



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Billy Falconer
Interviewed by Stephanie Pennell

British Library ref. C1345/39

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Falconer

Title:

Interviewee's forename: William McGilvary

Sex: Male

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1947, Edinburgh

Date(s) of recording: 4th April 2009

Location of interview: The Bruntsfield Hotel, Edinburgh

Name of interviewer: Stephanie Pennell

Speech to Text reporter: Hilary McLean

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[Track 1]

This is Stephanie Pennell, interviewing William Falconer on Saturday 4 April, 2009, at the Bruntsfield Hotel in Edinburgh. The Speech To Text Reporter is Hilary Maclean. Billy, I think you like to be called Billy, could you please give me your full name.

My full name is William McGilvary Falconer.

Could you give me your occupation or former occupation?

I've just got early retirement.

Former occupation?

Got a pension yes. Former occupation was, I was a storeman. But I got a pension, yes.

Can you please give me your date and place of birth?

My date was 12/11/47. And I was born in hospital in Edinburgh.

Can you please give me your father's occupation?

My father used to be a miner, my father has retired now.

Your mother's occupation?

My mother died in 1963.

Thank you. Moving on now, I'd like to ask you some background questions to deal with your early life. Can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents?

My grandparents died a long time ago, when I was young. Both grandparents lived in Armadale and they both lived pretty close to each other in a place called Barville in Armadale, and my grandfather from my father's side was a wrestler, a well-known wrestler,

and my grandmother was pretty well-known in the town as well, his wife. My other grandparents were from the mining community and lived pretty close, both grandparents lived pretty close and they were more or less what was known in that time as mining families. But they died when I was quite young.

Right and your parents, what did they do?

My father worked as a miner, all his life. Well, he came out of the army, from when he came out the army he worked as a miner. Lived in Armadale. And my mother she collapsed and died in 1963 when I was 15 years of age. My mother had enough to do looking after us obviously but she didn't work until just before she met my father, of course, when my father and my mother were younger obviously both of them were working, but my mother died when I was 15 years of age and I had 2 sisters, so it was quite hard.

[04:21]

I was going to ask what sort of effect it had on your family when your mother died?

Very hard. Very hard. Because my two sisters are younger than me. When my mother died one was 10 years of age, another one was 10 month. So it was very hard for my father and us to cope with it. But, I had my accident when I was 10 years of age, 5 years before my mother died, and it was my mother that actually found out I was going deaf. My father who'd been a good father didn't understand as much about deafness at that time, but he did buy me my first hearing-aid at the age of 16. My father continued in the mines until he had hit retirement age. In fact he had to retire early, he finished up as a training officer in the mine training centre which has closed down now, and right now he's now 82, and in hospital.

Did you find you were close to your sisters as a result of all that?

I was pretty close to my sisters, yes. As far as one sister goes, yes I'm very close because we are together, but my other sister she trained to be a teacher and she left and she's been - she's living now down in Lancaster so I don't see her very much but we had our arguments just like any other family and we had fall outs and making up but right now I'm fine with my sisters. We're OK. My sisters especially June who lives in Armadale beside me and she's fine.

Where you live was that a mining community?

It was a mining community, yes.

Was that close? Did you feel very close to other families?

We were close but at that time Armadale was away up and pretty much you were close to other people there, a lot of people know me. I'm home town a lot of my people know me even more now since I got my hearing dog. But I was very well-known all over the town. Armadale was quite a close community. In fact I could be able to tell you how to find every other street, every street in Armadale at one time when I was young but I can't do that now because it's got too big, it's so big. Yes, there was a very close community.

[08:04]

And can you tell me about your partner?

Margaret. I met Margaret at my work. I worked as a storeman and a meat producing factory in Broxborough and Margaret worked there as well. Margaret was in the factory from - she left school until she finished up in 1997. I started in the factory in 1974. And I met Margaret there. And we got married in 1981. We've been married now for 28 years. Well, yes. 28 years. And I've got to say we've got on well together, we've done fine, but like everyone else we've had our disagreements, everyone has at sometime or other, but we're still there. We're still there.

Do you have children?

No, Margaret had a hysterectomy when she was young. We couldn't have children.

Is this something you have feelings about or do you think it strengthens your relationship?

Well, I've got to say myself I've always thought about trying to have children myself. I've always wanted to have children myself but it couldn't be, it couldn't be. I'm not the type of man to say, well, Margaret can't give me children and leave her just because of that. But

Margaret and I have been fine. I've just got on with what I did. But I've got to say it's not been easy for Margaret as well because of my deafness. When we first got married she took me the way I was, she was fine. And we have quite a good relationship. As partnership goes. But sometimes she still forgets all about my deafness and doesn't face me and things like that. And that itself can be quite hard. But Margaret is a good - she's steady, steady. She goes out of her way to try and please me in a way, but all of us, she could learn to lipread and things like that so that she understands about me and my deafness.

[11:03]

Can I go back a little and ask you about in your childhood your education, your school life.

When I started at school, my marks were quite high, I was regarded as quite clever, and I passed the old 11 plus examinations. These were years ago. And I passed to go to Lyndsey high school at Bargate. It was only 2 days before I was supposed to begin at the high school in Bargate that I had the accident that eventually made me deaf. It wasn't noticed that I was going deaf right away. It was only noticed when I skipped school for three days in a row and obviously I got taken up about it. That was when they found out there was something wrong and my confidence was way down. They found out that I could hear the teacher when the teacher was close to me, but when the teacher went away I couldn't hear the teacher so I couldn't hear, my hearing started going down. It was very, very hard from there on in because there was no hearing dogs, there was no Hearing Concern LINK there was no socialising or anything like that to help me in those days to try and cope with this. It was very hard. And people, some of the pupils in the class and that, didn't understand about deafness, and couldn't understand why I couldn't hear them. And that didn't do my confidence any good. It was really hard. The answer that they tried to do was to try and bring me to the front of the class so I could hear the teacher but what they forgot was when the teacher went up the back of the class I was in the same position. They didn't understand this. Nowadays there is a lot of help that you can get like Hearing Concern LINK and hearing dogs and socialisers and audiologists that can help you all now, but when I was young there was nothing. There was nothing. It was very hard indeed all through my young life. Sometimes you felt a different man, you know what I mean? Sometimes you felt like, well, why should I carry on, I felt like doing away, you know, and it was really really hard. My hearing-aid my first hearing-aid, what I got was, oh, you're wearing a hearing aid, why can't you hear us? What they didn't

realise was there is different kinds of deafness, that I have one deafness, I could hear them speaking, their voice through the hearing-aid but I couldn't make the words out, it was a word deafness so it was very, very hard. In those young days and all through my working life as well.

[14:45]

Can you tell me what happened. You mentioned an accident. What was the actual accident?

I was on a push bike and I was heading home from my aunt's home with my new blazer for my new school, the Lyndsey High, and I was quite happy, travelling down a road, and there was an ice cream van parked on the opposite side of the road from me and the van came round it, it was a double bend, it came round a double bend and didn't see me and passed the ice cream van and I went over the top. That was how my accident happened.

Were you taken to hospital as a result of that?

Yes. Yes I was taken to hospital. Yes. Had my face, I was given 18 stitches in my face, and I was quite a few months before I could start back at high school until my scars had healed but it was after I started at school that's when the problem started to arise with my hearing.

Were you unconscious after this?

Yes I was unconscious and in actual fact the driver drove away for a wee bit but his conscience must have got the better of him because he came back and took me up to the doctors. The doctor's home was not very far away from where the accident was and it was the doctor that phoned for the ambulance to come down.

[16:38]

Thank you. Can I take you back to your employment? Can you tell me a little more about the jobs you did?

Right. I was a storeman, general operative, in a meat processing factory in Broxborough. That was where I was for 22 years until I landed off. My knees had to be replaced. Before that, I was actually working in a grocer's shop and a labourer in a brickworks so the jobs were very hard. And the brick work was hard manually, very hard manually, and sweat, things like that, it was a very hard job. The grocer's job was hard because of my deafness, it was hard to try and see people speaking because shops were entirely different. In those days as the supermarkets you have now, in the old days you had to serve a customer and a lot of customers did not understand about deafness. So it was really hard. It was really hard all through. And then when I was in Halls, well, that was the name of the meat processing factory, there was a lot of machinery, when you went through the factory you had to take the stuff to all the departments and all this machinery going on all the time, it didn't make things any better for me. In fact it made them worse. And even working in the store itself when people came in to get hat, coat, or anything else from the stores, you had to serve them, and they obviously didn't understand about deafness as well. So, all in all, through my school life, and my working life, it's been hard.

So, when did you leave school. How old were you?

I left school as 15 year old I left school in I think it was 1962.

Then you went to –

No, then I went to a shop. I worked in the co-operative for 5 or 6 years. Then I went to the brickworks for 3 or 4 years. I say roughly. Up until 1974 when I started in the meat processing factory.

Did you make friends?

I had a lot of friends, yes, but a lot of these friends didn't understand about deafness. A lot of these friends didn't know to face you like they do now. And help you to lipread and things like that because they didn't understand about deafness at this time. And I had quite a lot of friends actually.

So, socially you got on with people.

Yes. I got on with people OK, yes

[20:21]

At that time, did you have leisure time with hobbies?

Yes I used to be a football player I used to like playing football. I was actually quite fit, but I had 3 cartilage operations in my legs and so football wasn't feasible any more, and eventually my knees had to be replaced. Socially and when I went out at night sometimes I liked playing darts, and later on in life especially in 1994, 95, I took up bowling and I like bowling and I've won a lot of medals and that for bowling and I even disabled bowling I represented Scotland in 2001. So, socially and in sport, fine.

That something you still carry on with.

Right.

Do you have time for holidays?

Well, last year, had a hard time with holidays because I do talks for hearing dogs and last year we didn't get much of a holiday because we were so busy because Margaret, Dougal and I have become so well-known that a lot of people were telephoning up asking us to go for a talk, so we didn't get much of a break last year. But 4 years ago, sorry 3 years ago we went to Germany for our 25th anniversary, and that was a good holiday. That was the best holiday we've had for a wee while. I was hoping to get away somewhere this year because I've got a pension and I'm hoping to get away somewhere this year for a holiday.

What about when you were a child? Did you have holidays then?

Well, we had things then. We didn't go very far because my father and mother before she died my mother was busy my father was always at work, may be we went on what is known as gallery trips, things like that, going away to a town for a day something like that, that was all we did then we first went away, once we went to what is known as school camps; you had school camps at that time and we went to one at Aberfoyle that was when I was young when I

was a child. That was my first time away from my Mum my Dad by myself but we didn't have very much holidays when we were young just day trips here and there. That was all.

Did you go to the seaside?

That's right seaside. Portobello. Burntisland. These come to mind. And a few other places. You know near the seaside. Ayr. Just day trips away to the seaside. That was all we had.

[23:52]

Moving on a little now. Do you have a religion or a faith?

I've always been Protestant. And I've always been - I'm a member of St. John's church in Bargate West Lothian. And it was actually Margaret who got me in there because she was a member in there and she wanted me to get membership to get christened and get membership. Before that I've got to say I didn't actually go to church very much but after Margaret and I got married we go to church every week now.

So you feel very part of, very much part of the church community.

Very much so.

Are you interested in politics?

It's not one of my better subjects. I would say as far as politics go I would say I think there is a lot of them in politics nowadays are out to help themselves and they're not bothered about the people. But that is my opinion. It's not really a bad way of thinking. There is a lot do a good job but there is one or two that are not quite - but I've never actually given politics a thought because it's not one of my better subjects. I try not to.

Do you vote?

Yes.

[25:52]

Moving on a little now. I'd like to ask you about the health aspect of your life. We've talked about your accident when you were young, and that the deafness came gradually rather than suddenly. Can you tell me what your feelings and emotions were when you realised you were deaf? Deafened.

Very lonely and isolated. I felt like a different person altogether. I've been better since I got the help from hearing dogs and Hearing Concern LINK and if I'd had that help when I was younger my life would have been entirely different. But I never had that help. I was very lonely and isolated. There was no one there you could talk it over with. There was no one to help you. And it was very hard. And I've got to say, health wise, I've had a lot of trouble. I've been in and out of hospital quite a few times. Not because of my deafness. I've had 3 varicose veins operations. 3 cartilage operations. And 2 blood clots. One which stopped my lung. All in all I've had it quite hard all through my life health wise. Now I'm diabetic. I'm taken Warfarin for the blood clots for the rest of my life and I've just had my tablets stepped up for the diabetes. So, I'm not getting any younger. That's my health wise. My deafness was the biggest hazard when I was young but my health hasn't helped later in life.

The fact that you've had health problems and then the deafness on top, do you think that's changed your attitude?

Yes in a way. One of the questions you always ask yourselves: why is this all happening to me? What did I do to deserve this? And the question just comes back the same thing: that's life. Some people get hit with everything and other people remain healthy all through their life. That's life. I've just got to try and accept it now.

When you had deafness, did you suffer side-effects?

There's times - I don't think it was so much side-effects so much. Sometimes my ear water you know a discharge especially wearing the hearing-aid for long periods and sometimes I was taken dizzy spells and things like that but they weren't bad, I didn't even report them because they weren't bad, it just lasted a minute or so and that was it. Overall I wouldn't say I

had too many side-effects as a result of the deafness, just the loneliness, isolation, and the lack of help.

[30:06]

What about tinnitus?

Very much so. I have got tinnitus. This is a big problem when I'm getting my hearing tested by the audiology because when the audiologist is testing my hearing and the noises are coming through that wire, I don't know whether it's the noise coming from the tinnitus or whether it's coming through the wire and they asked me to put my hand up if they hear a sound and then if I put my hand up it could be the tinnitus, I'm not really hearing anything so it's difficult but it's with me all the time, especially at night. Especially at night.

Can you describe the noises that you hear?

It's sometimes like a big wind blowing through your ears all the time. Sometimes you get a noise like one man described it like a pipe band, I'm getting the same noises like I'm hearing music and it's different types of noises. It's very difficult to describe some of them. For instance, right now, it's as if there is something blowing through, the wind blowing from outside me inside blowing out. And that's how it feels now. It's quite bad especially when you're trying to have a conversation with someone because this noise is there all the time going through all the time. It's very hard.

[31:50]

Can you tell me about the attitudes of the medical staff you've seen over the years?

Some of the staff have been excellent. Other ones have not been so excellent. A doctor for instance it's very difficult to try and get, they'll always look at their notes and not facing you to tell you. Sometimes they speak to Margaret instead of speaking to me. And of course, if I hadn't had Margaret with me what would I do then? But doctors are always looking down and a lot of them I think still don't understand so much about deafness but, I have had help from a doctor in a way though, they gave me help to send me up to St. John's for hearing tests

and things like that. The staff at St. John's have been good volunteers, there has been a few excellent volunteers - sorry, audiologists. I apologise. Audiologists. And they have been good; some of them have been excellent. But there are one or two that have been exceptions to that that have not been so good and I actually volunteer in the WRVS in audiology at the hospital and I've heard other people complaining about how they've not received good treatment and things like that. But like I say then again I can't say that about other people because that's their opinion of themselves.

What about your GP? Do you have trust in your GP?

They're OK yes. I'm well-known with them all because I've been to see them over the years. So, even Dougal, my dog is well-known as well. I'm OK I can trust them but I think my opinion is some of the doctors that are coming through nowadays are not as good as some of them they're taking over from and I think that's going to degrade the service just a bit. That again is my opinion.

When you were referred by people, did you feel that was handled in a satisfactory manner, throughout the various channels of service?

Yes. When I was referred, yes, I could say it was OK but it's the waiting time is the killer. The waiting time from the doctor sees you until you go to the audiology takes quite a wee while and then there is a waiting time from when you are tested by the audiologist until you finally get your hearing-aid and this is quite hard for people who are waiting and hearing-aid need help I think if they could speed it up it would help everybody I think the waiting time is a big hazard. Other than that I've never had a problem. I've always got an appointment if I needed it. But I've had to wait quite may be months before I can go for that appointment. But my - with the doctors I'd say I've got a good camaraderie with them, not too bad with them and they do - it's a hard job that they do and I've been quite happy in a way.

[36:05]

Moving on a little bit now to what we might call interventions. On the subject of hearing-aids. Can you tell me a little bit about your hearing-aid? You have one I think, is that right?

My hearing-aid, yes. I've actually got 2. One is a national health and one is a private one. I'm wearing the private one now but the national health one is a good one. Only reason I'm wearing the private one is because I feel the T position is better and for this interview I felt it would be the better hearing-aid to wear for this interview. The national health aids are so different now from when I first got one. I need a very strong hearing-aid because I've been told from audiologist that my hearing is quite profound and that some of the smaller aids that they've got wouldn't do me any good they're not strong enough so I need a really strong aid. I've given help by the staff at the hospital right now with my aids. If I needed help I just need to ask them, especially if I'm working in the hospital. I do work there. I just need to ask them to have a look at it if it's not working properly because I need my hearing for working in audiologist or in the WRVS. But they want everybody usually I make an appointment, if I need anything, I'll phone up first, and make an appointment.

Has anybody spoken to you about the possibility of having a cochlear implant?

Yes. I don't know if it would be suitable to me. I've actually been watching other people that have got cochlear implants such as Gerry Leeper and I've got a friend Pat Forsyth, and another friend Margaret Scott, they've got cochlear implants and I've heard good things and some not so good and they could hear me when I'm speaking to them from the side that they've got the cochlear implant on but if I come to the opposite side they don't hear me as good and I feel that there is not much difference between the hearing-aid and the cochlear implant then, and I don't know if it would do me any good any way. But having said that, I don't know if I'd be able to get one any way because I'm on Warfarin tablets and it could be quite dangerous for them to give me an operation, it's dangerous for everybody but could be more dangerous for me to have that operation because I've had two operations knee replacements and both times I had blood clots after them so my surgeon who did my knee told me he didn't want to do it again because of the Warfarin problem. It would be too dangerous to replace my knee again so I'd have to get steroid injections instead so a cochlear implant would be very dangerous as well. That's why I don't know whether it will work for me or not.

[40:11]

Moving on to hearing dogs, can you tell me a little bit about hearing dogs?

Good subject. My hearing dog came in to my life in 1999. I didn't go out very much before that because you can't have a normal conversation and my confidence was very, very low. Before I got Dougal, people didn't face me, people spoke to me, and if I didn't answer them they didn't understand about the deafness and they thought maybe there was something wrong, mental-wise. After I got Dougal it was a different way of life altogether because people could see with the hearing dog that I was deaf and people came and faced me better, and spoke to me better, and my confidence started rising up so I started going out. First place I went to was into Glasgow to a place called Deaf Connections in Glasgow and I started taking trips to various other places. At Deaf Connections I heard about a computer course. Now, they never had computers when I was in school. In fact I was lucky if I had a pencil. But, I decided to go ahead with this computer course because I was thinking about getting one from my home and now I've got a certificate in word processing one in two, that's a certificate I would never have had if Dougal had not come in to my life. Since I got him, since I got Dougal, my life has changed dramatically, because that's how I heard about Hearing Concern LINK. It was only LINK at that time but I'd never heard of them before and I happened to be doing work for hearing dogs and that's when I heard about Hearing Concern LINK. Since that dog came in to my life, it's been brilliant. My life has shot up. I do talks with Hearing Dogs. Mrs. Arthur who is a Scottish representative, who was the Scottish representative for Hearing Dogs at that time, she asked me to take Dougal to a talk that she did, just to let them see a hearing dog. She didn't have a hearing dog at that time. She's got one now. Her husband was blind, had a guide dog for the blind her husband, also asked me to go on one of his talks and when I went and let the people see the dog I said to them would you like me to give a demonstration with the dog? They said do you think you could because it's not every dog that will demonstrate outside the home because they're trained from a home. And I did the demonstration. And after going to 5 other talks with Mrs. Arthur and doing the same, she asked me to do these talks in my own area of West Lothian. I thought, I haven't got the confidence to give a talk like you can because you've been doing them a lot longer. She had been doing them for 17 years. So I said, I don't know if I could. She said, will you give it a try because we've seen your confidence rise up so much in the time you've had Dougal. That's what I did, I started doing talks in West Lothian area. And I changed the format of the talk to my own, telling people about myself, how I became deaf, telling people about how they trained the dog for me, and finishing up with the little demonstration with Dougal and confidence shot up 100 per cent and now was so well-known all over the central area of Scotland not just West Lothian all over the central area of Scotland because that dog has

given me a life. And then in 2005, that was when I went through the intensive programme with LINK and my life has been brilliant since. I've had a lot of help and we're very well-known. And the dog has changed my life. I won't go past hearing dogs. They're brilliant. They're well-trained. And they're not a pick as a working dog and they do a brilliant job and that wee dog has given me a life.

[45:50]

Thank you. Moving on again to communication methods. Can you tell me about the things you do to communicate like lipspeaking and lipreading?

I go to lip-reading class every Wednesday. I've got to say it was at a lipreading class in 1994 that I first heard about hearing dogs. I was in that class in 1994 for 2 years, and from that class we started a hard of hearing club for deaf people. And that is where I heard about hearing dogs. But, my hearing has got worse over the years and I decide to go back to a lipreading class. I joined that 4 years ago and I'm still going yet. I will continue to go as long as I feel it's helping me and it is helping me. I also went through a course for learning sign language which I've just finished and I passed the first two assessments at level 1 and I got my third assessment a week on Thursday past. I'm awaiting the results.

What about finger-spelling do you do that?

Finger-spelling yes. Finger-spelling helps especially if you are lipreading. If you can't see everything on the lips then it's good to fingerspell. Especially if you are communicating with another deaf person. Some people are quite fast at finger-spelling but others can be slow. Finger-spelling is good, yes it helps. A one of the other things I do to take a notebook about with me just in case. And it has helped.

As far as the technology is concerned you mentioned your computer course, do you have things like a mobile text machine?

Yes I've got a mobile. I've got the new BT speed phone, you do it through Typetalk, you come through Typetalk, I've got one in my home. It's a brilliant phone. I've got a mobile which I carry about in my hand, and I can't hear all the time on the mobile though because you get so much interference but I can with the text phone in my home. That's good.

Do you use emails?

Yes absolutely I find it's a god-send. Because it's the best way to communicate with a deaf person. There was one man that I know when you spoke about the doctor earlier, and he's got a machine there just like a typewriter and he can see what he's typing out and the doctor whoever he is communicating with can see on the other side what he's saying, and yet the doctor won't let him use it when he goes to see him. Why? It's a good means of communication. Modern technology has taken over the life of so many people nowadays, without it a deaf person would have a hard time trying to hear, put it that way, it's the best way of communicating with deaf people. Email, text, they're all good way of working.

Do you use text for the television?

Yes. I've always got the subtitles on. Yes. I've also got a video that tapes the subtitles but modern technology is even getting better there. You can tape on to a disk now and have the subtitles put on your disk as well. Modern technology has taken over the lives.

There is text on cinema and on the stage now, are these things that you've taken advantage of?

Yes. Very much so. Only three weeks ago I was at a show in the Kings Theatre. It was a captioned show and the captioning was coming up just like it's coming up on the screen the now and it was really brilliant. I enjoyed the show. And I was asked by at LINK we're doing a project to get deaf people to go to cinemas and theatres and even the museum as well, use some of their technology, and I think it's absolutely brilliant and I've been going to theatre quite a lot since then. If it's got captioned performances yes I'll go to some of the shows. One lady there said how do you feel about a sign? A signed performance? Not everybody knows sign language. That's why we would prefer the captioned performance because you can see what the people are saying.

Yes. Let's take a pause there.

[Break in recording]

[52:22]

Moving on now to the impact of hearing loss on yourself. You've touched a little bit about how the hearing loss affected you and you talked about feeling lonely and isolated. How do you feel about your identity? Did you feel it had changed?

Well, yes. I've got to say that's a hard question because I've always been pretty well-known. So, people have identified me with a hearing loss and the hearing dog. But I've always been pretty well-known because of that as far as identity goes. I've been fine. But there was times I felt I was a different man altogether you know when I was so lonely and so isolated as if it was a different man entirely. I didn't know what I was doing part of the time you know because the deafness took an effect so much. There were times you wondered you often wondered why you go through it all especially when I was young, specially when I was younger because it was specially bad then, I never had the help I'm getting nowadays and it was very hard. It was very hard indeed.

Did you feel apart from your friends? I know you said that they didn't understand that you were deaf, deafened. Because of that did you feel separated from them?

You didn't exactly feel part of the crowd because you couldn't hear what was said and it's a case of, they didn't understand about deafness and you just had to bluff your way through conversations because they didn't understand a thing about it. It was very, very hard trying to bluff your way through.

Did you feel you were successful at bluffing?

Not too bad. Not too bad. I wouldn't say always worked. If I couldn't hear I tried to ask were two of them to say it again, repeat what they said. I would sometimes ask what we were talking about, what subject we were talking about, but again if you had to do that you felt embarrassed trying to ask people that, you know what I mean? This is what made it so lonely and isolating because the embarrassment as well in asking people for help. And it was very, very difficult especially when I was young. Nowadays I'm different. I'm not afraid to come forward and ask someone to repeat what they said. I'll always say, 'look, I'm deaf, I missed that, what you said there, could a repeat it again please?' Or, I will show them my badge as

some form of identification to let them know I'm deaf. I will show you one in my pocket. This is from my bus pass. It says - show this to the driver, and I am deaf, please face me. I never used to do things like that, I never had the confidence to do them especially younger. I didn't know how to do things like that. So my life has changed so much better now that I'm getting help. But it was very difficult when I couldn't get help when I was younger.

How do you feel obviously you feel it helps you to tell people about it, do you feel it's a label or some kind of disability or handicap status that you have?

It's true what you said that last bit it's like some kind of disability or handicap status that you have definitely some kind of disability. As far as a label, well, it's a hard one because a label, a lot of people used to say totally deaf person in a non speaking person was deaf and dumb. Now it's a deaf and non speaking person. So, it's different. It's like having a different label there you know what I mean, but I've got to say it's definitely some kind of disability. Yes definitely some kind of disability. That's how it feels, yes.

[58:17]

You talked a little bit about Margaret and yourself. I really wanted to ask you about your personal relationships generally. Do you feel that they are satisfactory?

Margaret and I have had our ups and we've had our downs we've had our arguments and good times, just like any other family. Margaret sometimes gets me uptight when she forgets all about my deafness and she tries to speak to me as she's walking away. Or, if she's in another room and tries to call me and forgets about - now she uses the dog. Margaret been OK as far as that goes but I've been trying to get her to go to learn about lipreading so that she could communicate better with me. But Margaret hasn't got the mind for doing anything like that. Believe you me, Margaret and I are like two different people with two different ideas on things. For instance, Margaret is the type of person that she could sit in the house all day, every day and watch the television. But I'm the type of person I like going to things, like to museums and things like that, I like travelling different places. Margaret's not like that. You know what I mean? It's like two different people with two different things. But we've worked well together. We've worked well together. And it's like two different people though, you know. But she's fine. She's fine. She took me the way I was when I was deaf. I actually

had two girlfriends before Margaret and they both broke up because they felt the hearing was a problem. We were young, before I met Margaret, and Margaret took me the way I was, she was quite happy so altogether it's been not too bad. We're still there after 27 years. So says a lot for herself. That's what - but we've had our ups and downs.

You've talked about your employment, and you mention that you now have a pension, how is your life affected financially?

I've always had to work really hard for the money I've got but since I got my pension obviously I got a lump sum and this has helped me do a bit that I've been wanting to do before, like say may be buy a new suite something like that. And financially we're OK the now. But, all through life until I got the pension I've had to budget, watch what I'm doing you know all through life. But the pension has made a difference.

Do you have Disability Living Allowance?

Yes. I've got a car through Motability yes.

And has the fact that you now have got financial independence has that helped your self-esteem?

I say I'm just much round about the same. To me, my money is there and I know it's not always going to be there, it all depends on how you use it. So, I'd say I'm just much round about the same. The money is there and I could do something in the home, but that's not the all and be all of things I feel it's the same. Just the same as it's always been.

[01:03:02]

Are you interested in education and lifelong learning? Is this something that you are involved in?

Well funny you ask that. I've been going to adult basic education classes for the last five years and in 2005 I got an adult learners award. Dougal and I have also took part in a DVD called Strictly Come Spelling encouraging adults to come back to adult learning. It was based

in the modern Cinderella theme and we got two awards for that DVD, the group did, two awards for that DVD, and we've also got deaf support group just started up with adult basic education FABE, Friends of Adult Basic Education. And that is totally superb and I feel well it's helping in a way, education is a good thing. Education is - should be there for everybody to go to. But I feel education needs to look at a few things. For instance, sign language classes, I came to a beginners class in Edinburgh at Deaf Action, and that beginners class cost £350. I got a grant to pay that so it didn't cost me really anything but that's what it cost for the course. And after the beginners class I got a taste of that to see whether it would help me. I felt it was a lot of money to pay just for the beginners class and I decide to apply for level one. I applied again that was another £350. I got a grant for that as well and applied in Deaf Action but before the class had to begin I got an email back telling me the class had been cancelled because of lack of names which didn't surprise me because they're charging so high but I heard about a class in Deans high school which was a lot cheaper and for £194 I got my level one course plus all my assessments and it was far cheaper than £350 but I feel sign language or even lip-reading classes should be free to all deaf people that need help. Maybe that the classes is not suiting to the deaf person involved, they might be elderly or something like that, but until they try the classes they won't know whether they're going to help them or not and I feel a beginners class should be free. If they want to charge for level one that's fine. But I don't think we need to charge so high to encourage more people to come and do them. And I think the beginners classes specially should be free and audiologist should be able to refer a deaf person to a sign language beginners class to see if it could may be help them I feel they should all be able to do that but again that's my opinion.

[01:07:00]

Moving on to support networks, I know you've mentioned Hearing Concern LINK and I'll go back to that in a moment are you involved in charity work other charities, and in community groups?

I help, I volunteer for the WRVS at St. John's hospital audiology department. I give hearing-aid batteries to deaf people who need them and I maybe change tubing for the hearing aids.

Are there other groups in the community you work for?

Only Hearing Dogs. I do talks for Hearing Dogs. I do talks all over for Hearing Dogs.

Tell me about your involvement with Hearing Concern LINK.

Right. I went - I first heard about Hearing Concern LINK when we were doing something for Hearing Dogs. I applied and I was given an interview by Lorna McNae. And I was accepted to go on an intensive programme. I went on an intensive programme for 5 days. I was so impressed with what I heard and the help that I got that I decided to apply for a volunteer job. As a volunteer. I went through a 3-day course as a volunteer, and I was shown what to do when interviewing someone. I interviewed two or three people since that time. It's changed my life because we've got a lot of information that we never knew before. I think it's changed me in a way. I'm a far better and far more confident now than I've ever been before because of what I've learned.

And have you been involved in any of the other work by Hearing Concern LINK?

Fundraising a bit. Actually went on a sponsored diet, yes, 3 years ago. And I think Margaret went on as well and we did get over 200 pound, which wasn't too bad. I'm not want to see how much we've lost because we've put it all back on again but it helps with fundraising. I will try and help Hearing Concern LINK in any way I can if it's possible. All depends if they need me or not.

[01:10:59]

Can I ask you a little bit now about access and awareness in terms of legislation.

Right. Access. Well, we're now getting access into theatres and that because of the captioned performances and things like that, and it's now law that disability discrimination comes into things now. I've got problems because I've got a hearing dog and it's not everyone that knows that a hearing dog is an assistance dog just like a guide dog. I've had a few problems especially in foreign restaurants in that respect. They don't know about hearing dogs and I feel, my opinion, is environmental health should be doing more to make awareness of other assistance dogs not just guide dogs for the blind. I feel there is more and more foreign people coming in the country every week and environmental health should be making sure that these dogs are let in no matter what the nationality of the restaurant is because the law disability

discrimination laws say that they should be let in. I have been turned away on a couple of occasions with my dog myself. Usually when you're turned away either report it to disability discrimination commission or I report it to Hearing Dogs but usually if I've been turned away from a restaurant or such they usually ask you back the disability discrimination commission get on to them. But a person doesn't like going back if they've been turned away so again I feel there is something needing done as far as access for all assistance dogs is concerned because there is five different kinds of assistance dog. They should all be let in because they're doing a job to help deaf, disabled person. Handicapped person. And they need them beside them. Deafness itself, I've not been turned away from very many places but it's just that a lot of the people there don't understand about deafness and they just don't know how to go about trying to communicate with a deaf person. And if they're too long trying to communicate with a deaf person, they lose patience and it could cause friction actually but I feel access with my dog, more or less that I need my dog with me especially if the fire alarm and that goes. I rely on him. He's there doing a job for me so they should let him in.

[01:14:38]

You mentioned discrimination, my next point, I have heard you speak very movingly about problems you'd had with the transport company. Would you like to tell me about that?

Yes. I actually try to board a bus. The bus driver was quite aggressive because he had a dog on the bus. The bus driver said to me: one dog on the bus, I can't take you. I said: but it's an assistance dog. He said a guide dog. I said no it's an assistance dog it's a hearing dog. I can't take it. That meant guide dogs only. But the man was quite aggressive about it. So I was angry and I got off the bus and I drove down to the bus garage, his main garage and I complained there. I also put a letter into his boss, his manager, and I got, I received a reply telling me that that driver had been reprimanded now and that they'd changed the rules that it doesn't matter whether they've got another dog in the bus or not, an assistance dog must always get let on so we got that point sorted out but it was really embarrassing in front of all the people on the bus at the time because the driver was quite aggressive about it but we sorted it out and he's changed the rules. Now I've never had a problem since that. Only problems I've got on transport is a lot of drivers don't understand about deafness either and a lot of them don't know about the other assistance dogs yet. Some do and some don't I feel this is where, it's to do with the training. They're not getting told about these dogs in training and

that's why they don't know enough about them. I feel it should be looked at especially in training. On the train and so forth, the problem on the train is tannoy systems. Deaf people can't hear a tannoy. Go to the railway station there is a board, again they announce over the tannoy what platform your train is going to leave from but deaf people can't hear a tannoy. If you had to change platforms say it was up on the screen as platform 10 where you had to go for your train but they decided to change that to 21. 21 might be across a bridge. If you're a deaf person you can't hear the tannoy you don't know to go there. If you're a disabled person in a wheelchair it takes all your time trying to go across the bridge to get the platform on the other side so I think something needs looked at and the transport problems especially as far as tannoy systems and deaf people are concerned.

Generally have you come across much discrimination not about Dougal but generally from people about you as a deafened person?

I've heard of one case a friend of mine he's got hearing dog as well but he didn't have it at that time but he can't speak he can only sign, he's deaf and he can't speak. I heard the story actually when I was doing one of my talks and he said when he went in the place they treated him like he was not quite right in the head. They couldn't think for himself and things like that and they treated him very badly. I've heard about that so I can't really say for certain but I heard from his father when I was doing one of my talks because he told me about it. It's never actually happened to me yet. It's never actually happened to me yet. I've got to say if it ever does, Heaven help the person who does it.

[01:19:33]

Moving on slightly, you mentioned some of the things that you are involved with but can you tell me about other interest groups that you are involved with, the clubs and things?

Like you say we've got a deaf support group and we have speakers come and talk the group. We've got two way system to help them to hear. Last weekend last Friday we visited Donaldson's school for the deaf, a new school. And it's fine. This is what I'm involved with. I'm also involved in a forum for disabled people, deaf and disabled people, blind people. It's a forum dealing with all disability. And it's held in the ability centre in Livingston and there are different people there with different disabilities and me working in line with the Council.

So they can work with disabled people. They know all the hazards with disabled people. They go out of their way to try and help disabled people. That's called forum. And I'm on that forum. I'm also on the FAFE that I told you about I'm also on the Committee in Bargate. And we decide what's happening with FAFE throughout the coming months or discuss things concerning that. So I'm out quite a lot because my confidence has really went up. I've never done that before.

Thank you. Moving on now, we're getting towards the end of this interview. But I wanted to ask you about your feelings on Unheard Voices project and the work you've been involved with today.

I first heard about this when I went to York and I met Sarah, and to me it was a good, interesting project. And it would be good that there is a lot of things could be changed may be because of this and that's why it caught my eye because it's a very interesting subject. I think there is more need to do things like that as word gets around so things could be changed to help people with different disabilities things like that. Especially deafness.

Finally, can I ask if you have any plans or hopes for the future for yourself?

Yes well I'm 62 now, I could always say that I wish to get a good young actress beside me but I don't think that will happen but, no, I'm just going to continue with what I'm doing the now and try and help out and volunteer, like I'm doing the now. I hope to continue that. Hearing Concern LINK if they need help they only need to pick up the phone and ask and if I'm free it won't be a problem. That's what I'm going to continue doing. I'm not hoping for anything or setting any goals in that way because at my age it's kind of late on for second goals in that department. If I'd have been younger yes but not now. Mind you I'm still good looking! She's looking over her glasses.

Thank you very much indeed Billy for all that it's been really interesting and fun as well. Thank you for coming along today and thank you very much to Hilary for all your work. Thank you. I shall end the interview.

It was a pleasure.

[End of recording]