



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Beryl Indge
Interviewed by Colin Ellis

British Library ref. C1345/04

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/04

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Indge

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Beryl

Sex: Female

Occupation: Retired bank clerk

Date and place of birth: 1932, Catford

Date(s) of recording: 25th October 2008

Location of interview: Hearing Link head office, Eastbourne

Name of interviewer: Colin Ellis

Speech to Text reporter: Emma White

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Colin Ellis, interviewing Beryl Indge on a lovely day, Saturday, 25th of October, for Unheard Voices Project at Eastbourne in East Sussex. Good afternoon, Beryl.

Good afternoon.

Would you like to state your full name, including your maiden name, please?

Beryl May Indge, I-N-D-G-E. And my maiden name was Lilley, L-I-L-L-E-Y.

What is your occupation now, or what was you in your occupation in your life?

I am now retired, and I worked for 25 years for Lloyds Bank.

Could you tell me the date of your birth, and where you was born, please?

The 8th of July, 1932.

And where was you born?

I was born in a place called Catford, South London.

Do you know exactly what your mother and father's occupation was, and even more, a little bit about your family background, like your grandparents? Would you like to tell me?

Yes. My father worked for the London Electricity Company, and my mother worked for C&A's in a place called Lewisham. My grandparents lived in Lewisham. My grandfather worked for the Post Office. He was in charge of the main registry department in London. My grandmother was a lady. She didn't put a hand to any work at all!

Some people have all the luck, don't they!? What about where you was born? Did you live in Catford for long?

I lived in Catford until the 1939 war broke out, then I was moved to Barnstaple in North Devon where my grandparents then lived, and they brought me up until I was the age of 13. Then I came back to London, went to school for a little while, left school, and worked in a private chemist to become a chemist pharmacy, but it didn't succeed. I went into Boots in the city and worked there until I got married, which was in 1950.

That was lovely. Now, was that your mother's parents that were in North Devon, and what was it like during the war?

Not my mother's parents. My father's.

That is fine.

Well, really, we didn't know what the war was about. We had rationing, but you still get lots of food that you couldn't get in London. We had an evacuee with us. Her name was Rosemary, and we became like sisters because we were both only children, unluckily Rosemary died. She had pancreatitis. Can I tell you something about my father's sister?

You may indeed. That would be lovely.

My father's sister was a matron of a hospital. She went to the front during the war. She nursed in Alexandria. She did quite a lot of brave things. She ended up at Cirencester as a matron there, and she died when she was 78.

[05:23]

Where did you go to school in Devon? Did you...

I went to a private school.

Oh, did you?

I am afraid I was a bit backward in schooling. I wouldn't pay attention, and I was the one that did the daring things! But I have made out in life, so I am not too worried.

So, you worked in London, and what was it like in those days to work in London? I suppose you had to go up on the train, and ...

When I first went to work in London for Boots Chemist, it used to cost me ten and six a week to go to London. It was not as busy as it was today. You could walk around, the traffic wasn't so much, but then when I went back to London in 1970 and worked for Lloyds Bank. That was quite a journey then, because you used to have to stand in the trains. They were very crowded.

Were you living down on the south coast then? When did you move down to Brighton?

No, we were living in a place called Eltham, E-L-T-H-A-M. That is South-East. We lived there for 38 years, and then we moved to Brighton in 1996.

What was your husband's occupation?

My husband worked for himself. He did --he's a carpenter by trade, but he did all sorts of things. He worked for himself for 36 years, and I had two children. Will you correct that? Sorry. I had three. My first daughter died at the age of seven months. My second daughter, Wendy was her name, and she had auburn hair, and again, she was a bit like me at school. When I went to see the headmistress, she said, "Your daughter will be good enough for doing sweeping roads". She turned out to be a company director for a printing company in South Africa where she went with her husband. My son was born in 1957. He did well at school. He worked for British Airways for 32 years in a very good job, got redundancy and is now out of work, but something in the pipeline, so we will keep our fingers crossed.

[09:20]

Do you have grandchildren?

Yes. I have a granddaughter who lives in South Africa. She is 38, Christmas, and she just opened her own shop cake making. She did seven years training to be a master chef. My grandson was a bit like his grandmother, didn't concentrate at school, but lives in Israel with his wife and three children. I have three great grandchildren. They were all girls. He works for a company that makes milking machines, and in about six weeks' time they are emigrating to New Zealand.

You are lucky to have family all over. Do you get a chance to visit them?

Yes. When I was working we would save and go every Christmas to South Africa to see my daughter and family. Sadly, my daughter died three years ago. She went on safari, who she used to do work for, and she got -- I have forgotten what it was called. Where the mosquito bites. Malaria. So that was a very great loss. I don't think we have really got over it. Right.

So, are you still able to go and see your granddaughter, if you can?

Yes. My granddaughter texts me every week, and keeps me up-to-date what is happening, and what my son-in-law is up to. I don't think we will go back to South Africa ever again, but you never know what's in the future.

Do you keep contact by the text with your other grandson in Israel?

Yes. My grandson 'phoned last night and we had a talk on the 'phone. He doesn't text much, but I text him and keep him up-to-date with what's going on.

People of our age find computers a bit bewildering. I use it quite a lot, and do you find it very useful in your retirement?

No. I don't use computer at all.

You just text?

I just text.

On the 'phones?

Yes.

[12:44]

That is fine. When did you first have, or, the deterioration of your hearing?

In 1998. I went to bed one night, got up in the morning, and I had lost my hearing completely; after wearing a hearing aid in one ear for about 12 years. I blamed the hearing aid, but when I learned that it was me. I was at Royal Sussex Hospital, and I said -- they would make an appointment for me to see a doctor which was about six months forward. I screamed at the girl at the appointment office, and said, "I will pay privately". Away she went, and she came back and she said, "Can you come tomorrow, 10.30". I said, "Yes, I can. Please give me a little idea of how much it is going to cost me". She said, "It's National Health". So, my advice to anybody, do a bit of screaming!

So, you were wearing a hearing aid for 12 years before that, so you must have seen a doctor to tell you that you was going deaf, or deafened?

Yes. When I saw the doctor at the Royal Sussex, he said, "I am sorry to tell you you have lost every bit of hearing". This he had to write down to tell me.

Is hearing loss within your family, or was it something that came out unexpected?

Well, my grandfather on my mother's side was deaf, but they said it was because of the guns in the 1914 war, but since then, through research at Southampton University, we have found out it is hereditary, because my son, at the age of 51, has started to lose his hearing.

*How did you feel in yourself about losing your hearing, and your related problems?
Did it affect your self esteem, and your relationship with your husband and children?*

It upset me very much. My husband was a brick. He would write everything down for me, and what really upset me the most, I think, was I couldn't talk to my daughter, or my grandchildren on the 'phone. Poor old Ken, when they 'phone, he used to write everything down and give it to me to read.

What about when you was at work? Did you find that you lost friends, people couldn't be bothered to talk to you? Did it affect your promotion within the bank?

Luckily, I had retired, and most of my friends took a lot of trouble to write things and make sure I understood what was going on. I was one of the lucky ones. I went deaf, as I said, in the August, and by September I was attending Link, which put me back on the right road again.

[17:33]

How did you find out about Link?

When we were waiting to see the doctor at the hospital, there was the little notice on a board, and it just said, "If you are deaf, please ring this number. Link of Eastbourne", and that is what we did.

So, was you invited along on a course with your husband?

Yes. We came over to see a lady called Maria, and she said, "I will put an application in for you to come and do a course at Eastbourne", and I was lucky. Brighton and Hove had not heard of Link of Eastbourne, so I got the money quite quick.

Did you find that the course helped you, and in particular, did it help your husband to understand?

The course helped us ever so much. It made us understand that you are not the only one out there who has gone deaf. There are people who are far worse than you, and they helped you so much.

So, you came to Link, and then you went back to the Royal Sussex to see the specialist?

Yes. Royal Sussex put me up for an implant at Southampton University. You work through Southampton University, because they are the one that is doing a lot of work for Cochlear. Again, I was lucky. I only had to wait two months for my first appointment. The appointments went on for six months. On my daughter's birthday, July 16th, 1999 I was told I would have an implant at the end of the month. By that time, I was getting more involved with Link.

[20:25]

Implants at that time was only 25 years old from the time they picked them up. What was your thoughts about having an operation, and having this thing on the outside of your head so you could hear?

I think I was so desperate to hear, I think I would have done anything. But the people at Southampton are so informative, they tell you everything that is going to happen, so I just kept my fingers crossed and said, "Let's go for it", which I have never looked back. That was in 1999. Then in the year 2001 Southampton asked me to take part in some research with a second implant. They had asked 30 people in the country, and I said, "Yes", I would do it. My husband was a little bit against it. He said, "Let's be thankful for small mercies", but I am afraid I am a person, if I have made up my mind, it has to be done. So, this second implant went ahead. It is very good, the second one, because you can hear all sorts of things that you can't hear with one, but there is lots and lots of drawbacks, with doing research work. At the moment we're trying to do research into music because lots of people with implants can't hear music.

[End of Track 1]

[Track 2]

That is very interesting, Beryl. Because not many people get to have two implants. I myself have only got one, but I can see the goodness of having two, because of the balance, and you will be able to hear from both of them. So, how did you think the people at Southampton treated you? Did you think that they were very professional?

They are very professional. They are very caring people. The lady that told me about having an implant when I was in hospital, luckily for only two days, she came in with a big bunch of Sweet Peas that grew in her garden. They take a lot of trouble with the people they talk to. The people, no that's not right, the people that are going in for an implant really need to be talked to by someone who has already got one, because a lot of them don't understand what it's like to have one. When they tell their friends, and their family, they think that they are going to get their normal hearing back. I have just got a friend who is going to have an implant in January, and his family think he's going to be right back to where he was in the first stage; he's going to hear everything. So, we have had to explain, really, it is only a posh way of having a hearing aid, a modern way, a computer kind of thing.

We will go back to when you first found out that you was deaf, and how it affected your social life, your hobbies, and do you think you were discriminated against?

Yes. Our social life went completely.

[End of Track 2]

[Track 3]

Our social life went completely. What we used to do on a Sunday, my husband and me, we would go for a drink at a local pub, we would take a pack of cards, and we'd play Crib, but through doing that I met some quite nice people who used to come out, and write on my little pad I used to keep at the side of the table, and through that we made quite a lot of friends, but I think what I used to do myself, I would sit back and let everybody talk, and I wouldn't take any notice. I'd just sit there and look at the wall. I think it made me quite depressed. I think I got a bit awkward to live with as well. I think I have come out of that. I am sure I have. Again, this is where Link helped, and when I have had my first implant, I came to do work for Link, talking to people that were deaf, and couldn't understand why. My husband used to drive, and for eight years we used to go to Hampshire, Kent and Sussex to talk to people, and this way we have met a lot of nice people that were in the same position as us. Now we run a club called, "The Chain Gang". 18 people, we meet once a month, we go out all over the place, each other's places for lunch.

Tell me more about your club and where the people come from, and what activities you get up to.

The people come from Sussex and Kent. There's 18 of us. We manage to go all over Sussex and Kent -- National Trusts, we go out to lunch, we are all deaf with our partners. What can I say about it?

When you were deaf -- I will go back to this discrimination. How hard did you find, on your own, if you went -- had to go to the shops, or cross the road?

Crossing the road was very, very difficult. I used to stand and look both ways, and I would stand there, and I would ask someone to see me across the road. I explained that I was deaf and I couldn't hear the traffic. Shops, again, was hard, because you used to tell people that you were deaf, "Please bear with me", then you would get all the funny shouting and talking at you which I think made you feel worst. I think a lot of companies now have started training their staff to understand deafened people.

Do you think in today's world that it is much better, or better, than what it was ten years ago when you were deafened?

Definitely a lot better.

[05:24]

What about travel?

That's a lie! When you are completely deaf you sit on the bus or a train and you think, "Let's hope it is going all the way". It was like one day when I was going up to London when I was deaf, with no implants. The train stopped at Croydon. Announcement evidently was made, everybody got up, and got off the train, and left me sitting there. If they'd had some way of writing it on a board or something, deafened people would understand. What I did, I got off and I asked someone on the platform what was happening, and gave them my little pad, and they wrote down there had been a train accident, so we all got held up. The buses I don't think are quite as bad, and perhaps I have just been lucky. I think you use your eyes more when you are on a bus, because you know where you are going.

I think today buses are better because we have got bus passes, but it must be a problem, especially trying to communicate with somebody behind a screen that is there for their security.

Yes.

When you was deaf, deafened, what help did you find locally from your council or Social Services?

I got no help at all from the council, or Social Services. I had to fight for three years to get Attendance Allowance. This is not made known to deafened people unless they come to somewhere like Link. The council don't advertise it, but I have read just

recently in the daily papers a little column saying about Attendance Allowances, Disability Allowances, so perhaps someone out there is doing something about it, but Brighton and Hove Social Services did nothing for me. Again, it was Link that did most of it.

You were not aware that losing your hearing, you was entitled to Disability Living Allowance, or that you had to register because you was deaf?

No. What happens through Link, again, someone must have rung up Social Services, because one day there was a ring on the doorbell, after I had been deaf for quite some time, and a lady standing on the door, and she said, "I have come to speak to you because you have gone deaf". I said, "Oh, come in please". She began to tell me things, what I could do, and she registered me deaf, but I don't think if it hadn't been for Link, I wouldn't have known about it.

[09:50]

Are you aware that there are no actual figures for the number of people whom are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafened in the UK?

Yes. I am aware there is no figures for this. I think something should be done about it.

If you go to have your eyes done, you are automatically registered as having a sight problem, so you have to go and register, which is voluntary, to Social Services before you can climb the ladder to any Disability Living Allowance, benefits, or things around the house to help you and to make your life more secure.

Yes. When I started doing voluntary work for Link, I made it my job to find out more about these kinds of things, so that I could tell people, and I am still doing it.

Today?

Today, yes. I find if you get Disability Allowance, or Attendance Allowance, you can get a reduction on the telephone, and I have only just found that out by three little words in a paper. So, why isn't it known?

I am afraid I cannot answer that, but understand your frustration, like so many. Was you aware of the various services that Social Services offer across the county, and what -- and where to go for help with police forces?

No. Again --I am still very backward on that side.

Again, we have a problem where little is known about these services. So, what would you say to anybody that, all of a sudden, found themselves deaf? How would you advise them into getting a better life?

I think first of all I would give them Link's address and telephone number. Then I would put them on to Social Services and try and get someone to come and see them, which is very hard, but if you shout enough I think someone will turn up. I think going through it myself, you could give them lots of information of what to do. Try and explain to them, "You are not the only one out there, and the more we get together, the more there is going to be done".

You very kindly told me that you think your son was going deaf. So, how would you prepare him for losing his hearing, or have you discussed it?

No, not really. I think he has learned a lot through me coming to Link and being implanted, so I think he knows how to deal with it. Luckily, it is only in the very early stages, so probably, as he goes more deaf, he might come and ask me about things to do, which I am sure he will.

[15:37]

What would you say to today's world regarding children that are coming up who are deafened? How would you approach that subject with all your experience?

This is a very difficult question. I think the experts should deal with this. Perhaps you could just sort of put your arms around them and say, "There is lots of things out there going for you, with the way research is going on today you will be helped quite a lot". I have just remembered something. I was walking in Sheffield Park last year when a grandmother came up to me and said, "I have noticed you have got two cochlear implants. My granddaughter, who is with me is going to have one. Have you got time to sit and talk to her?", which I did. I explained about the operation, and what she would hear afterwards. Luckily, she was at a deafened school, and what she said to me was, "I am longing to hear the birds. Grandma tells me they are beautiful to hear". I know more about the little girl than that, what happened and how she got on, I don't know.

It is my experience, up at St Thomas's, is to see the joy on their faces, when these little four, five, six year olds come out with a cochlear implant, and hear all the noise, and skip away, not realising all the dangers they may have faced without it. It is a wonderful technology.

Okay. I think the most moving thing I have come across is a little boy. He was about two to three years old at Southampton. He couldn't hear at all. He laid on the floor screaming and -- while they were trying to do tests. Luckily, they must have got some results because I saw him again six months afterwards, and he had got his implant. He came rushing through the offices and I shouted at him, "Hi! How are you?" He turned round and said to me, "Very well thank you! I have got one of those things that you've got! ". I cried.

I agree with you. They are the sorts of things that move me, too. Now, I am just going to ask you now about the old, crazy, the Chain Gang deaf club, because when we were deaf, deafened, and you go to the doctor's, and they tell you you have got an ear infection and things don't work out, you actually cannot communicate unless you have got a pencil and paper, so did anyone try to help you by teaching you any languages or signs, or anything, when you were deafened?

I went to lipreading classes, but I must say I am not very good at this. The doctors I have found on the whole would rather talk to the person you are with than to you. I

went to the eye hospital not very long ago, and still, I have got two implants, and they still spoke to my husband instead of speaking to me. My husband turned round and said, "My wife can hear. Will you please talk to her".

Again, we see discrimination coming into play, or the laziness by some people, but did anybody teach you the hand alphabet, or British Sign Language?

No. I am going to be honest. I didn't learn any sign language. I am afraid I am a bit lazy in that kind of thing. So really, that's my fault.

[22:28]

I think not so much as a fault, but you still had your pencil and paper, and notebook with you. How do you communicate with all the friends in the Chain Gang when you are out? By signs? By speaking?

Luckily, there is six of us with implants, the rest have hearing aids, so we get on very well. What one person doesn't see or hear the other one tells the one that sort of passed by, and we have all got good partners, so we all have a good laugh. We might have a couple of upsets in the week, but we pass it on and then we do have a good laugh.

Obviously, the Chain Gang is a good set of pals, but some of them are in the future going to lose more hearing. Had you thought about inviting some specialists along to give some chats to them?

No, I haven't. That is a good one! That is one I am going to put to the Chain Gang.

I would strongly suggest that perhaps every three months somebody, maybe from Social Services, comes and just talks to you generally, some cakes and tea, to tell you what they do so that they are well-prepared in the future, maybe a policeman from the Diversity Unit to tell you how to look after yourselves, because we are the most vulnerable, and then perhaps somebody like yourself can stand up and talk about Link for twenty minutes. It is just a thought, but that is what we do in our hearing club.

Thanks Colin. That is good.

It helps to prepare people for the inevitable which we hope they never will find, but you never know. Well Beryl, it has been a very interesting discussion, and something that has opened my eyes with regards to having two implants, which I will certainly think about in the future, and I want to thank you very much for coming along this afternoon and talking to me and telling everybody your interesting story. Thank you.

[End of Track 3]

[End of recording]