



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Ann Moss
Interviewed by Fran Walker

British Library ref. C1345/15

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/15

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Moss

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Ann

Sex: Female

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1953, Northern Ireland

Date(s) of recording: 14th December 2008

Location of interview: The Westminster Hotel, Chester

Name of interviewer: Fran Walker

Speech to Text reporter: Francis Barrett

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

Recording format : WAV 16 bit 48 kHz

Total no. of tracks: 2 **Mono or stereo:** stereo

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

I am Fran Walker interviewing Ann Moss on Sunday the 14th of December for the Unheard Voices Project in Chester the Speech to Text recorder is Franny and before we start the interview proper I would just like you to give your full name and including your maiden name if you were married and your occupation or what you used to do and the date and place of birth. If you do that then I will ask you another question then we will get started on the interview proper?

Okay my name is Ann Moss and my maiden name was Grant. I am a teacher and I was actually born in near Bessbrook in Northern Ireland.

Okay and when were you born and also if you could say your mother's occupation and your father's occupation?

I was born on the 6th February 1953. And my Mum was a housewife and my Dad was a builder.

Okay now it's for the actual interview and to begin with we will go over a little bit over your background if you could tell me a little bit about your family and growing up in Northern Ireland?

Well I was the youngest of a family of 3, I have 2 older brothers so when I came along I think I was pretty much spoiled. Erm, I just had a normal growing up in Northern Ireland, I went to a convent a primary school.

Was it a town or a village or?

No, we lived out in about 3 miles outside the town of Newry. I attended a village convent primary school and then I went on to the girls convent grammar school, so I was pretty much surrounded by nuns most of my life and then progressed to Sedgeley Park teacher training college in Manchester, once again run by nuns. So, I had a...

Carry on yes?

Just a normal childhood really nothing extraordinary to record.

What kind of things did you like doing?

Well, with having 2 older brothers I was just pretty much a Tomboy. I was always outside playing on my bike with my dog, just an outdoor person.

Right, right and it's a Catholic childhood I assume from all the nuns?

Yes, we were, yes. I had a very strict, quite a strict Catholic upbringing really.

And when did you come to England?

When I was 18 I left school and I came to Manchester to teacher training college.

And after teacher training college did you start teaching?

Yes, I did my probationary year in Manchester then I stayed on another year and then I got married.

[06:06]

How did you meet your husband?

My husband was a student at Salford University and I met him when I was 19.

Right, right and did you live in Manchester or did you move around a bit?

Well, I stayed in -- when we got married we moved to Kent because my husband took up his first position. He was a trainee accountant with Reid International.

Right, okay. And what else was going on in your life at that time when you were first living in Kent?

Erm, I started looking round for a teaching position, and then we bought our first house and 5 years later we had our first child and then shortly afterwards we had a second child, then we got our second house and we were there 7 years.

Carry on, yes [laughs]

Then my husband got an opportunity to move back North, so we moved up to Lancashire and we have been living up here for the past 25 years.

Right, right and so your children must be grown up by now.

Yes, my eldest son Charles, is 27, and he has gone into teaching. My daughter Kelly is 25 and she is a recruitment officer for Marks and Spencer currently living in Kent actually. [laughs] I also have a second daughter Laura Louise, she is 16 and studying for A levels.

[09:40]

Okay. And when did you first start noticing anything wrong with your hearing. What was the first signs?

I just woke up 1 morning and my left ear was ringing and I went to the doctor because it didn't seem to stop and he said if it didn't stop in a week we will send you for a hearing test so it didn't stop and I went for a hearing test and that was the start really of my hearing problems.

Right and what happened next?

Well, because it was on 1 side they sent me for a scan but nothing showed up and they couldn't find any reason for it so they decided just to monitor it so I was back and forward to the audiology departments over the following years, and then.

And when abouts was this?

It went into my right ear then and gradually it began to affect my hearing and I had to have a hearing-aid, 2 hearing-aids fitted to start with. It just gradually progressed from then my hearing seemed to get worse and I was then sent to Manchester to see various consultants but unfortunately no reason could be found and eventually I was just signed off and told to, unless I had some dramatic change that there wasn't anything really they could find to improve the situation. I then decided to go to a private practitioner and had an in-the-ear aid. Actually I had 3 of these over the next say years, I don't know how many years really and I just struggled on really so till I got to the point today where I am going to have a cochlear implant at the end of January.

So about how old were you when all this started happening?

Erm well it was actually 6 months after my last daughter was born and at the time we had a particularly stressful period and I think at first they thought it was down to stress and I was always assured at the beginning that it was temporary and it would pass and my hearing would come back to normal so but unfortunately this didn't happen.

And how did that make you feel? How did you react when you realised...

Well, I think it's only within the last couple of months I have realised it's not going to happen [laughs] I always thought oh I will just wake up 1 day and my hearing will come back to normal or they will have some break through and be able to fix it but I think I have just recently after all these years realised my only way forward is to have a cochlear implant.

[15:08]

Tell me a little bit about how it affected your work situation, you were a teacher?

Well, I have had to give up teaching completely.

Was there a time when you were trying to teach and cope with your hearing loss?

When did that happen?

Erm, no, I had actually finished teaching to have my daughter and then this all happened 6 months when she was 6 months old so it just it was separate really I had finished teaching and oh and this happened and I knew I would never be able to go back because you have to cope in a teaching situation.

And what was it like coping with a baby and other children how did you cope in your family?

Erm well, my hearing wasn't actually affected to a great extent until my eldest daughter was about 4 or 5 and started school and then I began to realise things like teachers parent evening and when I would go in to speak to the teacher I was struggling to hear what she was saying and when I went to doctor's appointments and things like that everything became a struggle. And then gradually I began to think well, it's best to avoid these situations because they are so stressful and as I got stressed my tinnitus went up and my hearing came down so it was like a vicious circle. Before I went anywhere I was thinking I am not going to be able to hear what they are saying and I was totally stressed and it made the situation worse.

And your husband how did he take it, what was his reaction?

Erm, I think at the beginning he didn't realise how bad it was. He used to say things like oh, can you arrange this or can you ring this and I don't think he realised that I was having trouble on the phone, and you know I think it's only recently in the last few years that he has realised the trouble I have actually but I think that was my fault because I kept covering up for it. I thought well, you know, I can do this and I can do that and covering up for it all the time rather than saying I can't hear you know.

So, it sounds as if you didn't have a lot of support. What about your wider family, were your parents still around or were they....?

No, both our parents had died previously to all this. My friends just thought it was a bit of a joke really and when I would see them they would say can you hear better now. I think they thought it was some passing phase I was going through. Even now they say oh is your hearing better now [laughs] I don't feel I had any support whatsoever until I spent a week at LINK and realised other people were in the same situation. I didn't actually know anybody who had a hearing problem until I went there.

And how did you hear about LINK?

Erm, when I was on the implant programme a couple of years ago my hearing therapist mentioned it to me and said she would put me forward to go on it.

[20:22]

Right and what happened then. You were on the implant programme a couple of years ago?

I came off the implant programme.

Why was that?

I am a proper coward [laughs] I actually felt I was being pushed into it at that particular time. Everyone was telling me how fantastic f it would be but I didn't feel happy in myself at having it done so I came off it and at the same time I was being told there was this new hearing-aid out that would make a vast difference to me so I thought I might as well try that but unfortunately I don't know what happened I seemed to have got lost in the process again and ended up just going back to audiology and being fitted with the aid that I have now.

So, you never got the aid that you were specially had been recommended or... I don't quite understand what happened then sorry?

I don't understand either what happened because I was put in touch with at the time I was going back and forward to Manchester to see a hearing therapist and it was such a trek that she said oh you can see a hearing therapist in Nelson which would be closer so I did actually see this hearing therapist and it was her who recommended this new aid and I thought oh fantastic this is going to be my life-saver. Unfortunately I lost contact with her completely I don't know whether she moved or what happened I just couldn't get in touch with her at all and I was then sent to Burnley and they didn't know anything about it and in the end I just gave up really I didn't know what happened, whether it was actually this aid or what happened in those circumstances.

It sounds very frustrating?

Oh [laughs] yes it was terribly frustrating because I just didn't know which way to turn really. Everyone seemed to be telling me different things and I think that's why I just went to a private hearing-aid dispenser because I found he was the only 1 that seemed to understand and be of any help really.

Yes, you had been passed from pillar to post until then?

Yes, I felt as if I had been all over the North West really and no-one could give any answers to why I was having all these problems but at the same time, the attitude was just get on with it.

Yes, yes?

You know, 1 hearing consultant said oh there has been no progress in hearing in the last 35 years which was a bit scary.

[24:50]

Yes and not very true [laughs] so when was all this happening? This must have been in the 1990s?

Erm, yes, it's not that long ago. I actually went into hospital when I, well, I don't know. I had really bad tinnitus, my hearing had gone down, I think I had a really bad dose of flu and I was actually in hospital for a few days and I think my daughter was about 4 or 5 at the time, yes so you are talking about 1996, yes, some time around the 1990s but I think the overall view was, 'it's not life threatening, we don't know what causes tinnitus, just get on with it and stop bothering us'. That's the impression I got from everybody.

Yes. And did you get any information that would help you in your everyday life about phones or anything?

No, absolutely, nothing up until about, since I had been to LINK and was told what was available.

And you were seeing a hearing therapist or you had seen several hearing therapists. What kind of information did they give you?

Erm, no particular information about help in everyday life. I just got the impression they didn't realise how bad my hearing was.

It's difficult yes. You had been having your hearing tested presumably?

Yes, I was having the hearing tests regularly up until they decided to sign me off and then I was just left really.

So how did that make you feel, what did that feel like just being left?

I just thought I had to help myself and the only way forward was to go to a private practitioner but just like I just had to get on with it really and every day was just a struggle but obviously it affects you, it affects your whole life.

[29:00]

Can you give me some examples of how it, you mentioned, erm, parents evenings for instance were hard to cope with?

Erm, I think it's everything really, I mean as I say before you start to think of self-preservation and you avoid situations where you know you are going to be stressed so you can become very isolated and I think over the years you just lose contact with people because you don't want, for some reason you don't want them to think oh you can't hear and I think I just centred on my family really and situations where I felt happy which weren't very many [laughs]

Oh yes. Yes? And so what did you do, you weren't working? You were looking after your children and what? Did you have friends to go out with?

Erm, I think I just put all my energies into the family, erm, I suppose looking back from being a person with perfect hearing and doing all the things like working full-time and having a very busy life I just suddenly found myself sort of more or less isolated with my family (Smoke alarm going off) Sorry about that.

That's okay. And your children, how did they react? How did they manage? Did it affect your relations with your children?

Erm, no I have 3 perfect children [laughs] I have 3 very understanding children and the funny thing is with my youngest daughter, Laura I don't have any trouble hearing what she says I don't know whether it's because she speaks clearly and she was only a baby when I started having trouble but I very rarely do I miss anything she says, so I think the thing is with my family I was lulled into a false sense of security, so I find myself almost forgetting I have a hearing problem and even today I will go straight into a situation and then think I can't hear what they are saying [laughs] I think I always have this false sense of security that propels me all over the place and then sometimes I will find I am struggling or I just have to get on with it really.

What are the things that help you cope when you are in that kind of situation?

Well over the last year or so I have just said to people I haven't heard a word you've said can you say it all again or just tell people that I can't hear whereas before I would sort of perhaps catch a few words and pretend I had heard and sort of bluff my way out of situations [laughs].

Yes. We have all done that [laughs] and can you think of some practical examples of where it's been a problem, I don't know, maybe going away or something like that?

Well, I have had to give up horse-riding lessons because I still feel a bit silly if I am in a group lesson and I can't hear the instructions. And I have tried to get into I don't think there is any such thing as horse-riding lessons for hearing-impaired.

And?

Erm, I think in situations like group situations I don't feel as if I can join a club or a hobby group because I won't be able to hear properly. You are pretty limited really in what you can do when you have got a profound hearing loss I find.

[36:07]

So have you had any contact with other people with hearing problems?

Only through LINK and that was really why I came along today I thought oh I will probably meet up with some people I have met on other courses.

Right, right?

Because I don't know anybody in my area that has a hearing problem. I think my nearest LINK is Merlyn and he is in Manchester.

Right and have you been to lipreading classes or anything or?

Yes, I have joined a lipreading group and that has also been my salvation although I feel I am probably the worst person there really. I think most of the people there have

age related hearing loss and cope admirably with hearing-aids but I have a marvellous teacher called Carol who makes sure everybody is involved and will repeat things endless times without losing patience [laughs]

And has that been a help to you?

Yes, it's been marvellous because I feel I can go there every week and it's a nice friendly little group and you feel involved in it.

And when did you start going there and how did you find out about it?

I found out about it on the Internet and I have been for about a year now but previous to this I did try and go to a lipreading class in Preston and it was simply horrendous because it seemed to be geared at college students who all had perfect hearing and I was the only person there with a hearing disability and it was all right while the lesson was going on but at the break they were all listening to the I-Pods and chattering and when I asked them I found I was the only person there with a hearing problem it was really odd but it was the most horrendous experience I just felt awful and it was at a time when I felt really low and I thought well if this is lipreading classes it's not going to do anything for me and I didn't go again because I just felt awful so when I enquired about other lipreading classes I made sure before I went that they are aimed at people with a hearing loss and there would be other people there in my situation.

That must have felt very weird?

Well, it was absolutely soul-destroying because it was at a worst possible time for it to happen and I thought there is nothing left for me if this is lipreading classes.

Yes?

I think I it was actually a college orientated course they all seemed to be about 16 to 18 year olds so apart from the fact I felt the granny in the group [laughs] it was terrible.

[40:38]

So it must have been very off-putting. And how has it affected your, I mean you've talked a bit about it, your sense of feeling a bit isolated. How would you say it's affected your identity and how do you think.... your sense of self?

Well, I suppose to say it's totally wrecked my life is almost an understatement. And I know they say things happen for a reason but I honestly can't find it.

Yes?

I am not really a positive person to start off with. I am not one of these people that say oh well I will cope with this and not question it. There is not a day goes by that I don't say why me? [laughs] no-one in my family has a hearing problem. I have never met anyone with a hearing problem so it's just something totally strange. If something had happened I had been in a car accident, I had been in a bomb scare and that was the result of it I could cope with it but when you just wake up 1 morning and find your hearing is starting to go for no apparent reason I have never had an ear infection as a child no-one in the family you cannot until the day you die accept it.

Yes. So, you feel you have not really had any support really even if, or what about understanding do you think people have understood what's happening?

Erm, I think you actually blame yourself and think well, I am covering it up. Perhaps if I had said 15 years ago "I am really worried about my hearing and I want something done" but not in my wildest dreams did I ever think 15 years down the line I would be in the position I am in today because I was always told at the beginning, "it is temporary, it will pass, it will get better and I think if they had said at the beginning look, we are worried you are losing your hearing, let's do some, see if there is anything possible we can do" but they didn't so I was always, had this in my mind "it's going to get better, I think it's a bit better today I think I could hear that that I couldn't hear yesterday and I think because tinnitus has played such an active role when it's really affecting my hearing when it's calm I can hear better and because it's been so gradual I honestly don't know what normal hearing is now. Someone might say oh a

consultant would say, 'oh you have really bad hearing and I would think I don't even know what normal hearing is anymore because it happened so gradually over such a long time.'

Yes and what things do you miss from your hearing life?

I think the thing I miss most is music. What else? Going to the cinema, going to plays, all the things normal people just take for granted really but listening to the radio and having music around the house and things like that.

Yes. Have you ever had information about things like films with subtitles and?

Yes, I do use subtitles on the telly and if I buy a DVD I always make sure it's got subtitles on.

And it's, that's all information you found out for yourself or have people help you find out about it or....?

No, I have just found out myself really.

[47:30]

And how do you see the future, you are having an implant in January? Did you say January? How do you think the future will be?

I don't think I am going to suddenly have perfect hearing by any means but I have been assured it will make a tremendous difference to what I am using at the moment. I know it will be really hard work working with the implant and getting used to it and that's not something I am particularly good at because I like instant results but I think I will just have to really persevere with it because I know that's my only option at the moment.

Yes, a couple of years ago you were very undecided about the implant what's happened since then to make you change your mind?

I just realised that it's the only option available and having spoken to people who have had implants I can see how they have -- their hearing has improved and they can enjoy music and various things and another reason I came off the programme 2 years ago was when I used to ask questions like will I be able to use the phone and they used to say things like well we don't know because each person is different. "Will I be able to still watch television without subtitles? Well, we don't know because each person is different", so in the end I thought it was very off-putting because I thought there is nothing definite that I can think of, well I will have this implant and I will be able to do this because perhaps it won't work for me but now I know my hearing has deteriorated to such an extent that I don't really want to carry on hoping that it is going to get better and spend the next 10 years the way I spent the last because I just feel as if I want my life back and if this is 1 step towards it then it is worth taking really.

Yes and your family, how do your family feel about it?

I think my husband is quite pleased [laughs] my daughters are a bit "iffy" because they are worried that anything about hospitals, erm, I think my son has got a bit of a shock because he didn't actually realise my hearing was that bad he always seems to say but Mum you can hear us all right. But, I think if I have decided to do it I will just have to go ahead and have it done. I can't be put off because they have absolutely no idea what it is like.

[52:21]

Yes. You talked a little bit about coming to LINK earlier and what kind of things did that help you with? What changes has that made?

I think that it stopped me pretending nothing was wrong and everything was going to be all right and I had to say I have got this hearing problem and cope with it and use the things that are out there to help rather than saying I don't need those and pretending I was perfectly all right and it helped by meeting other people and seeing

how they coped and finding they faced the same problems in everyday life and I was not sort of the only person that had this problem that I felt before I went.

Okay, I think that's probably as much as we need to talk about unless there is any other area you feel we have not touched on and you feel you would like to talk about any area of your life?

No, I think it's really covered everything. It's just, I think it's important to say that it affects every single day of your life and there is not a day that goes by that it doesn't. I think that's the important thing.

Yes, okay.

[End of Track 1]

[Track 2]

I have switched it back on again because in the break we started talking about signing and I asked if you had ever thought about learning signing?

Yes, people used to suggest well not people only when was at LINK, we did a little bit of signing but I thought, well, there is no real point in me learning it because I don't know anybody else that does signing so if I know it who do I sign to like even if you are in a shop, you can't start doing fingerspelling or anything because they won't have a clue what you are doing and I think this is also something that should be addressed I know LINK I don't know if they did it in the North West they were doing a hearing awareness course going round hospitals doctor's surgeries, shops, schools trying to make them deaf aware and how they could help people who had a hearing problem you know by speaking to them face on, trying to speak slowly and clearly. But, I didn't actually hear how that went. Do you know?

[01:57]

I don't know. Can you think of examples where you felt people should have been more deaf aware?

Not really. I find I say to people well there are different ways of putting it and a friend of mine lipreading says he says, 'I am prone to deafness' rather than if you say, 'I am deaf' they don't want to know. There is no point speaking to you if you say you are deaf. If you say, 'I have a hearing problem' it doesn't make the slightest difference, you just carry on the same. So, he says, 'I am prone to deafness' and because it's a little bit different they catch on a bit more. And another person wears a badge, saying 'speak slowly'. My personal experience is no matter what I say it doesn't make the slightest difference, they just speak the same. They will speak to you while they are at the tills or while they are down here getting something so you can't see their lips and I think it's because you don't look deaf. Unless you have got a gaping wound people don't -- aren't interested. I had a terrible experience when I actually went to a hearing consultant at a private hospital and I went in and at the reception and she said right take a seat, didn't tell me where the consultants room was,

so I sat down in the nearest seat which unfortunately was a long way from his office. I had never met the man before so I didn't recognise him. When he came out he called my name. I didn't hear him. He went back in. He came out again and then when I noticed he reappeared twice I thought he must be looking for me because nobody else moved. I then went in. He proceeded to speak as he would to a normal hearing person. At the time he put a load of antibiotics in my -- which is my good ear because I had an infection in my ear at that time and told me to go out and make an appointment for a week's time. Couldn't hear a thing. Went out to a busy reception trying to make an appointment with my good ear blocked up. Oh it was the most horrendous experience because you just feel nothing. I did not hear half of what he had said until I actually told him to write it down and by the time I got home I just felt oh terrible.

Yes, yes?

The next day, having reviewed the situation, I thought other people must experience this so when I went back the following week I asked to see the person in charge and I said to her there is no facilities for the hearing-impaired explaining what had happened to me and how soul-destroying it was and I said if someone came in in a wheelchair and there was no ramp oh, it would be discrimination. But, I come in, hearing-impaired, and I am expected to just get on with it so I don't actually know if what I have said will make any difference but hopefully the next person that comes in and says they have a hearing problem perhaps it will I don't know but on the whole people just they always say it's what, the laugh disability, the comic disability because people think it's funny. Why? I just don't get that.

I know

Hopefully if I do have this cochlear implant I am going to work tirelessly for people who are hearing-impaired.

Good

Because somebody has got to do it.

Okay.

[End of Track 2]

[End of recording]