

**David Acton interview with Pam Dawes One file (47.36)**

**26<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

(00:00) PD: It's Pam Dawes on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016, recording with David Acton for Voices of Kosovo in Manchester. David, could you introduce yourself, please?

DA: Yes, I'm David Acton; I was leader of the council in that period [Trafford MBC: 1997-2014]. I'm no longer the leader but I am a councillor, still a councillor in Trafford, and I'm also the Chairman of Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority.

PD: I wonder if you could tell us about your memories of the council planning and the council decision to try to help the Kosovars who were flown into Manchester airport in 1999.

DA: I was approached to see if we could support refugees from Kosovo to look at a program of how we would do that. And obviously had - like everybody else - had seen the images on the TV which horrified me and everybody really. What sticks in my mind, really, is the drive from the community to take action to deal with what was a horrific situation people were fleeing from. And obviously that feeling from the community in Trafford was felt very deeply by myself and I felt that we had to do something about that. I agreed to lend my support and I think - I know - that a number of

community groups were trying to cut through some of the bureaucracy that happens in local councils and in government circles. The one thing that I knew I could do was cut through that bureaucracy and see what actions we could take to actually integrate some of the people, who had been suffering in Kosovo, into our community.

But also the campaign, really, to transport food and clothing and other requirements into Kosovo was quite mammoth really. I remember seeing the work that the community did in making pleas to everybody to donate their clothes and bedding and coats, and anything that they could get hold of, and food, so that a convoy<sup>1</sup> could actually take this over to Kosovo. And it was absolutely remarkable the strength of feeling. Practically everybody in the community took part in trying to help wherever they can - as little or as much as they could do really. I was really motivated in terms of that. So, that's a stand out thought that this was driven more by the community than politicians like myself. All I could do was really lend support.

PD: It reminds me that you were actually councillor representing Urmston until 2004, and now Gorse Hill. So you're absolutely right in terms of the response that led to Manchester Aid to Kosovo<sup>2</sup> the seed and the growth all came from Urmston<sup>3</sup>. And it was actually five men in a pub, in The Brit watching the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Guest convoy diary <http://makonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/To-Hell-With-Hope.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.makonline.org>

<sup>3</sup> A town in Trafford, Greater Manchester

news who said, "What do we do? Just have another drink, or do something?" And as you well know the decision was to do something.

(03:47)DA: Yeah. And that was amazing to me and you're absolutely right, it was five men talking in the pub, having a drink, seeing these images on the TV. They just said, "Right, we've got to do something!" And they then mobilised, I think, the whole of the community to get something done and there was massive appeals that went out. There was great communication in the local newspaper. It absolutely worked. On reflection now, what happened then: you feel that in today's world with Syria and Iraq and other places where we've got these refugees that are in desperate situations and I think back to those days and how the community came out and really supported. And I know it's a different situation and it's more difficult because obviously Kosovo is a European country and it was easier to actually help. I believe that as a society, as human beings, we cannot turn our backs on anybody who is fleeing that kind of situation. I understand that there are difficulties that people see in relation to, how do we help.

(05:04) PD: In 1999, David, to what extent was Trafford influenced by central government? And we had Tony Blair as Prime Minister at that point. There'd been a bombing campaign<sup>4</sup>. We were part of NATO: were there messages or instructions coming from central government?

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<sup>4</sup> The air strikes lasted from March 24, 1999 to June 10, 1999 and led to the withdrawal of Yugoslavian forces from Kosovo and the establishment of UNMIK a U.N. mission in Kosovo.

DA: Yes. I think Tony Blair and the government of the day really brought NATO together to really take action. And I'm really pleased that that did happen. I think Tony Blair deserves a lot of credit in terms of what happened there. And yes, I think what happened, really, was that the messages came from government, well, "We need to help people who are fleeing from ethnic cleansing." And there were messages that whatever you can, do (in your local community, particularly, obviously in Manchester). And I think there were other areas of the North of England this happened, where you've got to take refugees in and we've got to try and look after them. Give them a place to live, to try and organise: particularly the young people's schooling, and so on.

I think we rose to that challenge, really. And I was keen to ensure that we did do that and that we took a fair share of refugees in and made them feel as at home as they possibly could, but recognising it was very difficult.

PD: The numbers of people divided between Manchester boroughs - because Trafford is one of many - presumably, Kosovar refugees went to other areas? Was there some kind of dividing up of the group?

DA: Yes. I mean we have an Association of Greater Manchester Councils and the leaders lead that association.

PD: Leaders meaning you? The leader of Trafford?

DA: Yes, I was one of the leaders in Manchester; we call it Greater Manchester which has ten metropolitan authorities. Manchester, Stockport, Tameside, Wigan, Bury, Oldham, Bolton, did I say...? And now it's a combined authority because that's all changed now, we are looking at devolving power into Greater Manchester. At that time, we did meet and we spoke about how we could...

PD: So you represented Trafford. You would be the one person at that meeting representing Trafford with nine other leaders? See this is very fascinating because I've often wondered about the mechanics of how decisions were made. I don't know how many million people there are in Greater Manchester.

DA: 2.8 million.

PD: So, you ten leaders representing 2.8 million people and making the plan for receiving the Kosovar refugees?

DA: I think because things worked very quickly at the time, there was no sort of 'grand plan'. I think what we were saying was that where each of the authorities could take refugees in then we would do that, and schooling was quite an important part of that and having the housing that you were able to

utilise. So I wouldn't say it was a grand plan because we were reacting very quickly. It was like - we've not got time for grand plans. Let's get the job done and see how it works, really. And I think that... that sounds a bit messy... but sometimes these things are messy and you've just got to get on and do it, you know. That was my philosophy.

PD: What was the time scale roughly?

DA: It was just happening almost on a daily basis so.

PD: Almost instant? The government?

DA: Yeah, I think that's right. There was a need. We didn't know how many was going to come. I don't think the government actually knew at that time, how many was going to come in. I think it was just a matter of - because it was messy on the ground as well, as you well know, with a war going on, and NATO involved and so on - we didn't know where the refugees would come from, how we would deal with it. Sometimes it was just done because people were literally fleeing the war zones and so on.

PD: If we talk about Trafford, would you be allocated more resources from the government?

DA: I think we did get some resources but it was very little. I think it was... I think it was more that where a school was able to take in, as an example, take in children, then they would take them in and look to government to support that schooling. A lot of what we did was really our own doing.

PD: It came from Trafford budget?

(10:20) DA: Yeah, I think so in the main. But I think we clawed some of that back from government. But when you're faced with a crisis like this you've just got to do things, you know. It's just like - I'll give an example of where I am now with the fire service. When we had the floods in Greater Manchester on Boxing Day you've just got to get on and do it. You know, you don't say, "You need to give us more money." You just get on and do it. And then you think about all those things afterwards because it's a crisis. You have to respond. My memory is that yeah, we just got on and did it, basically.

PD: I think you've brought back how there was a sense of crisis. I remember going to the Co-op in Urmston where we were. I just went taking black bin bags of clothes and blankets and things, like everyone else, but I got involved and never left. But I remember, to be honest, for weeks virtually wearing the same clothes every day and the house was a tip: it was full of bags, and your priorities just completely changed. But, in a sense, do you feel that that sort of motivation and drive that a crisis creates, it really creates a strong community? It's a test of a strong community but it also strengthens?

(11:50) DA: I absolutely do think that, yes. Crisis brings the best out of the public sector as a whole. The public sector, sometimes, get a bad name but when there's a crisis, you need your councils; you need your emergency services; you need your hospitals. You need all the public services that are out there. And that's when you see them at their best. There's absolutely no doubt about that: I've seen it so many times happen. In times of crisis they turn to the public services and the public sector. And similarly with the community, I think, when they feel really aggrieved and they see a crisis, they all come together. And that is absolutely magnificent.

And I think you get a very, very strong feeling of where people's values come from. And it is about fairness and it is about protecting each other. Sometimes, I think people can be distant because they don't know how to handle certain situations. I think when they are given something that they can grasp and say, "Right, well I can help here," they will go and do it. People do feel good about themselves, and about the community, when they do things like that and that's shone through to me, anyway, during that period. It really did shine through and I think I said at the beginning, the drive for me was the community. They're the ones who drove the initiatives, really. I just feel that I was there just to help and support, to cut through that bureaucracy.

(13:29) PD: But, it was a great mix, I feel, of community and elected representatives working together. In the council, Ray Bowker was the mayor.

DA: Yes, yes he was.

PD: How do you remember those days of working with him?

DA: The mayors - it's all changed now because you get elected and directly elected mayors and so on - but the mayors in those days and still is, in Trafford and elsewhere, where the mayors are the ceremonial side, they're not the decision making side.

PD: Different to Kosovo?

DA: Yes, it is different than Kosovo and it's different from America but we are beginning to pick that model up and you will hear about elected mayors and so on now, which would be similar to what is in Kosovo and America and other countries. Yes, Ray was ceremonial mayor at that time but I think the council from my memory across the board did support the drive that we were - the drive to help people and support the groups - that were working so hard in our community to support the people of Kosovo.

(15:00) PD: The housing situation seemed to work very well, in that there were some reception centres set up in Trafford. One of them was Meadow Court<sup>5</sup> which I knew very well, where groups of families were actually housed together. And we know that there was a policy where at least one member of the family had special needs. So for example, there was one family brought to Meadow Court where a young lady was suffering from leukaemia, and sadly she died in Manchester. For example, there was another family where five children had survived a massacre and they had received multiple gunshot injuries and several of them were taken straight to hospital. They were at Meadowcourt. So were you involved in that decision?

DA: I certainly was. It was important that, where there was, again, a desperate need to get people in accommodation, then we had to look at where there was room to be able to enable that to happen. So Meadow Court was one of those buildings. I think there was one or two others as well that we utilised. I can't remember the names of them now.

PD: They were similar, I think.

DA: They were. They were similar. I think it was a matter of where we had accommodation we would utilise it - that was the instruction that I gave and which was supported by the council - utilise all the spaces that we have available, really. And that's what happened.

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<sup>5</sup> Empty sheltered accommodation for the elderly in Hale Barns, Trafford.

PD: I know, if we talk about Meadow Court, I think there is a lady called Barbara Donahue and she was a local authority employed social worker who was absolutely crucial. So you also put in resources like that.

DA: Yes now, we did. And the Chief Exec at the time was very, very supportive of what we were doing. She organised staff through. Obviously we talked about how we would go about doing this and she was really, really good around pulling the staff together who would... it was a team of staff.

PD: A team?

DA: Yes, who would liaise with government and the community groups and what was necessary.

PD: Yes, because there were unusual things happening as well, like, for example Mines Awareness Training had to be held because some people were going back.

DA: I'd forgotten about that.

PD: And they were missing the education that was going on in Kosovo and there were some tragedies of children going back - I think from Switzerland -

and being unaware of what a cluster bomb looked like, for example, and, I think they died. So there were so many things that you had to think about?

DA: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I had actually forgotten about that but yes, there were things like that were put in place: a lot of support.

PD: Apart from the ethnic cleansing consequences, these were people where at least one person in the family had exceptional needs which may or may not have been related to the trauma. For example, there was Remy who came who was wheelchair bound, and he had special needs, and then, obviously, people who had injuries that were caused by the ethnic cleansing program. So it was a complex evacuation?

DA: It was. It was.

PD: Can you comment on the educational side of things because talking to children - now adults - that seems to have been a great plan in Trafford.

(19:00) DA: I mean, we... I think it's just one of those things that everybody pulled together. You know, the five men in the pub kind of galvanised themselves and then galvanised the community, which was very infectious I think: galvanised all the different organisations. And schools obviously were quite central to trying to give some stability to children, but also provide an

education as well. And I think they came together, as Head Teachers and Governors and so on, to look at how they could support<sup>6</sup>.

At that time, there was a Head Teacher group who met on a regular basis to discuss education.

PD: For Trafford?

DA: For Trafford, yes. And they obviously discussed this issue around how they could support, and I think it was really successful in giving that stability.

PD: And we have to remember that the children arrived without any English.

DA: Exactly, yes.

PD: So there were language issues as well as the fact they were traumatised.

DA; Yes. So we had to have language teachers and interpreters and all that kind of stuff.

It was a mammoth task when you look back but, you know, you just get on with it. I think that's the thing. That's what you have to do in times of crisis. I

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<sup>6</sup> Lou Harris, Head Teacher of Blessed Thomas Holford School, recording available in this archive

think you just do. And I think we have really good people and a good community in Trafford.

PD: It sounds as if you have a lot of time for the voluntary sector. Would you say that this is an example of the voluntary sector really shining and showing that they have the energy and the commitment and the compassion to really make a difference?

(20:50) DA: Yeah, I mean, it doesn't have to be a voluntary group. I do have a lot of time for people who belong to voluntary groups and who give of themselves and their time to support people, so I admire them hugely. The volunteer groups did really get involved. But it was also individuals: like the five men in the pub. I'll just go back to, sort of, seeing where they stored all the goods that they were collecting for the convoy... how they got drivers to come along.

PD: Forty.

DA: Yeah, yeah, it was just amazing. You know, these were just people who, you know, one day they were sat at home and another, you know, they just rose up and sort of did this!

But, yeah, I do admire volunteers, generally, you know. I think they do a magnificent job and that's what makes society. That's what creates a community. It all comes together, doesn't it?

PD: What did you feel about the decision to allow lots of Kosovars to remain in the community because a lot didn't really apply for asylum as we think of it now; they were brought in because of need in an emergency? Then there was a process of encouraging for people to apply for Leave to Remain and some of those were turned down. And we - our organisation - fought some of them because they were still having medical treatment. It was complex. But then there was an amnesty saying that families where children had been born in the U.K. could stay on. So it was quite a complex and changing policy which resulted in a lot of people staying in the U.K; some went back. What do you feel about that?

DA: Yes, I mean, I wasn't involved in any of that. I that's very much central government in terms of allowing refugees to stay on a permanent basis. It's not my decision, never was my decision. And I think, as you say, it was complex. But it's a complex situation, I think. I don't know how many there was nationally that came into the country at that time. I have no idea.

PD: I know 4,400 were brought in by the government - the government evacuation programme - but it's hard to get statistics [landings at

Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow airports] and half of that group came to the North West.

DA: Yeah, I mean, I think the complexity of it was the stability within the country to go back, anyway. There's still instability, isn't there?<sup>7</sup>

PD: Well, that's exactly right because the U.N. was saying to the countries who received refugees, "Don't send them back because there's nothing here."

DA: Yes, so then our government was faced with that kind of situation and I think government, again, was central - in a sense - leading that United Nations assault on trying to create some peace in that region. And I think our government felt a responsibility to make sure people were safe.

Now, I don't know how it worked in terms of who would stay in this country and who would go back. I really don't know.

PD: Well there was a policy called 'Look and Explore' or something where people did get some funding if they wanted to go and visit. But I think it happened quite early and it was snowy and people were a bit horrified because they would go and find, for example, their whole village had been burnt and shelled. And there was just nothing. So a lot of people were very

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<sup>7</sup> <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=9230&lang=en>

anxious after that. So there was some degree of choice about whether you wanted to go and look at that stage. And most stayed on.

(25:20) Could you, tell me, David, what your relationship was with Beverley Hughes because she was M.P. for this area, the same party as you? I think you worked very closely together and I know she was very concerned about Kosovo and went on to be Minister for Immigration actually.

DA: Yes, she was. Beverley was leader in 1995 and I was deputy leader, that was for two years that she was leader, and I was deputy leader. And then in 1997, she became an M.P. for Stretford and Urmston. Obviously, as an M.P. (and I think she got a Ministerial Post at that time), we worked very closely together on this because Beverley was very close to this situation, I think, and wanted to do as much as she possibly could. So we liaised quite a lot in terms of between government and then the council and how we could actually help the situation. So, yes, she did play a very central role in all of this.

PD: And it's interesting that you had a Labour M.P., Labour leader of the council and Labour party in government, so perhaps that helped in that there was a degree of cohesion.

DA: Yes, I think that absolutely did help. I think right from Tony Blair as the Prime Minister, as I've said before, I think took a leading role in trying to get support from other countries to try to sort out the ethnic cleansing and what

was going on in the region; Beverley, who I think was becoming a prominent figure as well on a national stage, was able to liaise very closely with myself as leader of Trafford; and that worked in terms of issues that we could actually sort out on the ground<sup>8</sup>.

PD: Big decisions?

DA: Yes, yes. And I knew that every step of the way, even though I was making, kind of, instant decision, like housing for refugees, schooling and using buildings and using offices, that I would not get into any difficulty in doing all that because of the connections with Beverley, and Beverley with the Prime Minister.

(28:01) PD: I think I should convey to you because we've been recording a lot of the children you evacuated, and now we're sixteen years on - so, for example, the 13 year olds are now approaching 30 - I think I should convey to you that so many of them have a sense of gratitude that they can't even express in words. The contrast between the way they were being treated in the Balkans and the experience of the camps, as well, which was obviously very tough, through to - they've commented on, the Macedonians on the plane flying them in were wearing masks - to being received by people, even

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<sup>8</sup> See MaK timeline and report in this archive: In a global humanitarian response to the conflict, the British government evacuates dispossessed Kosovars to Manchester, Leeds and Scotland. 4,346 of the most vulnerable men, women and children are selected from refugee camps. 2,400 arrive in the North West. *"People had few belongings, what they brought with them instead was bewilderment and dignity, grief and dispossession."* ('My Name Came up' Refugee Council, 2000)

the people who went on the planes in Manchester - who didn't wear masks - who were compassionate in a way they hadn't quite been experiencing. They are overwhelmed when they talk about their sense of gratitude and really it's a sense of love they felt when they landed in Manchester. So I do want to convey that to you David, because you played a huge part in this evacuation program. And so many of them are doing so well!

So this group of people who were brought, often with at least one member of the family - often whole families - with physical illnesses or injuries; no English; absolutely no belongings, no possessions, have become successful in the U.K. And we were talking earlier about how one of them is now an Organ Transplant Nurse<sup>9</sup> in Manchester Hospital and a lot of them are very successful in creative work as well, for example, graphic designers and other forms of art. And I know they would want me to say to you, David, they felt the plan and the whole welcome and reception - and then the programme which was set up for their recovery - was extremely good. So I do want to convey those thanks to you and I'm sure you'd be very glad to hear how well so many of them are doing.

(30:24) DA: Yes, I think that's absolutely wonderful that - from where they had to come from in terms of a horrific situation that they were growing up in - to actually hear those stories of how they have prospered and that they are

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<sup>9</sup> Lumnije Ahmetaj recording available in this archive

grown people now and are probably making huge impacts wherever they are. Yeah, it is really good to hear that.

But it's not down to me, I can assure you that it's down to, you know, the community.

And I think the love that people felt and the compassion that people felt when they saw what was going on, it's them, those people who drove that really. They should take the credit. I just pushed a few buttons that would open a few doors, quite frankly.

It's very simple, really. I think everybody deserves opportunities and life chances. I was given life chances: I had a good upbringing. I love my family and my community. I'm not the brightest person in the world, but I know what is right and what is wrong and when I see inequalities and vulnerable people and vulnerable communities and where I see conflict, you want to try and change that. And young people, particularly, deserve to grow up in a place where there is peace and where they can prosper and not be brought up into conflict and poverty in the way that many people do. And what drives me is where I can do things, I will do things.

And I think how we can collaborate in any different way to prevent things from happening, particularly around health and around vulnerable people

who have not got those same life chances that I had: that's my motivation to improve the lives of people who I represent and work for.

(33:35) I think that time in history was really, really difficult. If we don't record those difficulties in the world, we will never learn the lessons from them. Ethnic cleansing to me is one of the worst things could ever happen to anybody and it's not a society that I want to live in. We see it so many times. We thought that the Holocaust would be the end of all of that, and it's not. It happens time and time again. And if we do not record the history of these terrible events then we'll never, ever learn the lessons from them.

One day I hope we will though, and we'll all live in harmony and so on across the world. But, I'm an idealist.

The Imperial War Museum North:

(35:05) I was actually deputy leader of the Council at the time when we were approached by the Imperial War Museum in London and they wanted to build an Imperial War Museum in the North of England<sup>10</sup>. And they were looking for a site and they had a competition for a site. And myself and Bev Hughes agreed that it should be in here in Trafford, and on the banks of Manchester Ship Canal opposite the Lowry, with our site. And we actually

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-north>

then won that competition. Imperial War Museum in the South - who obviously runs the project - they decided that was the best site. So that happened.

We had to get Peel Holdings to agree to allow that site to be used for that, which we did.

PD: Who also own the Trafford Centre.

DA: Then Imperial War Museum London appointed an architect, Daniel Libeskind, who is a famous architect who actually designed the Holocaust Museum in Berlin. He designed it: they had a competition who would design the building. We saw the designs that they put forward. I think there was a few of them but Daniel Libeskind was just outstanding. And when I saw it, I said, "That has to be built here in Trafford!"

So we were trying to raise money then. We were charged with trying to raise European funding as a council. And we did: we got £8,000,000. The Imperial War Museum in London, they were charged with getting the rest from the Lottery and we didn't get a penny from the Lottery, which was absolutely terrible. So we were... we had a massive gap and we asked Peel Holdings, who own the land. They gave us the land, and they supported us in funding most of the rest although the council had to put another £2,000,000 in it. So it

was an absolute drive. I wouldn't give in for that! I just wanted that being built here in Trafford because I do think that you have to tell the story of conflict.

(36:55) And basically Daniel Libeskind, his thought process around the design was the world has been in conflict in the air, in the sea and on the ground and the shards that stick out, and so on, are the rebuilding of the world.

The shattered globe, yes: so an absolutely fantastic concept. And so it had to be built, as far as I was concerned, so I was determined that that would happen. And we did, we did it. But it was a struggle to do it.

PD: Are you pleased with the success of the museum, it's very, very busy - millions of people have visited it - I think it opened in about 2001, 2002, didn't it?

DA: Yes, 2002.

PD: And it's regarded, I think, as being hugely a successful museum. Whenever I go, it's always full of children.

DA: It is.

PD: And in a way, that breaks your heart but, in a way, it's incredibly important that they understand about conflict.

DA: It is. It is a shame that it is full of children when you go but at the end of the day, children take in a lot of stuff. And I think you have to catch it when they're young - you know, to get the messages through. I think the Imperial War Museum does that really, really well and captures that.

PD: Have you seen 'Children and War', the Big Picture presentation? You will, I'm sure, picked up on the fact that we contributed a lot of material to that so the children were in Trafford both gave oral histories which are edited in - it's not just about Kosovo, it's about many conflicts - but also the portraits which we commissioned, actually for an album we were doing, Manchester Aid to Kosovo, we gave those beautiful black and white portraits of the children and it ends with them.

So Kosovo featured quite heavily and I'm pleased that that's still being shown. That has been shown since the museum opened. And they've taken one or two of the Big Pictures shows down, (a multimedia presentation, which dominate the museum for 15 minutes and the lights go down) but 'Children and War' is still programmed, I think, twice a day at least.

DA: Which is brilliant, isn't it, yeah?

No... it's fantastic. It's also regenerated the whole area, as well. (laughs)

PD: And you're right about the architecture, that it lifts the whole of that area. It's so stunning. I think Daniel Libeskind might have gone on to win the Ground Zero prize.

DA: He did, he did. He's a remarkable man, actually. He was a top musician.

PD: Have you met him?

DA: Oh yes, yes, a lot of times.

PD: Could you describe him?

DA: Oh, absolutely fantastic, a fantastic person.

PD: So, he's German?

DA: Yeah, yeah, he's German, lives in America, real character but really nice bloke, basically. And I'll tell you, when he described his model, he described it absolutely wonderfully.

PD: So the decision was made but the money had to be raised. So it could have floundered but you pulled it off.

DA: Yes, we did. (laughs) I don't know how sometimes, but we did.

PD: So you've been involved in a way with lots of things connected with war.

DA: Yes.

PD: And survival and recovery. Not just the Kosovar evacuation programme.

DA: Yes.

PD: But now, Fire and Rescue and the War Museum.

Could I... one thing I'd like to just spring on you David, is Angela Merkel's leadership of Germany in the Syrian crisis, in a way, was quite surprising, I felt. Could you comment on that? Were you surprised at the leadership she took?

DA: I was and I was very impressed. She absolutely took the lead and I just was amazed by that. But I was also amazed that people didn't follow her in the way that I believe that they should have done.

PD: Do you mean other governments?

DA: Yes. I thought she gave real leadership, probably to the detriment to herself, really. In her own country it could easily backfire on her. I think that took real courage to do what she did and I admire her for that but I wish that

other countries had followed suit, including our own. We could do a lot more: but that's personal.

I do understand how some people feel that we're over crowded and all that kind of stuff. I don't believe it myself but I can see the message, the negative messages about. Trying to tackle these issues, people sometimes respond to those negative messages but - for the life of me - I cannot believe that we can allow people to suffer, and turn our backs. I just can't personally believe that you can do that. When you see families coming over on a little dinghy and drowning and that little lad that was washed up on the beach, you know. What does that say about our society?

So yes, I have very deep feelings about that and I believe that we do have room and we can accommodate. We've got to do it in a structured way. I understand that you have to do it in a structured way because I think this crisis is like not many others, but there are others that you can draw on. And I think, you know, we just have a moral duty to deal with it. I think you've got to. So, yes, I do admire her.

I am that person who just gets on with things. I always think about John Lennon in one of his songs when he says, "Life is what happens whilst you're making plans." So, you've just got to get on with life and do the best you can I think.(laughs)

I believe that. I've seen so many people making plans and they never deliver on anything, all they've got it plans! (laughs) And I actually see them coming backwards and forward because I've been around them a while now. And I just want to get on and do things, you know.

All our fire stations were facing inwards and because of operational, and all that, the public didn't really come into them. Why? Why are people not coming into our fire stations? They're in the heart of all of our communities. They're all community fire stations now. I think that is so important.

PD: That's a really good symbol.

DA: It is.

PD: And I think that team work was - and being open - was very characteristic of the work with the Kosovar refugees as well

DA: You've got to be, haven't you?

PD: Break down the barriers.

DA: I couldn't understand. I went once, and I couldn't get in, you know. And I was the Chairman and I couldn't get in. I thought: *This is ridiculous!*

Not that I couldn't get in but it was, like, turned away from....

PD: Fort Knox.

DA: I don't care, you know. I'm not precious about anything. I just thought that that's wrong. So anyway, they're all open to community groups and council if they want to use it and any voluntary groups and community groups. And they can come in for free.

So we've got a community room in every single one of them, now. Because there was room to have it - it was just, like, tradition: "Well... these are fire fighters homes, really. Well not homes, their 'domain' shall we say?" And you know, "Operationally you can't have the public wandering around!" Well, why not? What's stopping them from wandering around? You should be bringing them in.

So, anyway, they are now, so. But that's the type of thing I love doing because the fire engines and the fire stations are paid for by the public and they should be used by the public, like schools.

PD: Yes.

DA: It really annoys me when a school - and they still do it - they, you know, they've got all those facilities and instead of just opening them all up and

trusting people, you know, they've got to charge them this and charge them that. And, keep big fences. "Don't let them on the fields and all that, people!"

"Why?"

There's ways and means that you can do it: a little bit of imagination to open them up. I mean, they are better than what they used to be but they could be a lot better than what they are now. You know, community is important. You saw that through the Kosovo situation: you build a lot stronger community if you open everything up that actually does belong to the community because they pay for it.

And you will get trust. If you give trust to people you'll get trust back.

