



# Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

John Hirst  
Interviewed by Stephanie Pennell

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## IMPORTANT

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## Interview Summary Sheet

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<b>Interviewee's forename:</b>	John	<b>Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Occupation:</b>	Farmer	<b>Date and place of birth:</b>	Meltham, Yorkshire, 1928
<b>Date(s) of recording:</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> October 2008		
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[Track 1]

*This is Stephanie Pennell, introducing John Hirst on Saturday 25th October 2008 for the Unheard Voices project in Eastbourne, East Sussex. The script to text recorder is Mirella Fox.*

*John, could I please ask you a few basic details first? Could you give me your full name?*

John Sydney Lewis Hirst.

*Could you please give me your occupation or former occupation?*

I'm a farmer.

*Could you please give me the date of your birth and where you were born?*

18th September 1928; at Meltham near Huddersfield in Yorkshire

*Could you please give me your mother's occupation?*

My mother's occupation, she was a housewife, mother. She didn't, didn't have a job.

*And your father's occupation?*

My father was the director of a cotton-selling, manufacturing firm.

*Thank you. Going right back to your early years, I'd like to deal with your background first.*

*You were born in 1928, so obviously you have a life of experience. Can you tell me something about your grandparents?*

My grandparents, my grand father was a Yorkshire man and he ran a big factory for sewing cotton at Meltham in Yorkshire; my mother's father was a solicitor in Norwich

and he lived to the age of 92 and he was practicing as a solicitor within a fortnight of his death!

*Gracious me! That's wonderful. Can you please tell me a little bit about your parents?*

Yes. Well my father again was a director of this same firm. Started in Yorkshire and then he had to move up to the main office in Glasgow; until he retired and then my parents moved down to Norfolk. They were married for nearly 50 years and had after their 3 children my brother and my sister; they had a very happy marriage.

*And your sisters and brothers, how did you get on with them?*

Very well with my sister, my sister unfortunately was a bit mentally handicapped and she died at the age of 30. My brother who is now a retired Court of Appeal judge I have always got on extremely well with him, three years older than me, but the age difference didn't matter and we have always got on extremely well together.

*Are you married?*

I am indeed, yes. We have been married for just over 50 years.

*And that was a happy marriage presumably?*

Extremely happy, four children and nine grand children.

*Yes. Yes. Goodness me. Do they live nearby?*

Fortunately they do, yes, very near. We, my son the younger son who runs the farm he just down the road. My two daughters are within... one is about 3 miles away, the other one about ten and my eldest son now who is moved away from the farm, he is only about 30 miles away. So we are very lucky, we all keep in touch.

[05:05]

*Can you tell me a bit about the houses that you lived in, your homes and the neighbourhoods?*

Well I, we lived in Yorkshire for the first five years of my life, right on the edge of the industrial area. Permanently smog and smoke and fog and everything unpleasant one way; but luckily we were just on the edge, and moorland and fresh air well within walking distance of the house luckily. And then at the age of five we moved up to Scotland and we lived on the Clyde coast there, with a house looking out over the sea with wonderful view: Aaron and some of the Clyde coast islands. Completely different to down south - to Yorkshire. But we did get a very, very wet climate there and my father had always promised my mother that when he retired they would move back down to her the home county of Norfolk which we did in 1950. And then five years later, I got the farm about 25 miles away from where my parents lived, which is on the edge of the broads between the broads and the sea. Lovely part of Norfolk, very good land and some lovely countryside roundabout there.

*Thank you. We didn't touch on your education as a child. Could you tell me a little bit about that?*

I went to two prep schools. The first one just outside Birmingham from the age of 8 'til ten at the beginning of the war and that was evacuated to Shropshire and we were actually living in Scotland; so I then went to another school which itself had a evacuated from Edinburgh to Perthshire, I was there for three years. Then I went to Eton from 1942 to 1947, when I did my national service. After that I did three years degree course at Oxford taking it -- reading agriculture, which was extremely scientific, not at all practical. Great mistake really, I should have gone to Cambridge. And then I took up farming, worked on a farm for a time and then got a farm of my own luckily.

*How did you feel about your school life and in the prep school and then at college afterwards?*

Well my first prep school I was definitely bullied and I wasn't at all happy there. But when I changed to the new school, in Scotland, completely different atmosphere

altogether; I was very happy there. And I was also very happy at Eton, made some good friends. Although I was not particularly good at games which was a very important thing at a public school. But never mind, I think everybody understood. And I got on well with the people that were much better and cleverer than I was.

*I know that sometimes people's friendships from college particularly last, did you find that yours did?*

Yes I did. Although not many friends in our part of the world unfortunately, but we do have reunions from time to time, particularly with my Etonian friends and our house, we had a very successful house; unfortunately I couldn't go to the last reunion which was only about a month ago and I am hoping it will be another one but we are all getting a bit ancient now!

[09:43]

*Thank you. Can I go on from education to employment now? You say you were a farmer. Can you tell me a bit about farming from the very beginning from your early times as a farmer? And over the years how you have got on? And the various stages?*

Well, when I first got involved in farming at all when I was down in Norfolk, I worked on a farm in the village, that a Scotsman who had come down from Scotland in the 1920s bringing everything down on a train and he was a very, very good farmer. But worked me very hard and sometimes got a bit exasperated with me I think, but had a lot to do there. And was treated very much as a junior member of the team, but there was a lot of hand work there, we used to have to muck out the cows by hand. They were milked mechanically but one had to carry the milk to the cooler; there was no system of pipes and what automatic transport to the milk about the farm, or anything like that. The corn was cut with a binder, sugar beat was singled by hand, there were no loaders no elevators, so it was very basic, even in the 1950s. When I, when we got the farm, my father knew nothing about farming at all but this farmer who I had been working for was like a father to me from the farming point of view, his whole attitude changed once I got the farm, he used to come over about once

a fortnight and keep me on the right track and that made all the difference because if you start up with something quite fresh like that, you have to have the benefit of somebody else's experience. And we were a bit more mechanised by then, we realised we would have to do away with as much hand labour as we could. But we still although we had a combine, we were still doing a lot of hand work and over the years the next sort of 50 years retired the first time from farming, we became more and more mechanized and tried to minimise the absolutely exhausting hand labour, monotonous work that so many farm workers had to do before that. Now the farm worker is very skilled, artisan, an engineer, he has to understand what is happening about his machinery, how to repair it and it is remarkable that there is still some people working on farms who started with horses and now can maintain these very complicated agricultural machines. It is quite amazing. I remember retired at the age of 65 handed over to my two sons, only one runs the farm now, but when my eldest son moved away, he gave up his interest in the farm and my wife and I sold our house, last year, bought his house and his section of the land and so we have now started farming again, my wife and I in partnership.

*You mentioned Birds Eye?*

Yes, we had a lot to do with Birds' Eye. Who are the main processors of the top quality vine and peas and we have grown that crop on the farm ever since I started. We had a group of about 70 farmers eventually, we co-operated to buy the necessary very, very expensive machinery and I was the chairman of this group and we had to take part in price negotiations with other farmers with Birds' Eye. And my son now is chairman of this group, which has been enlarged to include farm all the farmers in Norfolk and Suffolk that grow for birds eye at Leicester, it is quite a major undertaking. We also used to grow dwarf beans for them, very good crop to grow, with another type of machinery. But unfortunately in recent years, they have given up growing these beans, locally. And they import them from Spain and South Africa which is very, very sad.

[15:18]

*Thank you. I think you must have had a very -- it was obviously a very responsible*

*job. And you must have enjoyed it I assume? I was going to ask you about your leisure, did you have ever have time for leisure?*

Yes indeed, but after all if you are a farmer, you can to a certain extent decide when you start and stop in the day. My wife and I don't often go away on holiday, we have been on very few holidays, but my main recreation really was shooting, which I had to give up when I had my cochlear implant. But that is a good way of relaxing with friends and seeing other farms and generally you know enjoying oneself. Now I have given up shooting, I now go and beat our local shoots for charity. So I keep up with that side of it but don't actually do any more shooting.

[16:29]

*Can I take you back again? You mentioned national service. Can you tell me what rank you were and what you did in the war?*

I was only for two years. And I had a year of training. I then got my temporary commission joined the First Battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment which were the fourth regiment in the army to have been established - there was a long established regiment. And I spent nearly a year in Trieste, with no real excitement there, but always expecting that Yugoslavs might try and take Trieste because they surrounded us there, but nothing dramatic happened at all. And I very much enjoyed the time in Trieste, although the early training I found jolly tough.

*What sort of things did you have to do in training?*

Well, really being prepared for leading a small body of men under the conditions of warfare, because we might easily have gone to war with somebody rather like people now being sent out to Iraq. And it meant really taking part in mock schemes and mock battles, and we had to go on a battle course at Oakhampton and I went in severe winter time, we were in a Nissan hut and it was so cold there that although we had a small stove in the middle of the bag room and I was jolly near there, when you woke up in the morning the snow on your boots hadn't melted and that was pretty tough doing schemes and training in the snow on Dartmoor, I can tell you.

*And presumably, there was gunfire?*

Yes, that is unfortunately what most started off my deafness, and all sorts of gunfire. From rifles to peers, automatic anti-tank weapons which are still used and at that stage there were no ear defenders; nobody thought that any of this might cause deafness. And I wasn't actually luckily involved with any sort of major artillery, but I think there they probably would have given one some sort of ear protection.

[19:41]

*Thank you. Moving on just a little, have you been involved in politics at all? As part of your life?*

No, I haven't, no. Not really. Unless one calls being a member of the local parish council, I am trying to think of. Nothing above that. So really local parish councils ought not to be involved in politics, I am quite interested in politics, I am very interested, I vote. But I have never and I have filled in envelopes, filled up envelopes and delivered a few leaflets. But apart from that, take no active part in politics at all.

*And what about religion, is that a part of your life?*

Very much so indeed, yes. I have been a church warden for about 30 years, in our little village church of which I am very interested in and tried to support as much as I can. I have been a reader in the Norwich diocese which means that I was able to take Matins and Evensong at local churches, although now I only just concentrate on our own church. I have been on one or two church committees. I have been a member of our broker church council for I don't know how long. And I have also represented the parish at sort of deanery and diocese level. Which was all right when I could hear reasonably well, but I had to give all of that up except for the local parish work before I got my cochlear implant.

*I am sorry, I don't think I actually asked you where you live now?*

It is in east Norfolk, near Yarmouth between the broads and the sea.

*Yarmouth, presumably, was one where one of the big Birds' Eye frozen foods centres was?*

Yes, it used to have a factory in Yarmouth and in Lowestoft and we supplied Yarmouth to start with, but they then rationalised moved to Lowestoft and the roads the communication in Yarmouth are nothing as good as Lowestoft, they by pass to Yarmouth so we could deliver our crops down to Lowestoft within very strict time limits and it was a more modern factory down there. Birds' Eye of course did also a lot of fish and they still do a certain amount, mostly based up at Hull. And with the port at Yarmouth as well we used to send some of our and still do send some of our grain there, which goes exported on small ships.

[23:28]

*Fine, thank you very much. I would like to move on now to change the subject a little. Moving on to health care and professionals, and on to the hearing loss itself.*

Can I ask you about your hearing loss and the diagnosis, when this happened? When did the diagnosis happen? When did you first notice that your hearing was going, how old were you?

I think it must have started immediately after my national service in 1949, although it was fairly gradual and I didn't really have a problem until we got married in 1958, when my wife said, I think you must go and have your ears tested. I, we then went to see an ENT man in Norwich and he did the usual moving over to corner of the room, looking away; so I couldn't see what he was saying, so completely disjointed or non-connected sentences. And I heard not a word. And that really brought it home to me that I was getting a bit deaf.

He then supplied me with a hearing aid in one ear, and the other ear which was my worst ear; he suggested that I should have an operation a fenestration which I believe is trying to loosen the bones in the inner ear, and I had this operation down in Oxford, what went wrong I don't really know. But under the anaesthetic I heard an enormous

bang like a land mine going off because land mine did once go off very near our house in Scotland during the war, and I heard no more in my right ear and what actually happened was discovered until I had my cochlear implant operation, that the surgeon completely dislodged the ear drum and so no sound could pass through that at all. So that ear was knocked out completely from 19 -- beginning of 1959. I then had a series of hearing aids that got more and more powerful, I did once try a private one which I think must have been one of the first digitals; and that was all very well until it went wrong, after about a year. I went and saw people who supplied it, expecting that they would supply me with another one and they said, no another £250, so I said thank you very much. And continued with the national health who had been absolutely superb all the way along. Well, then, I was gradually getting deafer and deafer as I was taking stronger hearing aids and in about 1987 I woke up one morning and thought, Oh gosh I have wax in my ear again; which sometimes did happen. Build up of wax which just about knocked out my hearing temporarily, went along to the village surgery, had the ear syringed out and to my horror, absolutely no improvement at all. So, I then lost I think I suppose about 90 per cent of my hearing in what was the only ear that was working. And so, we had to do something fairly drastic. Went to see a specialist at the Norfolk and Norwich and he recommended that I should go to be assessed for a cochlear implant. Things were very, very slow in those days. It took two years of assessment at Addenbrooke's, and I was then told that it was a waiting list of two years because Norfolk could only supply the funds for two operations a year. And that was a waiting list of four. So I had to resign myself to a long, long wait. Struggling desperately with my hearing in the meanwhile, I then moved on to the very most powerful hearing aid of all and that wouldn't help me very much. And then when two years was almost up and I really had given up hope because I knew that the funds were limited and I thought they had probably forgotten about me, particularly with somebody of my age. Got a call one week to say, can you come in? Thursday next week, have the operation done. And of course I accepted that. And here we are with this wonderful miracle of a cochlear implant.

[29:26]

*You said generally that the treatment that you got was good. And that people were largely superb in their help. How did you feel about it yourself? From the very*

*beginning, how did you feel inside? When the ENT person did something wrong?*

Well, when I had this when the operation went wrong, right at the very, very beginning I didn't realise what had happened at all. That is the only error that I am aware of, you know, in the whole course of the of my deafness and the treatment I have had for it. I realise now in the present conditions probably that I could have taken action against the surgeon for gross error, but never occurred to me in those days whether I would have tried to take action I don't know; but I didn't realise at that stage how serious it was to completely lose the hearing in one ear. Because I can still hear fairly well in this one with a hearing aid, so you know things weren't dangerously wrong then, if he knocked out both then that would have been a major disaster! But when they were assessing me, the there was great debate as to whether they should put, I should have the implant on my left ear which while I was having the hearing aid in, or whether they should use the -- try to do something with the right ear which hadn't been working for 40 years. And I think luckily, the surgeon decided to do the ear that hadn't been used, my right ear. My theory is that nothing inside that had got worn out, no sound had been going through so everything was sort of in the same state right inside the ear, the cochlea certainly as it had been 40 years before, which might explain why I have got such brilliant hearing now. The actual -- the operation they managed to thread the cochlear through, so I got full advantage of all 22 electrodes, the full range of sound so it is really a case of matching up the volume on each electrode to get them right, which took a bit of time. Perhaps about six months of going back to Addenbrooke's, but then they got it right. And so ordinary speech it is quite remarkably clear.

*During the time that you saw the different medical people, people at the clinics, did they do the referrals or did you have to chase people up apart from having such a long wait, did they refer you to different people each time?*

Yes they did. I think really from their point of view there was no urgency about it because knew they wouldn't get the funding for all this time. I did get a bit frustrated; I would go along perhaps and have my balance tested one time. And then another time I have another test of some kind. And then the final thing was the X-ray; which then showed I think that state of the cochlea and I was a bit surprised

really, they didn't do that first, because if that had been in a poor condition then they presumably wouldn't have gone ahead anyhow.

But now I think the whole process is tremendously speeded up because they have I think they have done 200. I think I was about number 205 something like that, and they have now done over 500, so they are doing constantly employed, they have got far more staff working there now. And they have two surgeons. I was when I had my operation I was the first nearly the first I think done by Mr. Axon, who had come from another area and is now sort of permanently employed at Addenbrooke's. There was one slight scare that they were warning me about, they said that when I had this implant that it might -- the only danger was that they were operating very close to a nerve that works on the side of the face. And there was about one in 200 chance that this might go wrong and as I was just over number 200 and they hadn't had any problem about it I thought well, I might be the unlucky one, but of course luckily that didn't happen and I don't know whether it has ever happened since; but one of these things they have to warn you about.

*So overall, the process of having your implants put in to the time that you were then made to work so to speak, how long was that all together?*

Yes it was two years. It was two years of assessment time and then once the operation was done it was only a matter of couple of months to allow the tissue inside to heal up. But then it was the great moment of switching on as they call it, and I could then hear 90 per cent as well as I can hear now. It was just the fine tuning after that. I would like to say how many times I went back to have these, have these fine tuning done, they actually changed the apparatus from a body worn one which I started with, to one behind the ear. That was a major improvement, but except for really what fine tuning the job has done, when I had to switch on.

*Can you describe to me your feelings when you had the big switch on?*

Well, complete amazement really. Particularly I hadn't met anybody and I was not introduced to anybody who had had a cochlear implant and I had heard these rumours it might sound like a dalek noise that I only just get one tone the whole time, but every

sound would sound the same. And I was quite amazed because the very first sounds I heard somebody said, can you hear me all right or something like that and the voice sounded just like it used to do ten years before when I had very much better hearing. It was quite extraordinary, I couldn't believe it. But since then, I have been able to go and see some people who are being assessed for cochlear implants and I have tried to explain to them what I think they may be able to hear; although because mine has been so successful, I think I may sometimes be a bit optimistic because it doesn't -- it is not always so effective for everybody, than it has been for me. I belong to a, I belong to a lip reading class in Norwich and I recommended when people, there are two people there had the chance to have cochlear implants and one of them hasn't worked really very well, the other it has worked very well indeed.

So, I realise how lucky I am that in my case it has been so brilliant.

*Fine. Can we just take a pause there please?*

[Track 2]

*We have been speaking about the health care aspect of your life. Can we talk now about the impact of the hearing loss on you? Firstly, on your self-esteem, how you felt about it, your identity, did you feel that it changed you in any way, losing your hearing?*

Well, initially when my hearing was just going down gradually, no, not too badly. But the dramatic moment where I woke up and thought I had got wax problems and in fact my hearing had almost gone, from then to the time that I had the cochlear implant things were very different indeed. And I really thought I might become a kind of recluse, which hopeless trying to hear people in any situation. I got very depressed and virtually gave up, as I said earlier, all the committees that I was on because no point in going there if you couldn't hear. I find it very difficult to socialise in any way, even to carry on sort of casual conversation, because you never quite knew from the start what the other person was going to say and I had to try and monopolise the conversation as far as I could so I knew what we were talking about; which is pretty poor way of working with people, talking to people, or communicating with people.

So I did find things very difficult.

*Did you feel that people shared or understood in any way this?*

Certainly my family did, very much so indeed. My wife the whole way along has been most wonderful support and under in difficult situations she would always be there and would tell me what I missed or whatever it was. But certainly meeting with complete strangers things weren't easy at all. It is quite certain that my whatever hearing aid I had got was visible, and I used to, I didn't like the behind the ear one because that might easily not be seen by people who one met just occasionally. And I on that subject I find it difficult when you meet somebody who you can't see their hearing aid to know that they, they are hard of hearing.

*How did you feel about labels becoming a deafened person?*

No, that didn't worry me at all. The label side of it, just the practical side really; that it was a major handicap and I wasn't being very successful in overcoming it.

*And the status of being a disabled person, did that bother you?*

Well, I didn't really consider being disabled. I call it more of a handicap. And well it did bother me because I couldn't communicate that I ought to be doing, but otherwise that was not worrying to me.

*When you weren't able to take over the conversation as you said, what happened then, how did you feel then when it might seem that you were being excluded from a conversation?*

I felt a bit of an idiot really, because I couldn't join in what other people are talking about and sometimes found that if I did make a remark then the subject had changed or somebody had said that already, which made me go more and more into my shell. I think that is the experience of a lot of people, who are particularly hard of hearing.

*As far as your intelligence was concerned, did you feel that you were able to exercise that in the sense that you were on committees and there is something you felt you couldn't do any more because you couldn't hear? Did you feel the frustrated by not being able to do those sort of things?*

Yes very much so. I tried to overcome it by taking round a portable loop but that wouldn't always work. And it was a very difficult to organise things so that one could see everybody who was talking and people would talk at once or they would be looking at their neighbour away from me and although I was usually chairman, I didn't like to make too much fuss and I suppose being a bit cowardly I just gave the job up, but occasionally I used to come back home and said it was an absolute waste of time going; I couldn't hear a word.

[06:41]

*Could I ask you about your personal relationships? You said your wife has been very*

*supportive to you over the years. Had you met her as you were a hearing person or did you meet her afterward?*

Yes I was a hearing person then, it was her that really said to me look I think you are going deaf. I think ironically, I think she is going a little bit deaf now, but so we have some funny conversations occasionally, but, no, all the way along she has just accepted me for what I am and I think if she hadn't been supportive I think life would have been very hard. She always knows and still does really, things like where to sit in the room, she is thoroughly deaf aware; in a quite unobtrusive way. But we do have our funny moments because when I take my implant off which I do going to bed, until I get up in the morning, I can hear nothing and we have an absolute minimum sign language and it is usually just nods and grunts and some sort of absurd communication until I put the hearing aid on again when I am dressed and then we start up with the normal conversation once more.

[08:31]

*Moving on now to employment. Has your income been affected by your deafness? I suppose a way of life.*

I would say no, except when I had to give up being chairman of our farmers' group. I did lose some income there, but I didn't so to speak rely on it for my living. So I like people that are in an office job I was lucky in that respect. One could be a farmer without any hearing at all and with no hearing aid or assistance in any way I think, it would be slightly at times but you could still do the job all right. Particularly with modern forms of communication; which I am afraid I still hardly use at all.

*Do you claim benefits?*

I get a benefit for -- I can't remember the exact definition of it -- from the war disablement pension. Because I was assessed just after I had my cochlear implant and it was decided that the damage was initially caused by the gunfire that I mentioned earlier, while I was doing my national service. And I get a very useful tax-free pension which is index linked as a result of that. But I don't claim any other

disability benefit at all. Although I think one can and I feel that I have got this one, that it was slightly immoral but I don't need it if I did claim it I think I ought to give it to charity. But at the moment I don't do that, but I may have missed the boat anyhow.

*But you are happy with your financial situation?*

Yes.

[11:36]

*Moving on, can I ask about your education as an adult and maybe life long learning, is this something you follow?*

I don't go to any particular classes. I have just now given up going to lip reading classes which may be a mistake. But the actual technical side of it goes in cycles and I have done two if not 3 cycles and that side of it I don't think I would get much more benefit, although the social side of meeting up with other people in the same position is an important part of deaf lip reading class. But except for reading papers and articles and that kind of thing, I am not doing any formal further education at all.

*You mentioned your interests earlier. You have given up shooting; do you anticipate that you might take up different or more interests in the future?*

Well, I am very fond of gardening, spend quite a lot of time doing that. And I am trying to do some local things to help such as I am hoping now to enrol for, Oh dear - - not Help the Aged, Age Concern, but at the moment we only reach the stage of having yet another criminal record board form sent off. So that will be another delay; I believe some of the people handling at the other end have gone on strike or go slow! But I hope to do something there. And I do a certain amount for the Norfolk Deaf Association as well. So I have enough to keep me occupied anyhow. Perhaps I ought to learn to be able to use a computer. All I can do at the moment is send and receive E-mails! But we have got a grant at the Norfolk Deaf Association rewards for all, for I believe 10,000 pounds, which is earmarked for IT skills training for the deaf. So it is possible I am going to enrol on that. Try and learn a bit more.

*What about travel, do you get a chance to travel?*

Well, not really, no. My wife and I were so happy at home that we very rarely go away, our passports are now out of date and although we may have to renew them for identification purposes later, you know, we are very happy as we are really. We have had some very good holidays mind you; in the past, but we have never taken two holidays, three holidays like some people do. They seem to insist on going abroad two or three times a year, we have never done that in any way.

[15:47]

*Moving on now to yourself and wider society, although we have touched some of it, your family you have already mentioned as being very close. Do they take part in any activities involving deafened people? Apart from keeping you amused?*

No, I don't think they do unfortunately. They are members of the Norfolk Deaf Association, my four children, but fortunately now at the moment now that none of my or grand children are showing any signs of being hard of hearing, and you know until that happens, I don't really expect them to become involved in that.

The support they give me is very, very good. That is all I can expect at the moment.

*Can I ask you about your grand children specifically? How did you find they responded to you as a deafened person?*

They treat me quite naturally, they all -- they are all deaf aware in a sort of unobtrusive way. And they always make certain that they face me or they know that I am listening to them and they speak up and they do some, they enjoy finger spelling at times. And we treat it as a bit of a joke all together, so it is a very relaxed relationship in that way.

*Excellent. We have dealt a little with support networks with your work with the Norfolk Deaf Association. Are there other things you are involved in? You are a*

*guest here today at LINK, how involved are you with LINK?*

Well, not as much as I would wish I am sorry to say. I am a bit disappointed that I have had very few new contacts suggested in the last year or so. And I have made overtures – in fact, I very much like if possible to become a trustee and I was on the point of being sort of informally interviewed about this and then there was one of the inevitable financial crises last year and the interview was cancelled. But I would very much like to take, you know, more of a part in the actual policy of LINK because I think it is such an important means of helping deafened people. I enjoy my work as a volunteer. But we don't get enough referrals in our part of the world. I don't think people are nearly well enough aware of LINK as they should be. Whenever you go on the training course to be a volunteer, I think there were four people from the Croydon area and I got the impression that sort of round London this way, it is very much more intensive volunteer system than there is in East Anglia. I mean, my responsibility goes from I have got contacts at Kings Lynn and Cambridge and north Essex; so it is quite a large area and yet not as many contacts as I would expect. I think it may be slightly my responsibility for not chasing up the audiologists, so I did do that initially but I think I have got to get busy again. Partly for LINK and partly of course for cochlear implants.

*Not forgetting of course that we should be speaking of Hearing Concern LINK and I am sorry I didn't say that to start with.*

I am trying to say -- think a new word for it, perhaps LINK Concern, I think Hearing Concern LINK is a bit of a mouthful, we will see, I don't think that name has been finally agreed on has it?

*There are a lot of areas that the organisation ---*

Has come through.

*Covers. I believe you have also been involved with the National Cochlear User Association?*

Yes I am on the national executive of that. And we meet fairly regularly, we have another meeting coming up next week and of course we are extremely pleased that the powers that be have decided that the cochlear implants are a worthy benefit to be funded by NICE or NICE or whatever they call themselves. Which gives us power to our elbow, for our campaign that everybody who can benefit from a cochlear implant should have one. And particularly exciting that it is these implants are being given to children younger and younger and I feel so strongly that they should be given the chance, so that they could keep up the main stream of education and general communication rather than being just yet another young member of the Deaf community. I think I am sure that the longer that they are left to lag behind, the more difficult it will ever be to catch up. I was inspired by Lord Ashley to join the Cochlear Royal Users Association, and in fact it actually went Lorraine Gailey came to talk to the first Annual General Meeting I went to have the cochlear implant users association, that really got me on the idea of joining LINK so the two things together have, you know, encouraged me to try and do what I can to help. Unfortunately, we do a lot of our business of cochlear implant users by E-mail and I get a bit browned off with what is almost a chat show at times. We get five E -- everybody else except one other chap like me who doesn't communicate too much, and they keep voicing their views about something. And I haven't sort of got into that way of communicating at all yet.

[24:20]

*You mentioned campaigning. Can we perhaps talk a little bit about access and awareness and legislation? You obviously have views about cochlear implants and in a general way what are your views about a better deal for deafened people?*

Well, the main one must be deaf awareness. Because I am absolutely appalled how ignorant people are, and pretend that they are helping and for instance in our local supermarket they have two check outs, which have got the symbol for a loop and yet the first place they very rarely got anybody on those check outs and even when they do, the person who is there says no training, doesn't know what it is all about at all and I have been campaigning for so long with no effect and I have been trying to arrange that the Norfolk Deaf Association will give them some deaf awareness

training; but that still hasn't materialised yet. I was also hoping that I was going to become involved in the deaf awareness training programme that we do. But the person who organises it thinks that I wouldn't be, so to speak, stay the course or perhaps stay the course would probably find that the sort of day of delivering the deaf awareness would you know be beyond my capability, but I am a bit sad about that. I have been rather discouraged from carrying on on that one, but I have said that I would be quite prepared to go and talk to people on an informal basis without a sort of major day's programme, which can be fairly intensive I admit. But I would very much like to help in that. I did manage to get the a major improvement at the booking office on our main station in Norwich, where they had the signs up that they got the loops and they never used them, didn't know what it was all about at all. And actually took them to the disability commission and got the --they got a major rocket after that. And they installed the system properly, so that one can now tell what times people are talking about and what days people are talking about which is always a great difference. Numbers is one of the most difficult things to lip read for deaf people, and they were just completely unaware that a lot of what they were saying to deaf people wasn't understood by a deaf person. It is -- deaf awareness is so simple. A few simple rules make life so much easier for the deaf person, and just this one here with this screen, this moving as we have done now. And so I am facing you I haven't got the screen here, it has made all the difference, it is round like this and you were sitting there, light behind you, how difficult that would be. Elementary.

*This is the use of a palantypist, and the Speech-to-Text reporter; which is an ideal situation for an interview between two deafened people.*

Isn't it?

*But not every meeting is lucky enough to have such a facility.*

No. I found it extraordinary this happens, before I came up yesterday. My tax return, my wife and I had bought this land for my son, we have expenses to buy the land and I want to know how much that can be set against our other income. And I have been to the tax office in Yarmouth and they referred me to Norwich; they couldn't give me an answer. So I went to see Norwich before I caught the train and

the receptionist there said they don't give face to face interviews about technical subjects, you have to ring on the telephone. So I said well that is discrimination against the deaf. Because I am very, I am not happy using the telephone for business conversations. And so there is a case of deaf unawareness. It should be put right. Anyway the public body like that, again dealing with numbers, you have to get it right and face to face or in writing you can but over the telephone, hopeless. And surely they ought to realise that. That is the kind of campaign; I am going to campaign about that one now. And you go to a bank and they have the sign up and you say have you got your loop working? And they have got it in the cupboard in the corner. They have to bring it out, it is not operational, often they don't know how to work it anyhow.

*You obviously feel very strongly about discrimination?*

Well, I do, it is so easy to be avoided, you know. I mean the loop once they have got it set up, there is no, as long as it is set up and you have to look up and speak to you, and they don't, the machine is working but nothing else they need to worry about, the person behind the counter whatever it is.

*So, in the knowledge that discrimination still exists very strongly, from your description, is there any way you feel you personally can get involved in this and work against it?*

I think always one has to try and see the person in charge and quite in a reasonable way explain what it wrong and say can you do something better and if they can't, well say to them, look there are items of legislation about this, I hope you will put it right, otherwise I am going to make a fuss about it. And usually that does work. But it is ignoring it and expecting somebody else to do it because if one can communicate I hope I can do, it is my responsibility to try and take an initiative, whereas other people have the same problem might feel very scared about making a fuss and I am never afraid to make a fuss, provided I feel I am in the right.

*John, that was a very positive response. And you have given a very good interview, thank you very much indeed. I found it very interesting indeed. And thank you*

*Mirella for the Speech-to-Text reporting.*

I have enjoyed it.

*I will come to a close there. Thank you.*

[End of Track 2]

[End of recording]