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The original version of my presentation today was for an hour's lecture. However, today I will offer a much shorter, condensed version of the original.

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In 1924 an exhibition was held in Wembley, which is about 10 km from the centre of London. The British Empire Exhibition had been planned much earlier but wars and politics had delayed it. It was to celebrate the British Empire which then consisted of 58 countries across the world. In the event 56 of those countries took part. If you looked at a map of the world at that time, much of it was coloured pink - that was the Empire but, even then, people were aware that it was shrinking and today it has been replaced by the Commonwealth, a loose confederation of largely independent countries.

But why this slide of Wembley Stadium ? Well it's because I was born and lived there just up on the hill above the stadium. My family consisted of my two parents and 3 children, of which I was the youngest. My parents had been born and bred in London but my grandparents were Jewish refugees from what we now know as Poland and Lithuania but then all part of Czarist Russia. As I grew up there were only two grandparents left neither of whom spoke English fluently.

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My sister was 10 years older than me and left home as a married woman age 18 so my brother and I , 5 years apart, followed the same educational pattern: starting at age 5 we attended the local Primary school then at 11 we passed the examination which took us onto a Grammar School, a secondary school for the minority of children thought to be capable of an academic education up to the age of 18. For the majority, however, their secondary schools only took them to age 16 and the curriculum was less specialised and less demanding.

This pattern of separation reflects a fundamental truth about Britain which is that it is a divided nation – wealth, education, culture, speech, occupation, where people live and the homes they live in – all these reveal differences which either ENABLE or DISABLE and we can add religion and skin colour to that list . These divisions may be less marked than in the early years of my life but they still persist.

Although my brother and I followed a similar route, we were of different temperaments and achieved different outcomes from our time at school. He was more serious and hardworking than me. I spent much more of my time in the ice-rink which was in the building now called the Wembley Arena. I enjoyed some success in the junior ice-hockey team and was a member of the England Junior team – although, of course, there weren't that many ice-hockey teams in England at the time!

My other activities in my teenage years were focussed on earning money and I had a number of different week-end jobs, including working in a milk bar (coffee bars hadn't yet arrived in England) and a music shop in central London. The shop sold records (the vinyl ones) both new and used and my job was to improve the appearance of the old ones by applying a coat of black shoe polish to the discs which made them look much brighter and newer than they actually were! In the summer after I left school I worked full-time for a firm of accountants, helping on audits of various companies in different parts of London.

Now aged 18 and ready for my entry into adult life which would either be conscription into service in the armed forces or deferment of this until the completion of university studies.

This latter choice was the route my brother had chosen and I now decided to follow that same route. Unfortunately my lack of devotion to academic study produced the inevitable result – I failed to reach the required level in my final school exams! But luck was on my side and I was offered a place in a university on condition that I repeated the exams I had failed before entry to the degree courses which I had chosen.

So in October 1951 I joined an even smaller minority than before as I became one of the 5% or so of my age group entering higher education (today that figure is roughly 40% of the age group).

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University College, Leicester was for me a totally new environment and a new way of life. I was now a semi-independent person having left the sheltered experience of home. Being away from home, sharing a room in a university residence, organising my own time were all new experiences. Even getting from Wembley to Leicester, some 100 kms distant, involved an interesting new experience – hitchhiking! I thoroughly enjoyed this first year but again I failed the end of year exams - disaster! I was given one last chance; pass the exams in November and proceed to the main degree course OR into the army you will go !

All's well that ends well - with some useful advice from my brother and some hard work, I eventually made it onto the French language and literature course which would occupy me for the next three years. So in June 1956 I emerged with a good degree and as the President of the Students, Union for the 56-57 year. That year consisted of informal and formal occasions as President as well as my preparation for a career in education.

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In the 1954-55 year my course had taken me to France as a foreign language assistant in a French lycée and, despite my difficulty in passing exams in German, I had asked to be placed in a part of France near Germany. I couldn't have been nearer – Sarreguemines was 16km from Saarbrücken and in addition to all the various experiences of that year abroad, I learnt to understand something of the difficult historical relationship between those two countries.

On my return to the UK in the summer of 1956 I again sought employment and I was taken on by a major tourism company to act as a travel courier accompanying British tourists to Switzerland and Germany. This occupied two of my summer vacations and gave me some insight into the handling of groups of people and the demands of a stressful occupation.

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In June 1957 my wife, a fellow student of French, and I were married and after another brief temporary job, I began my teaching career. This was in a school which was part of an experimental scheme of comprehensive education where the divisions of separate secondary schools were mitigated by having all of an age-group learning in a single school. This change has developed over the years but met considerable opposition initially.

The next few years were a busy and demanding times: by 1960 we had a young daughter, I had a period off work following surgery to remove a brain tumour and the first of several of my books for schools had been published.

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After 16 years service in four very different secondary schools, my career took a turn as I became a school inspector / adviser in Nottinghamshire and finally as a Senior Inspector/ Adviser in England's second city, Birmingham. My retirement was early, in my 50s but then yet more opportunities opened up: a new national scheme of school inspections was introduced and I took part in well over 20 of those inspections after which I became part of a private educational consultancy with a retired senior academic from Birmingham university and then, finally, I became involved in the world of third age education where I met among others a lady called Carman Stadelhofer on a committee which I chaired for a number of years.

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It was during those years that I had gone to a college in Birmingham, where our consultancy had an office, to pick up some post. Unusually the entrance to the college was lined by young children holding flowers and obviously waiting for the arrival of some important person. This was confirmed when the Principal of the College emerged accompanied by the well-known figure of the head of the English Catholic church, Cardinal Basil Hume. They were also awaiting an arrival which turned out to be none other than Mother Teresa and I had only come by to pick up my post !!

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In 2012 a debate was held in the House of Lords, the second chamber of Parliament, in Westminster, on questions relating to the care of the vulnerable in our society. U3A members and senior school pupils from across the country took part in this event and I was fortunate enough to be there as well. Apart from the debate, I also learnt something important: when the Lords are in session some may well be asleep slouched on the leather benches but leaning back like this is, in fact, necessary to be able to hear through the loudspeakers embedded in the back of the benches!

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Some few years earlier this invitation arrived in the post. It was quite unexpected and without being royalists my wife and I were delighted to be invited to the Palace. There were some 200 people at that occasion including many famous in the fields of science, education and entertainment.

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Photography was not permitted but an official photographer followed the Queen as she talked to the invitees. This was the only published picture and shows HMQ (Her Majesty the Queen) enjoying a joke with a former Speaker of the House of Commons and a very well-known TV actress. Just behind them you will see a bespectacled gentleman who was part of our party, with his wife's hat just visible further back, myself just next to him and, looking away from the Queen, a lady in pink, my wife.

So as I approach my 90th birthday I am still busy and very much aware of the changes I have witnessed over the years.