Print to PDF without this message by purchasing novaPDF (http://www.novapdf.com/)

Let it slide

Going back to your spinal centre can be a strange experience. It can dredge painful memories that we may have scuttled away many years before. There could even be fond memories of friendships that were formed during a time of emotional upheaval. For me, going back to the National Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville serves to remind me just how far I have come since my injury seven years ago.

But this time I'm not visiting for treatment, or for my annual 'MOT'. I have come for a music workshop with a remarkable man. Describing himself as 'an old tetra from the seventies', Tom Doughty has been playing slide guitar for thirty years.

The guitar has always played a big part in Doughty's life. It started at the age of seven, with a secondhand guitar and an eclectic range of musical influences, many of which came through his dad's collection of Reader's Digest vinyl. By the time he was seventeen, he had developed a reputation as an accomplished folk player.

Then he suffered a spinal cord injury in a traffic accident in 1974. The resultant tetraplegia meant that he had no movement in the fingers of his left hand and only a weak curl in some of the fingers on his right. It was six years before he tried to play guitar again.

Doughty describes how, during that time, "The music was in my head but the way of producing it had disappeared. So I had to reinvent it."

The reinvention came when he placed a guitar in his lap, a tube on the index finger of his left hand, and began to experiment with slide guitar. It was a revelation. Soon, he was taping picks to the fingers and thumb of his right hand and picking out melodies. Over time, he was able to recapture his early command of the instrument, producing familiar sounds using a completely different method.

Now he's doing a tour of all the spinal centres in the UK for a series of guitar workshops and concerts.

At the beginning of the workshop, we all introduce ourselves. I explain that I played before my accident, and as a paraplegic I can still hold the guitar in an orthodox position.

"I hate paras," Doughty says, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

There are six of us in the group, an even split between paras and tetras.

We are each given a guitar tuned to an open cord. Then Doughty explains all the different kinds of bars and tubes that can be used on the strings. This includes an ingenious piece of kit that he has designed himself - a curved piece of metal that straps around the left hand, below the little finger. This allows someone with no hand movement to play by laying the side of their hand on the strings to change the pitch.

The slide guitar is played in a different way to a conventional guitar style. Instead of pushing the strings onto the fret-board with the fingers, the player lays a piece of metal on the strings, which produces a smooth slide between notes.

This description may sound confusing, but I am confident that you would recognise the sound as soon as you heard it. If you visit Tom Doughty's website, you can hear him playing **www.tomdoughty.com**

Once we have been introduced to the equipment, we're off. The room is filled with the sound of cats being