



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Ann Thallon
Interviewed by John Newton

British Library ref. C1345/46

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Interviewee's surname: Thallon

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Ann

Sex: Female

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1950, Aberdeen

Date(s) of recording: 5th April 2009

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Name of interviewer: John Newton

Speech to Text reporter: Lynn Allen

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[Track 1]

This is John Newton interviewing Ann Thallon for the Unheard Voices project in Edinburgh the Speech To Text Reporter is Lynn. Now I have to ask you, Ann, to state the following: your full name, including maiden name if appropriate?

That is appropriate, John. Yes my name is Ann Mary Thallon. I was born Ann Youngson in 1950 on 1st November in Aberdeen.

It says here, I don't know why they want this, this is obviously for record purposes they want to know your mother's occupation and your father's occupation?

Well, my dad worked for Burtons the tailors, the bespoke tailors at that time. And he was manager of the Aberdeen branch and my mum quite unusually for a woman at that point in history, my mum worked full time as a teacher, as a primary teacher.

I see, right. So that is just for the record I think for the historians. Now, you know I have read the notes you made about your life. What I would like to do to start with is your childhood, tell me about your childhood?

I have lots of happy memories about my childhood. Growing up in the 1950s was a good time to be growing up there was quite a lot of freedom and it was really out and about quite a lot. It was safe to go off to the parks and play. I had an older brother, 3 years older and a younger brother, 5 years younger than I am and I think I had quite lot to do with looking after my little brother, that is the way I remember it anyway I liked that. So, I.

Where were we talking about where were you?

This was in Aberdeen but I stayed in Aberdeen until I was 20. So, very much from North East my parents both came from Aberdeenshire from a fishing village and from a place in Royal Deeside so they met in Aberdeen as well, so we are definitely North East people. And I went to school, of course, I went to school when I was about 4 and a half and I went to a girl's school. It was -- you sat a test to get in, but it wasn't fee paying or anything it was just a council school but it was particularly for girls and it was selected so I was quite good at doing

those sort of tests at that point.

The single sex school was your secondary school or primary school?

That was at primary school but it was -- you got in at primary stage and but the school carried on right the way through to sixth year. And I think it was just as well I got in when I was 4 and a half, because as I got older I think I got very nervous about tests and we have a thing in Scotland called the 11 plus, which is like a really scary lot of tests that go over several days. And if you pass them, then you go to senior secondary school and if you fail them you go to junior secondary school. That didn't have comprehensives then. And I think that if I -- I mucked up my 11 plus I got really nervous about it and if I was not already in a selected primary school I don't think I would have got into the high school, but I did and it went on from there. Not too badly. I liked primary school, I didn't like secondary school so much, but...

Why?

I will tell you exactly why actually, there were six classes in each year. And depending on how you did with your 11 plus exam you were put into a stream. So I was put into the bottom stream in this selected secondary school. And I remember some of the teachers treating us as though we were not bright. I remember a maths teacher, I remember her name but I will not give it for the record but I am sure she is dead now, I remember her saying to a student when I was at 13 'oh don't bother about them, they are just the dregs'. That didn't make me feel very good it made me feel quite angry and you know we weren't allowed to do Latin because we were not bright enough, goodness knows why we would have wanted to do Latin I am sure we would have hated it but I had to do sewing and I was rubbish at sewing it wasn't until I got to about 14,15 that I think they realised that maybe there was -- I was allowed to stop doing needle work, they gave up on the needle work thank goodness and things went on from there. But I think that had a big, big effect on me, because in later life I went into teaching and most of my teaching life has been to do with children who have difficulty learning. And I think how they feel about themselves; they feel that they are not successful at being learners if they feel stupid then that is the big thing that makes such a difference to them. I remember what that felt like, yes. I still sometimes feel like that in life, but yes so that was a kind of an important moment for me I think.

Yes. I mean, would you say your secondary school was an unhappy time altogether or were there happy times as well?

Of course I had happy times as well.

Tell me about those?

Okay. Friends.

Yes?

Making friends, there were things that I enjoyed. There was a dance and movement club that started in primary that went through secondary it was called Eurythmics it was a particularly kind of dancing and the link with the Annie Lennox group is not coincidental because she was actually at my school as well. So if anybody listening to this has heard of the Eurhythmics and Annie Lennox she did the same kind of dancing, she is not exactly the same age as I am so she wouldn't remember me but I can remember her. So there was the you Eurhythmics side that was good. And I particularly like the 6th year play that we put on when we got to our last year in school we did a pantomime and I was Ali Ba Ba. That was super that was a really happy memory.

[07:30]

What did you do for boys in your dramatic productions then?

Well, I Ali Ba Ba and you are right it was an all girl's school that was not a problem at all. The girls played the boys and the girls played the girls and it was absolutely fine yes.

You didn't have a link with a boys school?

Certainly not, absolutely not allowed. There was a secondary dance club once a month, you know for ballroom dancing, and on Saturdays you would go along and the opposite numbers of the boys from the grammar school you used to be allowed to dance with them then,

allowed to do ballroom dancing it was awful, it was so embarrassing. But you know, we did get the chance to, you know, see boys occasionally we were warned against them of course. But I had two brothers that probably helped.

Yes of course, yes. I have forgotten what I was going to ask now. Oh yes, obviously most people will be aware the Scottish education system is slightly different to the British, English rather. How old were you when you left school?

I was 17.

17?

That was the normal time to leave school.

You were a disaffected student at secondary school, how did you become a qualified teacher now then?

How indeed, how indeed? Well you mentioned boys, I remember when I was in my second last year at school just when I started doing my highers, I had always thought in fact I had been told that people of our stream in school 'now girls, you won't manage to make it to university but there are still things that you can do, you can go to secretarial college or may be even training college for teachers'. I thought 'right fine'. But when I was in my second last year my brother my older brother was at university and I remember going down to the local university in Aberdeen and seeing all these young men, and girls just hanging out down in the university I thought 'oh I think I would like to do that'. I think I would like to go to university so I put in a bit of work, and you know got enough highers to go to university. I went to university. And that was a very good thing, because it wasn't segregated and you know, you could become friends with boys and you know go around fancying boys as you do, well you don't obviously John, but I do.

How did you get into Aberdeen University? How did you qualify?

I got the right number of highers and you know rather than A levels because we didn't do A levels it is just so the equivalent of higher of A levels is highers. And I got what was it four

highers. And of the right level to go into the course that I wanted to do. And I studied English and sociology, which was a kind of a new thing then and psychology and history of music, that sort of thing. And I loved it, that was a really, really good time for me. I got involved with the student show more amateur dramatics, great for your confidence, and I loved university I had a great time. I had such a good time that I didn't do quite so well with the studying but I did end up with a degree so that was fine.

Where did you live when you were at university?

I lived at home.

And your brother as well?

Well that was yes.

All of you?

My older brother had actually got married by then he got married very, very young. And so yes there was still my younger brother at home and it was much more common then for young people to stay at home and go to the local university particularly in Scotland. I think it was to do with money to a great extent. It was obviously cheaper and from my point of view going from the high school where I was, which was quarter of an hour's walk away from my house, going to the university which was at the other end of Aberdeen it felt like travelling I would go there first thing in the day and not come home until late. And it felt like you were really moving on. But when I finished university I was ready to leave home by then, so I wanted to do teacher training, I went to Edinburgh for that.

[12:24]

Sorry did you say P G C E they called it did they, your teacher qualifications?

Yes.

After you had taken your?

Yes that was after a one.

Going back to your while you were still at Aberdeen, though, how did the social life of the university fit in with your parental control when you were at home?

I don't remember there being any problem with that.

You don't?

No, because well my parents thought that I was absolutely fine and so I was. You know what it is like with there I was 17,18,19 you don't tell your parents things and that was fine. So, I don't feel that I was constricted in any way, my mum in particular was a very assertive person and it was very strict moral code I would say, so did my dad I suppose. But you know what they didn't know didn't hurt them. We are talking about the late 60s here, so that time in history was a, you didn't tell your parents everything.

But then you went away to Edinburgh?

That is right.

For a year presumably?

Yes, yes.

Tell me about that?

Well, there were two things about Edinburgh. One was that I was really ready to leave home then and the other was that I had met a chap in Edinburgh when I was doing a working holiday and I wanted to see more of him and he seemed to quite like that idea. So, that was another reason why I wanted to go to Edinburgh.

Uh huh?

And the course, the one year course, wasn't terribly exciting actually it wasn't nearly as good as university. But, you know, it was the teaching practice was okay. I wanted to be a primary teacher because I like kids, and in primary teaching you get to do the all the subjects. I didn't want to go and be an English teacher which I suppose I might have been. I wanted to teach the kids, and I wanted to do all the stuff with them. So, I specialised on the older ones at primary, that was the bit that I liked the idea of most. So, I liked the teaching practice, I liked living away from home, and I really liked being able to see more of my boyfriend.

How much teaching practice did you do?

We did certainly two spells within the year in different schools. One in Edinburgh, and one near Dalkeith a place called Gorebridge.

Can you remember your first day in school?

When I started teaching.

Yes -- no your first day when you went in to do teaching practice your very first day?

Oh teaching practice.

Yes?

I remember the school dinners were really good. I was living in a student flat and I don't think our cooking was very good and I do remember that in the school near Dalkeith they had a wonderful school lunch. Anyway, no, it was okay actually. I had a primary 7 class which is like the oldest ones so they are 11 and 12. And it was the head teacher's class so he just left me to it a lot of the time. And it was okay I remember I quite enjoyed it then you had somebody that came in and gave you a KRIT lesson, an inspector sort of person came in and sat in the corner and you had to teach in front of them. That was very nerve wracking.

That must be very difficult yes?

Well, you had to do that to learn to be honest.

Yes?

It went okay, I didn't set the house on fire but it went okay it did I passed anyway so...

But you enjoyed it from the start then did you?

Yes.

The teaching?

Yes I enjoyed primary teaching I did four years of primary teaching and of course to begin with it is a terrific learning curve and I can probably fill a whole tape with my memories of that bit, but by the time the first six months were over I was really beginning to get the hang of things. And I had a great time, I got my primary teaching job in Fife, where I live now actually, and I have really, really good memories of just exactly what I hoped from teaching you know. The whole range of kids, none of this specialised, there was none of this selected stuff, I am not into that at all having experienced it myself. It was just the whole range of kids and all the subjects, and you have sort of common themes and lots of a lot of freedom I think, that was in '73, '74 roundabout that age, that stage and you had more freedom in teaching then.

Yes, yes?

Than you do now. There is less paperwork and it was good. I have very happy memories of that.

[18:06]

Where was your first job?

That was in Burntisland.

Burntisland which is the other side of the water?

Yes that is over in Fife. That was where there was a job going, and so I got the job there. I didn't know Fife.

Yes?

But I really liked it and when I got married to that same boy friend who I mentioned we got married during my first year of teaching.

Oh yes?

In 1973 and we moved to Dunfermline in Fife and then a few years later, in 1976, moved to Burntisland so I was actually living in a flat, oh, 3 minutes walk from the school for a while which was quite good.

[18:50]

What did your husband do? Or does he do sorry.

Yes, yes he is still my husband 36 years. He has done a number of different things. At that time he actually thought about being a teacher at one point, aim glad to say that that didn't end up being a teacher because I think two in one family would be one too many. Now, he actually, works in Edinburgh. He got into computers and, well, historically again the computer industry completely took off in the '70s and he got into that in the early days in Edinburgh. And you know it has really flourished so he is a systems analyst developer type person, you know, in an Edinburgh firm but we still live in Burntisland.

So, now we have got to when you have qualified as a teacher, you have got married and you were living in Burntisland. I know from what you said in what you wrote that you started to be conscious of hearing loss when you were about 40. Tell me about that period between starting work and when you started thinking worrying about your hearing loss. What happened during that time?

Well yes, aha. It was a really very gradual thing and I remember we had moved to

Burntisland and we had had our two children, so it would have been round about 1980

Yes, yes?

I stopped working for a while when the kids were young.

Yes?

And so I was working -- I was at home being a housewife and mother and I was aware that I was hearing bird noises but it was strange because it was the middle of the night there shouldn't have been any birds, I thought that is strange I didn't say anything I never thought anything about it and as time went on it sort of get a bit irritating I said to my husband who I call Thal short for Thallon anyway that is beside the point I said to Thal do you hear birds he said no, so I didn't do anything about it, I just thought it was strange it did sound to me my perception was that it was coming from outside the window.

But it wasn't associated -- you were not thinking you were deaf at this point?

No not at all, no I didn't I was not aware of having any problem with my hearing I was aware I was hearing these sounds but I didn't even know, I don't know if I even knew the word tinnitus at that point. It didn't I didn't know what it was. But eventually I thought may be I should just got and ask about this so I went down to my local GP and he took out a tuning fork and hit it on the table and yes I could hear that, that was fine. I could hear that tuning fork I think yes I could.

So you were testing yourself were you?

The doctor tested me, I went to the GP.

Sorry I missed that yes, yes?

I want to the GP to ask about these noises that I was hearing.

I am with you yes, yes?

And the GP must have thought it will be her hearing and he did the tuning fork thing and he referred me to that the ear nose and throat people at the local hospital.

He did. When was that how old were you then roughly?

That was -- well I was in my early 30s I was in my early 30s and.

[22:40]

How did you feel about that at the time?

Well, a little bit concerned but not really bothered very much. I was interested to find out why I was having these noises that seemed to be coming from outside my head but of course now I know perfectly well they are inside my head and they are 50 times louder than they were back in my 30s. But I remember going to the hospital and going to hospitals I didn't have anything to do with hospitals except when I had the kids and I was not terribly keen ongoing to hospital. But I went and I can remember the waiting room, it was quite amusing, because in the waiting room of this ear nose and throat place was a bird cage with a canary in it. Which was singing, twittering away I thought 'oh that is nice'. So I went in to see the doctor, the specialist and said he was -- he was not born in Britain anyway, and he was I was describing to him the noises that I heard. I said it is like bird song, but not like the bird in the other room. And he just gave me such a look and I thought 'oh, there was a bird in the other room and it was making a twittering noise but different from the bird song that I hear in my head'. So, I don't remember him giving me any advice, or explaining anything. I don't remember him saying 'tinnitus'. I don't remember him giving me any sort of hearing test at the time. I honest think can't remember if he did or not but I don't think at that point, although I think my hearing was beginning to be affected, I don't think it was impinging on my ability to make out speech.

In the face of this apparent indifference from this specialist, how did you feel about that then, on your way home?

I think I just thought 'oh well that was a bit of a waste of time wasn't it?' And this twittering

noise is not bothering me too muchly just get on with it you know why bother. I think I went and read up about it we didn't have the internet then but I do remember buying a little book saying how to live with tinnitus.

You did?

I did there was a self-help book so I must have found out it was tinnitus one way or the other and I read that and it made sense. I thought well yes that is what I have got. But it wasn't bothering me. It wasn't distress for me I was just interested to know what it was. And I forgot about it a lot of the time at that point.

And you didn't have any communication problems at that time?

Not at that point.

[25:29]

Were you what were you doing -- what work were you do doing then?

Well that was just at the period when I was not working. But I then got another job just at the time that my second child was starting school. So that would have been 1983.

Yes?

So I had the noises in my head, but I didn't have -- I didn't I was not aware of any problem with my hearing at all.

No?

And I didn't know that there was any link between tinnitus and hearing loss anyway, I didn't know anything. And there was no deafness in my family, there was nothing to make me know anything very much about deafness at all at that point. So, I got a different kind of job in a secondary school.

Yes?

And that was in a department called learning support. That is where you are a teacher who is working with other teachers, english teachers, science teachers, maths teachers or whatever and working with them in the classroom to support a whole lot of kids and to help the kids understand. And you may be work with the subject teacher to look at the kind of work the kids are doing and you adapt that work so that the kids can understand it better and you find out why the kids are not learning, and you work out ways to help the kids learn better. So that is sort of learning support work. And I -- there was an opening in that, and I thought 'oh well you know, I will give it a go'. So I then moved into away from primary school teaching and into the this new kind of teaching.

In a secondary school?

In a secondary school yes.

And the learning support, was support primarily for the teachers or for individual students or both?

Both.

Both?

Both it was quite a new idea in Scotland at that time. Before then, if a kid had a difficulty they would be taken away to a little room and do you know, like they call it sort of like the hospital model where you take somebody away you do something to them, you make them better put them back where they came from. But they discovered that that didn't work. So the research showed that it is the curriculum and the way that it is taught that is the biggest barrier to kids learning. It is not so much the problem with the child, it is the whole learning environment and the way that teachers teach. So it was trying to change the way that the teachers taught, and the materials that they were using and the way that they were teaching to try to make it suit the children. And yes you have to help the kids as well, but so it was a new and exciting approach and Fife, where I live, was in the forefront of that development in Scotland. So it was a good place to be at that time. But it was a big change in my life.

I see.

And that kind of teaching completely different from what I had done before.

Why was that kind of teaching such a big change for you sorry you tell me about that?

Yes why was it such a big change, because in my primary teaching for the four years that I did that I was the queen bee, it was my class, my kids, my curriculum and you know, but when you go into somebody else's class as a learning support specialist you really have to be very, very diplomatic and you have got to you must not go threatening the authority of the subject teacher, the English teacher or the German teacher or whatever. You are working with them to support the teacher, and to support the children to try to improve the learning environment. And you can imagine there could be suspicion over that. They might not like 'who is this person coming into my classroom' sort of style, so I was not the main teacher, I was not the one who was standing up in front of the class and I did some of that, but I didn't do a lot of that. It was more like a team you were trying to have a team approach to things and there was a lot of new skills that you needed for that. And you actually had to have an extra year's qualification for that as well. That when you took on that sort of job, you had to sign to say that you would at some point go off and do another year's training for that kind of teaching.

[30:07]

How did you establish your professional credibility with these crusty old secondary teachers then?

Well my dad, who was the Burton's manager, he always used to say to me 'well the customer is always right'. Even if they are not they are always right. , so I used a certain amount of the Burton's manner I think. And I think I am quite adaptable and I think I have mentioned that I was involved in amateur drama so I am a bit of an actress so I think I changed the way that I was depending on the teacher that I was with. So the teacher was up for it and quite dynamic then I could go with that and we could do all sorts of interesting group work and different things. But if the teach was a bit you know wary of me then I could lower my profile quite a

lot and sort of go around and still help the kids and help them overcome the difficulties in the learning. But it would -- it would be, you know a bit more humble about it. So, yes.

What sort of problems did you have with a typical teacher can you think of a typical one?

Give me a moment to catch up with that.

No not a typical teach err typical situation?

Certainly to be fair to myself once I got into the swing of things, you know, I thought it was very, very worthwhile to do and I suppose it goes back to this idea that I didn't like feeling stupid when I was at school and there was no need for me to feel stupid if I there is no feed for these kids to feel stupid. So I was really keen to try to get it right with the kids. But one -- so I had a certain amount of success I think, yes I did, I did don't be Scottish I will say I got quite good at it John okay. But I remember in my first year of doing that kind of work there was a chap that I completely misread, he was a maths teacher again you see these maths teachers in is a lot of wonderful maths teachers in the world! Anyway he was a chap who I actually travelled to work with, he gave me a lift so I felt I knew him. And I was in his first year maths class. Now, I had taught maths to 11 and 12 year olds, I was fine teaching maths to that level of kid. I may be rubbish at maths but at that sort of level I could explain and I knew enough about maths at 12 year old level. And there was this particular bit of maths and it was binary, binary arithmetic that he was doing and I could see going around the class the kids didn't have a clue. The way that he was explaining it to them because he was a total mathematician and it was not difficult for him, the way he was explaining it was way over their heads. And I remembered my kids when I had been primary teaching having a real difficulty with it as well and I remembered a trick that I got together to help them. And it involved the kids standing up and down, you know on and off sort of style. So, I said to the teacher you know, quietly, 'I think I am finding that I am going around there is really quite a number of the children that are having a lot of difficulty with this' and I don't know whether he took that personally. He said well 'on you go then, you know, you sort it out'. So I thought well fine yes, that is fine because I know what worked for my -- the kids that are 6 years younger than that. So I went into my full right this row here stand up sit down and all this sort of thing. And the kids loved it, and you could see you know that moment when the light bulb moment when you just get the idea. Oh right, that is what it means. And I was

happening, I felt really good about that. And I thought the maths teacher was fine about it. But that night, when he gave me a lift home, he said he was very quiet, and he said 'Ann, don't ever do that to me again in my classroom'. And I remember the sort of I came over all hot and bothered. I thought 'oh no', you know. He was a very -- he is a friend now actually, a really nice bloke but he was very sort of traditional and very stereotypically maths teacherish and all this standing up and down all this movement bit what has that got to do with maths never mind about kinaesthetic learning for goodness sake! That was a lesson to me that sometimes, most of the time you could sense that it was fine to do something a wee bit more active, but that time I had just misread it and I embarrassed the guy. And really I suppose the customer is always right I have to take responsibility for that. I have never told him about it I maybe will yet but that was away back in 1983. So...

[35:44]

You said something about you were telling us don't be Scottish, what do you mean by that?

One of the beliefs I think about Scottish people is that they do not like talking about their successes. If they go for an interview or something they are going to sell themselves short. They are not going to say 'I was very good at that'. They are much more likely to say 'oh no I was all right', I was not that good that sort of thing. So, that is what I mean. I don't think that traditionally we have been very good at PR for ourselves, so I am just overcoming that and I am just saying 'hey I was pretty good'.

Right, are you still working at the statement school?

No, no I am working in another secondary school.

How long did you stay at that school?

I stayed at that school for quite a long time. I went off and did police my year's training, the extra year's training for support for learning.

Erm, what I was thinking was when you started to be aware of your deafness, were you at that school or another school?

Yes, yes. And interestingly the deafness thing really came home to me for the first time at that school.

Yes?

Because I was supporting kids in a science class.

Yes?

And they were studying hearing, so they were 13 year olds 13,14 and they were trying out these audiology sort of machine it is frequencies they had the headphones on and I would have a shot as well wouldn't I? And I was aware that there were an incredible number of frequencies that everybody else has been reacting to and there was nothing there for me absolutely nothing and I staid to the science teacher 'is there something wrong with the machine' and he said 'no that will be your hearing Ann'. And actually that was a moment when I realised.

You had got some hearing deficiency then?

That there was happening to me.

Did you have any communication problems at that time?

I didn't think I did at the time. But yes, I think there were things that I was missing. I think I misheard my own kids sometimes, particularly in the car when there was background noise. So, but it was really from that point so that would be may be the mid '80s then I think.

Are you thinking about that in retrospect or how you felt at the time then?

I am thinking about it in retrospect, because at the time although I do remember being a bit worried when I couldn't hear these frequencies and the machine in the science lab.

Why were you worried?

A good question why was I worried I thought there was something wrong with me I don't seem to be hearing that I think there followed a very long spell, as things got progressively worse that I was absolutely in denial about it. I wouldn't have spoken about it to anybody.

No.

I couldn't have spoken about it to anybody I wanted to keep it a secret. Completely illogically.

Why?

Well it felt like it was something I had done wrong it was something that was my fault. And that is completely illogical I know that. I think I knew it at the time but I was secretive about it I didn't want people to know. I didn't really admit it to myself as I was beginning to find particularly first of all in noisy situations.

Yes

I was beginning to find it more difficult to make out what people were saying.

Yes, yes?

And it took quite a long time before I was able to talk about it with my husband.

Yes with your husband even. So, is that what you said?

Yes.

I mean looking back now, could you analyse why you were frightened of what was happening to you?

Well it is a strange thing, because with anything else well I suppose the only medical thing that happened was having babies you know, and I found out all about that, I went to classes, I

read up about it, I was you know -- it was really, really interesting. But with the hearing thing I don't know, I don't know why. But I felt embarrassed and maybe, alright I am just sort of theorising right on the spot here and now, may be it goes back to feeling thick when I was at school, feeling stupid in that secondary school. And there is a thing, isn't there, with a hearing impairment if you cannot follow everything, then it is more difficult to understand. Not because you cannot understand but because you cannot hear all the conversation and so may be it was something to do with it because it made me feel stupid and I wanted to hide that. It is really difficult to know. But I didn't seek help for a long, long time. I didn't talk about it, certainly just talked to my husband but not even that for a long time. And I am very, very secretive about it, I didn't want -- I lied to myself about it, I pretended to hear when I couldn't hear, I filled in the gaps and sometimes came to the wrong, quite often came to the wrong conclusions, so I would and I would know then from other people's reaction that I had picked them up wrongly, they had said I had reacted to what I thought they had said and when I made my reply I knew that I had said something out of place.

Yes, yes.

And that made you quite tense. So that was, yes, that was -- it took me a long time to get through that bit, a long time.

[42:11]

You said in the stuff you wrote that the first time you went to have a proper hearing test you went sort of in secret. Well you said you went to some distant place tell me about that, what you recollect about that?

Yes I decided I had to stop being so silly and needed to go and do something about this. The idea of a hearing aid was anathema to me. Once again I don't know why, I didn't know anybody -- well maybe it was because I didn't know anybody with a hearing aid I don't know. But there I was in I would have been my 40s by then and I thought well all right I will go and get my hearing tested. I didn't go to the GP, I thought right I will go somewhere where nobody knows me, because it is embarrassing and I don't want to bump into anybody that knows me. This is like me an intelligent normal sort of a person but honest, how stupid. So I went away over to Livingstone, to an opticians where my sister-in-law worked and they just

recently got a chap that tested for hearing aids, private. And I went to him.

This was private practitioner?

Yes one of these guys that goes to opticians and sets up a room and tests your hearing and then sells you an expensive hearing aid. And I didn't like that.

What was the outcome of that?

The outcome was that I remember being very, very tense, and doing the, failing basically, I failed that test I tell you. I can quite clearly, I don't like failing tests, anyway I knew I was not hearing stuff. I tried to pretend I was hearing things I was not hearing how silly because he could tell he had not pressed the button and I was hitting things anyway you know stupid he said 'yes you have got a hearing loss and I can give you a hearing aid' so I said 'right go for it'. And he said it was going to be an in the ear aid. I didn't want anybody to know, so it had to be hidden as far as I was concerned. If I had my time again I would do it differently John. Anyway, may be if I had found link earlier I might have felt a bit different about it, I would have done I think. So, he had to take some sort of mould of my, the shape of my ear so he could get this hearing aid to fit. Goodness knows what he did but it was agonising he must have gone in too far and touch add nerve somewhere, anyway it was very painful getting that done.

That was when he was making the mould?

Yes when he put the wax I can't even remember what it is, the waxy sort of stuff inside my ear he must have, anyway it was this sort of jolt of incredible pain. Very short but so that wasn't very nice. It was a small thing but it left a lasting impression, not just on the wax!

Literally!

Anyway I went back some weeks later and got this thing fitted and for a start it was ugly. It was a horrible colour. I couldn't forget about it, and it didn't blooming well help me hearing one little bit. I couldn't hear any better with it and I hated it. And I got angry with it and I didn't like the man, and I think I went back for one check up but I didn't -- he didn't tell me

about after care, he didn't I have had much better experience since, so that let's me know that actually to a great extent it was my fault because I just had a stupid attitude to it. But it was bound to fail, it was bound to fail. And I gave up after quite a short time with it. It was an analog hearing aid and it was uncomfortable, and I felt incredibly self-conscious wearing it and it didn't help my hearing as far as I was concerned.

Did you hear any noises at all?

It didn't improve anything for me.

It didn't make any difference. There was nothing that I could hear with it that I couldn't hear just as well or badly without it. And at that point the gradual hearing loss, I thought I was still coping pretty well. I think if I had gone to the NHS at that point I might have got better aid or aids, I don't know. I don't know.

How were you coping?

Well, let's see. I think I was still coping fairly well.

Just go on about that experience in Livingstone. You mentioned you went to Livingstone which is a sort of a long way away from your home place.

Yes.

And it clearly wasn't a very good experience?

No.

[47:46]

What was the effect on you after that, I mean what did you do next?

Well, I just went into denial for years really John. I said 'I'll forget about it'. Just get on with it and my husband became quite good at getting me out of tricky situations, if we were out socially. And he picked up very well when I had misunderstood or he knew by the sort of

pauses that I made that I had lost the place a bit and he would subtly help me out. He didn't take over or anything but he would help me out. But it must have been really tricky for him, because I wasn't at that point able to turn to him and say 'what was that again'? You know, so I was not really asking him to help me out so he had to sort of do it subtly because he knew I was sensitive.

How were you communicating with him?

Well, at that point one-to-one, one-to-one was fine at that point. It is not always anymore, but one-to-one was fine. And I know his voice, and yes, I think communication was fine.

Were you conscious of lipreading, or was it unconscious?

Yes, I wasn't conscious of lipreading.

No, no?

But I was certainly well I think that is just the way I am. I tend to sort of watch people and you know, it is the body language thing as well, so try to work out what they are saying with any clues that you can get. And I wasn't consciously lipreading but I think I was a little bit anyway.

Right. What was the most difficult situation at that time do you think?

At that time, background noise.

Right?

So, increasingly in busy places, in busy places, at parties. Even dinner parties became more difficult. But certainly parties.

I am quite outgoing in some ways, but I don't actually like parties very much anyway, and I don't think that is to do with my hearing I think it is just I prefer not so many people around. So, and I don't think we went to the pub very much at this point in our lives anyway.

What about relations with your kids and work Ann?

That is what became increasingly difficult and really that was why I sought help again with that, a more determined attitude that I have got to try to get around this a bit more. Because I was -- I got to the stage, by this point I had moved school. I got a couple of promotions and I was running a department in another secondary school of learning support. And I was finding it more difficult in some teacher's classrooms. There was one English teacher in particular whose voice was really bad for the me it was quite a high voice and quite light and she spoke really quickly and she didn't move her mouth very much. And she was a very staccato sort of person and she taught in a classroom with noisy floor boards. And her classroom I really realised that I was not coping well. I was okay when I was beside the kids, you know, that was still okay.

Can you think of a specific instance which brought it to a head?

I don't think there was any one specific thing. I was just aware that in certain classrooms with certain teachers it was getting really difficult for me.

Did you discuss it with the people involved or was it?

Absolutely no way! Not a chance. I used all sorts of strategies for hiding the fact that I was finding it more difficult to hear.

Why?

The big why. I wanted to feel in control, and I didn't feel in control. I felt that it made me less effective, less just a lesser person I think. So there was a lot of sort of emotional stuff going on there. I certainly didn't know anybody as I said didn't know anybody with a hearing loss. I didn't even know what sort of words to use to myself to describe. I didn't have the right words. I didn't like the word deaf. No, and it was absolutely ironic, because I was in an inclusive situation. I was my job was all about getting the learning situation right so that all manner of kids could be included. And as my job, I got another promotion about six years ago within the same school covering all manner of kids' needs from cerebral palsy, autism, general learning difficulties, the whole gamut and just how good it was to get these kids

included and yet I was not including myself. I wasn't. I had a really bad attitude to what was an increasing disability yet there I was working with kids and trying to build their self-esteem and getting the society that they were in, the community in the school to be more inclusive of them and yet I was secretive, I was embarrassed, I felt, you know, all the things that I am ashamed of myself really in hindsight. I have changed a lot where it has been very recent and who knows why anybody should have the hang ups that I had. I suppose most people have got hang ups but I really it became a big hang up for me and I did manage to hide it quite well from a lot of people. But I finally stopped hiding it from myself and decided this was really, come on get a life.

[54:43]

Did you know any other deaf people?

No absolutely nobody as far as I was concerned I was the only person. I would -- my ongoing hobby has always been Amateur dramatics. And I was finding it difficult to hear the director's voice and that was difficult. Particularly if we were having a dress rehearsal in a big theatre and the director was at the back of the theatre and would say something to me. I couldn't make it out and I didn't say to the director, you know, this is me in my 40s I didn't have the confidence to say 'Margaret I cannot make out what you are saying I have got a hearing impairment'. I couldn't use these words I couldn't form these words so I sort of kidded on and I worked around it and second guessed and all that sort of stuff. And so there was a point there that I wanted to make. I think it was that I didn't think anybody else had the same problem. I would go to the theatre, and I was well aware that everybody in audience was laughing, at something that was happening on stage, I had no clue. I had missed it. I really liked going to the theatre, and not to be able to appreciate the words and to follow the story was really hard.

So did you continue to do the amateur dramatics then?

No.

When did you pack that in?

Well, there were a couple of things happening at the same in my life and one was that the job was getting bigger and bigger and I have always had a tendency, apart from at school when I was a lazy object, but I have always had a tendency to go into the job 100 per cent. And I think at that point I was going into the job 150 per cent you know I had had this other promotion and the amateur dramatics thing was taking up too much time I needed to work at night. I could not afford the time. And I would be going to rehearsals and taking my work with me and I used to love rehearsals. And I couldn't communicate as easily with the other people in the group, so I was sort of sitting in rehearsals and chatting and things, that became a really conscious effort for me, the socialising side of things. So I think it was a mixture of my official explanation to myself was 'I don't have the time for this'. But actually I think it was partly that I was finding it increasingly difficult and frustrating to communicate freely with my fellow people in the group. So I think the two things together, I gave it up. I am still a member but I am not an active member. I still have I run a primary drama group where I live, I do a lot of mime, but I still, you know involved in amateur dramatics but not in the same role if you like and yes.

Apart from your husband did you have anyone else whom you did talk about your deafness to?

Not for a very long time.

No?

And.

Did you know any other people with disabilities of any kind?

Yes absolutely loads because of my work. Kids. A whole range of disabilities. Actually interestingly we didn't have deaf kids at the school?

You didn't?

No. We had very -- one every five years or so.

Right?

And that was because there was a specialist branch of the next door high school that had a specialist part of their school for deaf kids. So they tended to go to the next door school rather than our school. So, but everything else you name it really. And as far as adults or friends no, nothing. Well my husband has got a problem with his eyesight, he lost the sight of one eye so I do lots of looking for him and he does lots of us listening for me. Not an awful lot, not an awful lot. But, yes we come across certainly people in wheelchairs, people with MS, so yes. And I don't find in myself any discrimination, or lack of acceptance of other people's disabilities. I honestly cannot think that other people's disabilities bother me at all, I don't think you are in a wheelchair you must be stupid or anything like that. I certainly don't think that when people, now that I have met other people with hearing impairments John.

I wondered if you felt any identity of interest with them that is why I asked about it?

I think maybe if I had met somebody else, anybody else, that had a hearing disability when I was in my 40s and we had got to talk about it, then that might have made a difference but I didn't know anybody. It was actually, there was one girl who was -- that I came across and come to think of it she did say that she wore a hearing aid and I didn't immediately say to her, oh then you will know what it is like. I didn't tell her that I had a difficulty as well. I was perfectly happy for her to have the difficulty but I was not going to tell her about it. Oh deary me.

This was a girlfriend really was it?

Yes this was somebody yes that was somebody I came across well through actually through the DRA that MA group come to think of it and also a little bit through work. And I didn't stay to her I have got the same problem as you have.

[01:01:01]

That is interesting though because men always assume that women share all their secrets with each other I shouldn't be making comments like that should I!

I talk a lot about it now, I am really even in the last six months I have changed a lot as well.

Well let's talk about that. You must have some point you then got talking to professionals, audiologists who gave you more help. Tell me about that next stage then?

That was about 2002, round about there, 2002/2003. So, just before I had my last promotion at work and probably it was because I was going more into a sort of management role and I think I needed all the help I could get with that and I thought well if there is something that can be done to help this hearing, which really was bothering me by then it really was, I was conscious of it all the time, I thought 'well maybe something can help me. maybe things have improved and I am a more mature person now'. I didn't go all the way to Livingstone I only went all the way to Edinburgh. That is closer it still was not the next town but it was closer and I looked it up on the Internet and I decided there was this particular audiologist, a proper audiologist not added on to the optician and I had heard of them and I knew where it was in broad and I thought yes, I like the sound of them. I got in touch with them by e-mail first of all, so I made a contact first of all.

You didn't go through your GP then?

No.

Why not?

I don't know why I didn't go to the GP. I had a friend who was a doctor, and I remember talking to her. And saying I have heard about these hearing aids that you get nowadays, are they any good, is it worth and she said 'no they are not really much good'. So I must have decided well there is no point in going to the GP so I just went to the private guy. And it was really good. That was a different kettle of fish altogether. And he...

Where was this?

This was in Edinburgh

But I mean what was the audiologist?

An audiology firm called House of Hearing.

Yes, yes?

And well established.

Yes, yes?

Well hearing aid people. But properly qualified, in the hearing aid business. And so they seemed to me to have a lot of knowledge. Actually now I come to -- now that I am in position to compare the service that the NHS offers now, which I have only rediscovered since last December 2008, and when I compare it to the service which I have to say was very good that the house of hearing people gave me, the NHS are streets ahead.

You think so?

And that is saying something because they have got a different angle to it I am sure we will come on to that. The chap in Edinburgh was super, he listened. He didn't mind hearing about my hang ups. I told him a little bit about my hang ups about my hearing and he didn't look horrified or equally he didn't say 'oh well I think you should go and get in touch with LINK' or anything like that. I wish he had. But I don't think he knew about link at this point he knows now because I have told him. So, he said 'well there is this kind of aid now and it is much better than it used to be, digital'. And he understood that I wanted something discrete still so I was still at that stage, I have really come on and he got me -- I tell you John it was blue, it was a really gorgeous shade of blue and I felt so pleased that it wasn't this horrible little curled up pink thing. Urgh. It was this lovely blue colour I didn't know because it was my left ear that both my ears are equally awful, but he thought I could get away with one aid at the time or may be he thought that is all I could afford. So I got this nice little blue thing which I decided I quite liked the look of, it wasn't you know and it fitted quite well. And I had proper after care, because there was a little book I had to fill out. I had to think about how I was coping with it in different situations and make notes about how it was helping or how it was not helping. And I went back for another appointment and he tweaked it a wee bit on this machine and went away and I came back and tweaked it again. And it was until till I

was happy with it that I had to pay anything. Then I could still go back for appointments. I didn't have to pay anything else.

Erm, let's just get the timescale right. When did you go to the first private bloke?

The first one the one that hurt my ear?

No I don't mean the disastrous one if Livingstone?

Not the disaster in Livingstone, the good guy.

The good one in Edinburgh when was that?

That was roundabout 2003 okay.

Yes, and what was the effect of the aids when you got them this from good guy?

Well it was just one aid in my left ear and it did help a bit.

A bit?

It did help a bit. And my husband told me that it helped a bit. He reckoned that I was picking him up better.

Yes? Were you aware of any improvement?

A little bit, it helped a little bit.

Can you think of a situation?

Importantly I told people at work about it. But I only told the people that I knew best in my department. I didn't tell everybody I didn't put it in the school news sheet or anything. Mrs Thallon is deaf. I just sort of I found it terribly hard to tell people. I remember having to -- well I remember deciding I had to tell the school secretary and I had to tell my boss.

Why?

Because it was only right that they should know. I was not expecting them to do anything about it, I had no idea there was anything that could have been done to hem at work. But I felt that they ought to know and it was part of me trying to be brave about this thing. Arghh and I remember going and saying 'I have come to tell you that you know', I cannot even remember the words I used but 'I have got a hearing aid that I am finding it difficult to make people out and I have got a hearing aid now'. And they said 'well that is fine'.

[01:08:23]

Do you think your coming out made a difference?

At that time yes, it was a little tiny step really at that point. The big, big difference in coming out, the big, big difference about how I feel about my hearing impairment has actually been LINK or Hearing Concern LINK as it is now.

You think the effects on your own feelings were more important?

Yes, the effect on how I feel about myself. I don't feel that I have done something wrong. I don't feel ... I still get frustrated by it but I don't blame myself for it. I have got more understanding of it and I also very importantly am aware that there a heck of a lot of people that have got the same sort of problem and much, much, much more profound problem than I have. I didn't know there was such a term as deafened. And I think a little bit before I found LINK I had -- I was being more proactive in trying to do things to help myself. I suppose because my hearing was dropping offer quite a bit in the last five years it has got quite noticeably worse, I suppose I had to do as much as I could. I couldn't get away with it any longer. And I did find a lipreading class. Well actually the first thing I did was I went to a deafness day, Deaf Communication Day. I saw an advert for it somewhere and this was a big conference in Glasgow. I thought well I should go and find out more about this and I want to Glasgow and I heard about the there were workshops an there were different sort of things that were on offer and I heard about lip reading classes and thought that would be good.

What did you learn at the lip reading class?

At the lip reading class I learned about communication strategies, John. Did I learn lipreading, no. I think I learned about lip reading and the teacher was smashing, this was in Dunfermline I found a class in Dunfermline which is only about 20 minutes drive from where I live and an evening class. And it was about you know stuff like sitting in the right place in a restaurant, where you would have the best chance of hearing. All that sort of stuff was really practical, really helpful and great fun. But in the group I was still the only deafened person. There was a guy who was -- had become deaf when he was not until he was about he must have been nearer 80 I think.

I see yes?

But I was the only person. The other people were hearing so I didn't get any feel of community there. But it was really interesting. I learned a lot and I did then get the idea that may be I wasn't the only person that had hang ups about this. And from there I heard about LINK there from the hearing the lipreading tutor. And I went on the internet and found out more. After a few false starts actually, because I didn't get a reply to the first couple of emails to the English branch but then I got a link for the Scottish branch and right away Linda got back in touch with me. Suddenly I found that there was a whole lot of stuff on offer. I met the criteria for being deafened even though, well as you know it is a sort of very gradual hearing loss that I have got. Oh and do you know I have never said the chap in Edinburgh, they explained to me that he thought my hearing loss was because of certain antibiotics that I took in the 50s when I was a little girl. Apparently there was an antibiotics around at that time, I certainly had quite a few childhood illnesses and there were antibiotics they didn't know that the side effect, the long-term side effect was it kills off your sensory hair cells. And he thinks that it is most likely that that is what has happened to me.

[01:13:05]

Did that knowledge change your attitude?

Yes.

In what way?

I had no idea that it could be traced back to there. I had no idea why it was happening to me and it helped to know.

Did it make you feel different about yourself though?

I did it helped it did help to have a reason. And I suppose because it was an interesting reason. Everybody has got an interesting reason, but I didn't know anybody else that had the problem.

Yes?

And I thought that is really interesting that is stuff and I remembered taking all sorts of and you know I missed quite a bit of school in my first year at school and my hearing was perfect in those days. I thought that is that is really interesting so I looked into that bit and yes, I think it is quite probable that that is what caused it. So yes that is interesting. And I met one other chap through LINK that thinks that is probably why he had the same hearing loss. Anyway.

What got you back to the NHS audiologist then?

What brought me back. Well, I had got involved with LINK by that point and I had been on a self-management days. Now, there's two things that LINK do. There is the intensive five day residential course.

Yes?

And I thought well that is not for me, it is far too intensive and I am not going to take a week off my work and my husband would not want to come with me to that anyway. It sounds too high level for me. But then they told me about the self-management thing, which was three separate Saturdays over three months and in Glasgow it is not too far.

So you didn't have to go to Eastbourne?

I might have loved to go to Eastbourne but no I only had to go to Glasgow. And I was a bit apprehensive about going but I am so glad I did, because that was the first time that I met other people with very similar experience to me.

How many?

How many.

Yes how many on the course?

There were about, I can't remember, about 6, 7 of them in the group. And then you know the facilitator, who had a cochlear implant and another lady that came along, Jan. Who had a cochlear implant, and the palantypist and then the organiser, the Scottish organiser Linda. And the course was excellent, it was so well run. Very, very well organised and it was social, but it was -- it allowed you to talk. You could hear without exhausting yourself because you had the palantypist, all the time, and you could relax. And people were speaking to you using communication tactics, it was wonderful. It was so liberating. I was completely lit up about it. I was lit up about it. Oh.

[01:16:23]

How did that affect your social life back at home?

Well I started to tell people about it didn't I? Because it was so interesting. I said you know what I have been doing ill am over in Glasgow and I went to the Mitchell Library and we had this self-management group and it was so it was really empowering is a buzz word I know, but it was empowering, it was you know self-oh you just felt better about yourself and you saw these fabulous role models of people who, I don't know, had had much more dramatic stories than mine, you know much more, there was a guy I will never ever forget him who had completely lost his hearing over the space of listening to one track of music on the radio. Oh, I'll never forget him. And that is not uncommon, well it is uncommon but it is not unheard of. And you know, just lots of people had had depression, and stress and everybody had had some sort of difficulties. Whether they were their hearing was I are still got a lot of my

hearing compared to people that don't have any hearing, I know that. And I don't know whether I will still have it tomorrow or in 20 years time because you cannot tell. But if I was to lose all my hearing tomorrow I am certain that it would not be nearly as bad because, it sounds a bit evangelical but it is true for me, because I have found LINK, and I would know who to get in touch with to help. I would know that there would be other people who would be able to listen to me and help me and give me tips and just be examples of 'get out there, and get on with it' and know what your entitlements are as well. And just feel more powerful about it. And that was such a big thing in my life. And I wish, I wish I had found them 10 years ago.

What about work?

Well, interestingly a quick drink of water here getting emotional.

I have run out of tissues, I think.

Don't you worry I have got tissues I have got tissues the perfect interviewee.

[01:18:48]

Work?

Yes work you see. The promotion that I got I don't know whether it is coincidence or it must have been coincidence to begin with I my that my hearing was getting worse and I was losing the bits that helped me make sense of speech as much. And at the same time I got this quite major promotion into a new role, a newly created role.

Did you have to apply for the job?

Yes.

Tell me about the application?

The application, well.

Well you will probably guess what am thinking, did you confront the deafness issue when you were applying for the job?

Absolutely not. Absolutely not I remember the first time I confessed if you like because I think that is how it felt to me, the first time I confessed on a form do you consider you have a disability I think it was actually when I was applying for a new library card and I can picture myself in Kirkcaldy library filling in the form for my new library card in the public library came to the box at the foot and thought 'okay' and gave it a tick I felt so much better. I thought right good be up front about it. The job was within the school that I already was a principle teacher, so it was within the same school but they changed the way that they were organising promotion in Fife at that time and they decided that they wanted to introduce coordinating role over 4 departments. And it sounded like an interesting idea to me, but I thought I don't know how good an idea it is. I don't know if it will be a doable job, but basically there were a couple of other people from within the school who were going for it and I thought well if one of them gets it, they will be my boss and I could not bear the idea of that, because (laughter) I thought right well I don't want them to be my boss. Maybe not philosophically on exactly the same line as they are, so I thought I'll go for it I will go for it. And I went for it and various other people went for it so I got it anyway. In the interview situation it was still okay at that point. You know, there were how many people interviewing us? I think there was only three people and I knew all their voices, no there was one of them I didn't know. But her voice was okay for me. And it was in a quiet room and I did most of the talking so that was all right. I must have said some of the right things. So, it went okay the interview was fine.

But you told the head teacher about your problem your hearing loss?

Yes. Yes I am trying to remember it all happened roundabout the same time. I think that it was all happening about the same time and I think I told him at the end of the summer holidays and they were looking at that new job then they probably forgot about it.

Anyway you got it?

Yes well.

Tell me about doing it?

Yes that is how I got it. Tell you about doing it? It is a very hard job, it was to do with managing change as well. And it was to do with making one bigger team out of what was four smaller teams. And there were quite a number of teachers, and then a lot of support assistants, so there were maybe about 35 people that I was their line manager. And there was some resentment from one woman in particular, who didn't believe that the more integration of the different parts of support for learning was a good idea and also they had not given her the job even though she had gone for it so she went off sick for a year and a half, so that was fine, but she came back as well so... that was another story. Anyway, it was a big learning curve for everybody and I went for it 100 per cent. Put in far too many hours for it and there was at that time in Scotland there was a change in the law and there was a new act of Parliament to do with support for learning. And additional support needs. So there was lot of new legislation coming in and that came within my role as well. And a great deal to do with contacting different people and meeting with different professionals and I still see kids but not very much. It is more managing the staff and coordinating things. And it was stressful.

[01:24:13]

Just tell me what your typical working day consisted of?

Getting to work increasingly early, 7.30 and trying to get through my emails. Having different people needing me to do things, you know it could be an educational psychologist or it could be the head teacher or it could be a member of staff. There was no typical day to be honest. My timetable, you know how teachers have timetables and it would be very compartmental mine was blank. And I knew I had deadlines for a lot of things. You never knew when the next deadline was going to come because you weren't in control of it.

Describe your work place?

My work place. I moved from being in with my little learning support department, which was only there were 4 teachers and 3 support assistants, to I was taken away from there and put into a little office by myself. I was quite isolated. Which was part of a classroom in one of

the other departments, one of the departments to do with kids with physical difficulties and more extreme learning needs. The department of additional support. Anyway, so I was kind of isolated there anyway. In a way as far as the hearing went, because I certainly was not in classrooms anymore I was never in a classroom any more, I still did one-to-one work with kids, which became increasingly difficult, and I had a phone and the phone was quite a good phone. Most of the time that was okay I was very, very lucky with that. But I was out and about a lot. I would be buzzing off up three flights of the you know about 1,000 kids in the secondary school may be buzzing off up to this meeting here and over to that meeting there it was quite physical but there was also a lot of sitting down at the computer, which was not terribly good for my sore neck actually. So, there was -- I feel that it was a stressful job. There were people needing you for so many things and you never knew what was coming next and inevitably because there were so many people in the team, I mean you cannot make a team of 36 people you have got to have subgroups within that. But there were personality differences between different members of staff and it was my job to manage that as well. So you would have, well if it was kids you would call it bullying, but you would have one member of staff actually bullying another member of staff and they separately come to me about it to try and work through that dispute if you like. So----

What was the power relationship?

The power relationship.

Were you the boss?

Aye, yes. I was what was called or am what is called a curriculum leader. So, it was sort of one step up from a principal teacher, because I had four departments rather than one department and but then so it is kind of middle management, but above me there are deputy heads and the head teacher. So, I was neither fish flesh nor good red herring.

How would you describe your management style?

How would I describe my management style? I think I am a facilitator. I am keen to help people break down barriers. I would rather negotiate with people than say 'this is what you will do'. But equally I think I am quite good at, there is a huge amount of paperwork

involved in this kind of work and writing documents and plans using very specialised language. And I think I can take what people are saying and make it into a document and say 'right there you go'. I am also okay at telling them 'this is the way that it is'. And I can be assertive.

Good?

I can be assertive I have got to be. I can be quite firm. But yes, I think I can be open as well.

You are not still doing this job?

Yes I am.

You are still doing this job so we are talking in the past tense but this is a job you are doing now?

I am talking the past tense John because in the summer I have decided to give up.

You have?

I am going to.

Tell me about that?

I am going to take early retirement in the summer. That is to do with my health actually. There they are restructuring again in my education authority and they need to save money. And if I go they will save money because they will not replace me. They will break the job down. It turned out to be a job that was far too big for one person. The remit was huge and I kept just trying to do it. I made myself ill. So anyway, when I go in the summer they will save money because they will bring somebody in who has a narrower role and they will pay that person less and then they will take the other bits of my role and I don't know what they are going to do with them actually I imagine the deputies or senior manager also do it I don't know. But I got quite ill twice over the six years and my hearing had to be something to do with that. I the way I explain it to myself was that the job was too big and however hard I

worked and however long I worked, I was never going to get to the end of it. And it stressed out. And I was off work on two different occasions because of that for a period of a month the first time and a couple of years later for 5 weeks and it was horrible. I was I have never been like that before. Awful I don't ever want to be like that again. But at the same time my hearing was deteriorating, and it is really sad for me that I can't make out all the children's voices any more. You know a kid comes and says something to me and I can't be confident I am going to be able to make it out. Have to ask somebody else what the kid has said. There is still a lot of good stuff they do, but it is disappointing you know. But the main thing is that with the hearing going down and with the just the job just I couldn't get on top of it the way I had been on top of the previous job so after the last time I was off which was just in September last year, interestingly roundabout the time that I found LINK, I knew that was a coincidence, but I decided this time I have got to sort it out because management does not seem to be able to sort it out. About the job size. So, I am going to limit myself to the hours that I work. So instead of working all the hours and weekends, I stopped doing it. I still go to work quite early, but I come away earlier, I don't stay until they lock the place up any more. And I don't work at weekends anymore. I do not will not do any school work at the weekends. And so the job still does not get done but I am awful lot healthier for it. But my husband has found it really difficult seeing me getting so stressed, and well we have talked about it a great deal and I have finally decided the best thing for me to do is to move on and move away from teaching.

[01:32:25]

When will you actually walk out of that job then?

The 3rd July at about 1.30 pm I think.

You go along to the end of the academic year do you?

Yes, yes.

But you are just taking this?

So that will be four years in primary and 25 in secondary so that will be 29 years in education.

Does your decision about the job make any difference to your effectiveness at work do you think?

What do you mean my decision to leave will that make me more...

Do you think your colleagues will see you in a different light now?

What because I are decided to leave.

Because you have announced your departure I mean?

I think, now I am going to overcome the Scottish bit again, I think despite everything I am pretty good at what I do.

Sorry?

I am pretty good at what I do, despite the hearing, despite the stress and I think that I certainly appreciate I have a huge respect for an awful lot of that my colleagues do in support for learning. I have a huge respect for them. And I think they return that to be honest. I think... you know what it is like, you leave and the waters close over and I will be hopefully more of a fond memory than a 'thank God she has gone' memory but the waters will close over and that will be fine. And nobody is going to die. But yes I think I have a pretty good relationship with my departments and I think some of them are really worried to know what is going to happen to the bits of the job that they are aware that I do a lot for. But that is life isn't it? So I am not feeling guilty about it.

[01:34:30]

So what is going to happen next?

What is going to happen next. Well, the NHS thing, is part of this as well, when I went back to the NHS that was because of access to work in fact. I got I found out about a crowd called the Fife Sensory Impairment Service and I was interested to know about assessment of help in

the work place this was just last year. When I thought well may be there is more out there to help me in the work place, I cannot hear the period bells you know the bell rings I am in my office and the bell rings an everybody else is reacting to the bell and I cannot hear it if the fire alarm goes off I cannot hear that either because it is out of my hearing range so too bad. So, I got in touch with this terrific development officer woman who came out and spent a long time with me finding out about the effect of my hearing on my job. And then she said 'well there are things that can help you here, but you have got the wrong kind of hearing aids'. By that time I had two hearing aids. But they didn't have the T position. They couldn't pick up the induction loop stuff and she said 'you need to have an urgent referral to the NHS to get different hearing aids'. So I did that and fascinating, really good. The Kirkcaldy lot I do not praise them enough they keep having me back and tweaking things a bit further and what I need to tell you about is the latest part of my story, on Friday, this is just Sunday, on Friday the last day of the term, I had another check up with the audiologist NHS in Kirkcaldy and a new practitioner I had been referred to, well new to me she is very experienced, and she listened to how he was getting on with my new hearing aids which I think are fine, they are very comfortable and they help a bit and she said 'they should be helping an awful lot more than they are'. I said 'well they are fine you know I am quite happy with them, I use the T position and that helps a bit and I have got a personal listening system that I am trying out. And that helps a bit some of the time in some meetings and you know that is quite acceptable about this I am feeling much better about my hearing and blah blah blah'. She said no, you should be hearing a lot more than you are given the kind of hearing loss and given the augmentation that these aids are giving me. And she says that she thinks that I may well have something called auditory processing disorder. Auditory processing disorder. I had heard that phrase, because it is something that some kids have but what I didn't know was that it can be acquired in adult life as well. What it means is that I can hear the sounds, but I can't make out what they are. So I hear noise, in conversation, and especially if there is a lot of people like in meeting, but I can't make out what people are saying the brain is not making sense of the sounds that I hear. And apparently the theory is, anyway, that this condition can be majorly affected by stress. So I am now just at the point I am reframing my understanding of what is happening to me and I am thinking 'yes I have got a hearing loss, yes'. And this auditory processing disorder can happen with people that do not have any hearing loss apparently, they can have perfect hearing but they cannot make sense of sounds. And it can be because of this. Well I don't have perfect hearing, I have got a very definite hearing loss, but with these aids that I have got I should be hearing much better than I am and I am not.

And she says that stress well that makes a huge amount of sense when you think about the way that my hearing has been falling off and the stress in my life increased enormously with this job that I have been doing for 6 years. Maybe it has not been a coincidence the two things.

This is to suggest if you remove the stress it will get better then?

Apparently it does not go away, but there is a possibility that with sort of retraining, I don't know much about it yet John. But because I only heard on Friday, but apparently there is some sort of way of retraining. I suppose it must be may be a wee bit like when you get a cochlear, and you sort of retrain your brain to break things up into sound bites and so on. It is possible that may be a couple of years down the line particularly as I am retiring in the summer and one would hope that is going to take the major part of stress negative stress out of my life, that it is possible that with my hearing aids I might actually start to be able to hear better in situations, the many situations that I find really difficult just now. And that I can't believe that is the going to happen, to me it will be, well you can imagine yourself I am quite sure, it would be amazing if it did. I am not expecting it, but it is very, very interesting and it is, you know, I am very keen to find out about that but I am also very keen you were asking what I want to do. One of the things I definitely want to do when I stop working is carry on being involved with Hearing Concern LINK. And I think, you know, the whole inclusive bit about Hearing Concern LINK and meeting people, I know I went on about it earlier on in this interview but I just need to say it again, I just feel so much more positive and about the future I really feel that stopping work is going to be like taking off into something really good you know. And yes, I think I am actually much happier at work just now than I have been for the also last six years but once I made the decision that I was going to go and once I stopped killing myself with overwork I started to feel better about things. I rediscovered some of the joy of the job which is fantastic because I have put a lot into my work and I want to leave on a, feeling good about it I hope. But, it is not like the end of something, it is like I am not joking with Hearing Concern LINK that is definitely something I want to I have been doing this volunteering stuff, there is very excitingly for me if you think about my sort of life long interest in amateur dramatics I have been asked to do a drama workshop thing with deafened adults in Glasgow in May at a confidence and creativity day. And I am a bit scared about that but that is okay I quite often feel a bit scared about things and go and do them anyway. And some sort of a, because I have seen drama workshop help kids, it helped me when I was wee,

and it helps your confidence and your friendship skills and all sorts of stuff. And the idea of having a go at that, just a toe in the water with people like me deafened adults I think that is really interesting. I think one of the things about Hearing Concern LINK is that they with are a dynamic bunch they come up with ideas and follow it through. I got an email on Saturday somebody had said 'Ann Thallon she could come along and she could do that' to some sort of talk or other so I got this you know somebody asking me to come and talk to some people. I thought me, oh right I could do that. And it is a lovely, lovely feeling. So that is definitely going to be part of my next bit of my life.

[01:43:09]

What do you feel about the issue of cochlear implants then?

That was interesting. I had a couple of outreach volunteers came out to my house to meet me and my husband, that must have been September or so because it was just when I first got in touch with LINK. And the chap was just on the point of getting an assessment for a cochlear implant and he was all bound and determined this was going to be, I hope I don't think he has had it yet, but I hope it works out for him. And I have seen it work out for quite a number of people that I have met now. I think if my hearing goes completely or gets down to the 40 per cent level that they talk about, I would be very, very interested in doing that, that would be a way forward. My hearing has not -- is not like that yet and we just do not know what the future holds. But I do know that I would have loads of people that I would be able to get in touch with, I would want to research it really, really thoroughly and I would be able to do that and when we finish this interview you can tell me what you think about it once we have finished this interview tell me afterwards yes but yes.

I am going to pause just for a second.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me or talk to me about in relation to this?

Well John I have talked for absolutely ages and really enjoyed doing it. It is even talking about it brought more things to my mind that I have not really thought through properly before and yet I have thought about my hearing increasingly so for decades now. I think we have covered everything that needs to be said to be honest. And I would think that if they

were revisiting the unheard stories in ten years time I would probably have some more to add to it I bet you would too. So, yes I think if I had any -- what I would really like to do now that I am in a place where I can talk about it and in fact sometimes you have to stop me talking about it, I am so up front about it 'Oh lord she is on about her hearing again you know'. But I would.

That is what we are here for today.

But you know I was saying at one point I wish I had found out about this, or I had had a better attitude to myself ten years ago. I would love to think that may be through Hearing Concern LINK that I would be able to get in touch with people who if they knew about stuff earlier on it would help them. They wouldn't have this sort of length of time that I have taken, you know. If there was some way. It is about inclusion, and you know deafened people have got just as many rights as anybody else and I can see that deafened people do not have the same -- well they do have the same entitlements but that does in the mean to stay that they get them. And if there is the anything I think talking is very powerful and I think that coming out about it and talking to people and helping them get the help that they need when they need it if there is anyway that we, as an organisation, can do that then what an impact on people's lives. And not just on the deafened person, but on their friends, their family, their children. And this is going the sound really well it is not airy fairy because I really believe it, if you have got an inclusive society then you have got a good society. If you have got people that accept people's differences, then that is the kind of society that I want to be part of. And now I am including myself in that. And I didn't before. So:

Yes that is good?

That is it.

Well, I think we have used up a fair bit of time. I feel very privileged that you shared this with me. And so I think the best thing is just to say thank you very much and we will stop it there.
Pause.

[End of recording]