

This is the transcript of an interview between Spalding Gray and the Irish Broadcaster, Joe Duffy, broadcast on the RTE Radio 1 programme "Liveline" on the 31st of May 2002. The interview and the transcript are the property of RTE (IRISH) Radio and are not to be reproduced without expressed permission. The audio may not be broadcast only the written copy of the interview. The interview is the intellectual property of RTE Libraries and Archives and the series producer is Margaret Curley. Copyright restricted / may not be loaned / may not be broadcast / not for re-sale / not for public exhibition / may not be replicated in any form or manner without the prior express permission of RTE

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Interviewer: Spalding Gray, Good afternoon to you.

SG: Hi, Hi

Interviewer: First of all Spalding, I'm very, very sad to read about your accident? What do you remember about the car crash?

SG: Oh god, I just remember looking up to seeing a little van hurtling towards us and the next thing I remember I'm out in the street in a puddle of blood in pain. It all happened so fast, so fast.

Interviewer: And this happened in Westmeath here in Ireland last June, around June the 22nd.

SG: Yes, yes, that was it.

Interviewer: And tell us how long were you lying in the road before the ambulance arrived.

SG: Oh an hour.

Interviewer: My God.

SG: And when it arrived it was like an old bread truck. It was really rickety. It went to the Tullamore hospital there in Moate. And um...

Interviewer: Why did the ambulance take so long do you believe?

SG: I don't know. I never found that out. I was so in such shock.

Interviewer: But Spalding was it that they didn't get a phone call or

SG: No, I think the ambulance was notified fairly soon by neighbors by the accident.

Interviewer: How many people were in your car and what condition were they in at that stage?

SG: There were 4 of us. I was the one who got the beating. My wife was driving and she got some chest problems from the air bag. She thought she was dying from internal bleeding. But, everyone else just piled out of the car, even one person took pictures. But the sad thing is I'm not getting any financial remuneration and it's costing me a fortune in medical bills. What was a comedy has started out to be a little heavier.

Interviewer: It sounds that it's turning into an awful situation because your whole livelihood, people would know you in Ireland from Swimming to Cambodia, your comic stand up, your writing, your acting. You weren't working, were you on a holiday here in Ireland at the time?

SG: Yes, we had just arrived. It was my 6th time over and it was my 60th birthday. We had been there only one day. So we were just into it and got demolished by fate.

Interviewer: What were your injuries Spalding?

SG: Broken hip, fractured skull and now I have a foot that's lame from it. The right foot is not responding.

Interviewer: Let me be blunt. Were you happy with your treatment in the Hospital? It seems from a piece we read that you weren't.

SG: Not the first hospital. The second one more so.

Interviewer: What was wrong with the first Hospital?

SG: It was run by Pakistani Doctors and they were not easy for the women to deal with. (In background you can hear child saying 'Mom' as Spalding was at home). And they were very officious and said that I just had to stay there for 6 weeks and have no operation. 6 weeks in bedlam. It was a dormitory room with everyone's television on and cell phones going off and I finally got moved down to Dublin. That was Tullamore Hospital in Dublin. (Spalding is confusing Tullamore, Co Offaly and Tallaght Co Dublin)

Interviewer: No, its Tallaght Hospital in Dublin.

SG: Tallaght hospital in Dublin. The Nurses were excellent and the Surgeon was an Irish man, John McElwain, and he proceeded to operate on my ahhh right hip putting in a titanium plate in and reinforcing it.they didn't discover the fractured skull, until, ah my wife discovered it actually about 4 days in then and had to be moved to another hospital to have that examined to St. James (James Hospital near Heuston Station, Dublin city) so it was a real ordeal In all it was 3 hospitals in Ireland.

Then back to New York for an operation here.

Interviewer: But you say in the first hospital you were in, I'm unclear as to which hospital it is, maybe we shouldn't name it at this stage

SG: I believe it was Tullamore.

Interviewer: Tullamore. In that first hospital, how do you think they regarded *you*, Spalding? First of all, did anybody know you? Anyone know your reputation?

Anyone know that...

SG: No. We got out because Kathie contacted Patrick Murphy, the head of the Irish Arts Council and he shuffled me down to Dublin. But otherwise I was treated like a stranger. You know I was treated fine by the nurses. It's just that the doctors were, they very hard to reason with, you know. Particularly the head doctor who said I just had to stay there in traction for 6 weeks.

Interviewer: But were you a difficult patient Spalding? Can I ask you that?

SG: Was I? No. I wasn't bad. (Both laugh lightly).

Interviewer: It sounds like you were in a terrible state.

SG: I was now looking back at it you know. In my journals, when I've done the material before it comes out funny. But now looking back, I see it as a real disaster.

Interviewer: But did one of the nurses say to you, you said...How are you feeling? (*Interviewer is reading from the Sunday Times article from the previous Sunday which promoted the radio programme to call Spalding*)

SG: Yeah, I said I was feeling a little, I was going to say depressed and I said blue. She said “why would you be blue Mr. Gray? Should I take you to the spinal ward and there you’ll see something to calm you down.” So um, that was a good Irish lesson in courage.

Interviewer: (laughs). And the story about the clipboard Spalding and your wife.

SG: Oh God, well. That was in the first hospital. They had a clipboard on her chest and she said but that’s where I’m hurting. And they said we haven’t got any other place to put it. They were taking notes on her chest. And another woman came through taking a survey asking me if I wanted the hospital to be smoke free. Really. Which I thought was really, um....

Interviewer: (Laughs). This is not a joke Spalding.

SG: No, still not a smoke free hospital up there. They have a smoking ward.

Interviewer: And the crew of the ambulance you say asked you something when you arrived as well, when they arrived, sorry, when they arrived.

SG: I think they were asking if I was temperamental because I seemed in such a state.

Interviewer: You'd just been in a car crash.

SG: I know but I was howling and complaining a lot.

Interviewer: Surely that's normal for people who are in a car crash.

SG: I think so. I think so.

Interviewer: We now know you have a fractured skull, hip injuries and a whole list.

Now, you turned this into, not you turned this into, obviously your forte has been talking about your experiences in life and turning them into entertainment so when did you decide to turn it into your act and how has it now developed til today when you seem down about the whole episode. Rightly so I suppose.

SG: Right. Well I turned it into like an opening act for one of my monologues, it ran about 15 minutes and the audience laughed a lot at it.

Interviewer: What were they laughing at Spalding?

SG: Oh they were laughing at me doing my version of the Irish accent and laughing at the about oh, laughing at the nurses being surprised at my eating raw spinach because I was trying to get greens. But I suppose it was the business about me being in a kind of state of wonder at that point of... and confusion. And, um, it got a lot of laughs but now to me it strikes me as more serious because I haven't got this foot back you see, I haven't got this foot.

Interviewer: It's now nearly a year, its 11 months almost exactly in June, broken hip, fractured skull, sciatic nerve damage, and your point is that you're not getting any better.

SG: Well no I don't seem to be, I don't seem to be because I've been depressed. I ah, not just from the accident because we moved houses around the same time as the accident and that left me devastated.

Interviewer: People might be a little bit offended with the mention of, you seem to be hard on the Pakistani doctors. A lot of Irish hospitals the backbone are doctors who are here working from...

SG: I understand, yeah

Interviewer: But you weren't happy.

SG: No, because of the way that they treated not only the nurses but my wife and you know would look right through her whenever she was trying to talk about me or was trying to get me moved out of there. They wouldn't respond to her. It just seemed that they were, it just seemed , I don't know if its true, that they were ahhhhhhh ummmmmm (pause) not ahhhhh at ease with women. But I may be wrong.

Interviewer: Ok. Are you able to perform now?

SG: Yeah I can go out, I can go out. Because I'm sitting down.

Interviewer: How are you today for example?

SG: I'm pacing around in the kitchen. Flapping my foot. I'm not, you know

Interviewer: You have *no* feeling in your foot.

SG: Right.

Interviewer: My God. Now do you hold....do you...How would you describe your feelings to the hospital then? Is it anger? Is it bemusement? ...

SG: No, no, no. The anger is with the man that hit me. Cause am I never got to yell at him. And he was in the same ambulance as me. But the memory of the hospital...

Interviewer: And how was he Spalding? What injuries did he have?

SG: Oh, he only sustained a broken arm.

Interviewer: And whose fault was it? Can you tell me?

SG: I think it was his fault because we were in the right lane about to turn, we were stopped , you know country roads and he barrels around the corner out in the middle of the road so he barreled right into us. We were stopped, you see.

Interviewer: Have you ever had injuries before Spalding in all your travels?

SG: Only from skiing. Never from automobile accidents. I broke 3 ribs.

Interviewer: In total, how long were you in hospital in Ireland for?

SG: I think 1, 2, 2 ½ weeks. *(In the background Kathleen (I presume it is her) says "longer")* Longer 3 weeks.

Interviewer: And now, you say now the big issue, Is it a big issue paying your medical bills in the States? How expensive is it?

SG: No it's not. In Ireland, the bills for the Irish stay was not high. But, am, the bill here is more extensive for the operation on my head, on my skull. My insurance is picking up most of it but they are making me sue.

Interviewer: Who are you suing Spalding?

SG: The veterinarian who was driving the van. You have to do that for your insurance to pay. There has to be some move towards suit or your insurance won't pay.

(Now Interviewer goes to a caller who says he had a serious car accident and essentially owes his life to the treatment he received at Tullamore hospital. He spends time describing his accident and praising the hospital. This goes on for a few minutes but is irrelevant to Spalding's case. What the motorcyclist is saying basically is that he was treated well in the hospital and the doctors were very nice to him. So what's his point? That because Spalding was a little more vocal he got treated worse and he should have adopted the Irish stoicism and accepted the meager treatment and be thankful for it?)

Interviewer: Spalding – did you ask for a private room?

SG: Not there but I got one when I got down to Tallaght.

Interviewer: But I remember hearing stories, this is to support Spalding, not about the hospital but I remember, we had an election here recently Spalding and hospitals and health care always comes up, biggest issue, so to speak in the election, and I remember one of the points being made was the road from one of the midland towns to

Tullamore hospital was an awful journey in the back of an ambulance.

What townland were you near Spalding when you had the accident.

Do you know?

SG: No. It was near Moate. *(It was Rosemount, County Westmeath, 5.9 miles, a 20 minute trip, they were coming back from a restaurant on their way back to their lodgings at Coolatore house. A right turn at the end of the village by the G.A.A. (Irish sporting) pitch.)*

Interviewer: Near Moate.

(More from same caller – questions politely Spalding’s negativity and wishes him well, the Irish will not allow one of their own hospitals be criticized by an American. Tells Spalding it was unbalanced for him to pick the negative experiences out of it, what’s positive about a car crash? Poignantly the caller says he “genuinely hopes that Spalding’s injuries clear up” and he does get well)

Interviewer: Spalding, in terms of your fractured skull, does that give you much pain or discomfort?

SG: No. It just doesn’t look great (laughs). Bumps in the front, doesn’t read well on camera, you know.

Interviewer: Now, this is all going come out in a book.

SG: Well, I don’t know. They’ve asked me to write one.

Interviewer: About your experience in Irish hospitals. About the accident and what happened. And it's called "Black Spot."

SG: I guess. That was a working title. Cause that was the place where we got hit.

Interviewer: And was there a sign up saying accident Black Spot?

(Sometimes we put signs up to warn people about places where they are more likely to get killed, sometimes people plough into the signs and kill themselves anyway, the family is billed for the sign. There is no sign in Rosemount, just a memorial to the boy who was killed almost exactly in the same place the year before. His mother attended to Spalding at the scene and is referred to in "Life Interrupted". That is how I was able to locate the scene of Spalding's accident. Without that I wouldn't have found it.)

SG: No, but the woman who first got there to nurse me lost her 9 year old son in that very spot just a year before so it was a dangerous turn. I mean, if there was a sign, I didn't see it.

Interviewer: No, well I mean it doesn't always help but anyway. So Spalding, you've performed in Ireland I know haven't you?

SG: A number of times.

Interviewer: And you got a great reception and you're very well liked here. Sorry for the accident first of all for all concerned. I'm sorry the recovery isn't going as well as you would hope. But our fingers crossed so to speak. I appreciate your contribution today.

SG: All the best.

Interviewer: I'm sure we will get some reaction from the hospital. All the best from you Spalding.

(Motorcyclist genuinely wishes Spalding a speedy recovery).

SG: There's nothing like an Irish nurse, I still can say that.

Interviewer: Is that good news or bad news, Spalding?

SG: Good. They're very good, they're very good.

Interviewer: Regards to you and yours, Spalding. Bye, bye.

SG: Thank you thank you. Byeeeee.

(Promo and music then follow to encourage people to ring in and contradict Spalding's experiences even though they weren't there. In the next part of the programme a Pakistani doctor rings in to complain about Spalding naming his nationality and hospital and the comment about the Pakistani doctors attitude towards the women. As someone who lives near Tullamore I can say that the truth lies somewhere in between.) I think the doctor went way overboard at times, with

Spalding given no chance to respond. Not fair. Same with rest of the callers.

Note by John Boland: To transcribe this was very difficult.

Occasional words by both parties were left out. Additions in italics are by Irish Dave. (*I have put them in, I am familiar with the North Dublin accent*). It is very hard to get the full meaning of the interview without listening. However, the radio station would only provide the tape under very strict conditions, such as transcript only and exclusive to spaldinggray.com. *We were not allowed to put the audio on the web so what you are not getting here is the desperation and despair in Spalding's voice and the warmth in Joe Duffy's (the Interviewer)*

Special thanks go to Irish fan Dave (*thanks John!*) for the purchase of the tapes at considerable cost. (*Bizarrely inexplicable cost*). He has done considerable further research on the actual Black Spot which can be seen at his blog <http://spaldinggrayireland.blogspot.com/>

jb

Webmaster, www.spaldinggray.com

Note by "Irish Dave": I first made contact with John in 2007 and told him I had this recording. I promised him I would transcribe it but

for one reason or another (my daughter was born around the same time) I never got around to doing it. In April of this year I passed the recording onto John and he has completed this Herculean task. I have proofread the text and corrected the spelling of the Irish place names. I have also put almost everything (except the bit with the motorcyclist) in verbatim including half sentences and unfinished utterances. Some of the Interviewers sentences I have completed as, being Irish and a fan of the show I know what he was going to say next. Anything you see in Italics is my own comments, so much for journalistic neutrality.