



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Anna Pollard
Interviewed by Andrew Goodwin

British Library ref. C1345/21

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/21

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Pollard

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Anna

Sex: Female

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1942, Dorking

Date(s) of recording: 14th March 2009

Location of interview: The City Inn Hotel, Bristol

Name of interviewer: Andrew Goodwin

Speech to Text reporter: Hilary McLean

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Andrew Goodwin interviewing Anna Pollard on 14 March 2009 for the unheard voices project in Bristol. Speech-to-text reporter's name is Hilary. good afternoon Anna. Could I ask you to tell me your full name including maiden name.

My name is Anna Pollard and my maiden name was Anna Curle.

What was your date and place of birth?

16 August 1942 at Dorking.

And what was your mother and father's occupation please

Its with an E on the end of Curle, sorry C-U-R-L-E. My father was a professor of education, Exeter University, I think and my mother was a housewife. She didn't do anything because I was born in the war, but...

I just paused there for a moment sorry Anna, you were saying.

Yes I came into - I was adopted at 6 weeks and my birth mother was in the A T S, and it's believed that my father was in the army, and then when I was adopted my adoptive father was also in the army and my mother was a housewife. I have one older sister. And we - when I was 15 my father remarried so I do have a step sister. The father - when I was 15 we went to Pakistan where my father was on the board of advisories in Pakistan where we lived for a couple of years. I was at boarding school. Not there, but I was at boarding school when I was 11 in Haywards Heath in Sussex. In fact both my sister and I were at Haywards Heath in Sussex. Unfortunately both my adoptive parents have passed on now and I have no idea where my birth mother was. But, I do know my birth mother's name and I do know my birth name. My birth name was Irene Bertram. BERTRUM – I think it might have been a “u”. When my children were little, we had goldfish and not knowing anything about my birth mother or even my birth name we called this fish Bertram. When my children found out what my birth name was they couldn't believe that I didn't know what my birth name was

so they felt that that was very strange. I still haven't found out where my birth mother is partly because I felt that I didn't want to upset her family if they didn't know about me and equally I had a family of my own so why should I bother. I had a normal upbringing I think. I was told at 6 I was adopted. Thought it was the most wonderful thing that had happened to anybody and went out and told all my friends that I had been specially chosen but I don't really know much about - I've been told stories that I don't remember any of them and just the fact that I have a wonderful sister that lives in America, but I will say one thing that if somebody could tell me otherwise I will always believe that my adoptive father is my real father.

The sister who lives in America is this your eldest sister?

Yes, she's 2 years older than I am, she has her own daughters and has just become a grandmother and my step sister or my younger sister lives in London. Unfortunately she lost her mother last year. We lost our father 2 years ago. But I'm very close to both of them. Probably slightly more closer to the bigger sister than I am to the younger sister but we just probably enjoy each other's company because I don't know we probably think alike may be and we're going to see her in May for 3 weeks.

[06:15]

Very nice. You've mentioned that you were born in Dorking and you had been living in Haywood Heath and Pakistan.

I went to boarding school in Haywood's Heath. Although I was born in Dorking, we did move to Oxford when I was probably about 2 and then when I was about 5, 4 or 5, we moved to Dartington, Devon, and then we moved to Ottery St Mary in Devon where I went to school there and then we were sent to boarding school in Haywood's Heath for a couple of years. My adoptive mother or my mother had been there as well. And then after that in 1956 my father took this job on the advisory board Pakistan and we went out with him my sister and I and my grandmother went with us and I went to an all American high school. My sister returned to take up a nursing training in St. Bartholomew's hospital in London. While I was out there, I got

pregnant, and was sent home in disgrace by my father and stepmother, went to live with my grandmother for a time.

This when you were in Pakistan.

Yes. This why I ended up in Bristol at Hembury at a mother and baby home where I had my boy, and it is where in 1961 I went on holiday to a holiday camp in North Wales with my young son who was about 18 months old and on the first night we were there I met Philip who 12 months later we were married. Somewhere here in Bristol and we hadn't been able to find out where he proposed to me and this is why there is - I don't know where it is, I have visions in my head as to where it is, but I can't quite remember. We got married just outside of Hembury probably in some place called Westbury on Trim. And we - well as I said we've been married now 47 years nearly. We're sort of history.

[09:37]

So, you met each other first of all at a holiday camp.

Yes, he was an apprentice in the merchant navy and he had done quite a little stint and he had booked this holiday for quite a while and in those days they always kept certain holidays for people at sea, under the counter. So you didn't have to book well in advance. My father booked my holiday for 2 weeks, so he was there for one week. So, on that first night I put the boy to bed and went out, hadn't had anything to eat, come up on the train, hadn't had anything to eat it was one of these holiday camping shows that you see, and I went to one of these camping shows, sitting in a darkened auditorium, and I had a sense that somebody had come in, but I didn't know who, and then this somebody came and sat beside me and I automatically moved then 4 seats beyond, and the first words he said to me was "who is the star of the show?" And then I offered him a cigarette. After that he said "will you come for a drink?" I said no. Persuasion. All right. Had a pint of shandy, of which I could barely get home back to the chalet and he said can I see you tomorrow? And I said no. He said come on. I said well I'll have to show you something first. So he came in. There you are. In behind the door in the cot was this baby sleeping and his words were: what time

can I pick you both up tomorrow morning? As I had a fortnight to go he had a week and it was arranged that I would meet him at Temple Meads railway station at Bristol at the end of September and in October he asked me to marry him. And August 1962 was when we got married. And the little boy we then had to adopt him in 1964. To take Philip's surname. He has always been Dad to Paul and, although we have two other sons, there has been no favouritism, they've all been treated exactly alike, and he knows who his father was, Philip knows who -, well, he knows his name, put it that way.

What was the reaction of your father when you introduced Philip?

Because I was living at this home, I'm not actually sure how he'd think but when he asked and because I was under 21 in those days you had to have permission to get married because I was under 21, and when he had to go, when he had to ask their permission, he spoke to my father over the telephone and my father said thank goodness for that somebody can take her off my hands but then he had to go in person to my mother and more or less go down on bended knees and ask if he could marry me but he had to go there in person but my father hadn't met him, just said right jolly good take her off my hands but they adored him. And they were both there on our wedding day. Although at that time they hadn't spoken to each other for 30 years but they were both there and they were both witnesses, which was quite nice. But their respected partners weren't.

[14:34]

The partners weren't there at the wedding.

No, my stepmother wasn't there and my stepfather wasn't there either. It was just my mother and my father that were there plus a lot of other family, parents in law, Phillips sister, my sister, my grandmother and two or three people from the home and my brides maids were two girls from the home and incidentally the home doesn't exist any more as we found out. I don't often talk about this part of my life with my boy because for many years we've kept it a secret even from our own two sons. They didn't know that their father wasn't Paul's father but we told Paul when he was 11

because we were due to go overseas for two years and he had to go to boarding school so we told him and he was absolutely so delighted that he'd go and tell all his friends that his daddy was the captain of a ship even though he was an engineer but captain of a ship sounded good enough. Then when we went to tell the two younger boys they said well we've known. How did you know? You shouldn't have left your wedding album hanging around with the date of your wedding and year of your wedding when we were born so many years after. Does it make any difference? No, he's our brother he's always our brother.

How did you feel when they told you that?

Shocked I suppose because when we were asked how long had we been married we always used to say "oh for too long" or we used to add on 2 or 3 years. And it was many, many years after that I started to say that I had got this son before we were married. It was always a taboo conversation because in those days, 50 years ago, it was sort of not heard of. I was often told that like mother like daughter like son. So, if your mother had had a child out of wedlock, her child was more or less certain to do the same thing. But I don't look at it that way. It was - I've often said if I had the chance to do it again I would do it again. I don't regret it. Sometimes I can't believe that he's 50 this year. Makes me feel ancient. But, yes, he's 50 next month. He's a good boy. I have no problems with my sons.

[18:03]

Thank you for that. Really very interesting. Just going through the list of questions, you've covered so much already, but I'd like to go back to perhaps the early years of you and Philip. Where were you living at the time when you first got married?

When we first got married as I said we had Paul when we first got married and he was 3 when we got married and because Philip had got to go to sea, we actually spent the first two years, Paul and I spent the first two years of our married life living with his parents. Although Philip had spent a few months at home because he had to retake some examinations that his shipping company needed him to take, I then fell pregnant with our second child and I was 6 months pregnant when he went away, and it was 22

months and the little boy was 15 months old before he returned. I had no - I didn't see him for 22 months. I didn't speak to him for 22 months. I wrote to him as much as I could and vice versa. So when he came home it was sort of, I suppose it was quite like a stranger but then it can't have been because I fell immediately for our third child but we're still living with the in-laws. Then when I was so many months pregnant with our third child we then moved into our brand new home Plymouth. Philip was up north but had to come home because I wasn't allowed to go into have the baby because the other two had chicken pox and measles. There we lived there for two years. Then we moved back to close proximity to the parents in law. Then we moved overseas to Bermuda for two years. Then we came back. Lived in Plymouth for two years. We moved to Essex for seven years. Moved to Devon for two. And we've been in Cornwall for about 25 years we've lived in Cornwall.

After all that moving around you must be quite pleased to settle down for a while?

No not really because we keep thinking we should move again. In fact we are half thinking that we ought to be thinking about moving again before we get to the stage that we can't look after the house we've got now and the garden. Sort of thinking where can we move to? Do we move into not sheltered accommodation but either one of these flats near the sea or should we move into one of these retirement villages and there is a very nice one down in Roseland, St Justin Roseland in bottom end of Cornwall. But we're not quite sure quite what to do. We have a nice bungalow so we're not sure what to do. Yes we do go through on odd occasions thinking we should have moved. Having lived in so many houses since we've been married and having move around obviously when I was a little girl it's been a lot of moving around and a lot of houses.

What did your family think about all this moving around?

They think we're mad. Our youngest son he has always blamed us for the way he is: no friends, a loner, quiet, because we always moved around when he was a little boy and he doesn't take into the fact that we had to because his father changed jobs so wherever his father went we did too. The others don't seem to look on it that way. They seem to make friends a lot easier than he does so he's actually been in the same

job for 25 years and has managed to move house once in 25 years and lives in exactly the same area in 25 years. He doesn't want to do anything else. He's happy doing his own thing but we do get blamed and now and again because he feels that we should never have moved when he was a little boy. But they didn't go to boarding school either of them like their older brother did.

Can you explain why not?

When the older boy went to school he was 11 and because we were told that there were no schools for him out in Bermuda they didn't take 11 year olds so we put him to school in Crediton which is in Devon. He wasn't all that happy but he was OK because he used to have his fare paid out to come out and see us school holiday times which he thoroughly enjoyed. When we'd finished our two year stint in Bermuda we were asked to do another two year stint this time in Hawaii, but because the older boy, the middle son sorry, the younger one, was time was due to go to boarding school, we tried to get him into the same school, but they said there was no room even though they made allowances for people in the forces in the merchant navy, navy, army. So, rather than going to spend two years in a country without myself and my children, my husband resigned his job and one week exactly after he resigned his job, the school came back and said " guess what we can fit your child in" and we said well I won't say what we said but hence the reason that's why they didn't go to boarding school.

[25:44]

If I can come back now to Philip's job, you mention he was in the merchant navy. Was he in the merchant navy all the time?

He went - when I met him he had just done more or less his first few months, may be a year at sea, but he did - he left school at 17 and a half, he went to Portsmouth College initially to get a - I've forgotten. He wanted the he didn't take his A Levels but he wanted to get qualifications and the only way he could get these qualifications was to go to Portsmouth College which he went so when I met him he had done just a small stint at sea. But after we got married he had to take some examinations before they would allow him to go to sea. He was also working in the dockyard in

Newcastle. Hence, that's where he was staying basically where we met. That's where he was when we met. He thoroughly enjoyed his life at sea. I must admit I think possibly if I knew now what I knew - if I knew then what I knew now, or what it was going to be like, I might have said no. When my sister-in-law was going to get married, and she was getting married to somebody that was in the merchant navy I told her that she was a fool because she knew exactly how I had gone through my early life, my early years of married life how unhappy I was, how miserable I was. She would never have done the same thing but she's a different character to I am, in fact she rather enjoys it when he goes away. He does four months away and she does her own thing for four months. She has no children. I had my children. And I found that is basically what kept me going was the fact that I had 3 children and my life was revolved around them. But they used to say when their father went away "oh gosh mummy is crying again forget about it let's go out and play". I hated every minute of it. But you learn to live with it but you don't like it. Not like today where they only go away for short trips and they've got the big communications with the - not the social workers but the communications groups. There was nobody. Once your husband had gone to sea you were on your own and you tend to become a bit of a recluse because if you went out you were looked as if "oh your husbands away" and therefore you could be classified as being sort of you know easy, easy prey, so to speak. If I went out my father-in-law used to say to me, we know where you've been. How do you know? A little dicky bird told me and you felt you were being spied upon the whole time. It wasn't until we went overseas for two years that I felt, that we felt that we could live our own life and become our own people without being spied upon. The 2 years that I lived with the in-laws was very difficult because I had not only had a little boy but I also was pregnant and then I had this other little boy. And many times I was shown the front door. And said well, you can coif you don't like it here, knowing full well I had nowhere to go. But, it was a safe haven I suppose because it was somewhere where I had to be, and they were very good. Mother-in-law in particular was very good. She was more like my own mother the like my mother rather than like my own mother was.

[30:48]

If I can bring you back to again still with your early marriage, you say that Philip was away for long periods of time, how long would he be away for?

The first time he went away, as I said the first time he went away was for 22 months and that was just 6 months after we got married. He was away for a full 22 months. We were then abroad - after the 22 months he left there because he felt the life was too long so he attempted a shore job for 19 months working for Anglian water authority in Essex. That survived for about 18 months and it was a more or less please go back to sea because he was on the verge not quite on the fur J of a nervous break down but his boss was and that was reflecting on us so it was a for goodness sake go back to sea even though I hated every minute of it. Then he used to go sort of for 3 or 4 months and then he would be home for a week, couple of weeks, and actually that wasn't too bad because we then got to see more of him but the only length of time was that 22 months that he did actually in one stint. Then as I said we went to Bermuda for 2 years but then they used to go away for perhaps 2 or 3 weeks and then be home and then when we came back is when he went with these other companies and they were short trips, nice short trips, 3 to 4 months, and he really really enjoyed his life at sea. Those weren't too pad because the children were a bit older and I didn't mind them quite so much because I saw him a lot more. I suppose I was that much older.

You mentioned a while ago that you did communicate by letter when he was away on these trips.

Yes I used to write to him quite a lot. I used to number them. Used to number them 1 to whatever and he used to get perhaps 5 and 6 and then about 2 weeks later he would get numbers 1 and 2. He wasn't a very good letter writer. But when they did come, they were all right. As I said because we were newly married we really really didn't know each other very well at all because we'd only been together 12 months before we got married. Even then we really didn't see very much of each other bar the weekend perhaps every month, may be a couple of months. And it's only now over the last 25 years that we've actually been together more than 7 years. Because in the first 22 years of our marriage you could probably say we lived together for 7. Now,

we can say that we know each other pretty well. So perhaps whatever I say he'll say and vice versa.

[34:51]

OK. If we can fast forward a little bit now to the area of time when Philip started losing his hearing, can you start telling me about that?

Oh yes. He was always a strong one, and this particular job we were running a guest house in Ilfracombe in North Devon and he wanted to go to sea in the winter but be home in the summer to run the guesthouse but unfortunately that didn't work out. He joined this brand new company on 10 December 1984. It was a foreign company. He was 3 days into this job when they were on a trip from some little port in Norway going up to Spitzbergen on a coal trip and on 13 December 1984 I had a phone call at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and the words were "your husband is all right" (in inverted commas) now for them to say that, is something that I would never expect anybody to say to anybody on the phone whose husband is away at sea because I knew immediately then there was something wrong but they told me that he had had an accident at 9 o'clock that morning, that he was in hospital some where in Tromso. He had 2 broken ribs, and a fractured skull. Well, I was so traumatised that I rushed across the road, got a packet of cigarettes and smoked them within half an hour. I got hold of my sister-in-law who spent nearly all night trying to find out where he was. They in turn spent the entire night pacing the floor without me knowing because they were told that they didn't know whether he would survive 24 hours. It was a 50/50. I found out the following day from my sister-in-law that he had had a double fracture of the skull, numerous broken bones, at that particular time they hadn't realised he'd lost his hearing because a couple of days later he actually - and he says he doesn't remember this but he actually phoned me and said that he was all right. The company made me wait 5 days before they flew me up because they wanted to know whether they actually had a body or an alive one. So, the 18th, 16th December they flew me up first class, by 2 aeroplanes to Tromso, and I saw the doctor first before I went in to the ward and he looked fantastic, he hadn't got a mark on his face, and he could just about hear me. I arrived back the following morning after I'd stayed in a hotel in Tromso. I arrived at the hospital at 9 o'clock in the morning to be found he was being

moved to the neurological department to see this fantastic Scottish doctor and his name was, because Philip couldn't remember his name was Prof. Nair, N-A-I-R and he was Scottish, he was an expert in his field. They told us if you had to have an accident anywhere you couldn't have picked a better place. Apparently overnight after I had left, he had lost his hearing. His hearing had gone. There was nothing. By being moved to the neurological department they would do further tests. I was able to go with him and I slept and stayed in his room, looked after him there, fed him, bathed him, you name it, did it all. I think I can vaguely remember his hearing did come back before we left on 23 December 1984 when we came back home into the care of our doctor over the Christmas and the New Year because it was suggested that he did need to go into the hospital. He had no balance but they told us his balance would go back inside of 6 months and at that particular time they didn't know what his hearing was like but within one month of us after his accident we were at the LINK Centre at Eastbourne where we have 2 weeks intensive rehabilitation partly paid for by the Sea Men's hospital in Greenwich in London which was organised by our social worker in north Devon who actually was deaf himself. It took him - he had a hearing aid for about 2 years. But it didn't really work. He could hear, he couldn't hear, and then one after a week of wonderful hearing noises his hearing went, totally. We went to see a neurological chappy in Truro who put him on very strong pills to stimulate the blood through his ears to no avail. Nothing worked and he had then no hearing at all for 14 years until he had his implant, cochlear implant in 1998. In those 14 years of having no hearing at all, I became the main stay. I sort of became the carer, the bottle washer, you name it, something that I wasn't used to doing, talking to solicitors, talking to accountants, doing the books, talking on the telephone, something that I actually rather enjoyed because for the first time since we were married, I walked 2 steps in front instead of 4 steps behind and it was him that needed me instead of me needing him. Which was - I actually had him back where I wanted him right from word go. Having him home all the time but probably not in this particular situation where he actually needed me because he had no hearing or no balance.

[43:12]

How did it feel for you suddenly being thrust into the full responsibility, or even the role reversal, you being the strong one?

Terrific. Is the word. Because I'd always been a mouse the may be not a mouse. I suppose I was shy actually because I always relied on Philip to do everything. Even though he was away at sea I did have to do a lot but he did teach me a lot like changing plugs telling me not to open the door to strangers and not doing things that I should be sort of wary of because I was living on my own with 3 children. But yes when he came home he became very dependent on me and probably we would be told that I was over protective of him, that when we saw doctors and psychologists and neurologists to be assessed at how much hearing he'd lost and this business for compensation and everything else, they said that I was over-compensating and they said he would be better off if I wasn't like that but I basically think he enjoyed it because I was there but when he did lose his hearing I was asked by my own mother-in-law and sister-in-law why I hadn't left him, why was I still there? And I said to them: why would I leave him now when he needed me most? I could have left him all those years ago when he was first away at sea, but I didn't, and I had all those wonderful 14 years where I did everything. I dare say I do most things now, but not quite the same not quite the same way.

We've been going now for 45 minutes, would it be a good time for a break.

If you want a break.

We'll break for 5 minutes.

[Break in recording]

[45:57]

OK we've just had a short break then and we're going to continue. I think just before the break we're talking about a period when Philip had just lost his hearing, come back home and you mentioned how you were feeling, you were in charge had him at home which was a change from the early part of your marriage. you've just

mentioned your mother and sister-in-law asked why did you not leave him? What was your initial reaction to that?

What anybody's reaction was for: why would anybody leave a husband that has lost his hearing, is disabled, has got anything wrong with him when they need you most? my reaction was, well, yes I could have left him many, many year ago when we were first married when I hated every minute of it when he was away at sea but I didn't and I thought, no, and when I went to bring him back from the hospital when they flew me up to the hospital in Tromso and when I brought him back after about a few months they actually turned round and said thank you for taking care of him. And I felt then that I was coming home. I felt that for the 20 so many years when we were first married that I hadn't really been accepted although Philip will probably tell you I had but I felt I had never been accepted and it was only when they turned round and said thank you that I felt I'd come home. Strange reaction.

Can you explain why you actually need to take care of him? He's only got a hearing loss.

He has a hearing loss but he also had a lot of broken bones. He had loss of balance and to this day he still has loss of balance. I suppose he's still a little bit dependent on me. Perhaps not quite so much. I think when you've been married, well, as I would say I've been married twice to the same man. First 22 years I was married to a hearing person, and for the second 22 years or so I've been married to a deafened gentleman. I think that when you say about he's just lost his hearing, why would he depend on me? I suppose it stems from the fact that he spent so much time at sea that you couldn't depend on him. Another thing I think too I was very unsure of myself while he was away at sea. I used to get it into my head that he wasn't coming home because he'd met somewhere else because they always say you've got a wife in every port but somewhere I always felt at the back of my mind that he wouldn't come home, that he'd met somebody else, and I think when I finally did get him home to myself I was reassured that basically dare I say that who would want him? We joke about that now. Who would want him in the state he is now? And he'll say "well only you". It's a strange way of saying it but that's the way we - going back further when we first

went to LINK that was a month after he had his accident, it was an amazing two weeks

Before we go on to that though if I can interrupt, I'm just trying to imagine that the situation that you're in, your husband who's been a very independent person has been brought back, he's had head injury broken bones he's lost his hearing and you're basically looking after him because of his balance. What - could you explain some of the challenges that may have been at that time?

Difficult. I suppose for the first two years the only way we could get over it was we laughed. Literally, for the first 2 years we did nothing but laugh. Everything that happened we laughed. I think it was the only way that we got through those first early years of his loss of hearing, his balance problem, any other problem he had, we just howled with laughter. I think people thought we were mad.

Could you give an example of something that made you both laugh?

Of course we would laugh if he was in the garden trying to dig, lifting one foot off the ground to put his foot on the fork, he'd fall over. If he was in the supermarket you would have to avoid him falling into a tower of baked bean tins. Things that he would say, because again you would say things to him, he wouldn't understand what you were saying then the things he would come out with, something totally different from what you had said, I can't think right now what words they would be but every word you say, whatever you said to him it would be, would just be hilarious because something else would come out that he hadn't meant to say. It was - I can't really describe it. It was just so much fun in those first 2 years. But it was our way of coping. There was no tears really. It was no why him, why me, why am I like this, what have I done, we were asked many, many times in those early years "why do you feel like this with the fact that you've lost your hearing? I would take myself to Beachy Head and throw myself over the top". And we would say it's better to be deaf and not hear than to be blind and not see. We would go to the sea side and although you could see the waves breaking Philip couldn't hear the waves but he could remember what the waves were like breaking. And all sorts of different things. It was just - children couldn't cope with it. Children found it extremely difficult. They

didn't talk him. They couldn't communicate with him. They were embarrassed I think. They didn't open their mouths wide enough to speak. We think that he learned to lipread by being in an engine room on the ship because in an engine room it's so loud everything is - so he was very lucky in understanding me, in fact I had to be very careful what I said because he could lipread me side ways on. I had to be very careful what I said because he'd know exactly what I was saying. It was just amazing. I had him home and I was doing things for him and I think he enjoyed probably being waited on or being looked after for the first time probably for a very long time.

[55:23]

Before I interrupted you you were about to tell us about a visit to LINK. What was the reason for going to LINK? And why did you want to go?

We'd heard about it - I think our social worker for the deaf knew about it and he was a deaf gentleman himself and he came to ask us what we needed in the way that would make life more easier for us. He showed us the catalogue and all this business and then he said well yes that's what you can have but unfortunately you have to pay for it yourself. We did. Everything we needed and we still do now whenever he needs anything we went out and bought it. Television with subtitles, flashing lights, flashing door bells, everything that would enable us or him to understand what was going on and then he asked us, I think he must have mentioned something about had we ever heard of LINK or we might have read something, I can't really remember and said would we like to go or do you think we would go and we went to the doctor I think who he had barely heard of it or hadn't heard of it but we needed funding so we got it funded by the Sea Men's hospital in Greenwich in London and we were then accepted. Once we got the funding we then the deaf social worker applied and we got put on to the programme and into the wonderful care of Rosemary McCall. We had a very special car that took us up there, drive up, because Philip had a zimmer frame because he had no balance bearing in mind it was only a month so he had barely recovered and it was a long trip and we went to this hotel where we had this wonderful lady called Miss Elly to look after us and we had to be taken to the LINK centre by car every day. The first morning we went, we were driven by a deaf gentleman. There was 4, 3, 4, 5 of us in this car. Out of the 4 of us, they were all

deaf. I found that incredibly stressful, that I was the only hearing person in this car of 5. But in that 2 weeks we learned how to live better as a couple with a deafened husband. It was just - just brought us together. It was just fantastic. He was able to meet other deafened people. There was a lot of us together as couples. I was introduced to deafened people and learned to speak with them. Philip was introduced to people that could hear. I was told at that particular time that Philip was extremely lucky to be married to me because even the deafened people there could understand everything I was saying and I'd only just met them. They asked me if I'd had training to speak and I said, no, and they said you speak, your mouth is so open and you speak well that anybody that is deafened and there was a lady there that I spoke to and she said I had not met her before - and she said when we finish she said I could understand everything you said. Your husband must be a very lucky man indeed. It was just sort of - they taught us so much. They made us understand that it was being deafened was just - that's not perhaps the right word. It was - I suppose it made you aware that you had a deafened husband but it wasn't the end of the world. You had learned to relive your life again and we learned the deaf alphabet of which we occasionally use now if for some unknown reason the

Can you explain what the deaf alphabet is?

A E I.O.U. on your fingers and you learned to spell out the letters on your fingers. It's not signing. He won't learn signing. We didn't learn signing. My husband was afraid of signing. But we did learn to talk on our fingers in the early days so we would spell out things that if he didn't get it right - in fact we still do it now on odd occasions if he can't - what I did find hard in those early days was not being able to communicate in the dark. When you were both hearing you could talk about things in the dark but once you'd lost your hearing you can't talk in the dark. But there were some wonderful people at LINK. Some amazing people that just - in fact it would be nice - where we had 2 months, 25 years ago they only do a week now, which personally speaking I don't think is enough because it's a lot to cram in in a week compared to 2 weeks because it was an intensive extremely intensive two weeks. We did socialising. In fact one day we went out to is it - no the Sea Men's hospital in Eastbourne where we often thought if it's still there now we would like to put our names down and go and live there. It was at King Alberts, King Arthur's sea men's

hospital at Eastbourne. Wonderful place. Amazing place. But, yes, it was a good two weeks and then about 2 years later we returned for a further week in 1986.

[01:03:44]

If I can take you back to the beginning of your visit to LINK you said that you were the only person out of 5 in the car who was a hearing person. You found that very stressful. Can you explain more?

I think for the first time I suddenly realised that Philip was deaf and that to be in a car with 4 deafened people that none of them could hear including the car driver, that I think made me realise for the first time that I was - I can't really think. Extremely - I wouldn't say it's stressful. It was stressful but it was very weird. If I had spoken they wouldn't have been able to hear me nobody would be able to understand what I was saying and I think it was just probably for the first time I suddenly realised that I was actually in, not actually a hearing world but I was in a deafened world and that everything that would be related to deafened, that that is where I would be and that probably for the first time that I realised Philip couldn't hear me, as I found out at Christmas when he was in the hospital, when they did carol singing outside the ward and I stood there in floods of tears knowing Philip couldn't hear and I realised then he would never hear again.

Were there other situations like that, you mention hospital and Carol singing where difficulty with communication were brought home?

I think that was probably the hardest because that was the first time I suddenly realised he wouldn't hear me. Yes, there were times when I got really frustrated in the early days, when I just couldn't make Philip understand what I was saying and I'm as guilty as anybody else because I would look at the floor or I would talk him from another room and I would keep on and on and on, and he just wouldn't get it and in the end I would say enough and I wouldn't speak again I wouldn't say the same thing. I suppose I still get frustrated now sometimes if he doesn't get what I say I just say "well forget it". Quite often if I've refused to say something he'll actually get down on the floor and look up at me because I'm talking to the floor instead of at him, as

guilty as everybody else and I still do it. I suppose because he has accepted being deaf, deafened, I've got to say, well, he's never really said why me and I suppose I've never said why him. We would say well it was just an accident. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time, he forgot his wings that day. But I don't suppose there has ever been any actual other days or times when you sort of felt that he can't hear you in any particular - I do everything now. Telephoning, banking, partly because he's a bit lazy. He could do I think if he tried because we do have a text phone and he won't use it.

[01:08:04]

You mentioned a while ago that certainly in the beginning your children found it difficult communicating. But I'd like to go into more what was the reaction really from not only your children but your close family when it was realised that Philip was deaf.

I can't say anything about my own father and mother, but Philip's parents couldn't accept it. In particular my mother-in-law. She just refused to accept that her son could not hear her. She talked him from a different room. Father-in-law was the same. They found it extremely difficult. My sister-in-law I'm not sure because she really wasn't around too much and she's not really around too much now, although if she wasn't here I suppose we would find it a bit strange. As for my children, the youngest one, although he had just moved out of home he wouldn't come home until he was sure that we were coming home. When we told them that we were coming home for Christmas, he was frightened. Although he was a young teenager, he was frightened because I think fact they were all scared of how they would react knowing that their father couldn't hear them, knowing that he would probably be home for the rest of his life. One was living in Plymouth he did come out about 3 weeks later only because his wife wouldn't let him come out the day after he got back because she wanted to come with him but he didn't her with him because he wanted to come out and see his father on his own. The middle one was living in Essex. He was reluctant but he came down within the week. But it was the younger one that was more afraid because he had lived with me while Philip was away at sea. He had moved out when we got back. I'm not sure if they still feel a little bit like that now. He communicates

with them but they don't speak with their mouths open wide. In fact they never used to phone him even on the text machine when we had the text telephone although they could do but they never used it. I think they were just probably shocked, upset, maybe they were upset for me knowing what I'd been like when Philip was away at sea, or whether they were shocked about how they would react themselves. I don't know. I think it hit them. Possibly it might have hit the elder one first because he has been there, he's the eldest, he's actually closer probably to Philip than the other two are, but I think it took them quite a while to sort of accept that their father couldn't hear them but it was certainly his parents right the way through until they died that found that it was incredibly difficult that he couldn't hear what they were saying. They never accepted it. That was hard.

If I can go back to your own personal feelings, could you describe what was going through your mind when you brought him home from the hospital?

I don't think I can because it was just I knew I had to look after him, to feed him, blanket bath him, obviously the closeness and the dare I say the libido side of it was non-existent as we had been told that he was not allowed to get excited and that he was allowed to do anything to me and I just had to lie there and think of England and I wasn't allowed to do anything in return. We have since found out that that was the worst thing we were told by the doctors because it made the relationship through the rest of the years difficult because when he came home from the sea you know things were just great, and to be told suddenly that you can't get close to each other, you cannot do anything other than think of England, that was probably very difficult. You could cuddle but that's about all. Yes I think we both found that was really, really difficult and one time we did, we had to own up, and we were told off. By the doctors. Because they were afraid that it would be too much build up of pressure in his head. Too much pressure anywhere else wasn't good for him. So therefore not much you could do about that.

[01:15:04]

So, what are your feelings about the general support and advice you got from GPs and the National Health Service at the time?

Nothing. We certainly didn't get - we got more support from LINK and we did everything ourselves to get through it. We certainly didn't get any help from the GP because it was our GP that gave us the wrong advice at the start. The National Health Service basically nothing. If we needed equipment to make life easy, we had to go out and buy that ourselves. We never saw other than the deaf social worker at the beginning we never saw a social worker again. Basically because Philip doesn't like them. And didn't want them interfering in our lives and making things perhaps worse than they were. So we learned to get on with our lives which we did very well, we're still together after that. We just - when he learned to - when we found that we needed to learn to lipread we had to go and see a hearing therapist before we could go to lip-reading classes. But there was an amazing lip-reading teacher in Truro that really went out of her way to make him understand and in fact he became a star pupil. Yes, it made life a lot easier. Lip-reading. But, no, I can honestly truthfully say we didn't really have help at all.

I'm going to change tack a little bit. Obviously what was going on at the time, you've mentioned the reaction from your family, but what about friends?

We've never had friends. That's something that probably sounds very strange. We've never really had friends such as friends as they are. Because with Philip being away at sea, he, when he came home he only just wanted me and the children. We never went anywhere. I have a couple of friends partly because where we lived when the children were very little we lived next door. One girl we communicate every year at Christmas but you can't really say she's a friend because we don't go out with her. Our only true friend or was a true friend is a girl we met at LINK, but due to unknown circumstances through her we seem to be losing that very valuable friendship possibly on her part more than our part.

Has Philip's deafness affected your social life at all?

Again we never really had a social life. We never really went anywhere. Again because he spent years at sea he never made friends while he was at sea. All right they were the people he worked with, we never really went to parties. We never

really socialised. Yes we do find that in the early days perhaps they would you know we would be in a little group of people you know and then they would be talking to him and then found he couldn't understand and resort to talking to me like "does he take sugar in his tea?" I found that quite stressful because they're supposed to be talking to him not me and I think this is where I became very possessive of him because I got very upset that they wouldn't talk him, they would ignore him, and you could, somebody might say something and then you would overhear it and then you would have a go at them. And explain how would you like it if you were deaf? You've got to talk to him. No, we didn't, and we didn't and still don't really have a social life now.

[01:20:39]

You mentioned you went to LINK on two separate occasions. When was the second time you went?

1986 when the ferry went down. The Pride of - can't think what the - that's when we were there. It was the second time we had gone there and we were still at the same place with this Miss Elly and we had a week there it was almost like a refresher course and although we'd been back numerous times basically for courses for him to become volunteer outreach worker, other courses he'd been on, this was a refresher course for ourselves so this would have been two years a year after our first visit. So it was much the same but yes we only had a week that time.

You say you've been on other courses. What other courses have you been on?

Um

Outreach volunteer?

That's probably - that was quite involved with different sort of - the main one was the outreach volunteer to be in communication with other deafened people that needed our help having gone through what he's been going through. Needless to say it doesn't really work in Cornwall or even Devon. It's getting to the stage now that

nobody seems to be interested in having somebody come to visit them. If you do and it goes off well and you communicate with them and then communication stops off. But going on these different courses of the various different guises when we were on a big hotel on the sea front when they did all the courses you met a lot of different people, a lot of fascinating people, and yes I think it's mainly for Philip more than for me because I don't really join in any of the courses. Say I'm a back up system. I'm there when he needs me. I'm there to be with him because driving is hard for him. If he has to do the driving then if he has to give a speech or a talk or go to any courses or anything, by my driving then he can, he is fresh.

[01:24:05]

OK you've talked at some length about the early part when you tried to come to terms with the big changes in your life, what is the situation at the moment? Is Philip still deafened?

Deafened as such, yes, but in 1998 - 1996, he read about having a cochlear implant somewhere and he thought that might be quite interesting, so we first saw the doctor about it and the doctor hadn't even heard of a cochlear implant, didn't even know what one was.

What is a cochlear implant?

It is a hearing device. It's an implant that is implanted into the cochlear when the cochlear of the ear is damaged. You have an internal bit and then you have an external processor of which somehow and I don't know how it works, but sounds that are coming in reverts to words and understanding. The first time that he had one, we were in the garden and he could hear what he thought was a squeaky wheel barrow looking round for this squeaky wheel barrow, couldn't see it and I said there's your squeaky wheel barrow and it was a black bird singing his little heart out. The implant gives him reasonable amount of hearing although he relies on the lip-reading, the two goes together, does a one to one. In 1998, January 1998, having been to see, been to Bristol, to a conference given by the team from Birmingham, the tremendously fantastic Professor Nair and his team from Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham that

when we talked to them about it said you can't let anybody else do your implant, you've got to let me do it. And he told us to go back to the doctor and say that you want to come to Birmingham. When asked why we were told because they want to do it and it was thought to be a challenge because in Philip's head as the words go we have scrambled brains. Because having had a double fracture of the skull all the little nerves inside his ears were severed. There was nothing the right ear but there was enough residual hearing in the left ear to get a little bit from the cochlear implant. We went to the first assessment and he was asked "are you having it done for yourself or are you having it done for your wife?" And he said I'm having it done for myself but my wife doesn't want me to have it. He said I want to hear my grandchildren talking. And once he'd been through all the assessments, he had the operation in January 1998, in Birmingham, but because it was an operation on a gentleman that had had so much damage done they opened him up from ear to ear and they did the implant, he was in hospital for 5 days, I stayed with him, was there all the time and in February 1998 he was switched on. I phoned his mother in the evening to say he could hear me but unfortunately bless her she never did get to speak to her because two days later he was dead. Her aorta went. When we got home to his father's house his father was there and his father said can you hear me speaking son? Philip said well of course I can because you're looking at me. So his father said no turn round turn round so your back is to me and he said now can you hear me speaking son? And Philip said yes Dad I can hear you. I think his father was just bowled over that he could hear him but it was very, very sad and very upsetting that his mother never heard his voice but she did at least know that he could hear me.

How did you feel when you knew he could hear?

As I said in the beginning, and if I'm perfectly honest I didn't want him to have it done, and when I was asked in an interview by the hospital team on my own why didn't I want him to have it I said because I felt afraid that all that I had been doing for the past 14 years by looking after him and that he would be dependent on me would be taken away, that he would be less dependent, he would want to do things normally for himself, I felt that I would be made redundant. I didn't like that idea at all. I suppose in fact I wanted him to be more dependent on me. I suppose I would say now he is still dependent on me but not quite so much that way. Yes I suppose if I'm

perfectly honest, it's been 11 years and you can see the difference in him in 11 years. He's more open. He is more with it. He is more - enjoys life more. He still gets cross with me when I don't talk him and look at him. But yes I suppose I would say that sometimes I still think to myself, only to myself, that I wish to hell he hadn't had it done. But that's something Philip would never know, although I think probably he knows that any way but. I still feel that somewhere along the line that that specialness I had for 14 years has gone that he is not quite so dependent on me not quite so - that I don't quite have so much say in what happens except probably I do have more say now because I still do all the banking and it still talk on the telephone and I still do make all the major decisions. When I think back, yes, may be I didn't want it in those days but when you see him with the children the little ones and he's quite happily communicating with them it's just, it makes him happy and I suppose if it makes him happy, I'm happy. I think they thought that I was extremely weird, may be a bit selfish, in not wanting him to have it, but that's my way of saying that - I suppose in a sense I would have liked him to stay where he was because he could lipread me, he could understand me better. I suppose he was more sort of not feeling - when he couldn't hear he didn't want to work, he couldn't work, so we never the but now all we do is sometimes I feel I should be doing something, be I should be working I should be doing this or doing that knowing full well he can't and I suppose that gets you a bit annoyed and unfortunately other things going on with his health there are a lot of things he can't do which he might have been able do 14 years ago.

[01:34:34]

Thank you very much for that. Is there any final comment or story you would like to tell me before I close the interview?

No, not really I don't suppose. It does make you wonder I suppose if he had never had his accident where we would be today. Yes he probably would have retired 10 years ago and yes probably if he'd stayed at sea I would have spent the time with him at sea, we would have had 12 months at sea then spent 12 months at home. We're still probably better off financially than we were before. So we have no problems with money. He enjoys life with the children the little children. We've still got reasonable health. No, I suppose I've got what I've always wanted. Philip at home.

Thank you very much Anna and I'm going to close the interview now at just after 5 past 3. Thank you very much indeed.

[End of recording]