



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

David O'Brien
Interviewed by Stephen Beal

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Interviewee's surname: O'Brien **Title:** Father

Interviewee's forename: David **Sex:** Male

Occupation: Priest **Date and place of birth:** 1925

Date(s) of recording: 13th December 2008

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Name of interviewer: Stephen Beal

Speech to Text reporter: Francis Barrett

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Stephen Beal interviewing Father David O'Brien on Saturday the 13th December 2008 for the Unheard Voices project in Chester. The Speech to Text Reporter is Franny Barrett. David could you please give me your full name?

David Vincent O'Brien.

And your occupation please?

Priest yes.

As I can see [laughs] can you tell me your date and place of birth?

Date of birth 22nd January 1925.

Your mother's occupation?

Mother's occupation? Housewife or a wife, a mother.

Lovely, and your father's occupation?

General practitioner a doctor.

Did he continue practising until he retired?

Yes, he did yes.

So how did you find your childhood?

Find your childhood? Pleasant yes very fortunate.

Where were you brought up? What area were you brought up in?

In St Anne's on Sea Lancashire.

A lovely place then and your earliest memories?

Swimming in the sea.

Oh lovely. [laughs]. Did your father and mother swim with you or?

Yes, yes.

Did you live far from the water?

Oh about half a mile.

Lovely. You were able to walk there?

Right in the centre.

Would you say you had a good childhood?

Yes.

[02:39]

What sort of house did you live in, a surgery or?

Yes we lived over the shop [laughs]

A lot of them did in those days. Your father was he a busy surgeon obviously it's changed a lot today a doctor sorry?

In those days the doctor did some of his own operating in the, I think some of them did, he was qualified to do that, in the local hospital he would do appendicitis and tonsils and things like that and set broken limbs.

A lot different to nowadays and are you were you a single child or did you have any brothers and sisters?

No no. I was the eldest of 7.

Wow?

Four sisters, two brothers.

And you how long did you stay in the area of St Anne's?

I stayed in the area of St Anne's I went to a grammar school in Preston and then in 1942 I volunteered for the Royal Navy.

Lovely. I will come on to that in a minute. Did you enjoy school?

Yes, on the whole, yes.

And your favourite subjects?

Oh favourite subject was history.

Ties in with this well doesn't it [laughs]. And did you do well at school?

Erm, I suppose yes moderately well, enough to get exams but I was never the top [laughs]

And you say you enjoyed school as a whole?

Yes.

Were you well behaved?

Oh, [laughs], now that's a difficult 1 it depends on what standard I suppose I was like any boy not badly misbehaved as naughty.

You did what you were asked to do?

Yes in those days I paid a reverence for the parent and a reverence for the teachers. What I mean today sadly from family life has gone and if a teacher reprimands you and you tell the parents they will sue the teacher whereas then they would say he was quite right I would have done the same.

Yes quite [laughs] and did you get on well with your brothers and sisters?

Yes on the whole yes.

And did they enjoy school?

As far as I know yes, yes.

Being a large household, what size bedroom how many bedrooms did you have in the house?

Well, I, always had my own bedrooms a small one but then there was 2 boys -- 2 girls, 2 boys, 2 girls. The boys went in together and the girls together I was if you like the top 1 at the top so I always got my own room.

You were the head of the house?

Yes.

Did you play well with all your brothers? Did you have a lot of entertainment with them?

Yes but they tended to be so much younger than I was I had my own friends my contemporaries boys I would play with my younger brothers well I got on quite well with a sister next to me although she was 3, 4 years younger than me up to the age of about 14, three or four years is a big gap.

[07:25]

Yes, lovely. And after the school you went into the navy you volunteered?

Yes.

You volunteered?

Yes.

Did you find that a good experience?

Looking back, yes, there were very difficult times.

Oh yes?

They were some very wonderful times as well and I saw a lot of the world.

Yes, yes. I have a friend who has been in the navy for 25 years and he said exactly the same he saw the world. What made you decide the navy? Why did you choose the navy?

Because I had been at the seaside, I don't know if you know Farehaven Lake there is a big lake and I started sailing on that and I was always keen on sailing in the sea. If you didn't volunteer for the navy and waited to be called up it was inevitable you went in the army. If you wanted the Air Force or the Navy you needed to volunteer to make sure you might still get called who were it so that is the reason I volunteered.

Just stepping back a pace did you have a healthy childhood?

Yes I would say I was very fortunate there, yes.

Having a doctor as a father probably helped as well?

Yes, I mean he looked after [laughs] all the health side of it you see.

Did you in those days before you joined the navy you said you went sailing, was that with a club or did you?

Yes, in a club there was a club a juniors club, yes.

Did they supply the boats the yachts?

Yes on Farehaven Lake there was a club boats, yes.

That's where you got your love of the sea?

Oh yes, yes.

[09:52]

And when you first joined the navy you obviously had good hearing then you didn't experience any problems before you went in?

Yes but there we come to the point.

This is what we are building up to. So reading through your application you said you were, gunfire caused problems on your hearing?

Yes.

Did you go straight away on to the guns or?

No, I was never actually on a gun turret; [confirmation with STTR] it was more on the ASDICS and radar. It was radar was picking up above the surface ASDICS was picking up submarines below they were two separate things.

Okay did you enjoy that the time there?

Yes, I mean you can imagine it got very dreary Russians convoy is closed up for hours on end but I don't know if I come to this point we were in actions then I was later on in a hubcast destroyer very small which meant any way you were in the ship you were getting the noise and they would be big guns but also machine guns oilycans it was like a machine gunfire 'bum bum bum', and in those days, there was no protection for the ears. You could go to the sick bay and get rubber plugs or cotton wool and the rubber plugs would be, and they stuck out and it was regarded as rather sissy and I can remember when after an action my ears the pain physical pain and I wasn't the only one, today somebody cutting the lawn will have pads on, but we didn't appreciate the damage you are doing to your ears. If you get a big flash you can close your eyes but you can't close your ears and that's where my deafness started.

Yes, yes. You served in the navy for?

Four years.

During that time in the navy did you notice a hearing loss while you were in the navy did you notice it was getting worse while you were serving in the navy?

Towards the end yes I can remember having to listen very carefully which I didn't do.

Did you notice some you said you had a pain in the ears, did you have any infections at all?

No, the pain was literally the reaction to the noise and then anybody could get that then after a time it wears off, no permanent pain.

That's a positive side to it. So you decided to come out of the navy you had a close friendship, bonds in the navy, you made friendships?

Well, was called HO, hostilities only so when the hostilities were over and I was out in the Far East by this time the Japanese war, the war finished, then when your demob

number came up you came back and you were demobbed and I then went into insurance broking and I didn't have a lot of problem with my hearing.

Okay, so?

[15:15]

And that was for another four years. Then, I went to try my vocation, as a priest. I don't know it. I am a Benedictine our religion order is Franciscan Jesuits and Benedictines for the sake of this I don't think it really matters but my studies took me to Oxford et cetera I was 8 years studying before I was ordained then did postgraduate studies. So that made it '60 in about 1965 I was teaching then and then I went to parishes in about 1960 call it 1970, in about 1970 and by this time I was having more difficulty hearing. The local GP who I knew well who had been a contemporary of mine and had been in the artillery said that he thought I should have my ears examined that I would probably be eligible for a handicap pension.

Yes.

I saw an ENT specialist at the Ministry of Defence it was the admiralty still then and he examined my ears and he asked an interesting question he said "when you were a boy did you swim in cold water" which I had done you see in St Anne's we would go swimming in May, when the temperature was only about 56°, 57° we would jump in and run round we would go on until October.

You didn't think of the cold then when you were younger?

So I said 'what makes you say that' to him and he said there were little white spots I can see and those are often caused by cold water where you are young, so the hearing must have started going then and it's interesting my father a GP didn't he had died by this time, evidently medical science had not gone that far I was not the only one, lots of people went swimming there was almost a competition to see who could get first and we might even go in March just to say you have been in so it must have started then. But then we are going now the parish it was actually Parbold near Wigan a GP

said to me he examined my ears and said yes I was eligible for a pension, and he said do you want the full facts. I said yes. He said your follicles are they in the ears, are so damaged he said it's like a man who goes bald, and once you forehead, they have gone if anybody tells you you can get a cure don't believe them, I am afraid eventually you will go complete stone deaf. Now.

[19:10]

What age were you there David?

I was told that in the 1970s. I am now 84 nearly 85 it's 30 years ago.

How did you feel at that time when the told you that how did you feel?

Well, he said again he said don't worry there are all sorts of things to help, you've got hearing-aids. So I was glad to know why that in fact it was not just my imagination because people would say you know couldn't hear 'look will you pay attention to what I am saying'!

Yes [laughs] yes. When people would say that to you did you think there was something wrong, or?

I suspected there was something wrong now there was no deafness in my family my father my mother could hear perfect.

What about brothers and sisters?

Well, now I am 85 they are in the late 70s and two of them have got hearing-aids but it's only gone in the last few years.

So it's probably age related?

Age related, not hereditary. I am sure it's not hereditary at all. I have then got the hearing-aid the original one you plugged it in and had a thing down here.

You had the box?

Then we progressed to having an in the ear, then digitals came along, and then I the one.

Before we go on to digitals can we talk a bit about the box aid?

Yes.

Did you find that a great improvement when you were first given it?

Not really, no.

You didn't find it helped much at all?

No, I would have it on and it didn't really help but also it was such a, you obviously you know, people would be, 'well what's that how does it work ' instead of getting a conversation it would revolve round this and they said oh I am glad, getting like that so apart from the effort of using it, it didn't really do a lot. It was not many years before it went into the hearing-aids.

Did people's reaction upset you to your deafness when you first discovered it you had the box?

Not so much upset me, it annoyed me, because people would say you know 'speak up' then when I got a machine they would say 'don't you think you should put a new battery in your machine or'.

[laughs] and were you offered from the audiology people who gave you the box did they offer you any other support at all?

Not a great deal, no.

Were you hoping to get more support?

Now yes. Where I did get support I would meet someone you see as a priest meeting all sorts of people, and what I said I still say this, 'would you please speak slowly and quietly not loud', and they would start that way and I would say 'this is marvellous'. Well, my father was deaf or mother was deaf so I know what it's like so I got understanding and sympathy with people who understood deafness but the majority of people still don't understand it.

[26:37]

No, no, not at all. We will come on to that later David?

Only recently I was making a phone now I have amplifiers on the phone now I found RNID are marvellous and I was saying to Sarah when you joined up with Hearing Concern when are you going to join up with RNID because that resource and I have their gadgets and for on the phone now somebody phoned me and they were, (mumbling) I say I am hard of hearing if you say deafened but everybody understands hard of hearing. I might say I have difficulty in hearing could you speak slowly and clearly. 'Oh yes all right' (louder), (mumbling) I am sorry I can't, 'would you speak slowly and clearly'. They were holding the phone and they obviously were going to put it down as they put it down I heard him say 'I can't put up with this nonsense' and the phone went dead.

We will come on to that later but I know exactly what you are saying.

That can be erm, it annoys me.

It's frustrating. I call it frustration I get frustrated yes, yes?

The same thing last night we went for a meal I forget her name who wears the cochlear implant.

Jan?

Who I know I have met before she and Sarah were able to, cope but the other lady like me we had to just sit there now I am managing fairly well I keep looking at that I shouldn't be.

I am the same because we lipread yes?

But, a background I hate going into a place where there is background music and even going into shops or anywhere that's a constant frustration sorry I am digressing.

Not at all, no. So, how long did you have the box hearing-aid for David?

Do you know I can't honestly remember only about four years if that.

[26:20]

Were you in constant touch with the ear nose and throat department or did you make another appointment?

No a friend said I think you should go for another test so I did I went to audiology and I found that this was in Preston most helpful.

Good

I forget who organised it, but there was a day on for hard of hearing people and I don't think it was organised by LINK I am not sure. One of the main speakers was the chief audiologist for Cumbria and he made the point that hearing was the Cinderella of the NHS, and we must always go and press if we feel we are not getting anything and if you are not satisfied don't just put up with it you may be put off by someone saying that's the best keep at them so the next time I went to the audiology in Preston I told them I had been on this day to this man and they laughed he was a well-known character this was what about 10, 20 years ago or something and she said there are seven of us and there are about fifteen different aids so you can go through the whole thing if you like we are here to help and I found them most helpful.

That's a really positive reaction though isn't it?

Yes now that was helpful.

Because a lot of people go along and they are given one aid and told to go away and try it out so how did you feel, you selected some aids?

I got aids and those were gradually the aids I was getting. When I -- when LINK started a local branch and I was the first chairman and on the board we had oh what's it called in the hearing department they have?

Erm hearing therapist?

That's right a hearing therapist I persuaded the hearing therapist to be a member of the deafened group and also a member of primary care became a member it was useful to have them at the meeting and she pushed my claim for digitals through quicker and I got digitals. And that was then gradually those went and I decided to try the private sector. These aids I have now are provided by the private sector I have got all the details there.

Are they provided by your expense?

Yes.

Were you able to get any help to purchase them?

No, I read it this way; I am getting a pension because of my hearing and therefore that pension is I see it as helping me to buy pay for aids. These cost 2,000 pounds each which is normal today I think, and I have had them I have then got, persuaded another private person came and persuaded me to get some that were even better than those. I was clutching at anything.

[30:40]

Yes, I know. Going back to?

Can I say I am very fortunate, I could be completely retired but I opted to stay where I am now there are nine of us at the monastery now other parishes in the neighbourhood there is always a priest who is ill, on holiday, on a course or something so I am going doing supplies I no longer drive but they will pick me up and take me there and public transport is very good indeed so I am still able to get a lot of job satisfaction as a priest. I can still say a Sunday with loudspeaker system and a loop-system, cope. I do a lot of counselling, that's one to one. I do one lot of counselling and supply in a prison, there are two local prisons.

Yes?

And then after care when prisoners come out again I am one of the people who will counsel them keep in touch with them.

OK. That's great.

I get a lot of job satisfaction out of that and I see other people contemporaries of mine who retired and they just sit at home with nothing to do you see [laughs] so I consider I am very lucky to live in the community, to be able to do something useful which gives me a lot of satisfaction so although I know my hearing is getting worse and worse but then I will be eighty-four in a months time I can't have that long to go

You don't look 84 and [laughs]

That's what everybody says I know and I think the reason is because I keep so active I go swimming three times a week and I get in the pool and swim for an hour as fast as I can.

Do you wear earplugs now when you are swimming?

Yes I do.

You've answered about six questions before I have asked them David but that's fine [laughs] I love it it's great I think I could sit and listen to you all day.

[33:35]

Can I say going on, another thing I was asked to be involved in we talk of humanism that's the Christian churches getting together but then there is interfaith who are meeting with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists et cetera and I became in charge of a group in the area Central Lancashire meeting with non-Christian faiths, and that took up a lot of time, also the fact I was still working took up a lot of time and now I am afraid I was getting, I get the 1 in 7 magazine and all that, I have diabetes, which I have to watch and all the rest of it and I get that magazine and I get another magazine of something else, then I get then the LINK magazine and I am afraid I got overwhelmed I couldn't cope with everything and I had a box file and I would put things in the files and say I must deal with that when I get a moment and in a month suddenly the next magazine would come and I hadn't look at the last and with age, at one time I could work till midnight. I get up with prayers and everything I am up at 5:00 every morning to get through all the spiritual side and everything and I find now by about four or five in the evening I am just shattered at one time I could have sat down and gone through magazines and everything and kept in touch so I feel a bit guilty because I haven't kept in touch with LINK of course then I was Chairman of the local branch for some time, now I don't know if you want to talk about that I think that is very important. I must actually all the people I knew if they are still involved is Maria still at LINK?

No, not as far as I know.

Of course you are not no.

I belong to LINK at Eastbourne and we will talk about that after?

Putting this in digest form I went to LINK twice in Eastbourne for courses then they wanted to start this and the man who was responsible came up he got about eight people who would be interested in a meeting. We met and he said 'oh you will be

able to build it up', and I was the chairman, we needed to raise money to have, this person is doing it, and also hire a room, so we had to do raising money and I was approaching all sorts of things. I was also went on supplies I would ask the parishes if I will make an appeal for LINK and I sent several cheques to LINK I don't know if they are recorded anyway.

They would be recorded yes.

I did raise money for LINK. But I couldn't get anybody to be treasurer or secretary, or vice-chair and I was doing the whole thing you see. Eventually I said which was 80 because of everything I said look this is ridiculous I am going to have to retire I will keep active in it but I can't be doing everything, so we got a person who had only joined recently actually we found the younger people dropped out because they didn't want to be with these old fogies and the old fogies started dying off but a younger person this woman probably in her 40s came in and seemed very enthusiastic and said she would be chair. Now, you know the way you get professional committee people they are on all sorts of committees, it was a tragedy of the first order you see, and the treasurer never really made a hopeless mess of it but having got a new Chairman I retired, because it was such a mess and had so, I had so many other things to do, and she was very critical of anything suggested, I dropped out of it. So, it started off magnificently but faded away and I don't know what if that's a help.

[39:09]

Yes, that's fine it's what we are after history it's fine I will go back to LINK and check what's happening and let you know but going back to your what I would like to know is you said you got up for 5 O'clock prayers?

Yes.

How was your hearing in the morning when you had become...?

No, it didn't get worse or better. Can I say this, I put my hearing-aids in and go into we have a choir it's rather like the Anglicans would have Evensong and you have a

book on one side and the other side you are reading and you know what's coming I would have my hearing-aids in but I wasn't having to listen really because I had it written and then private meditation there was no talking so I wouldn't get that problem at all.

Okay. As the day went on how did you find your, did your hearing-aids make you tired?

Do you know, I hadn't thought of that before. I don't know if they do I just thought toward the end of the day because thought just my age added to which as I have got older I have what a lot of people my age have and that's insomnia, you can how often you meet a grown-up and they say 'oh I did have a good night's sleep last night'? A child never says that, a child goes to bed to whomph, out, but grown-ups as they get older after two hours I wake up, I have to go I have a problem with the waterworks and everything and I have to get up and I don't properly get to sleep again for the night and during the day one can get tired I daren't go to bed or have a snooze because that would make it even worse so I haven't put down getting tired hearing-aids no I haven't.

Do you take your hearing-aids out at all to rest your ears or?

When I am sitting at my desk as you can imagine I get a lot of correspondence people I counsel I have people coming to see me from a parish I have gone to they say 'could I come and ask your advice about something' then but when I am on my own I take them out. Because even we are fairly quiet but somebody banging a door or opening I hear it so I find it's easier to concentrate by taking them out when I am on my own so during the day that's what I do.

[42:50]

Do you suffer from tinnitus?

A little. But it isn't a big problem. I find some programmes on the television are very good, some of the documentaries and I am able to put a Ceefax on but I also at

times put the volume a bit too high I am afraid, it's such a temptation. Although you can read it you want to hear it and you are just missing it so you press it a bit and it goes up a bit and sometimes after having watched the news or some, they're brilliant some of the documentaries on current affairs, I have a humming noise and it will go on for a long time it doesn't annoy me all that much and eventually it goes out all together.

Do you find when you are doing your studies the noise comes back all louder have you noticed a difference. You haven't?

No.

A lot of people we talk to they say when they are concentrating the tinnitus gets louder but..?

Oh no, I don't have that but the 1 in 7 magazine recently had an article on this saying the number of people who admit their hearing has been damaged by having the television too high. I say to myself 'so what' if it's damaging a bit at least I am enjoying it now if it means a shorter period of hearing well it's worth it.

[45:03]

Going back to have you had any bad experiences through being deaf, concerning your hearing?

No, the only bad experience is on special occasions for instance one of my brothers had his Golden Jubilee and invited everyone, you can imagine that. I couldn't hear a word that was said the best man, my other brother, he spoke, I was set to say a few words I thought I hope I am not repeating what was said and people, I.... the whole -- instead of being a joyful occasion for me it was just utterly frustrating.

Yes. You are not alone on that. A lot of people say the same. I feel the same myself when I go to places, the noise, people don't understand. So did they take your hearing into consideration? I mean support from family?

Now, sometimes, yes, on that occasion. Oh, a room you'd say four times the size of this. My other brother the best man said you better come up and sit here. I was sitting right up close and I still couldn't hear when he was speaking. I was like, and can I say also I am hopeless at lipreading. I have been to lipreading classes I have been down, run locally, I have gone and gone. Talking to another person who found it difficult and we came to the conclusion that if you wanted to play the piano you had to be musical. If you hadn't got that gift, no matter how hard you try and being able to understand lipreading, you needed a special sort of talent. I am hopeless at it.

I think what age were you when you tried lipreading?

Oh, in the 70s.

I think it's like learning French or German isn't it, it's very?

I only took to computers and if something goes wrong with it I can't, young nephew or great nephew or friend age 10 will come in and say, 'it's all right uncle, it will be all right now' and you feel such an idiot.

[48:15]

I am the same, my grandchild he is computer literate and he is 9. Oh dear, yes. You have gone on to private hearing-aids, did you discuss it with the audiologist first?

Yes, erm, when I was in York, or near York you see, and I was going to see the audiologist in York now they did a very interesting thing that nobody else has done and that was word discrimination now I was given headphones, and there was a disc, you know what I am going to say.

Yes?

Do you know this? And he would say 'fish and chips' and I had to repeat what he had said and he had a list 'oranges and lemons' and then he looked at them and I got only about a third of them right so he said it's not just hearing it's discriminating the

meaning of words that's your problem as well, so, that I found useful to know. Oh fish and chips yes before that, oh then I got on well with them there so I said 'I want to try the private section'. How would you advise me to go about it or would you advise me at all and they said it would be worth trying out we suggest you go and see such and such a person in fact he does a lot of work in the hospital already, we know him well. I went to see him and we tried all sorts of things and everything and he eventually gave me some and this must be what 20 years ago, and gradually those didn't get... I moved then to the Preston area and I was seeing the same firm as had been in Preston as in York, and they said 'well now you have had these so many years they are improving all the time', if you are not going to get anything better but they are all the time improving them and we have got a new one now of course when I tried it, it was magnificent. So, I got those and those cost something like 2,000, a thousand pounds each, then it went on and those went down and down then I got other ones at £4,000 but my pension was mounting up you see.

It's worth spending it isn't it as we can't take it with us?

The way I had, it's rather like the digital on the NHS with all due respect is like having a Ford Fiesta, these are like a Bentley or a Rolls Royce and you have got to pay more and you can't expect the NHS to provide Bentleys and Rolls Royces and I had my pension.

[52:04]

With the NHS you have just mentioned it have you always been satisfied with all the treatment they have given you?

In Preston yes but some others I remember going, what was it Ormskirk, I had a, erm, the tubing broke and I went into Ormskirk because I had a relation there, and he saw it and I said it needs a new, and he said, 'no it needs examining, I will take them both' and then he wanted to give me new ones. I said, 'what about the other ones'? and he said they were unrepairable. I said it was perfectly all right. Oh no, it was finished with now, that was throwing away two good hearing-aids, (to the hearing dog in the room-poor old thing, hey getting restless, you are very patient you are). So at times I

wouldn't like to put a percentage but sometimes when going to the hospital I am a bit apprehensive who is dealing with it whether they are really interested or whether they are just doing a job.

What about the doctors you have seen, you have been quite happy with the standard of doctors you have seen?

[laughs] Now I have to see sorry going into more detail as a result of diabetes I get ulcers on my toes, blood troubles because it's so far away from the heart and the other part is eyes I have to take drops, I may go blind ultimately and then I have trouble with the water works and the bowels so I am seeing 3 different consultants and what I do I take a friend with me they suggest this because often the consultants assistants are of African or Asian and they don't speak clear English, but they are no better at understanding deafness than anybody else so I take somebody with me to listen to it. The same when I go to the chiropodists I say to the chiropodist, 'would you speak slowly and quietly', 'oh yes, all right' (louder) they speak louder and more quickly I think they get a bit sort afraid or on edge so when I go to have my feet done which I have, and the chiropodist is over there and somebody sits next to me that's how I overcome it they don't seem to mind if you bring someone in, in fact, I think they are relieved.

[55:36]

One thing I would like to mention you said you worked with Muslims Buddhists and different religions in the communities?

Yes.

How did you find work with a hearing problem did you find they were understanding?

Now, there again, they are like anybody else, in a big meeting although I sit at the front but I have now developed a lot of erm one to one people coming to see me wanting to know more about the Christian faith trying to build up relationships. We have got to build up relationships we can't suddenly send them all [laughs] you

know, many of them, O'Brien originally my Grandfather came from Ireland. I haven't said that because I am not English.

Was he a priest?

No, who?

Your grandfather?

No, no, he came at the time of the potato famine as a refugee, he eventually he became Mayor of Altrincham and built up a big business and so my father qualified as a doctor and so on and so on, so he came from being a poor farmer's son to that you see but with the Muslims and with the Hindus, more Hindus, this is because the Muslims they control the women far more but arranged marriages may work in their part of the world but in this part of the world they don't and they have such awful marriage problems so I would have the lady Hindu and then the gentlemen coming separately and we are trying to do marriage..., apart from interfaith, their problems in this in our culture which now their cultures may have lots of faults but they're very basically spiritually and religion orientated, here in our now pagan atmosphere they are finding it very difficult and their children as well.

Have you been involved in the Asian deaf community?

No, I haven't. Yes, they must have these problems presumably but they haven't -- I have not been approached on that. I don't know whether the NHS or LINK has Hindus and...

They do, yes, they do have people who have been on the course.

That would be interesting to know if I could be of any help on that.

[59:00]

It would be interesting yes. When did you first hear about LINK?

I was working in the York area and one couple who were deafened like myself in the congregation went to LINK and came back told me all about it so I wrote and said I would be very interested, could I come and then I did and I did two courses down in Eastbourne and then another one in was it Oldham it started, I have all the details in my case, and then started it. I wish I had been about 20 years younger [laughs] and not involved in other things.

No, no. It's time isn't it I think. Time is a big issue isn't it?

Yes.

There is never enough time.

But also the problem that LINK, Hearing Concern must be having in trying to build up local branches I saw all the difficulties that arose, you tended to get the older people now some of them didn't drive. I did drive at first and I would go round picking people up and it would take you going round the suburbs and everything and you call and this old lady comes to the door 'I am not feeling well I don't think I will come today' you see if only she had rung up and told me and then other -- I remember a younger person didn't come to a meeting and I said 'we missed you at the meeting' well you don't need to come every time for instance I am in a painting club but I don't go to all their meetings. We only had, we met six times a year every other month and had three meetings with say Typetalk or the Fire Brigade came to talk about something positive and then three which were more just discussion among ourselves and when Gailey came,

Lorraine Gailey

sorry Lorraine she stayed over night with me came up by train and stayed and after the meeting she said, the acting secretary was not very good, had told her I was making it all so business-like and uninteresting getting these speakers to come they and would much rather have wanted to have making toys and I thought [laughs] it was impossible to get older people to form a constructive positive organisation. They didn't want to mix with the young people I suggested we started with young people

and got them in and we needed support of the older people the only time would be of an evening. The fact we had it in the day meant it was for retired people to get people who were working you had to have it in the evening, just like the young people, 'oh we are not coming out in the evenings'. I said, 'couldn't you just come and support at first?'. No. I said, 'how many of you go and play bingo in the evenings?'. In other words, they were only half-hearted about it although they were badly deafened but they just accepted it. We got about 10 people from the whole Preston area. There must be about 5,000 deafened old people in that area and I as a priest I call at a house where there are old people and say, 'we have formed this deafened group would you like to come?'. No, no, I am too old to start now. It's an awful problem for LINK to know you have something so valuable to sell and people who should be buying it are not interested.

[01:04:05]

Have you experienced any problems with travel with your hearing?

Any problem with travel? No. Oh yes, I mean I – flying, I don't think I am going to fly again, it's too tiring but when they make an announcement I couldn't hear it. If I am by myself I have to ask someone and sometimes they are not very helpful and also travelling on the train if they make an announcement. I got assisted travel. You know about it?

Yes, I know assisted travel, yes.

I rang up the assistance place and said I am catching a train from Bamber Bridge to Preston to Crewe to Chester. And they took the timing and everything and the same going back I have to be at the station at five to one I think it is, and there somebody will take my case put me on the train and when we get to Crewe there will be somebody waiting for me I am always in the back carriage and they will take me and put me on the next train coming and I have used it before we arrive on the platform and we have quarter of an hour to wait I say 'you can go I can manage' and they say 'no I have to see you on the train'. They wait, put your case on and I say thank you.

'No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, don't spoil it, we like doing it'. They won't take a tip even.

That's very interesting. It's good to know.

You have only to phone the special number in the telephone directory and they have someone meet you. That obviates the whole problem of standing on a platform in Crewe wondering what the announcement is and they suddenly change the platform these people have mobiles and they keep in touch and know of all changes and always go to the lift I don't have to struggle up lots of stairs and things.

What about car travel you said you have to stop driving. Is that because over your hearing?

No, the reason I stopped driving I was on the staff of a big parish. Then the superior of the whole thing in the country decided to have five of -- we have five big parishes instead of the priests living in the parishes we would all live together in another house and go out to the parishes you see. I would live there but not be attached to any parish, therefore when I got in the 80s they pay all the costs and everything. Car premiums when you go into the 80s go sky high so the superior said as you are no longer attached to a parish, you don't need the car because you have not got an area in hospitals and Hospice and everything. You will be available for all the parishes. they can come and pick you up. In fact, public transport is excellent, buses and trains in Bamber Bridge we have a railway station and a bus service in to Preston every ten minutes you see, so I ceased to have a car because overall I no longer, I never owned a car, it was a tool of the trade and rather than the firm or the order paying thousands of pounds for a premium I stopped driving so that was quite a, you know, people say 'do you miss the car'? Well, of course I do when you drive a car so, but then you have to come to terms with age and the situation and the cost, and because local transport is so good otherwise coming here I could have jumped in the car and come. Also, you see the point as part of the climate change and everything not to have too many cars on the road, so when I told Sarah it takes me nearly five hours with changes to get from Bamber Bridge to here and I said to come on the Saturday I would have to leave about six in the morning be here I would have to rush back I said

at my age I don't think I can cope so then she said would it help if you stayed overnight? Well of course that was a different aspect so I was able to come, you see.

[01:09:35]

That's lovely. Just to end and finish off now just very briefly you have been involved with a lot of groups you've mentioned. What about hobbies? Do you have any hobbies?

Oh do I have hobbies? When I was able to I played golf. I can no longer do that. I still go swimming and I do a lot of walking because again because of the diabetes and the trouble on my feet the more I exercise my feet the better it is to keep the blood going so walking now I can't walk as briskly as I used to with the stick but they say to keep healthy feet 20 minutes brisk walk a day is enough I try to get out two hours, an hour in the morning an hour in the evening, that's taking time again, so.

I would like to say thank you very much and I found that thoroughly interesting and I am sure that in years to come people at the British Library will find it interesting as well so thank you very much David. Thank you.

Can I just say one final thing that I feel some sense a failure in myself I wasn't able to get the group going but when I hear, I forget her name.

Sarah?

She had a group in and she's had the same sorts of problems.

Oh Jan, yes?

I think all the way round it's not just LINK and hearing, this is a problem people just are not activated enough to do things they should be doing. I mean whatever it is looking after the countryside or looking after themselves, they will not take the good things that are there and they would rather just sit there. When you have a general

election if they get 30% of the people they say that's very good, you know, complete lack of interest in anything.

I know, and I'd like to say thank you very much Franny. Thank you for all your work. And we'll close that there. Thank you David that was lovely.

[End of recording]