



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Margaret Falconer
Interviewed by Ann Thallon

British Library ref. C1345/40

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Interviewee's surname: Falconer

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Margaret

Sex: Female

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1948, Edinburgh

Date(s) of recording: 4th April 2009

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Name of interviewer: Ann Thallon

Speech to Text reporter: Lynn Allen

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[Track 1]

All right, this is Ann Thallon interviewing Margaret Falconer on Saturday 4th April 2009 in Edinburgh. The speech to text reporter's name is Lynn Allen. Right hello Margaret.

Good afternoon Ann, yes it is afternoon.

It is great you have come in to tell us a bit about your life today. Just to get started, would you give me your full name including your maiden name and when you were born, and where you were born?

Right. My full name is Margaret Gillis. I was McEwan once, now Falconer and I was born 15/01/48 in Edinburgh.

In Edinburgh?

Yes.

OK, and did you live quite a long time in Edinburgh?

No we never lived in Edinburgh. My dad belonged to Falkirk then he moved to Bathgate and that is where I was brought up.

Right. So you were brought up in Bathgate?

Yes.

That is not very far from Edinburgh?

No.

You lived with your mum and dad?

Yes and my younger brother.

You had a little brother as well?

Yes.

Did you go to school? What about your early school life?

Early school was in Bathgate, what we used to call - well the first one I went was like a nursery - it is now a nursery, it is what we called the 'wee mare' which is one of the wee primary schools that was in Bathgate. Then I moved to the Mid Street school then up to the High School in Bathgate.

Okay. And did you enjoy your school? Was that a good experience for you?

Yes I would say it was quite good. I wouldn't say I was that high up in the classes but I enjoyed my school when I went to it.

And then what did you do when you left school?

When I left school I started in what was David A Hall's meat factory in Broxburn, it is now, well it went to Grampian but I think it has changed hands again to a Dutch firm - I don't know for certain. I was in there for 20 odd years.

20 odd years?

Yes.

[02:30]

Okay. So how old were you when you started work in the factory?

16.

And you said the name of it was?

David A Hall's the meat factory.

And was it a big factory?

Not when I started. It got bigger through time, but it has maintained the Halls packaging. It was took over by Grampian and I think they went for somebody else. Somebody said it was a Dutch firm that has taken it over - I don't know. The names are still up there of what it was but I don't see the new name up.

And what sort of work did you do there?

Made sausages. Well it was a meat factory - they done bacon, pies, sausages and there was their own slaughter house as well.

And there were other people, young people your sort of age that worked there?

Oh yes quite a lot of us.

So tell me was there a social life attached to?

I wouldn't say there was a social life. If we had nights out we had - a couple of girls were getting married or that - we had nights out for that. But it wasn't actually a social life.

And did you make friends with some of the people in Hall's?

Oh yes, I seen a couple I used to work with. We done a thing for hearing dogs about the 1st March and I met the girl and her man up in Livingston that is the first I have seen her for a wee while.

And now you and Billy must have got together at some point?

Yes in David A Halls.

Say again how long ago?

About 28 year ago.

28 years my goodness and can you tell me how you two met then?

We met in the factory where we both worked.

So he was one of the ones that worked there too?

Yes he was in the stores. That is where I met him.

Can you remember the first time you met Billy?

Not really because I seen him back and forth with him working in the stores, so he was there with the rest of them.

Can you remember your first impression of him then?

No.

Just always around?

He was there.

So how did you two get together then, I mean you knew each other at Hall's and you had seen each other?

Yes.

So how did the?

I don't know how. It just came about.

And were you aware that Billy had a hearing..?

Yes I knew that then but it wasn't as bad then as what it is now. It has got a lot worse than what he was when I first met him.

[05:12]

Can you tell me a bit about how his hearing was - a bit more detail about that when you first met him. You said it was much better then that it is now?

Yes he could, to me he could hear through using his kind of facing him all the time. Now you have got to face him - afore you didn't need to do that, he could hear you. But as I say, it has gradually went down and down.

How important was his hearing loss in your relationship in your early days together?

It didn't really bother me whether he had a hearing loss or not. He didn't have any hair either so it didn't matter. He lost his hair as well before I met him.

I see. Okay. How old were you when you got married then?

I am 61 now, so that is 28 year ago

Too much math - we will work that out later. So there you were a young woman and you married Billy and you both worked in the same factory?

Yes.

As time went on how did Billy's hearing loss affect your lives, you know back when you were in your 30s, say?

To me I think it is just the same. It didn't really affect us that much.

And how did Billy feel about his deafness at that point? Did you talk about it at all?

No not really.

It was just part of your lives?

You know there is and there is nothing you can do about it - you have just got to live with it. It is the same with somebody that has maybe their legs aren't well - you have just got to the live with that as well.

You just accepted it?

Uh-huh.

Did it affect your social life at all?

Well, I used to go up to an Armadale bowling club and Billy used to come up later on. I used to go up for the bingo and stuff but he couldn't be bothered with the bingo so he used to come up later on. We would have a wee drink but through time the noise up there was affecting him too much so he stopped coming up. So I just I would just go up for the bingo maybe wait a wee while then come back down the road again.

So, were there any other things that you could not do together any more as Billy's deafness got worse?

Well it was the same if you remember going to the pictures and that afore you never used to be any subtitles as what there are now. You couldn't go and watch a film with him because he wouldn't ken what was happening. But now they have got some of the cinemas have got this subtitling up on the screen so, you can go to the pictures. We were at the theatre there beginning of March we went to see Alan Stuart with the Jolson story and it was all subtitled - it was great.

And that made a real difference?

Oh yes. As long as he has got the subtitles, it is fine.

So some things have got better.

Yes they have.

For two of you as a couple over the years?

I thoroughly enjoy the subtitles now. I wouldn't watch it without. It is the same with the television. I will not watch the television unless the subtitles are up. I know I have got perfect hearing. I just seem to like it.

[08:35]

I am taking you back a bit, to back when you were in your 30s and 40s. When did you notice that Billy's hearing was getting worse?

Well it is gradually been going down each year, just bits at a time. He said himself his hearing has gone down. But he has had his hearing tested two or three times. They say it has gone but it is not too bad yet. Through time it will be completely away. I have asked him if he is not wanting to go for this cochlear implant as well but he does not think it will be of any benefit to him so it is up to him.

And what do you think?

Well he will ken himself whether he thinks it will be any benefit. I cannot force him to go for it if he is no wanting to go for it - that is it.

Have you been involved with going to any hearing check ups with Billy?

I wouldn't say check ups. He has been to do like Queen Margaret College two or three times. He has gone there because they were wanting to help with their exams, testing audiologists. He seems to be kind of hard to test for the audiologists, I don't know how but he seems to be

hard to test, that is why they like him going and doing it. We have met two or three audiologists since and they have tested him that they said 'you were horrible to test'. So...

Did Billy's hearing have any effect on his work, You were both in the meat factory and he was a storeman, did they?

Yes because he couldn't answer the phone if the phone went he couldn't answer the phone.

And did he tell you how he felt about that?

He didn't say that much, because most of the time he wasn't actually in the stores. They bring meat in and he was taking stuff around the factory but even the noise in the factory were for his ears, so it didn't matter where he was, it was how he was going to get affected whether he was down in the stores or going round the factory with the meat.

So there was a lot of background noise?

Background noise yes.

So that would have been very difficult for him. So did he carry on being a storeman then, even though it got difficult?

Yes, he came out when he got his first knee replaced. He was not back after that, then he got the second one done so he has had the two knees replaced, but he is still on their books so to until they pay him off.

So you were saying the hearing loss was really gradual?

Uh-huh.

[11:21]

And sometimes you couldn't go to things together any more, which you were wanting to go

out?

Uh-huh.

And he really could not get any pleasure out of it. How did you feel about that?

Well sometimes if we were invited to a party and it was may be a disco he wouldn't go. He would say no because he doesn't like the background noise of the disco was too loud so we would just have to sit in the house. That is it.

Did you go to the discos?

No no. I didn't like discos myself but that is just me. But with his hearing he couldn't come into a normal conversation because of the disco he was shouting all the time.

And how did that affect you then?

Well I just had to stay behind as well because I was not going to go myself.

No. And did you mind?

No I didn't really mind. If he wasn't comfortable there is no use forcing him to go to it if he is going to be sitting there miserable.

So that would have spoilt your enjoyment of it. Yes sure. Do you find that you had really quite a quiet social life at that point then?

Yes.

You stayed in quite a lot?

Yes we do stay in quite a lot.

Is that the same now?

Yes.

You are in the house a lot?

I am not saying a lot at nights we are but we are out sometimes during the day quite a bit.

And now that Billy - because he is not working full time now is he?

No.

[12:49]

So what has changed in your life do you think? Have you seen any change in Billy? You said that you just carried on as normal to begin with and for years you just made an accommodation?

Uh-huh.

For Billy. Is that just carrying on exactly the same now or has anything happened to change in your life?

Well, it changed when Dougal came into his life, put it that way, because to me he feels more comfortable going out than what he did before, before he had Dougal.

Okay what - Dougal? Tell us about Dougal.

Dougal is Billy's hearing dog. We have had him for 10 years. He is a 12 year old Jack Russell.

A Jack Russell and he is a hearing dog?

Yes.

Can you tell me about that - what does that mean? What is a hearing dog - what does that do?

Hearing dogs are trained to the sounds in the house that a deaf person would not be able to hear. Like your doorbell, your cooker timer, your telephone, your fire alarm, things like that. They are trained to go to the sounds and touch the person and take them to the sound except if it's the fire alarm, they touch and lie flat down and that lets the recipient know it is a danger signal. The rest of the signals they will take them to the sound but that one with touch and go down and that lets them know it is a danger signal.

And how did you and Billy get in touch with -- how did you manage to get a hearing dog - how does that work?

Well, after we actually seen one of, the Scottish organiser came to a group that Billy was involved in and that is where he seen a video of the hearing dog charity. And from then he says that sounds like something that could help me if you are not there. He says I am going to put my name down. So he had to go and get an audiologist's assessment from St Johns and he got an application form for the charity and he put all that together and he was accepted.

Right - was that easy to be accepted for that, or did it happen quickly?

I am not saying it happened quickly but when did he put in for it? I am trying to remember the dates and I cannot. As I say he put this form in along with his assessment from St Johns and he got one back that he had been accepted and he would get a house visit from someone in the charity to make sure that your garden and everything is suitable for having a dog. And to check out your situation in your house, where your sounds are so once they have the dog they can train him to those sounds as near your home as possible. Although they train them down in England where they are trained, when they come back up they are trained in the house again, just to make sure they are able to work in the house.

So there is a lot of training involved?

Yes it can take up to, they are with a socialiser for the first 5 to 6 months to make sure that they can get on - they are good with children, good with people and they start them then. And then they will see when they are ready at the training centre and it could be another 6 months before they are fully trained. Then Billy goes for a week to the training centre to get him, to

get the dog working to him and not the trainer.

Did you go - do that as well?

Yes I went to that I had only one thing to do - it was the call, the rest of the sounds is all Billy. I have only the call to do. That I - if I am wanting Billy and he is in another part of the house, instead of shouting him that he will not hear me, I can tell Dougal go and get his dad and he will bring him back to me - bring him back to the kitchen but now Dougal has got fly. If he sees the dinner going on the table he just goes and gets Billy. He is fly.

He is fly?

Yes.

So Dougal came into your lives about 10 years ago?

Yes.

Has that made a difference to your lives then? You said that Billy felt that a hearing dog would probably be able to give him something that he had not been able to have before?

Yes it gave him that confidence.

Tell me a bit more about that then. How did it give him more confidence?

Well, if he was out anywhere and any sounds went off, Dougal would tell him these sounds were going off. Hopefully, we've have never had a fire alarm for real so it is not too bad. But other than sounds maybe somebody at the door, if he was in somebody's house or something, somebody's doorbell went, maybe touch him for that. I have not actually seen him doing that, because usually it is not bad. But he just seems to have more confidence with Dougal around him.

So he knows he's not going to miss things?

Yes.

He knows that he can be independent then?

Yes if I am not there he has always got Dougal.

So how does that affect you then? If you know that Billy is comfortable and confident without you in the house, how does that affect your life, Margaret?

That lets me go anywhere I want. I was away last Tuesday with my Guild and he was still in the house so I know although I am not there, he has still got somebody to help him if anything goes. If the phone goes when I am not there, Dougal will tell him the phone is going. It is a text phone he has got. So he has got that help and plus he has got Dougal's help when I am not there.

[18:29]

So looking back to the time before you had your hearing dog Dougal?

Uh-huh.

What was your role with Billy then, to help him?

Well, before we had Dougal I had to answer all the phones. If the phone went when I was not in, he would answer it but he would ask them to call back when I came in. But now he can phone himself he has got the confidence to do it. He has actually got a better hearing aid as well, put it that way. He has got a different hearing aid and he is better on the phone.

So he has got a better hearing aid as well?

Yes, yes.

Okay. And how did you, I don't know how to put this Margaret, but when Billy was really relying quite a lot on you?

Uh-huh.

How did that make you feel?

I suppose I got used to it because we had been together that long that I got used to him relying on me. That is what they are trying to get out of now. He is all right coming into Edinburgh himself or Glasgow but Linda is trying to get him to go further afield without my help.

Do you think he could do that without your help?

I think he could do it.

Would you be happy for him to do it?

I have told him that if he wants to go he can go - I am not stopping him.

[20:06]

So, there you are with Dougal, and that is not really so very long ago. You mentioned a group that you had got involved with that just before you got Dougal - what group was that Margaret?

From his lipreading class there was a couple of them left and they started off a hard of hearing club for deaf people. They got speakers to come and every second Friday. It was just like a wee social gathering for deaf people. Billy was, well he was supposed to be the secretary, but any phoning that had to get done I had to do it. But anything to do with letters and that he did them on his computer but anything for phoning I had to do the phoning for speakers and everything.

Right okay. And the social club is something that is in your local..?

Yes it was in Bathgate Community Centre. We had it going for about 8 years. We tried to get other people to take over the president, plus the secretary job, but they wouldn't do it, nobody

would do it so it folded.

So would you say that you and Billy are really trying to help people?

Well we were trying to help them. But because they kept saying there was nothing for deaf people to do. You could not speak to other deaf people yet they wouldn't come to the club. We had at one time we had about 12 members, we could not get any more to come. They just seemed to say there was nothing for them. They would not come to it.

What sort of things happened at the social club?

Well as I say we had speakers. Sometimes we arranged outings to go to. I don't know if you ken Paxton House - it's a way through the other side of Edinburgh somewhere I think.

Okay.

We arranged a trip there, we arranged a trip in Lochatrie. We were quite willing to come to outings but not to the club. To me deaf people are funny, there is something there for them they will not come to it. They will still moan about it - there is nothing for them to do.

Now have you got any thoughts about why that would be?

I don't know whether they feel uncomfortable going to things like that, in case they are not hearing what people are saying.

And is there anything that would stop deaf people being like that, your experience of deaf people is that?

I don't think there is anything that will ever stop it. It is just going to be their nature. I don't know because we went to the Edinburgh club about a fortnight ago and even it's dwindling away. It used to be a good club in Albany Street and it is falling away as well.

[23:08]

Are there other things that Billy and you get involved with then because if the social club is not terribly lively just now?

No. They have started another one in ABE in Bathgate. It is friends - what is it - friends of adult basic education. And it is a kind of - we do a kind of social thing there. We were at Donaldson's a fortnight ago. All the ones that goes to that they are not all deaf. There is some of them deaf but there is others just come for the company. So we have got into that as well.

And you said that Billy's confidence has really grown?

Yes.

Does Billy still want to go to the social clubs or does he not particularly want to go to the social clubs?

Oh he goes to the clubs for the deaf crowd right enough. As I say we were away a fortnight ago at Donaldson's seeing the new school. That was lovely - the new school - the new one in Linlithgow - so that was good.

And the school at Linlithgow you called it Donaldson's - you tell me a little bit about that?

Well it was like the one in Edinburgh was Donaldson's. Now it has transferred to Linlithgow. There as far as I know there is the same amount of children there as what was in the one in Edinburgh. They are not all deaf, there is some autistic and other things as well. But to me it is a better place. One in Edinburgh was awfully high ceilings, awfully high building. This one seems more compact although it is newer and there is more facilities in it to me, than what was in the old one.

So the acoustics are better in the Linlithgow school for the deaf?

Yes I would think so.

So when you and Billy went to visit there?

Uh-huh.

Was that better for Billy's hearing as well?

Well the lady that had taken us round, we were going to use our loop system, we picked up the loop system. It is a new loop system the A B E had got, but whoever firmed the cases didn't put the transmitters in so we could not use it.

There was a loop system but they didn't have the transmitter for it so it was useless for all the people that needed to switch on their hearing aids to pick up the loop?

Yes hearing aids. So that was a portable loop we had. A B E got a new one but when the cases came they put the transmitters in or something but did not put this receiver in so they couldn't use it. But the lady that was going around she was quite a good speaker so I think most of them heard her - it wasn't too bad, she was clear enough.

And that was interesting?

It was. It was lovely. We are going back again.

[25:59]

Sounds good. What other things, opportunities have come up for you and Billy really through the hearing dog association?

I don't really know.

What does Billy do? You said how much more confident he is in the house. Is there anything else that has happened?

Yes, when we were doing with the dog he goes out and gives talks to groups.

What sort of groups?

Any groups, male, female, children whatever - he gives them a wee talk and a wee demonstration of Dougal. Maybe I should haven't said that but never mind. That is where he is. First when Margaret asked him to give talks in West Lothian he said but I am not - I have not got the confidence to do it - to stand up and speak to people. Margaret says yes you have - I have seen it in you. If you can help me that would be great because she was getting too many for herself. So she said if you take some of the pressure off me that would be better so that is what it was. It was supposed to be West Lothian area only, supposed to be. But we have been away through at Kirkintilloch away through to Tayport at Jim's.

But that is miles!

I know.

So you are really travelling - so do the two of you go together?

Yes I have got a sales table and I go to sell things and that helps the charity as well.

Is this to fund raise?

Yes.

What is it fund raising for?

To get more dogs trained or to try to get a Scottish training centre up and running.

You were just telling me how much more confident Billy is because of this.

Yes.

It is really taking up quite a lot of your time as well?

Yes, last year we were too busy but so far this year we are not too bad the now but last year was terrible.

[28:50]

Could you, from your 28 years of marriage to Billy, could you think of any advice that you could give to couples who one person is hearing and the other person has got a hearing impairment? Is there any advice that you could give people starting out in their relationship together if one person is hearing and one person is not?

I don't know if I could, how would you put it. What would be the benefit? I suppose it is if they try to talk to each other yourselves. Sometimes I get angry with him right enough when he is not listening to me. And he gets the same with him. He keeps telling me not to walk away from him and talk to him because I have a habit of turning my back on him and keep talking - he gets at me for that. But that is about it. You can just have to try talk to each other.

Yes?

I know it is hard, but if you are going to be together you will have to speak to each other.

And is it just speaking or do you find that you learn any sort of fingerspelling or anything like that?

I have not learned finger spelling or sign language.

Okay.

He has asked me whether I want to do it. He has even asked me to go to his lipreading class and I won't go to it.

Why was that?

I just don't feel like going to it that is all. I can get through to him anyway so it does not make any difference.

Have you gone to any other classes with him?

No.

[29:27]

Now, I think that you and Billy have got involved with LINK which is now Hearing Concern LINK - can you tell me how that came about?

That came about because we were doing something for Hearing Dogs in Albany Street.

And that's in Edinburgh?

That was in Edinburgh. We had a table up selling stuff for hearing dogs. There was quite a few tables there that day. And one of the tables next to us was the LINK table. And it was Gerry Leeper that was there. I cannot mind the girl's name that was there - there was another girl with him - I cannot remember the name. So Billy went across and spoke to him and that is how we got involved. He got a form and then at that time it was Lorna McNae - she contacted him and she gave him his interview. And that's how it started.

And what has that, what effect has that had on your life then - being involved with LINK - has it made a difference?

Yes well it has made a difference to him. As I say, even with hearing dog and LINK he has got the confidence - more confidence than what he ever had. Because even going to the intensive programme - the five day intensive programme - we went to Kings Manor.

Where Kings Manor?

It is in Edinburgh down in Portobello.

So just a wee bit away from the centre of Edinburgh at a hotel there?

Yes.

And the intensive programme - now I have heard about that, but I thought it was run in

Eastbourne in the South. So it is - it runs in Edinburgh as well?

They have done two or three in Edinburgh. We done that one and I think there was one the following year. I know there has been three I think in Edinburgh before we joined.

And can you tell me a bit about that then what was that like?

Well, it tells you different things. How to do your fingerspelling. You get people coming from RNID. There was somebody there from the lipreading classes I think as well, telling you everything that you can go for. There is a lot of deaf people they say there is nothing for them, they cannot get the information they are looking for. But they are not looking for it in the right places. You could get a load of the information through the hospital but I do not think half of them tries. They just seem to think there is nothing there so I will not bother.

So what would your advice to people be then?

You just have to check out; even ask your GPs and your hospital where you can get the information. Because we spoke to a couple in Edinburgh - we had to go and interview them and they went on the intensive programme. They said it is the best thing we have ever done. We have done two interviews, three interviews I think it is. I know that one of the couples went. I don't know if the other two went on the programmes or no. I know one of the gentlemen was not very well so I don't know if he has went forward or not. But I know - what was his name - Andrew and Ada - they went through it, and they said it was great.

So you went to the intensive programme?

Yes.

And it is intensive so it must be fairly intense?

I wouldn't say it is intensive - you are relaxed. It finishes about 4 o'clock so you can relax after that and you are staying in a hotel anyway. So you go for your dinner after it - you can all relax.

And you met other people there?

Yes. Met quite a few. There was a couple from Ireland, there was a couple that had their three kids with them. Both the parents - I think both parents were deaf. And they were - she was visual and they had brought that and they had an interpreter for her as well. But that was kind of scary that one because trying to keep the kids occupied in a different room, the kids could sign to their mum - the two oldest boys they could sign to their mum. But the wee lassie was a wee nightmare but it was a good week. There was a couple from Cowdenbeath your area, Joyce and Bill, I have seen them two or three times. And there was another lady, she was from Armadale where we stay. Her and her friend were there. That is where we met Jim Hudson - that is when we first met him.

It is quite a network Margaret isn't it, you were saying, once you start to find other people?

Yes. Some of the groups stick together more than the others. They said our group was one of the best groups for staying in touch. Because we know Jim, we know Gerry Leeper - he was at the intensive programme as well. Bill and Joyce were there. Moira and Joyce. And I said a couple from Ireland. She went through a cochlear implant after it. She said it was the best thing she ever done. That is how she got her cochlear implant after that intensive programme or she would never have went for it before that.

So there is lots and lots of information from that?

Yes.

And make people feel more confident so that they can go on from there and find out more?

Yes.

[34:57]

Did you say that you became an outreach volunteer?

Yes.

With Billy?

Yes.

So what is an outreach volunteer? What does that involve?

That is when you go out and interview people to see if they are suitable to go on to the programme. The five days training.

And you go out to meet them?

Yes. We go to either their own home or somewhere suitable for them and give them - but it is usually Billy does most of the talking. He writes the report as well. We have done three. One in Edinburgh, one in St Andrews and one in Grangemouth. The lady in St Andrews we have seen her two or three times. She has been e-mailing Billy back and forth because she was going for sign language as well, so they have been contacting each other.

And Billy has learned sign language now?

Yes. He felt because one or two of our hearing dog recipients they can only sign and they are talking to him and he doesn't ken, this is why he went for the sign language so he could contact, they could speak to them more and he knew what they were saying. Whether he will go for the level 2 I don't know.

So he has done level 1?

He has done beginners, he has done level 1. He said I have done what I wanted to do so I can converse with the rest of them, Pat and Maria and some of the other ones. I said well Alan says your level 2 is a lot harder and it goes for a full year. So you would have to fit that in against your other things. For the full year.

Sounds as though you are really busy in your lives.

Yes.

So you are not sure if you can fit that in?

I don't know because as I say it goes for the full year, and whether we could fit that in and still keep doing the talks and stuff, I don't know. Because this last week we went through to see the Scottish organiser and she gave us six dates for collections for now up to September. So that has all started up again.

[37:21]

So what about the future then Margaret? You were saying at the beginning of this interview that Billy's hearing has deteriorated gradually and then quite a lot?

Yes.

I think you said it is likely to go completely?

That is what they have told him.

They have told him that.

So whether - I don't know whether he will still get the benefit of the hearing aid or not. Or whether...

You just don't know?

We just don't know. And he has got the one that is in the right ear, the left ear he has not got anything in that because the nerves in the ears are too badly damaged.

Now I don't think we have actually covered that. How was Billy's hearing damaged in the first place?

Right. Billy was about 10 when he was knocked from a push bike with a van and his face was

all smashed and his nose was broken and everything and the nerves in the ears got damaged with the smash. So, he didn't go deaf right away. But he told me he had his first hearing aid when he was 16.

That was before you met him then?

Yes and his dad bought him his first hearing aid when he was 16 and gradually he has got other hearing aids from the hospitals. But whether if he does go completely deaf, whether a hearing aid will benefit him or what - or what is going to happen, we don't know.

And you don't know how long that is going to be?

No.

Do you have any feelings about that yourself?

No. If it happens, it happens. There is nothing we can do.

If it happens it happens - that is life?

That is it. There is nothing I am going to be able to do about it.

How do you think you will cope?

Well I have coped up to now and as I say once his hearing aid is off if he is lying in bed, he does not hear me. I have got to nudge him now and again. But, as I say, once the hearing aid is off he does not hear a thing.

So what do you do if he has got his hearing aids off and other than nudging him, if you want to say something to him?

I have got to tell him put it on, I have got to tell him to put his hearing on, for he cannot hear me.

But you have got really used to that?

Oh yes, I think after 28 years I have.

[39:45]

Okay Margaret. Is there anything else that from your memories of living with Billy all these years that would be good for this interview? We have covered quite a lot. Is there anything else?

I don't think there is anything else that would come in.

Is there anything that you think has been better about your life because you are married to Billy who has a hearing loss?

Better, I will not say better, but I suppose I know, years ago, I never thought I would ever get married at one time, then it just happened. That was that.

Were your folks still around when you got married?

No.

Right, okay.

My mum died in 1971/72 then my dad died in '75.

So that was just before you got married?

Yes before I got married they were both away.

So I was going to ask you how they might have felt about you and Billy, but?

I don't know.

Who knows?

My mum had a kind of hearing problem herself although she never wore a hearing aid. She should have, but trying to get her to go and see about one, no.

That is interesting isn't it, why people don't wear hearing aids?

We have met two or three people that have had their hearing aids and they will not wear them.

Why do you think that is?

Whether they are self-conscious or what, I don't know but they are will just not wear them. there was a boy used to go up to the bowling club and Billy asked him one day. He said you have not got your hearing aid in. He said no, I can't be bothered with it. Why get them if they are not going to wear them?

Would you give them any advice on that?

No, they have just got to. It is the same with everything you get new - you have just got to persevere with it. That is what I tell them when they come up. We did battery duties at St. Johns every second Monday - giving out the batteries. Then and people say, 'I cannot be bothered with my hearing aid.' I said, 'You will have to wear it if you want to hear people. It is no use putting it in a drawer. You have got to have it on to hear people.'

And Billy is much more confident now. Maybe these people do not have the confidence to persevere?

Maybe.

Maybe they don't have the benefit of being married to you!

There was one of the girls - I think it was the second intensive programme we met her - we met her - Billy had to go and show Dougal or something - that is what it was. She came from Dumbarton. She was only 35. She went to bed one night and she had her hearing. She got up

in the morning - she had no hearing. And at that time she didn't know who you contacted, who to go and see or anything. So we showed her, she was living with another girl - her partner was there. We showed her Dougal, told her about LINK, told her about the cochlear implant. I think she has got a cochlear implant now. I don't know whether she went for a hearing test but she has been at the LINK course as well. She said I didn't know what to find until I got in contact with you because she was suicidal. She worked in the television industry but she was away abroad and things - I think she was on the motorbike. I said could that not contribute to your hearing loss, maybe picking up something when you were away? She says they gave her as many tests and they still didn't know how it went. But you go to bed you are fine and get up in the morning you have no hearing. I don't know how I would cope with that.

So, the fact that you got in touch with her and that was through LINK?

Yes between LINK and Hearing Dogs. Because at first she was talking about a hearing dog and we took her to see Dougal. I think we told her about LINK as well that day. I kind of mentioned that but she got in contact with Lorna and at that time and she went on one of the - perhaps then I think she went for a cochlear implant after that.

So there is help out there?

People. Aye.

If you go and make the effort and meet people halfway?

Meet people. You can go to your doctor or social services, or the hospitals - they should have all the information.

[44:18]

Do you think looking back on all these 28 years with Billy, do you think he got enough help offered to him?

No - not at the start he didn't. Excuse me. He said at the start he was at school they didn't really, how can I put it, they were not really aware of what deaf people were going through. If

he could not hear the teacher all they done was bring him down the front of the class. But what happens when the teacher is maybe at the back of the class he is not going to hear it anyway. And at that time they said they only had Donaldson's in Edinburgh, and they said it wasn't bad enough for him to get put into Donaldson's at that time. So he had to struggle with his as best he could. He used a link machine, a loop system thing he used that in the house. He has got a wee portable one, but the one for around the house he does not use that much.

So he must have told you quite a lot then about his younger life, you know, having heard perfectly for ten years, having the accident and then not being bad enough to go to the school for the deaf?

Yes.

But being in a mainstream school?

Yes the struggle.

And nobody knew how to help?

Yes.

Did he unload quite a lot about that when you first got together - he got to know you?

No, he didn't unload it. I have picked bits up when he has been giving his talks because he tells them in his talk how he became deaf and stuff. So I have picked it up from there.

So you have learned it as you have gone along really?

Yes.

Through when he has been talking to other people?

Yes talking to other groups because he starts with that and then how he became deaf, how he got Dougal, how he was trained for Dougal and all this so you pick it up as you sit and listen to

him.

Does he talk about how he felt about it all?

He doesn't talk about how he felt. Just how it happened to him.

Keeps it very factual?

Yes.

Okay. Well, I think probably Margaret we are coming to the close of this now. That was so interesting - thank you very very much.

I hope it was helpful.

Absolutely. Was there anything to round off you would like to say at all?

I don't think so - I think that is about all there is.

We have covered most things?

Yes. If we have covered what your notes, you will know whether you have covered everything or not.

What we wanted to know about was what it was like for somebody living with somebody with a hearing impairment. And I think you have told us loads about your life with Billy and it has been something that has happened to not just to Billy?

Oh no to everybody it can happen to anybody.

Absolutely and it has happened to you as well?

Yes.

Because the two of you are a couple. Thanks very much Margaret. I will stop now.

[47:19]

[End of recording]