



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Pam Blackman
Interviewed by Andrew Goodwin

British Library ref. C1345/25

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/25

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Blackman

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Pam

Sex: Female

Occupation: Librarian

Date and place of birth: 1950, Brighton

Date(s) of recording: 15th March 2009

Location of interview: The City Inn Hotel, Bristol

Name of interviewer: Andrew Goodwin

Speech to Text reporter: Mirella Fox

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Andrew Goodwin, interviewing Pam Blackman on 15th March 2009; it's 10:22 in for the Unheard Voices project in Bristol. The Speech-to-Text reporter is Mirella. Good morning.

Good morning.

Can I start off and ask you to tell us your full name please?

It is Pamela Anne, with an E, Blackman.

Your date of birth and place of birth?

It is 10/12/1950.

And where were you born?

I was born in Brighton, in East Sussex.

And your mother and father's name?

My, it is complicated. My mother's maiden name was Reed, R-E-E-D, and my father's name was not Blackman, but Blanche. B-L-A-N-C-H-E.

And what did your parents do for a living?

My dad was a compositor in the printing trade, and my mum, she only worked part-time actually while we were growing up. But she, I think when I was when they first moved to Brighton I think she was a waitress. I know she worked sometimes as a waitress in the big hotels, but my parents actually, this is at the surface of my mind at the moment, my parents actually met in Bristol. And coming here it has reminded me of that. I, you know I had forgotten. They met during the Second World War.

They were both working in ammunitions industry, factories, in Bristol. So that has been quite and they moved to Brighton after the war. I think for no other reason they thought it seemed a nice place to live. So, that's where they moved.

Okay. So where was, where are your parents from originally?

Okay. My dad was from Gloucestershire, Stroud in Gloucestershire; quite a big family, about five, not unusually large for that time. And my mother was brought up in Kent, born and brought up in Kent. Not sure exactly where, but I think that area Sandwich, Ramsgate, Deal, that sort of area.

Are you part of a large family?

I don't feel, although both my parents came from reasonably large families, I don't have a sense of being part of a large family at all. I have got one sister, who is four years younger than me; as a child, I mean we used to come to Gloucestershire once a year, I did tend to meet up with other cousins there were other cousins, that mostly older actually than us. So we used to meet them then. And my aunts at the time. So we had that kind of experience but I am afraid over the years, I haven't really kept in touch. It was really only when my mother died in 2001 and I think she had kept in touch with that side of the family which is my dad's side, you know, just through letters at Christmas. But suddenly realised either myself or Elaine my sister had to kind of take on that family duty. So I do now keep in touch at Christmas, but I don't have a sense, I don't actually have a strong sense, I do not think family is that important, it is not to say it is not that important. That kind of network is not obviously that important, otherwise I would probably revisit cousins, you know, that I am in touch with. I may do when I retire. Actually. My, I have got only one son, so again, that's quite a small family. My son's father, although we live together when Toby was young, we have been separated for quite a long time. But I do actually keep, I do see his mother and she comes to visit me. So, that's part of the family, I suppose. In fact, Toby's father we are quite good friends now, after a lot of tension and bitterness over the early years of Toby's childhood. So, but it is quite a small family unit. Yes. I think. I have a very good friend, who I actually used to have a relationship with, when we were really young. When we were in our 20s, I seems quite a long time ago, who has become a good friend and he actually does live in Eastbourne. He moved to Eastbourne soon after I did. So, he is I would guess Toby certainly saw him when he was growing up as part of

the family unit, you know, he spent a lot of time with Toby. So it is a, as with many people it is quite an unusual, not a conventional sort of structure. But yes.

Just to clarify you say you were born in Brighton but now live in Eastbourne.

That is right.

[06:24]

Have you lived anywhere else?.

I have, yes. I was brought up in Brighton; I live lived there until I was about 20. I think when you are growing up you don't really think Oh this is a great place to live. You just take it as read. Until I was ten, we lived, sorry, in the Queens Park area of Brighton which is you know quite near the sea. But when I was ten that area was, we were on the edge of a slum clearance area, actual my parents the house my parents was in it was their own house. But it was compulsorily purchased so, we moved further out still within Brighton. But when I was 20 I was actually really keen to, I didn't go, I didn't, I left school at 16 actually. Although I could have stayed on you know, it was expected of me by the school but not my parents. They didn't, my parents I would say, were working class people. They would have supported me whatever I wanted to do. But they didn't pressurise me into doing anything. And I don't regret actually not going to university then. So I left school at 16, and did a couple of different things. But at 20, I worked in the local library after working in the Civil Service for a little while and then leaving and then, you know I thought I would like that actually. Working in a library. And in fact I do, because I have continued really to work in that sort of environment since then. But at the age of 20 I did a course in London; now I can't remember now. But even if I could have done that course in Brighton I wouldn't have done because I really wanted to move away from home. And at the time I remember mooted the idea to my mother, that I might move out and get a flat. She was absolutely horrified. This was would have been in the late 1960s, but it wasn't such an accepted thing. But, you know, she didn't see it as the natural next move which is quite different to now I think to parents now. So I had a good excuse. So I did a two-year library course librarianship course in London at a college which has changed its name several times, like polytechnics have. But it was the, I think was the polytechnic North West Poly or something in London. So I wanted the, London was a place I was keen to so it is

a good excuse really, and that was just a two-year course. But which I enjoyed living in London. I would have liked to have stayed there then, but I couldn't get a job in London. It that was the early 1970s, I think one of those periods when it wasn't a recession I don't think. But you know it wasn't so easy to get jobs then by then. So, eventually, after going for quite a lot of interviews, around and about, I ended up although I didn't want to, not in Brighton again, but quite near, the only job I could get was in Worthing, and I you know I didn't particularly want to move back, you know, to I certainly didn't want to move back home. But at that was far enough away, my mum accepted that I couldn't I wasn't actually that far; it was only 12 miles from Brighton. So, I stayed there a little while I wasn't that settled. I don't really like West Sussex. I still don't actually. I much prefer East Sussex, and as soon as I, with librarianship then you got after you had done about a year after college, you became what they called chartered to the professional association. As soon as I got that, you know, qualification, I left and went to Israel on a kibbutz. Not quite sure why I chose to do that but as a volunteer; which was great, great fun because I hadn't really travelled that much before. It wasn't for that long, but it was good, yes it was good and I actually, when I came back I did manage to get a job in London and that was good and I lived in London then for the next 15 years; and really liked living in London, especially when I was younger. I lived mostly in South London. In Battersea, and then Stockwell in South London. And it was great; actually. It was loads to do and lots of you know, lots of free events, cheap buses, it was the time of, well, partly it was the time when the GLC was run by Ken Livingstone and he organised lots of free events in parks and things and he music events. So it was a good place to be actually, but at that time just renting actually, but I was I was living with someone. The person I am still friends with. But yes, it was fine. Didn't really have, actually what I did do although I started working full-time of course, it was in Battersea library actually initially, very soon after a couple of years, I was looking for, I was I have always found working full-time is just too much. I have always had it has always been important for me to do my own thing whatever that is, it is not usually, it changes. It often quite creative, I just need to do other things. I am not work is not the centre of my life really and never has been. Otherwise I could have progressed, you know, in libraries, become a branch librarian. It just wasn't my ambition. I wasn't very ambitious work wise. I wanted a job that I enjoyed doing. But I wanted to do other things; so actually in about 1978 I stayed within the same work authority. But I shifted from being a children's librarian to working on the mobile library which you might be quite surprised that London has mobile libraries, but they do, but they did then, and they basically go to the outlying parts of the borough where there aren't the libraries and that was great fun actually. And eventually, and so

but the point the reason why I moved there is so that I could it was only 21 hours a week. That was quite a drop in salary for me. But it was more important to have the spare time. So, I always think in fact my sister said this as well, not only, I think even before the term was invented I was a great believer in work life balance. I think. And I think the other thing, because actually about that time I did start, initially I just I reduced 21 hours, and it was great. I mean the rest of the week to do I think I was into spinning and dyeing at the time. You know, vegetable dyeing and you know that sort of things, not weaving but spinning but I after I don't though how long it was, but I realised that although I liked having the time, I needed a little bit more structure. I think. Because I am quite, although I don't like to work full-time, I think probably I am I like to feel I am being quite productive. Some sort of ethic of work there. Even if it is not you know paid work. So I started doing a degree then. Part-time. Humanities degree.

[16:06]

Can I ask, what time did you start doing the degree?

I think it was in the early 1980s; at Middlesex Poly. It was quite a flexible degree. It was humanities but you it was divided into modules and you could focus on various subjects and actually I think even before I went there, I have been thinking although I had never have done this, straight from school, I was thinking that philosophy you know I would never even have heard of it at school, I thought I was really drawn towards philosophy. And they had a very good philosophy department within the humanities and actually that is mostly what I did there, I did film studies and philosophy. Unfortunately, because I was working on a mobile library at the same time, initially it was okay slotting you know classes in but as I had done more modules, there was one key one in the philosophy thing that I couldn't, I said can't you programme it next year, at different times, you know, it was one day and anyway, whether I am making a excuse us or not you I don't know. But I took a year out basically from the course. Although actually I had done quite well in modules that I did. And I never actually went back and finished it. That is one of my weaknesses. I know. Finishing things off! But I enjoyed what I did. So, it wasn't I wasn't desperate to get a degree. So it was really, I think that's the other thing about me is that I am very into life long learning I think. I wouldn't say I am a late developer, but I was dead keen to leave school at 16. I was at a grammar school, girls grammar school and I didn't find it very inspiring. I was just keen to leave and I think my

parents expected me to leave at 16, I think my dad expected me to he said “why do you not get a job in a bank”, you know, that's kind of for him and you know work for a few years and then you know, you will get married and have children. So, you know, I think from time to time I do get the urge to do some academic work. I think I am actual quite academic on the quiet, but I have to be kind of you know inspired. Anyway, this was now mid 80s, I was getting to the able where I wasn't driven to have children. But I it was more that I thought if I don't, I will regret it so I was sort of early 30s, I was involved with someone else then, who was actual six years younger than me old who is Toby's dad. And it was, a very good relationship but he wasn't ready to have children. But and it was just something that I felt increasingly and I thought you know, I suppose I must have thought, he would do as a father. But he really wasn't mature enough actually. But he did go along with it. It was a planned pregnancy, and he went along with the idea. Only because he thought he would lose me I think otherwise. So, I was at that time I was, are we going too slowly?

No, no.

Can we have a slight pause?

Yes certainly. Pause for a few moments.

[End of Track 1]

[Track 2]

Okay. Just to have a break yeah. I just think I will probably go on all day!

So we have just had a short break, just to recap, you were talking about you started feeling you wanted to have some children. And Toby's dad wasn't quite ready at the time.

No. No. Although now he says, when he is talking about it when his mum was there, he said, Oh, yes, we didn't have I was too. I said no, no Noel, I said no, he looked at me and I said no you weren't yet old enough, you know, and that's how people perceive things. I think at the time he would have agreed he wasn't old enough. But we were talking about the amount of energy you need with children. And he thought that he was already too old and whatever, age he was, late 20s, I think. But the other thing that was happening that the tat and I think probably contributed to my feelings of in a funny sort of way I know I felt this at the time. I was living in a flat in Stockwell, in the basement flat and Robert my friend that I have mentioned, we were no longer living together but he was in the flat above and where we both lived. I had moved out, I do not know for how long. Somewhere else and he told me this flat below was coming up for rent. So, you can see it is a very kind of symbiotic relationship, so we were both in separate flats, in a big house, early Victorian house in Stockwell. And the landlady who we had known for a while elderly lady, whose great grandfather had actually built the terrace. So she and her brother owned either half the terrace between them. She lived down in Hampshire, very, you know, a sort of middle class lady. Suddenly decided she was getting on and she decided to sell, sell the house. This was in the mid 1980s and it was snapped up by Yuppies. They looked like Yuppies; they were Yuppies, young developers. But we were protected, we were both protected tenants in our different flats at the time, it doesn't exist any more. Tenants had a lot more rights and we had gone through, we had applied years before and got a rent regulated, actually the rent wasn't extremely high, and I know the landlady was annoyed that we did it. But because we were aware you know how things were changing. So that was with Lambeth, because we were protected tenants and in the developers knew this of course, although they could develop the house basically they were sitting tenants in two of the flats. There were two other flats, in that house; it was a four-storey house. And the reason I say I think this contributed to my feelings about having a child, I am not sure if I can remember exactly how, but I think I know it was to do with feeling, it sounds actually it sounds bizarre now to think of it now because actual we were in a very insecure

situation; in that they were okay, these developers, but the builders they got in were quite cowboys, really. And I am not sure how much of it was pressure. I don't think it was actually. But because we had each other in different flats we could support each other. So, and basically they kept offering us more money to go and initially, I just said no, this is my home, I was quite attached to the place. I can't really, I am trying to remember, I know it was connected, I think it was a factor in, because I actually became pregnant at that time, I mean I had obviously considered, you know I was keen but it seemed perhaps not the best situation. At the time I was planning to have the baby and live in the basement flat and not necessarily live with Noel, who was also renting.

[05:16]

So really I had quite, I didn't have an ideal pregnancy really. In that there was all that going on, my blood pressure I don't know if was to do with that, but my blood pressure was fluctuating like anything, Noel was, he was okay. He was quite supportive. He came to the somebody a middle class friend of mine said you must go to the National Childbirth Trust classes, which is was all mostly middle class prospective parents did. So Noel and I did go, we, he attended every one. We never used the information, when it came to the actual, what they drummed into the men was that they should on when it happened, they should bring a bucket along and they did explain what the bucket was for it was very into natural child birth but it never got to that stage. And actually for most of the people in my group it didn't go to that stage because for me, I there were various complications; for most the people, for me because of my blood pressure, I was I had to spend a little bit of time in the hospital. Just, sorry I am just casting my mind back. Because the consultant was worried about my blood pressure. He let me out, at this very point which was quite close to the end of the pregnancy, I was moving out because what happened is they kept upping the figure that they were offering us from really quite a low amount which I, it wasn't a case of bargaining. We just weren't interested in moving. Because we knew well we didn't want to live together, Robert and I, we both got sums of money but anyway, they kept upping the figure because obviously they didn't want us living there. Eventually it got to such a good figure that and we had this idea although we couldn't afford anywhere if London and I think possibly I was already thinking, Oh, you know young baby, it was kind looked back on my childhood growing up near the sea and I always missed the sea all the time I was in London. Especially at first. So I started to think about moving out of London. So, when they increased the figures, quite dramatically, I started

thinking about accepting it and I don't think Robert would have done, the friend who was in the upstairs flat. I think he would have stuck it out. But I think it was probably that is what I meant by feeling a need to nest, that's possibly why I accepted the money. Because I was concerned about, I was this a basement flat which was not damp but I felt it is not ideal, Noel you know, had just bought a small flat, very small flat in Brixton to is was not in some sense obviously as so often it wasn't an ideal time in terms of you want living, in fact actually a lot of the people in the national child birth trust group moved around at the very worse time, I just think it just happens like that. You realise where you live is not going to be very suitable, once you have a child. So anyway, I had to have the baby by Caesarean, it wasn't an emergency exactly, Toby was three weeks earlier which they don't call premature; but the consultant was you know, concerned about the blood pressure. So, I was unhappy about that; as I said the saying to you at dinner last night, I felt very cheated by not going through a conventional childbirth, but Noel was there, so in the operation which I think was.

[09:53]

Can I ask was he there with a bucket?

Did he bring a bucket? I can't remember. Because I think, no, no, he was not. No. But he knew he got the bucket at home ready to bring and did he actually bring it? Because at that time he cycled. And he lived in Brixton. And this was at St. Thomas's Hospital. Do you know I will have to ask him, I know, it I know this bucket has featured. He may well have brought it along, although because I knew, he probably because he had no idea what it was going to be used for! Even the fact he knew I was having a Caesarean because you know, it was decided and it was said right at the next day or 24 hours later we will do the Caesarean. I think might have brought the bucket by bicycle actually, but so.

So you now had Toby.

Yes.

So what happened next?

What happened next and also I agreed to move out and had moved out, in fact I couldn't do it

Noel and Robert had to move me out because I was the consultant had let me out of hospital, but I don't think he even knew I was moving. But I had to just direct bags and basically my stuff was partly stored in a friend's garage in Balham and partly Noel and I decided that I we would live together, and see how it went. But he had a very small flat in Brixton. Which he had bought really because he felt he ought to you know buy something, not because of the baby really, it was a little bit before that I think. So when I came out of hospital I went to the small flat in Brixton, it was very small, very small flat. And lived there not only for under ten months. What I haven't mentioned without it seems like endless detail, but the amount of money that we got Robert and I for our respective flats was enough to buy almost buy a house in Hastings believe it or not. Now when I say you think Hastings, where has that appeared from? We couldn't afford Brighton, we knew we couldn't afford London and we had this idea that if we bought somewhere together and lived separately, you know had half the house each, but apart from anything else I think one of the reasons I did it because I knew I was going to Brixton, and I was only on maternity leave that is the other thing so I still had my job on the mobile library part-time. Is that I knew I am not very good, well I am good with money in some respects. But I am not very good at hanging onto it! I am good at putting it into projects, so I knew that I wanted to put that money somewhere.

[13:13]

So I really wanted to buy somewhere. Even if I didn't live there, so we bought somewhere this Hastings. So it was the amount of money actually which might be of interest to people, we both got 16 and a half thousand pounds, so it so this was in mid 1980, from these developers. So 33 thousand was almost enough I think I had to get a very small mortgage for the house in Hastings. But neither of us actually lived there, neither Robert nor I lived there properly. It was purely and simply somewhere to put the money and to put belongings and things. I went down a little bit with Toby and Noel came down occasionally just when Toby was very little baby, you know a few months but was difficult because there was too much to do to the house. Robert was depressed, he had a form of depression. So he it was a bit of a nightmare really. But there was a practical reason for it, because it was good idea I think to do it. We were lucky in that when we sold it, it was in a going upmarket. So, I think we sold it about a year later. Because by the time Toby was ten months, Noel and I decided that to buy somewhere out of London we could either have tried to buy somewhere in somewhere like Kingston, because Noel works or did work until quite recently at the National Sound Archive actually,

coincidence and knows you know some of the people there, but we decide to move to Brighton; actually. So, he had his flat and I sold the house in Hastings, it is all complete muddle. But so when Toby was under a year old we moved to Brighton and Noel commuted to London which was a great mistake, because he absolutely hated it. However, and I still worked in London part-time, which worked okay actually. Because I used to stay up in London overnight so I worked on the mobile library 21 hours a week, did I that for about a year until I managed to get a job locally. So I don't know if at that point you want to, I my hearing was okay still at that point.

[15:54]

Before we go on to about your hearing loss I would like to go back if I may, because you have covered a fantastic range of subjects, I just want to talk about one or two other things. You have mentioned had this wonderful creative side and you were into spinning and dyeing at one point. Could you explain exactly what that is?

Yes, it is, well I always used to a spinning wheel. It was quite popular at that time, I think it was a part of the alternative, I think it was the sort of thing, there were courses amazingly enough in London I forget the place. But basically adult education courses, there was a course I think it was a daytime course the one I went on. Short course on learning to spin, would you like to learn to spin use vegetable dyes, it sound as bit airy fairy; I can't even remember why I was drawn to it now. I think I just I wanted obviously wanted to do something creative. I mean I have always said that I am not I wasn't artistic at school, not at all I was one of those people who was put their in place by the art teacher and told you can't draw, that was the great you know, that was the only thing that counted. But I don't know when I realised it but I realised that I needed to do something with my hands. So I did that. I did a course on and I actually did a course at Westing College which is near Chichester which runs lots of craft courses actually. I did a spinning weekend there, learned to spin.

So spinning is involved, spinning wheel, you are you actually making clothe or.

I used it just to knit, yes just to knit but a lot of people spin, they will spin interesting threads and then they will go on to use those as in weaving, but I never actually felt that I wanted to learn to weave actually. So I just did it, it is I actually, have I still got my spinning wheel? I

have, I decided to keep it. I didn't spin at all when Toby was growing up, you know, I found being a mother took all my time really. But when I moved from Brighton a couple of years ago I got rid of a lot of various past interests, you know the result of bags, big bin bags of wool, because I used to do machine knitting as well at one time. Lots of fabrics, I got rid of. So I had to do to decide what to keep, I decided in the end in fact Noel was horrified that I was going to, he has always been very sweet about the spinning wheel. In fact, when I came back with Toby, when we came back to the very small Brixton flat, my spinning wheel was there, and he you know he had polished and whatever. To make me feel at home I think, put patchwork quilt on the bed which I had made, you know! So he has always valued, very encouraging about that. So when I said I do not know if I will ever do the spinning again, you know, but I decided to keep it so the spinning wheel is up in my loft now and I think when I retire it is the kind of thing I might go back to. It very relaxing, very slow, you know, you can't want, there is no good wanting a quick result but there is something in the rhythm of the spinning on the wheel which is, it is one of those things that you can always improve on. You can produce something quite early on but it's something you always feel you know, you can improve on, which in fact is the current my current interest is in stained glass. And again I think with that it is something you learn some skills and by doing it, you can produce something which you are quite happy with. But by doing it, you gradually and that involving quite a few different skills which is quite nice. So, yes, at the time I, you know because I was only working part-time. We had a big garden in Stockwell, a communal garden and this big house and mostly my memories of that time are summer hot summers, in the back garden, either playing chess with Robert which is an interest we have always shared, or spinning or dyeing or with big fleece, you know, big a fleece from the Lambeth country show, so it is all very inner city but kind of rural important rural connection for people. I think people did feel that, you know. They liked living in London and the good thing about London is you have got or you did have then all these classes. So you had a lot of choice and they weren't so expensive. Halcyon days. You did have to pay actually but –

[21:19]

What other courses did you do?

At that time, do you mean? Well, it was quite soon after that that I started the philosophy or the humanities, so... I am not sure that actually I did any other courses. Patchwork is

something I sort of picked up and put down over the years. In fact when I moved from Brighton to Eastbourne I thought am I ever going to do patchwork again? Because it was a long time since I have done that but I had lots of lovely liberty materials. So I kept some of those put them all up in the loft. The strange thing was since I never know when it is going to hit me, but about a year ago, I was in Lewes in the needlemakers complex of shops and I just thought, Oh, that looks interesting and it is a patchwork shop that had opened. So I just wandered in. And they had some examples up on the wall. And there was this wonderful quilt. So I asked the woman about it and she said, Oh it is somebody's project, you know, it is the, is it the bicentenary in 1807 to 2007 with the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery movement, and somebody had created this quilt. To kind of commemorate Harriet Tubman, who was one of the people who a black slave who helped other people escape, basically to the North of, to freedom. It was really to commemorate that. So and I was just so taken with this quilt that from no where I thought and they were doing a workshop, so I signed up for it. And I thought I think I had this thought before when I was in Cornwall a few years ago, there was a patch work exhibition a quilt exhibition at Megavissey, a quilt makers group and I saw lots of quilts. I thought and somebody had made a quilt for their son for his 40th birthday and I thought I could make a quilt for Toby for his 18th birthday then. But I never did. But so basically I made did the workshop a couple of years ago and I made Toby and I did complete it, a quilt for his 21st birthday which was last October. You know, and so that was a completed project which is good but what I had to do after I had been signed up for the workshop, I said to Noel, you know all that fabric you put up in the loft, I didn't think you know I would be accessing it for years, it was only a few months before. I said can we have it all down again? So, you know I kind of never quite sure when I am going to return to you know interests or just move on to something else.

[24:29]

Ok, all right. Well, earlier on you were talking about you moved out of the your communal flat and you had a place in Hastings, and Toby was about a year old so you have moved from Hastings to Brighton.

We never really moved to Hastings, we never, we never lived there.

So you just bought the house but you are still living up in Stockwell.

Brixton, yes so we moved from we moved from Brixton to Brighton. Yes, we found a flat in Brighton it was very difficult because Toby was very young, so we had to go down separately mostly. Noel and I to and he found this flat. We couldn't afford very much. Well, it was a struggle, we could, we needed two bedrooms obviously. And we really wanted a garden. And we didn't want it to be too far from the train station so we did have to look at quite a lot but we found somewhere which was a lovely or we really liked it, anyway. I seem to remember surveyor one of the surveyors being quite rude about it! When we asked for, we wanted to remortgage quite early on, you know, it was when of those places that it was quite quirky I think. And maybe to a surveyor it had this, it was not falling apart or anything, but it was quirky flat, maisonette, on two levels built into the hill, but yes it was a lovely. I was very attached to it.

What would you say the things you remember most about that flat?

What do I remember most about it? When I moved in, when we moved in we liked the fact that the original windows, beautiful windows, casement windows because actually although it was in a Victorian street, it was at the end the terrace and they about four houses had been built on between the first and Second World War. Although when we moved in, it was described as an Edwardian house. But I discovered it was actually built in 1928, but perhaps they were still harking back to that time. So it had beautiful casement windows; at the front, it was semi basement, there was another flat above, but it was a house it looked like a house and in fact they were purpose built flats. Obviously a builder, it was just the only one like that, the house next door was similar. But they were the only ones really. So it had its own front door, it went down to, people are always surprised to learn that it was they were purpose built because you know it looked like a house. But at the front it had casement windows with about I know at least 40 panes of glass because I used to paint them because it was the south facing and it used to need painting quite regularly. So they opened out, you know, so they were quite unusual and we kept them, we replaced one of them in Toby's room which was one of the rooms at the front, quite early on, with wooden casement windows. And as far as I know the people that bought our flat, house, maisonette, they have I think they have kept, well in fact that is a conservation area now. So in theory they couldn't, people do of course, but I don't think, I think they really loved the place. So that's one of the things I loved about it. I loved the back, the rear aspect which was built, although it was semi basement at the front, it looked out it was

quite an open aspect at the back. There was the railway line, little garden, a plot of land behind the garden at the railway line that runs between Brighton and Eastbourne, behind that significantly in the end, was what was called the Hollingdean depot, which was where when we moved in, well it is the dust carts were on further over. A bit nearest to us was community transport. I think there was magpie re-cycling was there for a while, but that was, so it was fairly near but I loved the fact I wasn't overlooked at all at the back. That's what I found difficult when I moved into my house in Eastbourne, okay.

[29:28]

Brilliant. Okay. If we go back further in time again, you mentioned that at one point you went on a kibbutz in Israel. Could you explain more about that, what was your decision to suddenly travel?

I think I was only in my early 20s and I didn't want to be stuck working in an area that I didn't particularly like. I really didn't like working very much. At the time it was still predominantly quite elderly, although it was changing. But it wasn't just the elderly it was quite right, I think at the time there was a movement called the Rate Payers association or something like that. Which was a kind of tended to be quite a reactionary you know local council kind of movement I think. So I never really intended to stay there. And I just think I just wanted to -- I mean I think it was before I didn't know anyone who just, people did take off and travel. I think at that time they booby normally have gone to, what is it called, India Kathmandu or something, done that hippy trail. Which I never really thought about doing. So this was something which was fairly organised, fairly structured. You didn't I think your air fare was paid and you got pocket money while you were there. I think a lot of people did it at the time. My sister actually did it later on but she probably, during one of the summer when she was did go to university. She may have done it because she knew about it from me, so you didn't know where you were going, you were assigned somewhere. So I am talking about 1972, no, 74, 73/4. I wasn't that involved in politics. But there were things happening around at that time, I think the Yom Kippur War hadn't been very long before and there was quite a lot of security at the airport. The thing I remember, I suppose I didn't know where I was going to, how primitive it was. I remember my rucksack had loads of Tampax in, you know, and the guy who is who is on the security said, we do have these, you know! In Israel. So I have always remembered that. I really wasn't sure whether you would be able to get things like that. So I

was assigned a kibbutz which was in an area, it wasn't that far from the sea actually. It was the nearest town was it Anitalia, which is seaside resort that the Israelis always used to go to, so a nice seaside resort. That was a bus ride away so slightly in. But it was the way Israel is or you know split up, it was in an area which was surrounded although the kibbutz was about it wasn't that old a kibbutz actually. I am not sure, it wasn't one of the early ones. And it was mostly as kibbutzes tend to be actually it was mostly one nationality. In this case it was mostly South Americans, a lot of Argentinians, especially coming over even while I was there, wherever there is trouble, you know and discrimination, and I think there was in Argentina at the time. The parents tried to get the youngsters to come over at least to try out a kibbutz and maybe you know, if they have to flea they have somewhere to go basically. So it was not very political kibbutz, some of the kibbutzes were much more what is the word, purist. You know, they tried and work much more by the kibbutz ideals. This one did to the extent of having a children's houses the children looked after separately. And the parents just seeing the children, well, I don't know just, seeing them at specified times of the day. Eating with them. I think the idea was that you ate communally if the canteen but I don't think I think they used to eat in their own houses; actually. But the children were basically slept and cared for during the day in separate children's houses. And I did work a little bit in the children's houses. I don't know how much choice you had. This particular kibbutz had a lot of cotton growing. That was one of its, what I was going to say earlier is, it was in an area which was surrounded by Arab villages. So it was in an area which I think in the six-day war had been Arab and was taken over by Israel. Although there would already have been kibbutzes in that area. But I think this particular one was only set up after the six-day war. So of course once you went outside the kibbutz, it was like being in an Arab country. I mean Israelis quite different in their obviously in their culture, so but as soon as you went to the surrounding villages, you know it was Arab and they were ever so hospitable and the Arabians; that's partly their culture, but partly they were keen to put their side of the case, you know. So it was a good experience actually.

[35:25]

So what sort of work did you actually do there –

Okay, there yes, I started to say, I actually and this is where they were quite, they prided themselves on having a different system in the kibbutz which is of course only very minority of Israelis ever lived in kibbutzes. It is, but mostly I worked supporting the cotton. Now what

most of the volunteers did who were, it was the cotton season, all they did it was not hard work. The cotton was collected by tractor mechanisation, and tipped into there was a tractor which I drove I just said I don't mind driving it, so I learnt to drive it. So that's basically mostly what I did actually at that time. So you drive up to where the mechanised vehicle was. The cotton would be very fluffy of course. It would be tipped into a big very big sort of open crate at the back and the volunteers' job was to just wait for this, and then just walk around stepping on it. Because it was so fluffy it had to be compressed. So it was not arduous work; that is mostly what I did. At the end of when I was there, that season came to an end and they were, it was the orange and grapefruit groves and they also had avocados at this particular kibbutz. So just some fruit picking. It wasn't, it was okay. The worse thing about being on the kibbutz really I think was that you got pocket money, a little bit of pocket money but they also, because all the Israelis at the time smoked, you also got an allocation of cigarettes, even if you didn't smoke. And although initially I used to give cigarettes away, because I had never smoked although I did smoke dope at the time and but that went on quite a lot there, because we had loads of free time, you see. So initially I gave the cigarettes away. But ultimately I and they were really cheap cigarettes; I started that's when I started smoking actually. So, it wasn't very good! But it was partly having all the free time I think, anyway, whatever.

[38:00]

Apart from the travelling to Israel on the kibbutz, have you travelled anywhere else?

Not a great deal. I have hardly ever been on a conventional package holiday. I always thought I didn't, I think I thought that I would rather go on holiday, go somewhere, where I would be in contact with people who lived there. I think that's what I thought. Anyway, reality I didn't actually go on many package holidays. When I was still a student I did go to Norway, again as a volunteer, on a strawberry farm. And that was for about a month. So again at that was, a good way of we were living on the farm, there were several, I went with a friend of mine actually that I knew. But there were a small group of us and the farm people you know. And that was I think that's a good way actually of seeing a country. You get a very particular experience, you don't see you don't get an overview, we did visit a few towns. But they, you know, in that particular instance like a lot of Scandinavian people, they had a summer cottage or summer log cabin, so they took us up there. What else? I didn't go abroad very much, in all the time that I lived in London. I think I couldn't have really afford it, that was partly it.

Always seemed to me very expensive. I went to Cornwall and mostly actually. And I have been I haven't been to that many places actually. I have been to, I have been to South America now because my sister has been living there for several years, in Colombia. I visited her once, which was great. I took Toby when he was a bit older. We went to New York, that was fantastic actually, really, really interesting. I would love to go back there. And we went to Barcelona and Amsterdam a few places. I had been to Amsterdam before and but I haven't really been to that many places actually. I would like to travel a bit more. But again, not I would like to sort of, you know have a chance to take in the culture I think. I have a feeling I have been somewhere else but I can't remember now!

[40:38]

Okay. Well, if we can go back to the mid eighties now and you have now gone back to Brighton and you were living with Toby and there got yourself a new job. You said this is just after the period when your hearing started having problems with your hearing?

I am not sure when it was actually. Because it happened very, very gradually. And it was something that didn't surprise me. Well for a start I think I thought it is just a pity people mutter so much really! You know. And that if they speak clearly I have got no problem. But one thing that did I did notice is that I found I thought, Oh the films at the cinema are becoming they were actually becoming a lot more naturalistic, in other words you know, it is almost like you are overhearing that was the intention that you are overhearing what's going on on the screen. So, it is much more muffled, you know. But I thought that was it. That was why I found it impossible to hear what was going on in the cinema. And I am interested in film. But gradually, gradually I stopped going to the cinema, of course Toby was little anyway. So it was more difficult to get away.

Is this the early or mid eighties?

It would be, it may, it is probably the early nineties actually, I can't remember exactly when because it was so gradual. But that is one of the things, there were various things that made me think you though that my hearing was going, that was one of them. The other was that at work, my new job was at the University of Brighton, in a resource centre. Similar to a library actually. But supporting, it was in the teacher training department. And the centre was

dedicated to supporting student teachers and the staff at the university who were teaching them. I found increasingly the students who you know, were going to be teachers, I thought, you know you think they would have clear voices, some of them have very loud voices but awful lot of people and also not very coherent. And they could be asking about anything, you know, to do with the resources. A question. You know, and I found increasingly I had to kind of I was, wasn't picking up the beginning the sentence. And I was sort of looking for clues as they were talking. And they would say you mean you want such and such. Or you are looking for such and such and I just found that gradually more and more of a problem. So I realised and I did say to my GP, I didn't have much sympathy from my family I must say. They the view I think, it would be fair to say is well you hear something perfectly well. Which is true and even now I am quite sensitive to some noises. Traffic noise for instance; background noise. So it was like you know there is nothing you know, what is the expression, there is none so deaf as those who don't want to hear, so not much sympathy there, but eventually I did say to my GP, you know, I really think my hearing you know needs some support. He sort of shrugged and said, well I will put you down if you want a hearing test, I will put you down you might have to wait a while. But he was we liked the doctor. But I got the impression he would never have suggested that and in fact a friend of mine now, who is I think her hearing is going, I said, has your doctor because she has gone to the doctor and he has of course suggested having your ears syringed which I said I don't think that's the whole problem, Mandy. She said but that is what the GP says and I said to her the other day, you have had your ears syringed, isn't there still a bit of a problem? Yes, she said, I don't think the syringing helped. You know, but I am not sure the doctor will unless she has asked I am not sure the doctor will.

[45:12]

Anyway I got an appointment at the hospital eventually. And it was confirmed but yes, she described it as sort of wear and tier. And I was not picking up I don't know if this is form but I think both the high and the low tones I wasn't picking up and also it was consistent in both ears. So both ears were really quite similar. This all took quite a long time of course, going to see the different people. I must say I always found the people at the hospital the audiologists and the technicians who do the initial hearing tests; I always found them very good. And I was amazed and still quite although it should be like that, that everything is completely free. It is like an area that hasn't, they haven't realised yet, you know! They could get people paying. But at that time digital hearing aids were only just coming on to the National Health. And she

did say, or one of the doctors there said, I think you would benefit from a digital with your particular condition, because I find background I find group situations and other noises going on, she said I think digital hearing aids would really suit you but we can't give you one straight away, because we are wheeling them out slowly, we have to give you another one, which they did give me. And I don't know why, but I don't know, I never really worked with it hard enough. I never really, I tried it a few times. Found it was quite clunky, a bit bigger than these. I don't know what it was. It is my fault I think, really, because the hospital described how to use it and everything. But I never really stuck with it basically. And whether that was because I still, I mean I can still hear okay now, today without my hearing aid. But of course I don't hear the detail always. And so basically I never really used it. But still, the reality was my hearing was gradually getting worse, so I was forced I thought Oh I should never have, it was really stupid not to stick with it because it meant I had to go through the whole system again. So I said to my new, I had a different GP by then, look I am sorry, I should have, can you get me back into the loop so to speak. So eventually, by this time, so I had to go through all the procedure again. But by this time they were able to give me a digital hearing aid and of course and I realised that I really did need to use one. So, although I still find it, how have long have I had it, a couple of years now. I have had it a couple of years I think. I still find it intrusive actually. I still when I usually when I leave work I take it out. That's partly because whether I am driving or I am on the train, I find the noises quite intrusive, quite abrasive with the hearing aid. So I don't drive, normally, with it on. And when I get home, I tend not to put it in which is a bit naughty. Because until recently I have had a lodger, who is a very, who has very been very chatty and sociable and, you know, I can't really hear what he is saying. I say, I haven't got my hearing aid in and it is partly because I don't really want to be sociable. So it is horrible really. But you know at the end of the day I don't really want to be chatting to people. I think I have got a low threshold for - I like peace and quiet. So when the phone rings I often don't hear it and friends say there is no point phoning you. You never hear it, you know. Which I do when I have got my hearing aid in. So it is a bit anti-social really. And like with my friend Robert, I will say, I suppose I ought to put in my hearing aid because he does mutter a bit, but really I want to relax, you know and he will say, well you know you keep saying pardon, so it is you know I really -- my mother in law, who had a hearing aid only a year ago, she is much better. She keeps hers in all the time until she goes to bed. So I don't know what it is with me, really.

[50:12]

Would it be fair to say that you find it hard work your hearing aid?

Yes I did at first, I did at first find it hard work.

Could you explain why?

Well, I experience it as being intrusive. So I must be aware of them in my ear, although I can't honestly say they're uncomfortable, they are not uncomfortable. So I think it is partly psychological, but it is partly the barrage of noise that you get in a group situation. Or even if I am walking on the sea front, for example; with this friend of mine and I say, well I suppose I ought to put them in, you may think well, why not on the seafront; but the seagulls, but although I like seagulls, you suddenly pick up which, you know, it is and also other birds which is good. I don't hear birds otherwise, so and then you can hear the traffic. I think it is that background noise, although digital hearing aids are supposed to be better for blocking out background noise. I am not sure I still find that a problem. I think.

So am I right in saying then when you got your hearing aids in, everything is much louder, not just voices?

Definitely yes. Definitely. Yes, because I think you get used to it. But I certainly noticed this initially and I do notice it now if I have my hearing aid in in the house. That sounds like going up and down the stairs, me the sounds I am making are much louder and I think, I think you just get used to it. It is really if I persevered and used my hearing aid all the time I would learn to ignore those sounds; actually. I think that's what it is; it is re-learning to block out some sounds which hearing people do do. You know. Most people are quite efficient at tuning out various sounds. So it is a kind of, it is not a hearing, it is a brain thing I think.

[52:43]

What has the reaction been from your friends and family, regarding you having to use a hearing aid?

Well, they are as I say, they weren't terribly sympathetic, and I think once they had to accept

that it is the hospital does think I need hearing aids, they just wanted me to get on and get it and it stopped being a problem. You know. Even friends who weren't that close. I remember what somebody where I lived in Brighton up the road, who is German, she said, well Pam, what is the hold up? You know, you need to get your hearing aid sorted. Because I was always found it quite difficult to hear her because she still has quite a strong accent and she was quite impatient, well you said I am waiting because you had to wait a really long time, I think this is all to do, I don't know, not all to do with the digital, they had the supplies I think. But they didn't have the technicians at one of the stages. And that did make for a very long waiting list. After you had it all set up, and the next stage was being fitted with your hearing aid. There was about a, I think, I think I was told I might have to wait at least a year; I would expect to wait at least a year. And I think it was about 18 months going on for two years and this is when Renata, this friend, said I think you ought to chase them up. So I did say to my GP, you know I have waited quite a long time.

Was this the first or second time you went for it?

It was the second time when I got these. And as I said because they were rolling out the digital hearing aids I think that might have been part of the delay. But as I say I think it was also because they were probably switching lots people over to digital, I think it impacted on the, they didn't have enough staff. But no sooner had I mentioned it to the GP he obviously wrote to them and I heard very soon. So whether I don't know, whether they just put me to the top of the list, perhaps they waited for people to make a fuss, I don't know.

Can I just clarify the timescales, the first time you went for a hearing aid was when?

I am not sure actually. I think it was I have had a hearing aid for about two years and I waited about two years for that one. So that's four years.

So 2004? The second time.

Yes, yes it was - I can't really remember how much earlier. I think probably it was only the late 1990s; but probably for about four years before that I had been aware. So possibly from about the mid-1990s I had been aware, it took an awfully long time for me to get round to doing anything about it, as I say was only really the problems at work hearing people and you

know I was annoyed at only going to sub titled films, art films, although I do like that sort of thing. So it did take me an awfully long time. I mean partly I think what I haven't mentioned is my dad was quite deaf when he was older and so was his mother, my grandmother. So I just thought it is in the family. I think it is one of those things that does get passed on. So my dad never had a hearing aid, I think my grandmother did actually. But obviously it got progressively worse. So it was partly that I think which I thought Oh well that's life, sort of thing. My sister has very good hearing but she takes more after the female side of the family. So I think that's one the things that can be genetic.

[56:58]

You say that the reaction from your friends was very unsympathetic, can you explain more?

Well, they just thought they basically seemed to think I was not listening. Toby still makes jokes about it actually. They say “pardon”, you know, or you know, I don't know what it is. It doesn't really bother me and the funny thing is that Noel, who I am still, Toby's dad, he has become now he is six years younger than me but he has become actually quite deaf I think and he is not really acknowledging it. He will go like this all the time. You know.

Just for clarification you held your hand up to the ear.

Is it? Yes. Oh Right. Okay. But he is not asked for a hearing test, he doesn't think he needs one. But he does. I think quite a few people in our generation maybe have listened and I am sure younger as well, the fact that they may have listened to loud music in the past. At concerts, you know, and I think one just did have music on very loud. I still like loud music actually. I don't actually have music on that much but when I do, I like it quite loud. And I don't think that's to do with my hearing loss. I and Noel used to like heavy rock when he was because he is that much younger, you know, I think it is a factor, I think probably more people are going to suffer. I have said to Toby actually, not only has he got genetically he might, you know, it is all very well not being very sympathetic to me or his dad. But it might come to him.

[58:59]

And how do you feel about the situation?

About the hearing loss?

About the hearing loss yes?

It doesn't, it is not a big deal for me. However, I must say, that having since becoming involved in this project, I have become aware that a lot of people many of the people actually start off with only slight hearing loss and it gets worse, for various reasons. So it has made me very aware that I think my condition is just wear and tear and that it won't, I don't envisage it, I think this is it, I haven't envisaged it getting much worse. But I am aware that actually it could get a lot worse. And I have actually said to, people, people just don't realise, nobody realises that this happens, it is not uncommon, you know. And I have actually said to people, people don't, they take their hearing for granted and it is one of those things I can see there are a lot of vulnerabilities there and I can see things can go wrong, you know, other illnesses can impact on it. And I just don't think there is enough awareness but hopefully this project will go some way towards that. So, but basically, because I am quite an upbeat sort of person, I think well just got to make the most it while I have got it. I suppose at some level I don't think my instinctive feeling is it won't get worse, that doesn't mean it won't. But you know so that's possibly why I don't I am not that preoccupied with it. So it is not really, I mean I do go more to films although I have it say I do find very rarely does the induction loop seem to work. But it is easier.

[01:01:19]

Can I ask what is an induction loop?

In the cinema? I don't know, but it is something that they put in isn't it, so that you can switch to that setting, which I have got on my hearing aid, and it is supposed to tune you into that loop; which is supposed to, I would expect it, to make the voices clearer. But it doesn't always. But I think, I know from Toby my son who works at the Duke of York Cinema in Brighton, "there is no point switching it to that when you are at the Duke of York because I get into those films for free. It hasn't been working for ages, I said well you know, don't people complain, nobody has complained", he said! So, whether he was exaggerating I don't know. But I do

wonder actually, it is true that at the building society if you switch it does help. So maybe it is to do with the kind of sounds that are coming through. It is better with one voice maybe, I don't know.

You have mentioned that you got an increasing association with this particular project. Are you involved in anything else at the moment?

I think I can only cope really with one; I have been involved in other projects. But I can only really cope with one. I do work, after all. Admittedly I only work 27 hours a week and I am hoping to reduce that soon. But I have my other interests I need lots of space and time but I can only really do one, I think partly I can -- I am not very good at doing lots, I need to concentrate, I am not very good at multi tasking I think.

Okay. I am going to be winding the interview up in a moment. But is there any particular issue or story that you would like to finish off with?

I can't think of anything particular. That's, I am fine with what we have talked about.

In that case, then I shall close the interview at 5 to 12 and say thank you very much indeed for coming.

Blimey! Okay.

[End of Track 2]

[End of recording]