

# THE BODY BLOW

**Broadcast** 27 March 1962, repeated 22 July 1962, 3 August 1962

## **Singers**

Ewan MacColl  
Peggy Seeger

## **Musicians**

Alf Edwards conc+oc  
Peggy Seeger banjo  
Alfie Kahn flute  
Bryan Daly guit

## **Speakers**

Paul Bates  
Ken (Dutchy) Holland  
Norma Smith  
Heather Ruffell  
Jean Haggar

## **Text**

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This is the BBC Home Service from the Midlands. With the cooperation of the Polio Research Fund we present -

The Body Blow.

I remember giving my name, and then this awful suffocation feeling. Couldn't breathe. Next time I woke up I heard this machine, sort of Shhh Shhh. I heard the word Polio but I didn't exactly connect it with myself. I think that it's just a word you read in the papers and you say, Oh that's that awful thing, those people in Kent got., you know, isn't it a shame.

The Body Blow, a Radio Ballad by Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker, on the battle with poliomyelitis fought by five people.

By Norma Smith: I got polio in 1958, and I'm now left paralysed below the waist, no use in my legs at all.

By Heather Ruffell: Well I'm left virtually without any movement except my head. Breathing is difficult. I use my neck muscles a lot, particularly when I'm lying down. But sitting up I have to frog breathe. That's why I sound a bit disjointed.

By Paul Bates: The most upsetting thing about having your tracheotomy done or your throat cut is that you lose the basic form of communication, you cannot speak and that is the most upsetting thing. But for some reason I could speak. And I still can. Quite independently of when the machine's going up or down, whereas other tracheotomies, like Dutchy for instance, they can only speak on the inspiration phase of the machine.

By Dutchy Holland, to whose machine-chopped speech the tape recorder, with the editing that it makes possible, can restore wholeness: We can still do many things that we used to do in the old

days, so please don't pity us and worst of all, don't look at a crippled person and think they're mental. Because believe me they're not.

And the battle fought back in the everyday world of the housewife by Jean Haggart: And of course, there's always embarrassing moments in your life, when you're disabled. Not only in finding new ways in dressing yourself and, but you do come up against people.

The battle of five people against polio.

We present The Body Blow.

2

**What day did the world stop moving?  
What day did the earth stop turning?  
What day did the sun stop shining?  
What day?**

On the Thursday I was in one world. On the Monday and Tuesday I seem to have been thrown into a completely different world.

**It was in the season of the year when the small birds they do fly,  
When the flowers are blooming fresh and gay and the sun burns in the sky,  
I spied a fair young woman by the margin of the sea,  
A-taking of the pleasant air with her young babe at her knee.**

**All through that summer's afternoon how they did sport and play,  
Till tired at last upon the sand that fair young woman lay.  
She heard the cries of wheeling gulls and the murmur of the sea,  
But she did not hear the coming of the hidden enemy.**

**Oh drunk and drowsy with the sun she lay there half in sleep,  
While undetected to her side the enemy did creep.  
Death did stand at her right hand and did no mercy show,  
But to this young woman cruelly dealt a body blow.**

**Where were you when the birds stopped singing?  
Where were you when the flowers stopped blooming?  
Where were you at the body's dying?  
Where were you?**

In August. I went down to Brighton with my daughter, for about three or four days, you know, having the usual nice time, taking her on the swings, going on the beach. And I came home to tea and I had this awful sensation round my waist, I couldn't stand the material of my blouse on my waist, and all my legs were aching. I went to bed early, took a couple of aspirins, and Carol was sleeping with me because we were a bit squashed for room, and I couldn't stand the touch of her,

you know, her legs on my body in bed, I felt the most peculiar sensations, I was in an awful lot of pain. I had a very bad night, I had the doctor on the Sunday morning, and he said it was flu, of course everybody thought it was flu. So I came downstairs, so as not to be a nuisance you know with trays and things and I fell, fell on the floor. I was very surprised, you know, I mean I'd had flu before but I'd never exactly been so weak as to fall down. So of course I came and laid on the couch, all the Sunday I felt terribly ill, and Sunday night I don't think I could have been conscious really.

**Blow by blow this cruel foe does strike with grim intent,  
Until the body is laid low, all strength and courage spent,  
The citadel is occupied, the road from brain to hand is blocked  
Now by the enemy and death is in command.**

I was sort of shivering, terribly cold and this terrible headache, it felt as if I had my head split open.

Bang bang bang bang bang, like someone inside with drums.

Terrific pains up each side of my neck. Felt as if it's banging half on the top.

And he said I think you've got a touch of rheumatics in the head.

Your neck muscles go and you walk around like some old man.

I wondered whatever was happening to me.

My arms and legs started to go, and then finally my breathing and when I was rushed to hospital, I wondered what on earth was going on.

It is sort of dreamlike. I mean you've had a shock to the body, and of course then your mind, there's a shock to the mind as well. And of course you don't see anybody's face, I mean they haven't got any sort of identity to you. Just eyes, that makes it more weird. They're masked, because you're so infectious. You just see eyes, different sorts of eyes, peering at you.

Wearing white gowns, and white masks, frightened eyes, looking at me.

I got up to make my husband a cup of tea.

Sit up, your brain will say, sit up! And suddenly nothing happens, and you think but I didn't sit up. And using the use of my left arm and he says, go on, you're hawering. I said, I'm not.

What's the matter?

And losing the use of it, I could feel the use going out of the shoulder. Right down to the fingertips. And he, I can always remember him lifting my arm and turning it round and round and round to try to put the life into it again.

You think, gosh, my legs have gone, I can't move my arms. Well you get such a shock.

It felt, to me, it felt like all the muscles were being actually being knocked out of action. It was like electric light bulbs all burning out. One two three four, just one after the other.

Yes. It's a strange thing about nature. That you just don't realise how serious a thing is at the time. It's almost nature's way of protecting you.

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**The hidden foe it lies in wait and chooses place and time.  
It strikes the woman in her bloom, the young man in his prime,  
The runner who is in full stride, the soldier in the field,  
The strong, the young, the healthy, to this enemy must yield.**

**Do you recall how you climbed the mountains?  
The morning swim in the salt sea water?  
What was the name of the powerful sprinter?  
Was it you?**

**Ten thousand miles across the world far from his native land,  
The young man leads his company, a carbine in his hand.  
By swamp and jungle path he goes, and stalks his human foe,  
But the hidden enemy behind him deals a body blow.**

1954. August 1954. Serving in Malaya. Doing what I think would have been one of my last patrols. I got up and my men carried all my equipment except the carbine. I'd no thoughts of what might be wrong with me, I just felt ill. They got me into an Auster to fly me down to Kuala Lumpur, down to the base hospital and I'm rather big, six feet four, which doesn't, you know, go easily into that sort of thing. Had to drag me out feet first. I got into the ward, was helped to undress and I sat on the edge of the bed, and then decided to, to lie down, be more comfortable, lay back, and I couldn't get my left leg onto the bed. And that was the last time that I sat on the side of a bed or, or anywhere.

And from then on things really began to move. I was transferred to a tank respirator, and I had the Bulba polio which means the paralysis of the swallowing. It's quite simple - eventually you drown you see, in your own secretions, you can't cope with them. And they, the idea is that you put a tube down the person's throat, feed air through the tube, and then you can take them out of the iron lung, anaesthetise them, and then cut their throats, literally. Put a shortened tube straight into the throat, which I've still got eight years later, and breathe them through that, respire them through it. Now unfortunately I was still fighting when they put this tube down my throat and I bit through it. I also bit the anaesthetist when he tried to retrieve the, the broken tube - he tells quite an amusing story - I believe his ???leg, which is marvellous. He's a good strong, strong Yorkshireman - I've met him since and we're extremely good friends, and he always sort of licks his thumb when he come in, but... Anyway they did the operation in what I think they would claim to be

a world record of about 28 seconds. No anaesthetics were necessary because I was out and, almost gone anyway.

**Every cell despoiled and raided  
Every muscle is invaded.  
Every nerve affected.  
Brain from body disconnected.**

**Lungs are the next objective**

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Can't. Breathe. Can't. Breathe. Can't. Some air.

**The swimmer panics in the undertow.  
Fingers lose their hold on the rock face.  
The runner stumbles on the rim of darkness.**

I think you've got to be a polio, to really understand. We have a saying in this ward that we live dangerously. And by golly you do. If someone's forgotten to put a shilling in the meter bang goes your air supply.

We have to have machines to help us live. But they're not enemies, or awful frightening things. The machines are our friends. Well they're our life, our breath.

**Steel and plastic deputy for lungs  
Does your breathing for you night and day.  
This small machine, your shield, your sword and buckler,  
Holds death at bay.**

**A week, a month, a century of pain.  
One day you may learn to breathe again.  
If not you're joined for life, this breathing tool and you,  
Man and machine.**

Well, the first week in hospital I didn't remember anything at all.

Somebody...

Not in this world at all.

Calling my name.

I'm awfully sorry I really don't know you.

Asking what day it was.

I remember there was a window, and I saw this funny shape.

Easter Sunday.

And I kept looking at it, wondering what it was.

But I wasn't afraid.

It was rather like Punch and Judy, then it sort of materialised into a little nurse, and of course as soon as she saw me she smiled.

When I woke at night my husband was standing beside me.

You know, people are awfully good. The way they talk to you and the way they help you.

I used to wonder what was down below. I could hear people laughing, I suppose they were patients in the other ward, and I could hear television. But a lot of those sounds used to make me feel ill because I had an awful sensation, if anybody shouted or if somebody dropped something it used to go through my body like a pain. As if I was super sensitive, my whole body, all the skin used to creep, with this noise.

You're ill, your whole body is aching, it's not used to lying on its back, and flat, and the muscles are gradually changing because they're not being used. You get passive movements, but those are agony.

Of course you're very surprised because I've always thought that paralysed people were numb. I always thought if anybody was paralysed they wouldn't feel anything, but of course you do feel everything.

Body's aching and it's racked with pain. It certainly is in the beginning.

It's deep bone ache. It's in every muscle, and everything. Your whole body seems to shriek with pain. And your heels, little pains start and then they get like flames, then they get like worse flames, and unless somebody lifts them and rubs them to relieve that, it just gets, well it just really blots you out. But you just have to give in to it, just have to lie there and bear it, you see you can't do anything about it, just have to let yourself get carried away on the pain. To me it just felt like being crucified all the time.

You have to know pain, to appreciate being out of pain. That's why the pain when I first got polio, and the no-pain now, that's why I'm happy.

To me at that time, I felt that... the world was finished for me.

I know it was a silly feeling, I knew it was silly, I kept saying all day long I want to get out of here, I must get out, I'm going, I'm going to get out. And the fact that I knew, that my mind told me I

couldn't get out, made it worse, I felt more desperate to get out then. I wanted to walk away from the situation I think. Just felt I must get away from it, I didn't like it, I, I... I couldn't bear it.

You see, you're just there as an individual absolutely helpless. Only you can think. You've got a mind left.

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I. Often. Think back... I worked at Fords on the commercial assembly line.

Useless.

Cling on to it desperately.

I worked at Fords.

You're not master of your body.

I worked.

If I was a dog they'd have destroyed me.

I worked at Dagenham.

I didn't want anyone coming near me.

Ever again.

The worst month was being isolated because then you've got to time to think.

And I can't help but wonder... what good I'll ever be. A disabled mother, not able to look after her child, not able to look after my husband, not able to do a thing. Ever again.

**Hands that were supple and strong, the best servants that ever could be,  
Weak and crippled now, why should this happen to me?**

You're just not in control any more. You're not the controller.

**Legs strong and shapely for walking and running and dancing too.  
Weak and crippled now. Why should this happen to you?**

You resent your body because it won't do the things you want it to do. One just resents everything, I just resented living.

**What lies in store?**

**To shuffle on crutches, will that fate be mine?**

**To creep like an old man an inch at a time,  
To be pump-fed with air,  
To be wheeled in a chair  
To be rocked on a bed like a babe in its cot, will I stagnate and rot?**

I served all throughout the war and never received a scratch. But it makes me laugh to think that now I can't move nothing. All these years later.

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**The world is a bed and life is a turn of the head.  
The vanquished body is helpless and waits to be fed.  
The hands that obeyed you, the legs that conveyed you,  
Just memories now you're dependent on somebody else.**

All the time people are doing things for you. I'm sure this is one of the hardest things. All through one is grateful and yet one doesn't want to be grateful because one doesn't want to be so dependent. And that's so hard. You know it's much easier to give than to receive. And my goodness it's hard to receive all the time.

I think at that point if one just lies back and takes it then one probably would peg out.

I used to hate it.

It's one of the very few things that I still get hopping mad about. You have to ask for every mortal thing.

You know, resentful. And I was a very nasty patient at first. I wasn't grateful for anything that was done for me, and I knew I wasn't being nice about it and that made me feel worse, you know? Apart from that then you see you've got the indignity of all this. People cleaning your teeth as if they're doing a doorstep, you know? Scrubbing away and your mouth stuck up with toothpaste, tons more than you'd use yourself. You feel that you could, clumsy thing, and you sort of clench your teeth and say for goodness sake, it's not a doorstep you're scrubbing it's my teeth. Come along dear, you know, open up. Talk to you as if you're a semi-idiot child and this vigorous scrubbing, on your teeth. Used to dread it.

One just laid there and demanded. You wanted your hand moved or your foot moved. And then to be told wait a minute I'm busy, you hate them for it. Can't they see that you want your hand moved? No, one gets completely intolerant.

I'm sure the concern was to get this physical disorders sorted out as best they could be, get this lump that I've been presented with, get it organised. If I wasn't going to move, well we could get comfortable, get the insides to work properly - everything becomes a major problem.

It doesn't frighten you the respirator because I think you're so glad not to struggle for breath, and when this thing is put on you, or you're put into it, the relief, you've stopped struggling and this

thing breathes for you and you feel calm.

**This will breathe for you, you're safe as a babe in a cradle of steel.  
You're waiting and hoping and praying your body will heal,  
But your mind fills with fear as the moment draws near  
To part from your friendly machine and try breathing alone.**

7

I wasn't afraid while I was in the lung at all, ever, but I was afraid to come out. I can always remember Sister pulling me out a little bit every day. Five minutes, ten minutes, extended periods, and then she said to me one morning: Mrs Haggar we're going to take you out of the lung today and you're going to lie on the bed. I was quite happy with that, but when night came I got a terrific fear. I wanted back in it. And in the morning she said, well, you're still here, aren't you? So I said, yes, it looks like it. So she said, well look, you're not going in the lung again, she said, and nothing will happen to you.

I used to find myself looking at people. I was so frightened of forgetting. Walking. You see I thought perhaps memory came into it, and if anybody stopped and turned to look at their nylons to see if their seams were straight I could feel it as she was feeling. And I was thinking yes, she'll have the weight on that leg, now, as she turns round to look at the other leg with the leg back you know to see if the seams were straight, and I remember myself doing that so many times. Used to think that might help me.

**Try to remember walking, create the design,  
The sequence of movement, and then keep it clear in your mind.  
The coordination, the exact relation between toes and ankle,  
The calf and the knee and the thigh.**

When you're lying down there you feel so much like a landed dab. You feel more like a moth on a pin down there, you don't feel equal to anyone. You're lying so flat, terribly laid out. But, I had this bell in between my fingers for the nurse and I could press it, and then they started giving me sandwiches on my chest, and I had to get my arm up there to get a tiny, they were all tiny sandwiches to put it into my mouth. It was a great effort, took me a long time, but it was nice to be able to feed myself. And of course having the use of my arms helped me an awful lot. Alleviate my discomfort. And I started on physiotherapy then - terribly tiring, I mean really when you come to think of it these physiotherapists they're terribly strong. I mean they really are pushing against you, it's like all-in wrestling. She's got your arm going back, and again, and again, and again, and again. And a great big woman of about six foot, she had red hair, and she sat down for a rest. She said Oh I'm exhausted, you know. She's putting me through it. Up and down up and down, I just, just like all-in wrestling, you know, pushing and tugging and pulling. It's all good for you but Oh it's exhausting, my physiotherapist. Cos you, stops you from getting, when you've been stiff, you know, you feel all your limbs loosening up and that does alleviate a lot of the pain. All these things that you never knew you had like hamstrings. When you lie there for long they shorten down. Of course when they start again they've got to pull them like elastic to their proper length.

And of course they've got muscle charts. They chart every muscle in your body. That means that they have, sit there with a chart, and they've got every muscle listed down, and then they go through the motions of asking you to move these various muscles, and whether you can move them or not they can tell with their fingers on your limbs whether there's any reaction. And if there is a reaction they can tell what strength it is and they put it down on a chart. Of course most of mine were noughts and the next month they were noughts and they just get tired of saying nought they used to say zero, nothing, nought, nought, zero, nothing, you know, just to make a change, done in front of you. Whether they think of you as a human being while they're doing it I don't know. I mean perhaps they, they don't really know. They're not really concerned about you. They are, and they aren't, you know what I mean? I don't think they think to themselves Oh I think this might depress her, don't let's let her listen. They're just carrying on all round your body, they're all gathered round you. And you have to get over that embarrassment of lying stark naked while they all peer down at you, very disinterestedly, and of course one's sitting there giving you a smile now and then, you manage to give a smile back if you can make it, your face as red as a beetroot. But it is, it's such a lengthy business, it's not like there's a quick flash of you in the nude, it's a rather lengthy process, you know. Somebody's probably got an elbow on your stomach, one end, while they're looking at your feet and saying, now waggle your big toe, and you go blue in the face trying to move your big toe, and you're sure it must be moving with the effort and you look down at the toe... It's best not to look really because if you're not looking you're sure that your big toe's moving but if you open your eye, you see the ruddy thing's still stuck up in the air, it's not even moved an inch. That depresses you immediately. Because othey're all very cheerful, you know, they say Oh never mind, keep trying, you see, you can see it's not moving. You feel with such concentration and willing everything, you know, you're saying, move, move, move! And you think that it must move.

8

Well, first of all/Appreciate the situation/Paralysed/My left arm, completely/Make the physical drawbacks become of lesser importance/A very weak half arm/Accept it and forget it/You know I'm trying/You can, eventually/Difficult/You can't/Hate it/Learn/Learn to be able/Able to/Try/Being able to get on with it/Do it.

**Though my body is defeated,  
Still I'm alive and heart and brain -  
Search for roads across the wasteland  
To the living world again.**

The exuberance of being able to do it. It's tremendously exciting.

**At first the simplest task defeats you,  
And your heart breaks every day.  
Do your stricken hands remember?  
And you will them to obey.**

I began to realise that perhaps life wasn't so bad after all.

**For the rest of my life my body will lie here.  
Numbed and helpless, still I'm a man.  
And a restless mind still drives me  
So I do the best I can.**

It seemed incredible that, that I could do it. It was like rediscovering something.

**My dear friends, I'm writing this letter,  
Though my hands lie dead and still,  
But a man is more than a pair of hands,  
When the mind joins with the will.**

Even though you're down, you're not out.

**The body makes its adaptation.  
And it learns to improvise.  
But the spirit can't surrender.  
It must conquer or it dies.**

And I had lots of pulleys put above my bed, which I was told that I was to hang on to and help myself. This was a new angle for me, I used to be chomping all round that bed and all these darn things used to ding ding ding all the way down the bed, it was like a tram. There was all little hangers and pulleys and rattles, and they used to call me Budgie, cos I used to look like a budgie in a cage, and I was always hooking from one to the other, like monkeys, and everybody had them, and it was rather funny, if anybody came in the ward we all hung on these things like a load of monkeys in a zoo, all peering forwards.

Of course all the other people,

They took me down to the occupational physiotherapy department.

Very bright and jolly.

Where they train you, you know, to work away with one hand

And I heard the word polio but I didn't exactly connect it with myself, you know what I mean.

I got the shock of my life when I went down there.

I think that it's just a word you read in the papers.

And suddenly

You don't really think when you're saying it

It struck me that I was a disabled person, that I was one of these people

That's that awful thing those people in Kent got, you know, isn't it a shame

What recovery you don't get within six months, you can say you've had it. If you've got a flicker, well then you can say in a year that flicker will be stronger, more or less.

Yes I think some are more adaptable than others. I mean I know a lot of people like myself and I keep in touch with them but I know very very few that have given up. Very few, most of them can do something.

After six months I got the use of my left leg back, for which I'm very grateful. It allows me to type. I can even draw with my left foot.

**When the old way will not serve you, then a new way must be found.**

Personally I'm pretty vain, and I was put into a jacket when I came out of the lung, and it isn't a pretty thing, it's a big, you, you look rather like a spaceman, and I was in that jacket for a year. And I did my damndest to get out of it. Because it was ugly. Legs and arms didn't matter, first of all was breathing. And that was the day the doctor came to me to explain the principles of frog breathing. Which is... taking mouthfuls of air, and pushing it into your lungs with your tongue. And you have to conquer the feeling that in fact you're not breathing, because you're not conscious of air going down your nose. It's the sensation of holding your breath, because you have to hold each gulp as it goes into your lungs. Till the next one goes down, then when you've got sufficient you let it all out at once.

**What is gone is gone for ever, what is left can learn again.**

I hate to be lying flat, it's very bad for morale. And when people come and look at you as if you're a cabbage it lowers you even further. And if you suddenly sit up a bit, then here you are, independent, typing for yourself, saying what you want, with nobody else's assistance, it gave me satisfaction, pleasure, pride, self-respect.

9

**While there's life there's hope, and you've improved a lot.  
Do not grieve for what you've lost but strengthen what you've got.**

Having the usual amount of time, taking her on the swings, and going on the beach, taking her familiar places.

**Every day and week that passes sees you growing stronger,  
Just a little more patience for you won't be here much longer.**

**While there's life there's hope, the earth still goes on turning,  
Now it's time for you to teach the lesson you've been learning.  
Day still comes, then night still falls and you must learn to live then.**

**There are those who love you and who need what you can give them.**

I was beginning to forget what her voice sounded like, and face, you know. When she did come in she seemed such a titchy little thing, and she said Hello Mummy and she was very good, she wanted to sit up on the bed and she was interested more in the hangings on the bed and said could she sit on my lap, would it hurt my legs. Course I could hardly speak actually. And she lisped, and I'd always denied that she lisped. I always said to everybody she does not lisp. They said but she does lisp. I said she doesn't. And every other word with a lithp, and I thought they were right, I hadn't heard her for so long.

I've seen them come and I've seen them go, and often I used to wonder when my turn would ever come. Would I ever get home? And I was in there for a year.

**While there's life there's hope so work and watch and pray.  
Drive each tortured nerve and muscle until it will obey.  
Wasted limbs must learn to work each day a little longer.  
Bear the pain and try again, you won't be here much longer.**

I just was so terrified they were going to send me home. I didn't really want to believe it. So I said, at least let me try.

I began to hope a little when they started to make me a spinal jacket.

If I, if I go home and I've never tried I'll always have the thought in my mind that I could have walked, if only you'd have given me a chance.

The doctor come in, and he said, now I think with the jacket on she'll be able to walk about.

Well I able to do a sort of a shuffle, you know, these leg irons, but of course I wasn't using my legs in them, I was really elevating my body on my arms.

But when they did come with this jacket and the dentist's headrest for my head, to keep me rigid - I had to hold it because it would have just fallen - I thought no but I can't face the world like this, can I.

But you see to do a three minute walk took me two hours.

And then again I said, well, there's others have done it, why can't I?

Unfortunately I'm still on the respirator, and even that doesn't stop me going out, because I take one with me. A smaller version, but it does the same job.

The first day they took me out, I felt it was wonderful. They went into the country, and the fields were green and there was lots of space, the trees and the sky, and they're only little things but things I didn't realise quite how much I'd missed them. Until I saw them again.

It's goodbye now, I'm leaving you this morning,  
 And a thousand thanks for all the help you gave me,  
 For the strength of will, kindness and the patient skill,  
 And all the things that helped to save me.

It's goodbye now, I'm leaving you this morning.  
 From the safety of this little world I'm parting.  
 From now on I'll learn to bide in the world outside  
 So another phase of life is starting.

Home again with the ones you love this morning,  
 An end to the lonely months of hoping.  
 Back to work and strife and the cares of normal life,  
 Now you'll have to show your skill at coping.

But when I did - all on my own - come out of hospital - very frightening at first - it felt - ward with about thirty people - for a year - felt very lonely - like coming out of prison - the outside world was very strange to me - the first night, just a dead silence, you know.

I think the homecoming is the frightening part of it, because it's then you realise that you aren't capable of doing a lot, and of course at this time when I came home my daughter was in Scotland with my sister, and I was worried. I wanted my little girl, should I bring her home and try, or leave her with my sister who was capable, of, doing everything for her? And I decided to bring her home with me (sound of daughter's skipping song in the background) and then gradually I found that I was able for to do for her.

....Cos he had a pimple on his um tum tum.  
 Here comes the nurse with the red hot poultice,  
 Slaps it on and takes no notice.  
 Ouch, says the patient, that's too hot,  
 No, says the nurse, no it's not.

How can I do all the small things that have to be done every day?  
 You'll have to learn how to do them in some other way.  
 All of the things I once did in the house through the use of my hands?  
 You'll have to learn how to manage the best that you can.

How can I bring up my child, earn a living, where do I begin?  
 Half of the battle it lies in the will to win.

All these things I wanted to do myself, I didn't want anybody to help me. Help. I used to hate it. Even my husband used to come to help me, and there were times when I didn't want him to do so.

And of course I had to learn to be able to dress myself with half an arm, I had to find new ways. They didn't come quick enough for me. But of course as time went on... putting my vest on myself, well once I'd achieved that I was like a baby with a new toy. You know, I can do it myself now, I don't need anybody to help me.

I was once a person who rushed about and I can't bear being slow, you know, cos I would go tearing towards the kitchen, very good for a wheelchair, and of course once I got clever at it I quite enjoyed nipping through, through with not an inch to spare, you know? Specially when the bacon's burning or the kettle's boiling or something terrible's happening in the kitchen, I can't get there quick enough.

**You're playing your part, you're managing, making do,  
Though you find it a struggle to see it through,  
You try and you fumble, you sigh and you grumble,  
But it's better than being dependent on somebody else**

**The more you endeavour, the more you will find you can do,  
You'll find that you still can be useful to somebody else.**

Night Mum. Come to say good night then. Give us a kiss. Night darling. God bless. Night. Off into bed now.

It's like going into a doll's house, a little house where a family live. They seem to live in miniature. And I was sitting there. I went for the day, and out of the corner of my eye I could see the kitchen, and I, I could see the saucepan bubbling on the stove, the lid jumping up and down, and the steam coming out and this was just home. This to me was all the things, in a way, that I'd lost, and although it filled me with tremendous happiness to be there and to see it, it just filled me up.

I went home about three years ago. And my wife was paid to keep myself, two children, and herself, eight pounds a week. But it didn't work out, so I had to return to hospital. And here I'm doomed to spend my days.

I lost my health, my home, my son, my husband, in the first year. And I looked round and I thought well I have nothing else, this is the end, I have nothing else to lose. It was only when I lost all that that I realised what I'd gained. I'd gained friends, help, I knew the truth. I suppose it's peace of mind, that everybody's searching for.

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**Stronger than pain is the human will to survive.**

I think probably I've learnt more in the five years I've been in here than I would have learnt in fifty outside.

According to the sort of people we were before then I think we react in the same way afterwards.

Life is funny because you have to pay in, as it were, before you receive.

I think that that one of our basic functions as severely disabled people, one's basic duty is to try and live as normal a life as possible. And to appear as normal as possible.

Oh I could tell you a whole lot about that. I have a lot of plans in my head. I've tried to put some of them into force but it doesn't work very well, people aren't terribly interested because it costs a lot of money. What I would like to have done - I feel that a lot of us are young. We're healthy, we have the world and the life ahead of us. I have friends, polio friends in America, I'd love to go and visit them, to see how they cope. Most of us are stuck in hospital, because there's nowhere for us to go to. But I think if a scheme could be developed for travelling, travel in a group, take one relative, each helping the other. You see they do these special schemes for students, for schoolchildren, why not us?

In a way the disability's become secondary. Damage still there, still can be a worry, but really there are so many things to do, to look forward to.

You see we've a lot to learn from each other. People should try and look on us as people, fellow people. I don't think we're conscious, or embarrassedly conscious of our disability. Not really.

Never took to it kindly, being talked about in the third person, or you know, sort of, does he drink tea, sort of thing, you know. People think that because you're disabled that you either haven't got a mind of your own or that you can't express yourself.

We like people because they're people. We like them to be people back to us. Understanding, but not pity.

We don't you people to say ah, those poor people, because we don't want your sympathy. We want help in doing many things...

But not pity.

**Hands lie still, but the brain's not resting.  
Legs lie still, but the brain's still working,  
Body chained, but the mind's still questing,  
On its way.**

The majority of disabled people like to be independent. I am one of them, I like to be independent too.

We have a saying in this ward that we live dangerously, and by Golly you do. If someone's forgotten to put a shilling in the meter, bang goes your air supply. And then everybody... They hunt for another shilling. See we can't afford to have... a quarterly meter here.

**One world. One cause. For lame and whole to share together.  
Our need is indivisible. To keep the spirit undefeated.**

**That is the human way.**

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The Body Blow was the work of Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker, and told of the battle against polio fought by five people. The singers were Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. The guitar was played by Brian Daly, concertina and ocarina by Alf Edwards, flute and harmonica by Alfie Kahn, banjo and guitar by Peggy Seeger. Recordings from real life were made in the homes of Norma Smith, Paul Bates, and Jean Haggar. And for Heather Ruffell and Dutchy Holland in Ward 11A, Rush Green hospital, Romford, Essex. The programme was prepared with the help of the Polio Research Fund, and recorded production was by Charles Parker.

**The hidden foe it lies in wait and chooses place and time.  
It strikes the woman in her bloom, the young man in his prime.  
It takes the runner in full stride, the soldier in the field.  
The strong, the young, the healthy, to this enemy must yield.**