



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Keith Corbett
Interviewed by Christine Beal

British Library ref. C1345/10

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/10

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Corbett

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Keith

Sex: Male

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1954

Date(s) of recording: 13th December 2008

Location of interview: The Westminster Hotel, Chelsea

Name of interviewer: Christine Beal

Speech to Text reporter: Laura Harrison

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Christine Beal interviewing Keith Corbett on Saturday 13 December 2008 for the Unheard Voices Project in Chester. The speech-to-text reporter is Laura Harrison. Would you like to give me your full name?

Keith Corbett.

And your occupation?

I am a supermarket stockist.

Your date and place of birth?

July 21st, 1954, Irvine in Scotland.

Your mother's occupation, if known?

My mother was a social worker.

And your father's occupation?

She is retired now.

And your father's occupation?

My father – I've not seen my father for thirty odd years; the last time I saw him he worked for the government job centre.

That is okay. Right, I need to find out a bit about your background and that, so if you are not comfortable with anything I ask you, just say, shout at me! Would you like to give any more personal details? Your family background? Do you have brothers and sisters? Where they grew up?

I have got two brothers and two sisters: an older brother and older sister, and a younger brother and younger sister, so I am in the middle.

You are in the middle?

We lived in Scotland until I was eight years old and then my father, who is English, his mother died, so the family moved down from Scotland to look after my grandfather, and we have been here ever since.

In Manchester?

We first moved to Crewe, and then my Dad got another job in Manchester and we moved to Manchester then.

Yes. Did you live in a nice neighbourhood? A house? A flat?

In those days Crewe was not very nice but there were nine of us living in a two-bedroomed house, so it was not very easy, no. Whoever got dressed first, got dressed the best!

A bit cramped? I am one of six. I have got five brothers and sisters, so similar [laughs]. So, I can understand that!

[03:13]

Did you have a good education? Did you go to a local school? Did you enjoy school?

I didn't at first: when I first moved from Scotland, the whole family got bullied because we were Scottish, so in England, it was a terrible time. We moved schools three or four times before we found one. That was in Crewe and we moved from Crewe to Manchester and we fitted straight in, no bullying or anything like that. So I think that is why part of me now is like that: I will not take any bullying from anybody; I will fight my rights and I have done since I was eight years old; it's bred into me now.

So, you are quite a strong character?

I can be, yes!

Did you enjoy school, as such?

No. I hated Primary school, I used to fight every single day, fight all the time. Sometimes, my older sister was at the same school and sometimes my elder sister used to come and fight them off. That is what it was like every day at school. The headmistress was actually the biggest bully of the lot.

What about secondary school, when you went on, did you enjoy that?

I enjoyed secondary school in Manchester. I enjoyed that; it was completely different.

Do you consider, looking back, you got a good education?

Not really, no. I could have done better, but I didn't really try! You don't think when you are fourteen or fifteen, you think you are just having fun.

You never think you have to grow up? Did you get qualifications and good exam results?...Or were you just glad to leave?

We could have left school at fifteen in those days and I was tempted to leave at fifteen but my family persuaded me to stay on the extra year. I knew what I wanted to do when I was at school, I wanted to be a motor mechanic, so I didn't need any exams it was straight to an apprenticeship, but I stayed on and I got CSEs.

[06:03]

Because they have changed now to GCSEs, have they not?! Did you have any holidays, or go on holidays when you were young, any particular places? Any particular hobbies?

No, we never had any holidays no. I think the first time I went on holiday was when I was about fifteen or sixteen to a caravan. We used to go to Scotland in the holiday period, used to go back to Scotland to see family there. I don't suppose it was really a holiday. No, we didn't have holidays. I never went on a plane until I was twenty-five.

Aw! Were your family religious at all? Religious background?

When I was younger, when we were in Scotland, my Mum, I think it was my Mum's side, were very religious and I went to a Catholic school. But it went right over the top of my head. There were teachers teaching about the Bible and English and maths, and learning the catechism and every Monday morning if you didn't go to mass, you got the cane, so I didn't like that, no. That put me off religion for life.

Obviously, quite strict in that sense!

[07:35]

At what age did you have your hearing loss? Were you pretty healthy until you lost your hearing? Any other illnesses?

No. I lost my hearing at twenty five years old. I had never been ill, never been in hospital. I think I had only seen a Doctor two or three times in my life, never any problems.

So would you like to tell me how you lost your hearing?

I got meningitis and septicaemia and I just thought I had the flu. I was out one Sunday evening in the pub with my friends and I thought it was something I had eaten or drunk. I could not even drive my car and I left my car outside the pub and got a taxi home and I went straight to bed when I got home on the Sunday night. In the middle of Sunday night I could not stop being sick; there was nothing coming out. I lost track of time then really. I remember my arms and legs going stiff. I was in bed. I had a raging thirst and I could not get out of bed to get to the tap. I had to roll and crawl down the stairs. It must have been the Tuesday, I think, I don't know, I lost track of time completely. Any way, I got downstairs and a got a bottle of water and got back upstairs and all of a sudden it was like being in a aeroplane when your ears pop,

or going downhill in a car. My ears just popped and I thought that was strange: I didn't realise I was deaf, because there was no noise in the house or anything.

Were you living on your own at the time, or did you live with your parents?

I lived on my own at the time. I was separated from my wife at the time so I was living on my own, so there was no noise in the house. So when this happened I thought I do not understand this, and I started shouting to myself and I could not hear it. So I crawled downstairs again and I put the television on to listen to the television, but just nothing. At the time, you don't think of it, you don't think it's anything serious. I thought I had the flu still. Anyway at that point I could not get upstairs; I was just lying in the front room. Luckily a friend of mine, he was worried because my car was still at the pub, and he came around. I hadn't locked the back door and he came and found me on the floor. Another few hours and I would have been dead.

My goodness. So, nobody had been over the few days to check at you at all? And you were on your own until your friend turned up?

No no I was on my own then. I was twenty five and all my friends were twenty five, so you don't think like that do you?

Were you taken to hospital?

Yes I was. Well, the ambulance driver came in and my friend phoned the ambulance up and, the ambulance came and the two ambulance people were messing about in the house and they said to my friend, "Oh, he is on drugs. He is on drugs, we see it all the time". My friend said, "He never takes drugs". But they said, "It's drugs, we have seen it hundreds of times". They took me to hospital and to and in accident and emergency, they didn't know what was wrong because by that time I had gone blind in one eye and paralysed. They thought I had a brain tumour or something, they were not sure. So, they took me from the hospital there to the Royal infirmary for a brain scan, and didn't find anything on the brain scan, but Manchester Royal said 'do a lumbar puncture to check, it might be meningitis' they checked to see if it was meningitis, and that is what it was, meningitis and septicaemia.

What year was that?

That was in 1979, November 1979.

When you were in the hospital, obviously, were you conscious, were you able to tell them that you could not hear anything?

In the Accident and Emergency, yes, I could, but after that I don't remember being taken for a brain scan. I don't remember going for a brain scan or anything like that: partly in a coma. I don't know if they put me into a coma.

[12:50]

Right, how long were you in hospital?

I was in hospital for more or less a year. I could not move for the first two or three months. I could not move at all. Obviously I could not hear and I was blind in one eye.

So, you obviously gained consciousness in the hospital and you remember being there for the year?

Oh, yes, I gained consciousness within a week. I was conscious. I remember being in an isolated room because of the infection and everybody had to wear masks. I could not see they were talking to me. I could see their eyes moving underneath the mask, but I don't know what was going on.

Did you have to have - could you walk and that? Why were you in hospital for so long?

Obviously, the deafness...

I couldn't walk; I could not get out of bed for about six weeks. I could not walk. Then I got a feeling in the back of my legs, and they were not sure whether to amputate because of the septicaemia but I gradually started getting feelings again. The first time I noticed the feeling was my Mum used to visit me every day and she used to sit at the side of the bed and pull the hair on my legs to see if I could feel something and one day I said, "What are you doing?!" She said, "Oh yes, you can feel it". So, after that, it was physiotherapy and getting moving again.

But at the time it affected my balance as well. So the first time they took me to physiotherapy, I got up and lifted my head off the bed, I fell over.

Were you working at the time when you had the meningitis, previously?

Yes I was working: I was a motor mechanic.

So that is what you were doing then. How long was it before you were able to go back to work?

I could not go back because they sacked me. I left hospital and I went to Link and they said another couple of months they said I could start working again. But they said "We can't give you a job as a mechanic but we'll give you a job cleaning the cars". So I told them to stick it, like you do. That was before the legislation; we are talking about the seventies now.

[15:50]

So were they good at the hospital in helping you with your hearing loss? How did you find out about Link?

They were a very good hospital. I mean, the consultant got a lip-reading teacher from Manchester University to come and see me twice a week to help me with lip-reading and she said I needed to keep interacting with people, so the consultant said if I wanted to go out for an evening with friends to go and go back to the hospital afterwards. So I ended up in the nurses most nights, with the nurses. So, it was quite good really. But, again, this was the seventies when hospitals were not really as busy as they are now; they had time for you. If it had happened now, you are in and out. So, then, I can't fault them. They gave us a party when I left. The day I left to go to the Link course on the Friday, on the Friday afternoon, the Sister on the ward said, "Keith, you have physiotherapy". I hated physiotherapy. I said "I am going home now". She said I had to go. So, I went downstairs to physiotherapy and they said, "We don't want you". So they said go back upstairs, so I went back upstairs and there were balloons and wine and all the doctors and nurses were there from the last year; it was really good of them.

Lovely. When you went on to Link, did you find that helped you? Did they help you cope with your hearing loss or were you managing that quite well?

I think I was managing quite well. I am quite a strong person. I like to get on with things, to get on with it. If a problem crops up, I try to get over it. Rosemary McCall was brilliant, really helpful. She kept writing to me but as there were no minicomms in those days and she used to write every month or so saying, "How are you getting on?" It was really good. She asked me to go down and help me with a course.

[18:29]

Did you manage to go back into employment long after you left the hospital?

It took a long, long time. When I was sacked I was still on the sick for about six months or so. Basically, they said, "You don't need to work really; we will sign you off for life". But I said "I don't want that; I want to work; I have always worked". So I went to the job centre and started looking for jobs and they said I couldn't do this and that. So I thought I will try training courses then. Being a mechanic I will try car body spraying. So I went to this place and for a course in Trafford Park in Manchester and he said, "You will not be able to do that, you can't hear the gas etc". So, I walked out of there and went to the job centre and looked at all the courses. There was a college in Durham for disabled people: an electrics course, domestic appliances. So, I thought I would try that, but I had to go for a medical to prove I could do it, if you see what I mean? Nowadays it's the other way round, but then I went to a medical in Manchester; it was a job centre medical. I went there, and he said, "You don't need to work" but I said, "I want to work". He said, "You don't need to do the course; you will get paid" but I wanted to go on the course. So he said, "I will sign you off" so I went there, for just over a year. I passed that. But I still never got a job. I was applying for every job going, nobody wants to know, nobody wanted to know because of my hearing loss. A friend of mine was a manager at Tesco's supermarket and there was a job going, on nights. it was very good money. I went for an interview and I had got the job; it was Safeway's then, but it's now Morrisons.

So you are still there today?

Yes I am still there. Not on nights though, days now.

Do you do the same sort of job? Or has it changed?

It's changed completely now. I am more of an order writer. Not rocket science is it?

It's the accent there, I think [STTR clarification].

[21:40]

So have the people at work been very supportive with your hearing loss?

Not at first, no. Now they all know me and know how to speak to me. I have drummed it in to everybody; it's just customers that are problems now.

Do you meet many of the customers?

Oh yes, all the time, all the time, they are always talking to me behind my back and saying I am pig ignorant and abusing me. I have actually been hit once.

Not very pleasant. What has been the history? Have they tried to help you with your hearing loss? I read on the notes...

At work you mean?

No, In the hospital, you had a cochlear implant?

Yes I did. Yes, I was one of the first ones done in Britain: number five or six ever done.

What year was that, Keith?

That was about 1981, or something like that. I can't remember exactly.

Did you want it fitted? Did you think it would be some sort of miracle to help you hear again?

No, I didn't, but other people did. I have low expectations of things, I always look on the, not the dark or black side.

You accept it and deal with it?

Yes that is what you have to do when you become deaf. Some people deal with it different to others.

[23:32]

How did your family and friends around you cope? Did they all cope pretty well with it?

Yes they did. My family, yes, I have never had any problems with any of my family. My friends are the same as I had then: the man that found me is still a good friend of mine. A couple of friends are a bit wary of how to speak to me, but now everybody is fine.

So they don't treat you any differently to how they did before?

[laughs] no, no, no, not at all. No, I am just the same person. I am just the same Keith, but Keith that can't hear.

Yes [laughs]. So how did it affect your relationships at all, like with females? [laughs].

I have never had a real problems that way, I'm not being big-headed, no. I am just me.

So it didn't? Were there any deaf clubs about or anything like that that you could have joined?

No. I did level one sign language. I used to go to the deaf club for practising it; but you don't really fit in there: I didn't fit in. I did have a relationship with a born deaf woman and we were together for about a year or so. She was very nice, but just completely different. I don't know. Born deaf people seem a bit more immature; it's a very close-knit community. Somebody leaves one person, they divorced and they move to on to another, so everybody knows each other. I'm not saying they're are in-bred but..!

Yes, I understand what you mean but they tend to be in their own society. But, going back to your cochlear then...

They treated me as though I was a hearing person, and I was probably more deaf than them; they've all got hearing-aids and can hear bangs and noises. I said I was deaf, but they did not believe me - "Because you speak".

[26:14]

Yes, they find it difficult. So did you find your cochlear helped at all? What sort of hearing did it bring back?

It didn't bring any hearing back, it just gave a little buzzing noise, that was it really, it never worked properly.

Oh right. I read that you had it removed several years ago in the end?

Yes about four years ago and my head swelled up, and there was always a lump there, but my head swelled up and my Doctor, GP set I had to go straight to hospital, and I went to Manchester Royal where they have a Cochlear Implant team and I had a blood test and I had an infection so it had to come out. So they gave me antibiotics but they could not do the operation at the time, and I had to go back a month later for them to take it out. Prior to that, they wanted me to have a new one put in and I had to go and see some University person. I didn't want one, and I said give it to somebody that wants one I am used to being deaf now.

But you could have had another one, another one if you so desired?

Yes I could have had a new one, yes. Yes, I could. I am deaf. I accept it.

Have you found it hard, apart from your job, in everyday life, you know? Does it affect you? Do you go on holiday now?

What, being deaf? Of course yes, it affects you everyday. You can wake up in the morning full of the joys of spring and then the next minute, bang, you meet somebody and they give you

that look with their eyes rolling. You should let it go over the top of your head, but it affects you.

I suspect it's difficult at times. Do you go on holidays abroad? Have you travelled the world?

Yes I have been to Russia and I was in New York last year, and Spain. This year I am driving to the south of France.

So it does not affect your hearing at all? I take it you have flown and it does not affect your hearing?

Oh no, I have not got any hearing to affect.

So it does not affect your ears in any way?

No, they pop sometimes, that is all, like everybody else.

[29:18]

So, are you married now?

Yes, I am married now. My wife has only ever known me deaf.

And children?

I have got two children. One is eight and one is fourteen: two boys.

Has that been difficult at all?

It was more difficult before I had them because I was worried about how I would cope, you know, if they are crying or anything. But, as I was saying before, you get over it and work your way over it and fight.

How did they react? And I know they have not known any different, but have they coped very well with it?

Yes they do, but like all children they have moods! They just take the moods out on me in a different way.

It's no good shouting at you.

They give my wife ear ache, but with me they do it in a different way.

Because they can't yell at you.

They blame my hearing sometimes; they trigger off things like, "Dad didn't hear me" when they said this or that. When I know they haven't said it to me. They try it on, but kids do.

Yes, they do whatever, so it does not matter, I don't think, if you have a hearing loss, or not.

No, I just do it in a different way.

[31:01]

So at the hospital was there anything else they can do for you, or have you just accepted it now that you are not going to hear. Is there no other treatment they can give you?

There is nothing that can be done, nothing with my ears or my eyes.

Has it affected your vision?

I became blind in one eye, at the same time.

So you are completely blind in that eye?

No, Yes in this right eye.

I didn't realise; I know you said about it, but I didn't realise that. So that is quite a lot to cope with? More than...

It can be, yes. I remember at the hospital, when they were testing me about my balance, because of my eye, they put me in a dark room and spun a chair around and put sensors on my eyes. On this one eye. They took me to the swimming baths, with a doctor and two nurses, and I had not been swimming since I became deaf. They said, "Jump in" so I thought 'fair enough' dived in like I used to, and I didn't know where I was; I was going down to the bottom and I completely got lost and I thought I was going to drown: nobody was helping me. Then somebody grabbed hold of me and pulled me out and I thought what was going on? The Doctor said 'we just wanted to see what you did' ...! I thought I was dying. Again this is the seventies, no Health and Safety or anything!

Yes it's all gone the other way now.

I just dived in as normal.

Have you attempted swimming at all since? Or is that something you don't do?

Yes, I taught both my children to swim. As long as I am careful and as long as I can see, I am okay, but if I get water in this eye, or if I can't see out of this eye, I will start flapping, so I wear goggles.

So it does not affect your ears in any way now then? Not prone to infection?

No, nothing affects me now I am deaf!

So do you still attend a hospital, or don't you just go any more for your ears?

About my ears? No, no nothing can be done, that is it, finished, it is over.

Yes, so you don't have to see an ENT consultant, or anybody now?

No, nobody now.

So, have you just...

I do go to hospital about my knees and arthritis but not about deafness, no.

[34:20]

So do you think the National Health has changed since when you were first diagnosed to now, at the present time?

Oh, yes, it's changed a lot more; it's more cost-orientated with customers but, then, they were patients when they looked after you. But now, I don't know, I mean, it's more of a business now, it's more of a business; is not about people no more. It's waiting lists, getting waiting lists down, rushing people in and out. But it's still a nightmare at hospitals. It's more customer-orientated; but not for us, it isn't. You have an appointment and you can sit there for an hour waiting and, if you are on your own, you are concentrating not missing your name. I have told them before I am deaf, but it goes straight over their head.

Yes, I wondered about that.

You are sitting there for an hour or hour and a half and every time a nurse comes out, you look for your name being called and if you don't get it...

That has not changed at all really! It's much the same in our hospitals.

No.

But your other health problems, then, that you spoke about, with your knees and that, how did you find it when you went into hospital to have your operations? Were the nurses sympathetic with your hearing then, or did you just have to deal with it?

Not sympathetic at all. It's the same as every day life. Other people have people around them to make them at ease, you have to make them feel comfortable to speak to you but at hospital

you do not feel like always doing that; they are not sympathetic and at all. Half of them cannot speak English any way, from Asia or somewhere like that.

Different nationalities.

They just ignored me. Half the patients ignore you once they know you are deaf. Six of us in a room a, little ward, and for the first couple of days nobody spoke to me. I didn't feel like speaking, I just went for an operation but in the end I started a conversation going. By the end of the week, we were all friends, but if you don't make the effort, nobody else will. It's too difficult.

I suppose does it makes you very tired at times?

Yes it does; I just want to switch off sometimes. Especially after a day at work sometimes, dealing with customers who have been rude or aggressive to me, I just go home and just want to switch off and sit down. Switch the telly on and watch the news or something to relax.

Your wife is quite understanding towards that? Obviously, if she has never known any different she is used to you?

Yes, she is used to me, yes. But she sometimes gets annoyed because if it is something I don't want to know I will look away from her [laughs] like if we are having an argument or something, I will look away and she really hates that! I think I do it now to wind her up! But she knows, and the noise and tinnitus and the stress, every day is stress and sometimes I just switch off, and she is quite understanding towards me.

[38:27]

Is your tinnitus worse than, well, is it the same all the time or is it worse when you are stressed do you think?

I think it's worse when I am stressed. Sometimes you get somebody speaking over you, and sometimes I speak over it so I am talking louder and my wife notices that.

Of course you can't sort of block it out. I know there are different things they can apparently do today.

Yes exactly. I read the magazines and there is a masker for this, but what good is that to me? Before I had the cochlear implant I was on trial, for drugs trial in London for tinnitus, and the one time, since 1979, I never had tinnitus for about thirty seconds and they injected a drug into me and it just went and disappeared. I thought, "Oh"! I could not believe it. After that they just did a trial of the tablets, but they would not work in tablet form.

Could you not have carried on with the injections then? Or, was that just a trial to see?

No, too dangerous. The drug was called Licocaine, its an anaesthetic. It's too dangerous to give you injections all the time. No, Licocaine not cocaine! [to STTR] It works as a local anaesthetic.

[End of Track 1]

[Track 2]

So, you could not carry on with that obviously then?

No, no. I went on a trial and they gave some people a drug and other people it was a pretend.

Yes, a placebo.

It didn't work; you had to get on with it. I'm not sure if they are still researching it. It was Jonathan Hazell in London that did it. Have you heard of him?

No I have not heard of him, so sorry. You don't take any other medication now then for your hearing loss or anything?

No, no just pain killers for my knees that it all.

Yes, for your other condition. So did you find it...I mean, obviously, you were twenty-five when you lost your hearing. Have you found it a bit difficult with music and that, because obviously you were very young.

I still miss music, yes, it's awful. I love music.

So you can't pick anything up from that at all then? You can't listen to the radio?

No.

Concerts?

Sometimes I go out and it's all seventies songs and my friends sing along, it's not same.

I used to listen to music if I felt happy: happy music and sad music if I was sad. I really miss that. That's one thing I will never get over.

Obviously there are still things you can do for leisure with the children but obviously you can't go to the cinema or concerts or anything like that?

We can go the cinema; there are subtitled cinemas, but I never used to go the cinema before I was deaf really. I watch football. I watch United, Manchester United. But the first time I went to United it was weird with people around singing and shouting; it was weird.

I suppose that is something you can still watch then? You can still make noises yourself?

Yes I do. I will never stop watching United.

So not Manchester City then?

Pardon?!

I should not say that, should I?! Has it affected your self-esteem in any way? You say you get on with life and you just do the things, so do you think it has affected you all in that sense?

Yes, it does. Sometimes it does; sometimes it doesn't. Again, any normal person has good days and bad days. You don't have to be deaf to have bad self-esteem. Some times are bad days, like I go for a couple of days, but if you are feeling down, it's easy to blame being deaf, I suppose. Sometimes I hold back a bit if I am not feeling too good in myself, and if I am in a group, I will keep out of it. So it does affect you, yes. I mean when you can hear, you can listen or not listen and you can be in a group, you can listen and join in, but when you are deaf you have to be one hundred percent focused all the time, or you end up missing things, so it does affect me.

I heard you say you drove here today?

Yes.

So it's not affected your driving in any sense?

No, no. I am a better driver. No mobile phone so I am more aware, and I use my vision.

So I was going to say something about that. So, you don't suffer with dizziness or anything like that? Vertigo?

No I never get dizzy. It's just with balance as long as I can see. It's a visual thing. If I am in darkened room with no lights, I will fall over, but if have something to focus on I'm fine, I never get dizzy or anything.

Or sickness?

No, never sick.

[05:12]

Is your Mum still alive now?

Yes, she is eighty six now.

She does not treat you any differently? She has not treated you any differently from the other children at all?

Yes she does. [laughs] She always worries about me, if I go out. I go up to see her once a month and take her out for a drink. It's "Watch the cars", you know. Older people do that. An older person sometimes they act like a younger person, you know. It's hard to explain really; she fusses sometimes. But I know it's just the way that she is...

Is that more you think because of your illness?

Yes it is because of my hearing loss.

And you are still close to the rest of your family?

Yes. Except my Dad of course.

Yes, you don't know [laughs]. You obviously still live in Manchester now then?

Yes I still live in Manchester.

Never thought about having a hearing dog or anything like that, would you not feel the need to?

No, I have got two dogs.

Oh?

Not hearing dogs.

No. So how do you cope? That is another thing. How do you cope then if your wife, your family are not there and the door bell rings? Or the phone goes? I suppose you can't use the phone?

I have an alarm. If the door-bell goes, the lights in the house go on and off, and the same with the phone. I am waiting for a fire alarm to be put in, that is another thing. It does not worry me so much, but it worries my wife. She is a social worker as well so she's doing it through social services.

So she is aware of all those things? But it could happen to you on your own, but they are not going to!

Yes she is aware: life is a risk!

[07:46]

I take it you can't use the phone at all then? Or...

I use a Minicom, a textphone, and text on a mobile.

So that was a wonderful thing wasn't, when they came in, really?

Oh yes, when I first went deaf there was nothing: no minicomms, no textphones, nothing. What we did at first is the social services gave me a temporary door bell; it picked up noises when there was a noise, a light flashed so I used to - I was living on my own then of course - if I

want to phone my Mum, say, because she was worried, I would take it to the phone box and dial the number, and then you could feel when you pressed the money in and put the microphone to the phone.

Oh, right.

It would start flashing like that and I knew Mum was talking, and I would give her a question with a yes or no answer, and she would tap the phone once for yes and two for no: if the light flashed once, she said 'yes' and that was it! Not the best way but we worked through it.

It worked obviously quite well for you two.

It didn't really no, because if there was any noise or a car went past, the light was flashing!

Oh dear.

Everything was mainly done by letter.

[09:34]

Can I just ask, Keith, going back, you said you were a motor mechanic. Why were you not able to carry on with that? Was it necessary you had your hearing to be able to do that then? I would have thought that was quite a manual job.

Yes, they said it was. The diagnosis was because of the gear box rattles and squeaks...but I said to them, "Tell me what is wrong and I will repair it". A friend of mine at that time had his own garage and own business and I used to do some things for him when they said I could not be a mechanic, but that was just on the side! But I knew I could not do the job fully myself as I was relying on other people, and I had to rely on other people, and I do not like relying on other people. I had to rely on him to tell me what was wrong. What's the noise, is it a rattle? It affected my self-esteem a bit, because I had to rely on someone who I knew wasn't as good a mechanic as I was. I could not have carried on, no. I was not happy, no. I like to be able to do everything myself. I don't like to rely on other people.

So have you got any hobbies now? Any thing you like? Obviously, you work so I don't suppose you get an awful lot of time when you go to the football. Anything?

I like football. I like reading. T V. Usual things. Going out with friends. Do-it-yourself, and work on the house. That is about it really.

Yes.

It's enough!

Yes! But, you said you have got two dogs now. Have you always had animals? Is that a recent thing?

I have always had animals since I was growing up. I had dogs in Scotland, rabbits and dogs. Always had dogs around.

So do you still go back up to Scotland now to see relatives or anything?

I have not got any relatives left. I think I have one relative left; they are all dead now. I have not many relatives but my Father was an only child and Mum were an only child. My father's mother and father died in the seventies and my Mum's Mum and Dad died when she was about seventeen. But I've got, my brothers and sister have children that are family and the family is getting big all the time.

Are they all locally?

Yes all in the north-west of England.

[13:10]

So were your grandparents around when you did lose your hearing?

My grandfather on my father's side was alive at that time, but my father disowned my family by then, he found another woman and moved away and didn't want to know the family. My

grandfather was frightened about contacting the grand children in case my father kicked him out. I think he knew, but I don't know.

Yes, I just wondered how they coped with your hearing loss; but obviously, people deal with it in different ways.

They didn't want to know. He didn't want to know the family, not just me, but the whole family. He didn't want to know any of his own children.

Oh. So, erm, do you feel, in any way, because of your hearing loss, it discriminated you in any way at all over the years? I know you said you found it hard, obviously.

[laughs] Yes, I am discriminated against all the time. I felt I was discriminated at work because I was on the same level for years and years and watched people go over me. Last summer I decided enough was enough. I put in a grievance against the company. Out of the blue, two months later, they wanted me going to do a management development programme! Weird that, isn't it?

Perhaps you should have done that a few years previously?

I was not really bothered. I was just watching people who I know had less experience than me going above me, and everybody has a limit. I reached the limit then and thought...that's it.

So you felt it was because of your hearing they were doing that, as opposed to...

Yes, I was told it was: I was told it was, unofficially. I was told it was. Somebody actually said to me, one of the personnel people said to me, "Well, we have not put you forward for management because what would happen if there is a disciplinary hearing, you wouldn't be able to hear what they are saying?" Oh my God, what year are we living in now?

Sometimes it has gone backwards. We think we have come forwards, but sometimes people still need a lot of awareness training.

Yes, they do. [laughs]

[16:20]

Yes I agree with you one hundred per cent there. I mean, people are more aware of born deaf people, signing. There is no problem with that now, but there is still a problem with us because we can speak. They think you are pulling their leg when you can't understand what they are saying.

Have you ever tried to do signing, or not ever felt the need for it?

I have got level one signing.

Oh yes, you did say.

I was living, not living, but going out with a deaf girl, so I was probably over level one.

Is it difficult doing that if you are not in a deafened world perhaps? It is different if you live in a deafened world with lots of people that can do sign, but if you live with hearing people it must be a bit more, well...unless they learned signing as well?

What do you mean 'if people around me signed'?

Well...

My wife and I sign at home. Well, if I don't get a word she will sign or finger-spell the word.

She didn't go to signing herself?

Yes we both went together; we went together at the same time, yes.

Oh. So perhaps we feel a lot of places should do deaf awareness training, but they don't. Never done that in your work at all?

No. [laughs]. My work have deaf awareness training.

Yes the people you work with, yes?

No. No, only for me!

They don't offer it to their employees then?

A company like mine employ over hundred thousand people; they have a few hundreds stores; millions of customers a year, and still have not got a clue. They don't even know how to answer a textphone. It's pathetic.

So we have not gone forward in a lot of ways?!

That is another thing that sometimes gets to me, you see all the adverts and companies, they have a textphone number but have you ever tried phoning one? Nobody answers; they don't know how to use it; it's just a gimmick, "Look we have a textphone number here".

Yes just sounds good.

Even Trafford social services, I phoned them up, and the person who answered the Minicom could not work the Minicom. I mean, what can you do?

So, as I say, it sounds good does it not? But if it is does not work in practice...

Yes it sounds good, yes, accessible, but they don't know how to use it.

[19:37]

You have never thought of setting up your own hearing group or anything like that? A club or anything? Not felt the need to?

Well, just after I became deaf, a lip-reading teacher came to the hospital and I kept going to the University for five or six months afterwards. She said to me one day that she had a phone call from the hospital that somebody else had meningitis and he was about five years younger than me and he was in Tyldesley, just outside of Manchester, near Wigan. She said, "Would you be

prepared to go to see him? He lives North London but he is at home with his Mum and Dad". I went to see him and we got on very well, like a house on fire, and he used to be in a group, a band. He was finding it really difficult to cope. His Mum and Dad didn't want him to go back to London but wanted him to stay there; he had a good job in London as a civil servant. We met up every week or so, while I was off work. One day he said, "I don't know what to do with my Mum and Dad, they are pestering me to stay, but I feel a bit, you know, a bit clingy now". I said "If you feel you can go, go back to London. What is stopping you, if you are struggling?" He went to London, but we kept in touch. We decided there was nothing for people like us that become deaf, so we thought we could set up a group, so we had one meeting, about six or seven of us, and it went quite well. Bunty from Hearing Concern was there at that time. We decided we would have one more meeting and take it from there. But then it just got taken over; people took it over and it became the NADP. I never even joined it. I never joined it. We wanted a social thing; we didn't want a political thing, but just to get a drink and a chat and get it all off your chest and have a moan and a laugh and whatever.

Oh, that is a shame. Are there many hearing clubs now around in Manchester or do you not know?

I don't know. I think Link have one in Oldham but I am not really into that sort of thing.

No, because you have managed to cope very well with it, and you seem to have managed to cope very well with it. That is a very sweeping statement to say that, but obviously it's come with a certain amount of problems and that. Is there anything else you would like to add?

I don't know; I don't think so.

Anything gripping?!

[laughs].

It does not matter what it is.

I will probably think of something later [laughs].

Yes, I know.

It's been very positive actually. You seem to have dealt very well with everything, you know. Obviously, as I say, it was difficult but you seem to have a very supportive family and children. Obviously, you get very frustrated by certain things but, as you say, life is like that any way. So, is there anything you would like to do that you have not done yet?

What do you mean, in life?

Yes.

I would like a world cruise! [laughs].

I think we would all like one of those!

Yes, why not! But, yes...

[24:20]

So, do you feel at all that you have been labelled in any way with your deafness?

Labelled? How do you mean by 'labelled'?

Labelled – well, do people react quite differently to you in general with the hearing loss?

Yes, they do.

There's a lot of the stigma that comes with that.

Yes they do, this is what I was saying before. You have to put people at ease or try and put people at ease but some people will never be put at ease; it's just not in their make-up and they get flustered if they do not understand something. They will get flustered and I get flustered, so it's gone completely. The whole thing has gone, no communication.

But you obviously...

One person at work yesterday was asking me something, a customer, and I had my back to her and she whacked me on the back and I turned around and I said, "Sorry, I am deaf" and I know I should not say, "sorry, I am deaf".

Yes you apologise for it.

It makes the thing more comfortable. So, she looked at me and just walked straight away, never said a word. So I thought right, fuck off - I better not say that!

But...

Yes, it's true.

That was her embarrassment though, I assume.

Sometimes it's people that should know better.

I mean, one man comes in every week, I think he has multiple sclerosis, MS. He comes in, in a wheelchair with his carer. I was working one day and customer said something to me and he turned around and said to the customer, "Oh, don't talk to him, he is deaf". That's a carer speaking! That is a case where I remember him speaking: that makes me angry.

There is not much though, obviously, not training, if any?

No, it's terrible. I just could not comprehend how he could say that.

[26:57]

You said, Keith, that you obviously went on a training course basically with Link when you first became, well, erm, not a training course, is it? But it was to help you with your deafness, and you have obviously done some work with Link since then.

Yes.

You have been involved in things. Have you enjoyed doing that?

Yes, I really enjoyed the deafened awareness training, it was a really good course and the feedback we got was really positive.

Who did you give it to, the deaf awareness training?

Erm, I have given two courses: one in Leicester to a mixture of people: Asian people, and voluntary groups, and six or seven different groups, a church group. I did one in Southport which was for helping single parents.

Right.

It was very good. The more people who know it, the better.

Yes, for the future.

In Leicester there was, I think, twelve of them. If twelve people tell another twelve, then...

Yes that is right; it's a build-up, is it not?

Yes, exactly. That is where we have gone with born deaf people; they have fought for everything, but we just sit back. The born deaf did a brilliant campaign in the last half of the eighties: they got sign language, as a recognised language and it worked. That is why I think we should be more political and fight for things.

Yes, but, erm it would be nice, and I don't know about companies but it would be nice to perhaps talk to companies, and go into them and make them more...

Yes.

I think they have a lot of failings.

Yes I agree with you one hundred per cent there. In the super market, one of the big super market chains, they have not got a clue but they are dealing with millions of customers a year

but they do not know what to do. I have had managers over the years that have been there for six months and never said a word to me because they are frightened!

Oh?

I look at them and I think...

It does not inspire confidence, does it?

No, no it doesn't. There should be more training. Everyone should be training. We are just sitting back doing nothing; we should be out there fighting for things.

*I will draw us to a close now but thank you very much for allowing me to interview you.
Hopefully it was okay? [laughs]*

Yes, okay!

Yes, thank you.

Yes, it was fine, no problem.

[End of track 2]

[End of recording]