**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File title: ‘John’ interviews GLC about his life and work

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Start of Transcription

00:00 John: Slate 2, take 1.

00:06 Man: Action.

00:08 GLC: The fact that every time I go down the stairs, I go past somebody who’s disabled, one of the residents, or… sorry.

00:18 John: Just start again.

00:22 GLC: I think that one of the great problems that every organisation faces is remoteness. That as you get bigger and bigger, so you get more remote from the people that you’re working for, and of course with. And for me, the very fact that every time I go down the stairs, I meet a disabled person does make me feel much closer— [audio cuts out]

00:46 GLC: See, right at the beginning when I started, my whole life was totally involved with disabled people. I had nothing else - it was just me and them, we were together. And gradually, as we’ve grown, as I think you’ll see, I’ve become more and more removed. And so, I miss this personal involvement. And I have to sit here writing letters and so on… I’m involved in administration; I’m trying to think out the future. I’m not in the same way personally involved with the residents. And so, I look for different ways of trying to maintain that personal contact. Well up here, if you have a look, you’ll see that I’ve got my Christmas cards. We’re just into the new year and I’ve still kept the cards up. Now these Christmas cards mean a tremendous amount to me, because as I sit here and look up, I can recall the people who sent them.

01:49 John: Cut. Very into your Christmas Cards….

[audio jumps to next slate]

01:56 Man: Mark it.

01:58 John: Service Corp intro, slate 3, take 1.

02:08 Man: When we’re ready.

02:10 John: Action.

02:13 GLC: Another thing that means a great deal to me is photographs. And I think people wonder why I walk around with a camera. In fact, when I was at Dehradun, dear old Mrs. Tarkadas who had been looking after the home there for 17 years, looked at me with indignation and said, “you’ve become a camera”. The point is that very early on I used to find I wanted pictures of people, I wanted to be able to remember people. It’s events and people I find that count, that one wants to remember. I used to ask the homes to give me photographs, I never got them. So, in despair I took to using a camera myself. I find that quietly in the evening you go around your photographs or your slides, and you look at them - people come back to you. You remember events that perhaps you’d forgotten. I really can’t stress enough the importance of the personal contact, the difference that it makes. I find that it reminds me of everything that people have done in the past to bring the homes to what they are today. The residents, the staff, the helpers; they’ve all played their part. And what we are today in any walk of life is what we were in the past. We’ve given this legacy, and in return we have to hand on to those who come after us. Whatever we can give them, it’s like passing on a torch. This identity of the human family from the beginning to the end, I think that in this day and age when communications are making such a difference - we can see the poor, and the poor almost can see us - we’re beginning to realise how much we are members of one human family.

04:08 GLC: This, I think, is the great lesson of this age in which we live. And I do think that you, who are embarking on life, are really very privileged if I may say so, because you have opportunities that my generation didn’t really have. Your own work is going to lie amongst the disabled. You may think this is just a tiny little part of what needs doing in the world - it is. But it’s a crucial part, and what you do will really have an effect upon the whole human race. You may not think so, but it will. And of course, you will learn, as I have learnt, or am beginning to learn perhaps I should say, that disability is a world entirely of its own. It’s different from illness and sickness, which is a temporary thing. You will find that the young disabled have one great burning desire, and that is, if I can put it in a nutshell, to be useful - to be wanted. They want, above everything else, to feel that somewhere in the world is a niche for them, where they can make their contribution to the good of the world. That’s what we all want, I think, in our hearts. We want to belong to a family; we want to express ourselves in our own way, I know that. But I think deep down in the human heart is this desire to be useful, to feel that we’re giving something, we’re handing on a better little world in our own little area than we receive. And no matter how disabled a person is, if like Hilary Pole you can only move one little toe, she wants to feel that she’s giving. And our work consists in helping giving that opportunity to them. And we’ll find that in return we’ll receive much more than we ever gave ourselves. That we are truly partners, even the most helpless, and the very fittest - we’re partners in trying to bring about a better world.

06:30 John: Cut

[silence from 06:31 to 6:49, recording jumps to next slate]

06:49 John: Wind up, slate 1, take 1. [pause from 06:50 to 06:59] Action.

07:00 John: Leonard, when we last met, we were talking about India - your misadventure, which seems to have been the start of a very great adventure, the vast development of all the overseas homes for Cheshire. Can you go into any further details about this expansion that’s gone on over these years?

07:18 GLC: I never for one moment expected the kind of expansion that has taken place since. I think I still marvel at the way that so many groups of people under such completely different circumstances have built up their homes. Because obviously at the beginning I was very much personally involved, and there wasn’t anyone else to do it. From there I was invited to go to Singapore - my cousin lived there. I landed in the middle of a riot, the first time I’ve seen a riot - it was a dreadful, dreadful sight to see this.

07:51 John: Was this a riot between the Chinese and Malay?

07:56 GLC: Can we stop? Sorry.

07:58 John: [overlapping] I ask it because—

[recording cuts out]

08:02 GLC: Be a bit different this time, will you?

08:09 Man: Mark it.

08:11 GLC: Slate 1, take 2.

08:19 Man: Camera ready.

08:20 John: Action. Leonard, the last time we met, we were discussing India, and what was a misadventure how it’d become a very great adventure. How fast have the homes expanded overseas since then?

08:33 GLC: Well, I certainly never expected the expansion that’s taken place. And I never cease to marvel at what’s been done by so many different groups of people, under totally differing circumstances. I sit here, and in my mind, I go round them - I think of the homes in South America, to New Guinea, to Hong Kong, Europe. Different places. They’ve completely different situations and different ways in which they started, but in a way, all doing the same thing. From India, we first went to Singapore. Of course, you understand that at the beginning I personally was very much involved - I had to be, because there was nobody else. I only went to Singapore because I have a cousin there who was then secretary to the government, and she invited me. When I landed, there was a riot - it was a terrible riot, I forget what it was about. But it was a traumatic experience to see these mobs surging about. And I was driven out under armed escort to the RAF… it was an occasion when the RAF stood me in good stead, or my connection. We went out to Changi, I was driven along the Changi beach road, and I saw a derelict building. And I asked what that was… anyway, to cut a long story short, it was the old gun site that had been built there to protect Singapore, facing the wrong way, out to sea. It’s now a very beautiful home with a swimming pool; very modern home, very beautifully run. But of course, it started with utterly derelict walls. And working parties from the RAF and the army, they built the first two buildings, or renovated them, completely themselves - it was like the old days at Predannack.

10:22 GLC: Of course, things have changed since then. We don’t always start in old buildings anymore, but my memories of those days are nothing but derelict buildings in different countries. Then gradually other people came along, and they went out their own ways - to West Africa; to the Middle East; and they started their own homes. It would often be somebody who was connected with us, who might be going out to Nigeria on business, and he’d say, “well, would you like me to mention it when I’m there?”. That’s what Wilfred Russell did, and out of it have come the five homes in Nigeria. One of which of course was bombed out in the civil war. But now, to me this is symbolic, when I think of that home. They were bombed out, and Josephine the matron had managed to save the children and get them out before the bombs fell and retreated back behind the firing line. You know how difficult life was inside that enclave, that besieged enclave in ‘68, ‘69. Well, the committee and Josephine together kept all those children, because they were disabled children, safe. And now there’s a magnificent new building being built for them at Orlu. A £15,000 building given by Swiss Caritas. When I went out and saw them, and I saw this little committee, and saw their devotion to their children and their utter determination that they were not going to let those children down, I think it’s symbolic to me of that goodwill that you find in every human heart. And to me it’s the person that counts - if you have a cause that you’re adopting, well you can drop it. If you’re collecting money for some distant thing, you’ll do your best, the day comes that something else takes your mind - you drop it. But when it’s a person, you can see him as an individual, and know that he depends upon you; I’m convinced that this is the motivation. We work through committees, as you know, but I often think that if I could just take a little child, if it’s children, put him on the committee table… let’s stop, shall we?

12:51: Speech ends

12:53: End of recording

End of Transcription