discovery and excellence, and it is just interesting when I am talking to kids to explain, that is why I do sport; and whenever I present an audience with what is important to me, than they can quickly see why I am where I am, even though it is maybe sometimes a bit counterintuitive. It is a very useful exercise to be able to do, and I am looking forward to doing more actually, if somebody would pay me.*

**You have experienced two summer and three winter Paralympics already. Could you somehow make a comparison with where the Paralympics are heading to?**

*It is very exciting to see what happened in London. Our chef de mission was involved in the LOCOG meetings and the preparations for the games and every time he came back he said, this is going to be a really special games, don't underestimate how amazing this is going to be. And he was dead right. It was. I think everybody knows that. Everybody knows that the London Paralympics were something special, like never happened before. And, some are saying, might never happen again – in terms of the audiences and the atmosphere. I think Rio could be great. I am actually, directly as a result to what happened in London, proud to be disabled, whereas I was embarrassed to be disabled before. I actually sit on the bus and on the train now and I take my phone and I look close at it and I don't care, if people watch and think blimey, he is looking very close to his phone there must be something wrong with him. Whereas actually now I feel that I am being public about my sight impairment and I am actually proud of it. And that is because Paralympians are now recognized, whereas we weren't before. It is really nice to hear people who previously have had no experience, no interest in Paralympic sport or maybe disability, talking in pubs knowledgably about the subtle differences between the T 44 and the T 45 200 metre race, and the capabilities of the athletes in the two categories and why they might put them in the same race together and whether that is fair. That was a conversation which I overheard recently from two guys who were sat at a bar and obviously had no prior experience or interest in Paralympic sport, I think that is just amazing.*

**Why do you think London games achieved that?**

*I think Seb Coe chaired a great organizing committee. He was my hero when I was at school and whenever he was winning over 8[00] and 15[00] in the non-disabled world I was replicating that in the disabled world. I think he is a great guy. But I think Britain is becoming really good at inclusion, a lot of my work is inclusion. I don't think inclusion in education works. It should, it is a great idea and if it was properly resourced it could work. And it works for some very well. At the time it wouldn't have worked for me, but I think there is a lot of good stuff going on in this country about inclusion. I think the last few Paralympic Games have been run by the same organization in the same venue as the Olympics and I think so many people have actually said to me and to others that they were even more interested and even more excited by the Paralympics than they were by the Olympics. The Olympics was great, the Paralympics was even better. The Channel 4 advert which came up between the two games promoting the upcoming Paralympics and saying to the BBC: Thanks for the warm up. That just says so, so much and so true as well. The Paralympics was*

*just phenomenal. It was so well organized, and did so much for being disabled. It is great that the best known Paralympians are as well known now as the best known Olympians. Maybe there isn't the financial recognition yet but it should come, it might come.*

*The biggest frustration that I have had - but don't really have any more - was about independence and driving. When I got to the age when my younger brother was doing his driving test and getting his first car, it really hit me hard, that I wasn't going to be able to do that. I was at university and had a really hard time coping with that actually.*

*Whenever I go go-kart racing - which I do occasionally - I am always very conscious of the fact that I don't want the organizers to see that I have the sight impairment and I don't tell them. You always have to fill in a form and sign it, whenever you are queuing up to get your kit and your helmet and I either cause a confusion in the queue so that I get a friend to fill in my form for me, so he fills in his and then he moves back couple of places in the queue and we swap places again and he fills in my form and hope that they won't recognize that. Or if I can arrange that I get to the front of the queue and I say, "I am dyslexic can you fill in that form for me?" I have been to the go-kart racing events where I've had the fastest lap time of the day. I know it is just too much for the uninformed to realize that you actually don't need to be able to see as well as most people think you need to be able to see in order to do stuff. And in all the times that I have driven on the roads either in a car or a quad bike or a motorbike or whatever, I felt completely safe. I have never had an accident (I don't do it that often, I haven't done it for a very long time) but I guess it was just to prove to myself that I could.*

*So we have deliberately chosen to live somewhere, where driving doesn't matter. You might think that it would be London, but actually where we are in the Cotswolds we are on the main train line between Cheltenham and London, it's very easy to get to Bristol, Birmingham and up North, the train station is only a minutes walk from the house. The shops are 30 seconds away and that makes it very easy to live without driving.*