



David sailing with Sailability charity.

LIFE STORY - David

My family came from North West London. We lived reasonably well. My father was in the furniture trade and worked for a big furniture store. In 1956, Dad opened their new store in George Street in Richmond, where the VisionExpress store is now. We sold our house in Neasden and moved to Strawberry Hill.

When I was 10 years old I caught TB and Meningitis, and I was in hospital in a coma for ten weeks. They put me in a side ward and one night the night shift Sister heard me singing 'Davy Crockett' over and over again. She wondered where it was coming from. That's when they realised I had come out of the coma. I caught the disease at the beginning of 1959 and eventually came back home to Strawberry Hill at Christmas that year, so it was a long time.

While in hospital, I was treated with the only drug available at the time for my illness, but the doctors were unaware of the possible side-effects. The drug affected me very badly, my eye sight was seriously affected and so was my mobility. It left me with life-long eye sight and mobility issues. If the doctors had known the side-effects, I wouldn't have had disabilities.

My education suffered as a result, of course. I had passed my 11 plus exam before I got ill, but any thought of ordinary schooling went out of the window, but I was always

eager to learn. When I was well enough, I had home tuition and I went to a school specially for visually impaired and blind children. But then I was sent to a small, all-boys boarding school in the depths of rural Hampshire up to when I took my A levels. It wasn't the nicest of places especially because I was so small and disabled and Jewish, and of course I faced a lot of comments and prejudices, but I survived.

I went to Exeter University where I studied History, and when I graduated I eventually found a very nice flat to live in Hampton Wick next to Normansfield Hospital. I worked in the civil service for a while but then in 1972 I was taken on by a prestigious firm of solicitors called Janners - the family firm of the late Lord Janner, who was an MP and member of the House of Lords. I did my solicitors articles with them and qualified as a solicitor in 1976 and law became my career for many years.

I worked for the legal department for Kensington and Chelsea Council for thirty years. I was asked by Kings' College, London to teach a law syllabus to students on various courses, which was the start of me lecturing law. I trained as a lecturer and travelled all over the UK to various colleges presenting courses. I also lectured at an army base in Ash Vale, near Aldershot, after one of my students at Kings College had recommended me to the Commanding Officer there. He said he had a group who needed law training. I was an honorary officer and when I would go to the 'Mess' nobody really knew who I was or how to address me or whether they should salute me or not. I said I was a civilian, please don't salute me or call me 'sir', I only answer to 'David'. I went down there for a number of years, and I got on great with them all and was invited to black-tie dinners with them all in the Mess. It was wonderful. I did that until Covid struck, and that put an end to it.

When I was in my sixties, The Law Society opened up a department for disabled people who wanted to enter law. I was the first chairman of the Law Society Disabled Solicitors Group, helping disabled students get the right sort of support and help to get into the profession. I was the first disabled solicitor to be on the Law Society Council. I thoroughly enjoyed it all.

Even though I have mobility issues, I still do a lot of activities. There are so many wonderful organisations who make things possible. I fly a plane, and go sailing. There's a group called 'Aerobility', based at Blackbushe Aerodrome in Surrey which I joined two years ago. It's a registered charity for anybody with a disability to learn to fly. I went along and the next thing I knew I was at the controls of a Piper Alpha light aircraft with an instructor pilot, taking off and flying with him telling me how to operate the plane. It's quite simple when you're shown how. We flew over Surrey, along the Solent, over the Isle of Wight, over the naval dockyard at Portsmouth. Absolutely wonderful.

My sailing is through an organisation called Sailability, who use the Queen Mary reservoir near Sunbury. It's for disabled people of all ages. I went out on the water with them the first time and thought 'this is great'. There are five of us in the yacht. When they 'tack', I take the tiller and they tell me to steer and aim for the other side of the lake. I've been doing it for four years now, they're a great crowd.

Companion Cycling in Bushy Park is another wonderful charity, where you are able to cycle in the park on specially adapted bikes with someone helping you to pedal. I used to go every weekend and as the weather improves, I shall go again. The T&HW

Care Group also have outings there, so I'll go with them too.

I'm a great theatre goer, and I love the ballet and opera and went to Covent Garden with friends recently. The local theatres are lovely too. The Hampton Hill theatre and the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond put on excellent productions. I love The Proms too, I've been going since I was 15 and haven't missed many years in all that time. I used to go to Glyndebourne for the opera when I was in my twenties, and I'm going again this summer. I hope it's the start of a regular thing for me again.

Until very recently, I was a Trustee on the board of Richmond Aid (R.A.I.D - Richmond Aid and Information on Disability), they are based next to Teddington Library on Waldegrave Road. It's a really great organisation, which helps so many people with disabilities to live an independent life. But after 18 years on the board, I announced my retirement.

I belong to the Kingston Liberal Synagogue which is based at Long Ditton and I try to go as often as I can. It's recently had a massive internal restoration and looks absolute beautiful. We now have a new vibrant Rabbi called Rabbi Lev Taylor, and I have made so many friends within the Jewish community there and I feel very,very blessed and it's very precious in my life. I've been on holiday with them over the years, we went to Spain and toured Jewish and Moorish locations.

I'm always up for new things, you need to stay positive and know your limitations but if you want something, go for it.

April 2025

(As told to the Teddington & Hampton Wick Voluntary Care Group)

All words and photos copyright of the Teddington & Hampton Wick Voluntary Care Group

