



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Dave Barnett
Interviewed by Roland Newton

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IMPORTANT

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The British Library		Oral History	
Interview Summary Sheet			
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[Track 1]

Okay. The date is 30 May and this interview is being carried out in Nottingham to record the oral history of deafened people. Deafened people are those who use the spoken language for communication, but have acquired a severe profound hearing loss. To avoid the communication problem due to hearing loss, the interviewer is being supported by palantype, which provides a verbatim, real-time text display of all that is said. Our palantypist today is Cate Oates. My name is Roland Hilton, and I am deafened, and today I'm interviewing Dave who is also deafened. So, Dave, can you please introduce yourself by telling us your full name and date of birth?

Yes, my full name is David Barnett and my date of birth is 13/11/1958.

To get an overview, so that we can see your answers and have a bit of background, I would like just to ask a few questions first that are fairly general. Where were you born?

I was born in Leicester in the UK.

Where do you live now?

I live in Melton Mowbray.

Have you always lived in the Leicester area?

I've always lived in the Leicestershire area, with a brief period in London.

Do you have any brothers, sisters?

Yes, I have five sisters and one brother.

Quite a big family. What has been your main career so far? What sort of work have you done?

Since graduating in 1999, I started a career in information advice and guidance for

unemployed people and I've worked for different organisations in a similar role, mostly helping people that are generally excluded in society and also excluded in the labour market.

Starting with your childhood, what's your earliest memories, what are the first thing you remember?

My earliest memory in childhood is probably when I was three years old and we moved from -- to a new house. I was three years old and I remember standing out on the street all excited because of the new area. I don't remember much more than that.

Thinking about it, I even have a memory, for some reason, of standing in a cot when I was probably one years old and that, for some reason, has always stuck in my mind as a memory but I can't remember anything else.

Your mum and dad at this time, were they both employed?

My father was employed, he has been a painter and decorator. My mother was mostly a housewife with the occasional job, part-time job, but she was mostly a housewife.

What about your wider family, your grandparents, aunties, uncles; did you see a lot of them as a child, were they local or far away?

Yes, we did, we saw a lot of my dad's side of the family. We were very close at the time and we used to go out to visit them because my dad's brother also had a large family, so we used to have get-togethers a lot in a place called Kenilworth and get together at family parties quite a lot, but that was years ago.

What do you remember about the neighbourhood, the area where you lived? What was your impression of that as a child?

My neighbourhood, I lived there since I was three until I was probably in my -- yes, in my early twenties, so I have fond memories of my neighbourhood because we used to go round with friends out on the streets a lot and always get up to mischief. In those days you could go for miles without worry of -- the sort of worries that you get nowadays and the traffic wasn't so heavy, so I have fond memories of my childhood. So -- because we used to go around in

a gang -- and I say I have fond memories, but also I used to be bullied as well on the streets by other gangs, because I used to wear bifocal glasses and I had a really bad squint and of course a box-hearing aid, so I was always the object of making fun of by other lads generally.

[07:17]

You've told me that you had hearing loss as a child. How did that affect your relationships with other children? Was it a problem at that stage or just a sort of hindrance?

Yes, as I mentioned, I used to be bullied a lot by people, young kids, because of my disabilities, but I did have close friends that were supportive and, like I say, we used to go around in a small group. My school years -- I have fond memories of my school years, because it was a small school for the partially sighted. My parents had to decide whether I went to a school that caters for sight impairment or a school that caters for deaf people, and they decided on a school for sight impairment. I think that's made a difference to the rest of my life, I think, because through my education and communication skills I developed quite good reading skills and I was often used to demonstrate my reading abilities to visitors at the school. So it was quite a contrast, my life in school and my life on the streets, because I was bullied on the streets but I wasn't at school, because you know we all had a lot in common, it was only a very small school. I'm not sure if that answers that question.

No, certainly. What sort of hearing loss did you have at that stage? Did you have a hearing aid for example?

Yes, I had a hearing aid, a box hearing aid, with wires going to both ears. I was born severely -- well, severely deaf in one ear and hard of hearing in the other. But my parents treated me the same as any others in the family. So I wasn't treated in any special way because of it. But it brought its -- I mean it had its problems, particularly in the teenage years, the box hearing aid was something of an embarrassment to me, you know, because of having to -- you start to interact with the opposite sex so you start to get conscious of what you look like and the box hearing aid was something of an embarrassment which I used to try and hide, which was quite comical really, I used to grow my hair and wear clothes and hide the wires in my shirt so it goes to the back of my head, and it was a right performance trying to get ready to go out clubs and that at that time, so when the behind of ear hearing aid came

I thought it was a God-send.

So you were quite conscious of your differences at that early age?

Yes, I was, very -- not necessarily, as I say, when I was very young, but I became much more conscious from my teens onwards.

Did you feel at that stage it was a case of finding the right friends, you were sort of looking for people who were supportive and trying to avoid others who were perhaps rather discriminating?

What stage would that be?

Well, when you were at school, sort of, in your early years, before teenagers?

Right, I wasn't at that stage looking for the kind of support, because it seemed to be already there. The school I was going to was very supportive and I had a -- I have a sister who was also born with a sight and hearing impairment, so we went to the same school and we were supportive of each other and I have friends in the school and friends at home as well, so I was quite happy with that sort of arrangement. I had a close family, so I wasn't really at that stage looking for anything more than that.

[12:36]

But did you find a difference between your school and family environment and the sort of general environment out in society?

Yes, I felt comfortable in the school and I seemed to fit in quite well. The teachers were good at communicating and the classes were very small. The acoustics weren't too bad and the friends I had, I didn't -- from what I remember -- have too much of a communication problem. Whereas at home, not necessarily with the family, but outside of the family, activities outside of the family, there were problems sometimes with communication and if I was to meet new people -- well, new people other than my friends, then it was sometimes difficult to sort of follow what was going on. But it was never a major thing that sort of had an effect on my

wellbeing, if you like.

So you were learning skills as a deafened person at a young age? Do you think that helped you really to come to terms with it at a young age, rather than find that difference later on in life?

Well that's -- the biggest difference I think was my parents' decision to send me to a sight impairment school, a school for partially sighted, rather than a deaf school, because the culture would have been extremely different. The communication aspects would have been different. I integrated with the hearing world, if you like, from a very early age, which is probably one of the reasons why I speak -- why I don't seem to have a speech impairment like some deaf people do. I had friends who went to deaf school and their communication needs were different from mine. They had speech impairments, a lot of them did, and they missed out a lot on -- through the education, because the education system was different in deaf schools than they are in either mainstream schools or the special school that I was at. So I think that made a huge difference to how I integrated within the hearing world and coped in that way.

We were starting to get on to your teenage years, how did you spend your weekends as a teenager in the evenings, what sort of things did you do?

As a teenager, I suppose I could say I was -- I used to go around with friends that you could say were -- but I always thought and it was obvious by the reactions of the opposite sex, by the girls, that my friends were good-looking guys and I always felt like in the background, and sort of left out. It was difficult because we were often on the look-out for girls and we would meet, go to clubs, or meet or if we saw a group of girls in the park then my friends would go over to them and talk to them, and because I had a really bad squint and a hearing impairment, my confidence was very, very low and I always felt inadequate with regards to communication, but one of the things that I had in my favour is that I think at that time I had the ability of making people laugh and I think that's one of the ways I dealt with my disabilities. I was always in the group -- I was always able to make people laugh in the group, but it didn't really help in finding any lasting relationships with girls. But it helped. But there was still the issue of being bullied, even in my teens, when we used to go to youth clubs, but there was never anything serious, just a lot of guys just making fun, which used to

affect me, because I just wanted to be like anybody else. So, yes, my teenage years, I would say, were quite tough for me, it was quite hard because of the wanting to be -- wanting to fit in, and I think I tried very hard, maybe too hard, to try and fit in. So I used to observe people a lot, and I was influenced by the behaviour of others in the group that were quite confident and during my late teens I started going out to discos and taking up dancing and I seem to have developed a talent -- according to other people -- in dancing so I used to go out to clubs a lot, sometimes with my friends but a lot of times on my own, and in doing this my confidence grew and my communication skills were still problematic because obviously discos were very noisy and dark places, so you know, I just used to go mostly because I enjoyed the dancing and that used to attract some attention, not always good, some of the girls seemed to be impressed with the dancing and the guys seemed to be -- at that time guys weren't dancing on the dance floor on their own, but I did, and for some reason it wasn't acceptable, and it used to cause some trouble sometimes. But it never stopped me. So I think that has made a difference to, you know, how I sort of got through the rest of my life, really.

[20:22]

So despite your deafness at that early age you mixed in groups quite a lot?

Yes, I didn't want to let it -- I mean I had learnt to cope with my deafness, and I was determined not to let it stop me doing the things I wanted to do. I think that's probably because one of the things that I wanted to do was impress people, especially the girls, and because I had a sight impairment as well, which was quite complicated, I was often going to the hospital and the doctors used to say to me that I wasn't allowed to do certain things, I wasn't allowed to dive in the pool, I wasn't allowed to hang upside down because it's something to do with the pressure of my eyes, and this prevented me from doing a lot of the things that I really wanted to do, but with regards to my hearing I didn't want that to sort of get in the way of doing the things I wanted to do. So sometimes it was a case of one step forward and two steps back because of the problems I had communicating, if I wasn't accepted or if I didn't fit in then I would often look for something or be with someone where I could fit in. But on the whole, I think that you know I could make friends quite easily with people that were maybe in similar situations to me, and I always felt that I had a lot to offer other people with any impairment, because you know, we had that in common. Yes, and I think that sort of attitude has helped me cope a lot better throughout the difficult times in my

life.

So in some ways your deafness helped you a lot, in that it was -- you were meeting problems because of your deafness, but it was driving you forwards to actually take on life and take on those problems as well?

Yes. Yes, I always tried to find ways of, if there was a problem or I was faced with a problem or I was prevented from doing things because of my deafness, I always tried to find a way around that. If I can't do it this way, then I must be able to do it another way. I was always looking out for new things. I think anybody that had hearing problems was always aware of the new things that were coming up to help them cope like the new hearing aids, like from box to behind your ear. It made a big difference to your confidence and it was always new developments like that that helped along the way. But I think it's just -- it does -- being deaf, whenever it happens in your life, it develops a sort of character in you that makes you what you are, really. I think one of the things I was very influenced by a friend of mine who was deaf, but he was part of the deaf community and I wasn't. But I was very influenced by his attitude to his deafness, he was very confident, he used technology -- everywhere he went he used to tell people before he started talking to them, "I'm deaf", so people would react accordingly and communication was better. I never did this during my early years, in my teenage years, when I was young. I was always very conscious of trying to cope without having to tell people about my hearing impairment. And it was part of my thinking that, to fit in and to be on a par with everybody else, I just wanted to have people thinking that, you know, I wasn't deaf. People couldn't tell, because I used to have my hair long over my ears, so it was quite a while before I realised that this wasn't the right approach and I started very gradually to tell people, "excuse me, I can't hear very well", but you needed confidence to do it. I found the more that I did it, the easier it got, and it's no problem now going anywhere and telling people that I am deaf. But I've found that it's not enough just to tell them that you are deaf, because they don't know how to respond to -- you know, how to communicate. So I tell people that I am deaf and I lipread. Generally that works quite well.

So is this that you didn't want to accept the word "deaf"? You wanted to be normal and not admit deafness?

Yes, that's right, yes.

You started initially saying to people that you are having difficulty hearing, rather than using the word "I'm deaf"?

When I started telling people that, yes, I started telling people that I am hard of hearing.

So it was a gradual acceptance, a sort of coming to terms with it, it was a long, slow process for you?

Yes, yes I began to realise that, in order to fit in, you had to let people know that you had a hearing impairment and let them know how -- what your preferred communication is. That could be either lip reading or writing or you whatever your preferred communication needs are. I found a lot of the times people responded accordingly.

[27:35]

At this time you had friends who were deaf as well. Were you making comparisons between your hearing friends and your deaf friends?

Yes, that's the problem, because I didn't -- I occasionally socialised with deaf people and deaf friends but that was only occasionally. Mostly I was with my hearing friends and in the hearing world. So when I was in the hearing world I was trying to fit in as a hearing person, but then when I was mixing with deaf people then, you know, I would try to fit in there as well. I couldn't sign at the time, but I could lipread and we had a lot in common, but I wasn't part of the deaf community, so it wasn't -- I only had one or two very close friends who were deaf at that time, but I had more hearing friends. So I would socialise mostly with my hearing friends and integrate within the hearing world a lot more, but then that would create more problems for me when I had to try and fit in.

What sort of character would you say you were at that stage? How would you describe your own character and personality?

You mean at this present time?

No, no, at that time, when you were sort of in your teenage years and so on.

At that time I was shy, very shy. I tended to be very comfortable with people that I knew well and wanted to be around people that I knew really well, and I was uncomfortable with people -- strangers, people that I didn't know very well. Women made me -- girls made me extremely uncomfortable. I was a nervous wreck around girls because I was so keen to make a good impression. Also, I was very family-oriented as well, very close to the family, so I did a lot of activities and fun things with the family as well as my friends. So I tended to be confident, or appear to be confident, with people that I knew, but if I was left, you know, sort of to go to new places and meet new people then I was very, very shy.

You mentioned shyness, but it seems to me that your deafness was giving you considerable determination to move on, is that right?

Yes. It started from my late teens to my early twenties, I started to try and deal with my shyness and, like I said earlier, I was influenced by other people who were very confident and I observed that the people's reactions to these people that were confident and found that people tended to want to sort of have more to do with the confident sort of people. So I was determined to become more confident and it was hard because it was difficult to be confident. For example, if I was to give you an example, then if we went to a pub and I had two or three friends of mine and there were some girls sitting over there, then my friends would walk to them but I would always be behind my friends, just follow them, and while they were all talking at the table then I wouldn't say a word, because I couldn't follow what they were saying but I was very shy. Also, I could never just go up to somebody in a pub and just start talking, because I would anticipate the problems, the communication problems, okay, so that was really problematic. But I was always in those sorts of situations. I never shied away from it, I was always in those situations because that's what my friends did and I followed suit. So really my confidence grew from that sort of situation, because then I used to go on my own, like I mentioned earlier, I used to go on my own to the discos and I was able to communicate with some of the ladies there, because I found that even though generally I had problems, there were some that I could communicate with that took -- that made the effort, made the extra effort, and I always looked for those that would make that extra effort. That made a difference to how we interacted. If there was big problems with the communication aspect too early on, then you know, it wouldn't continue, you know, I would move away or they would be put off and move away, so I tended to look for people where communication

was a lot easier. I found that women are generally better communicators than men.

So this was a case of being selective? There's plenty of fish in the sea; find the right ones?

I wouldn't say there was plenty of fish in the sea, because in those days it was hard to find people that were understanding and made that extra effort, they were hard to find in those days. They are probably nowadays much more educated and understanding, I would think.
[34:44]

You've mentioned your social life at that time, but were there any other influences in your life? Religion, politics, sport, big things like that that were a big interest?

Right, that's a question I need to think about. Religion never really -- no, politics no, sport; I was very sporty, very much into keeping fit. I was involved in sport in my early twenties I took up karate, which was a risk, which had obvious risks because of my eyesight, and the fact that I could only see out of one eye. In karate you are shouted out instructions and I wasn't always aware of what the instructions were, but I kept it up and generally fitted in quite well and was accepted within the group.

Yes, I would say sport was a fairly big influence in those days, because I was very sporty.

[End of Track 1]

[Track 2]

So a little earlier you mentioned graduating. Can you tell us what happened after you left school?

After I left university?

Yes, please -- no, after you left school. You went to university, can you tell us a little bit about that?

After I left school I was unemployed for -- in and out of work for years. I worked with my dad as a painter, helping in the painting and decorating, so I worked in the building trade, which nowadays would be unheard of. Then eventually I got a job in 1985 in Remploy, working in a Remploy factory in Leicester and I was there for ten years and then I decided to leave to take a degree, because I was aware that in order to progress I needed to improve my education. So I started off taking a couple of GCSEs at night school, and then I left Remploy to study full-time for a degree.

Does that answer your question? I'm not --

Yes, yes, I was confused I thought you had probably taken a degree soon after leaving school but you had a gap?

No, no, I was -- at school, I had I would say two O-levels that were low grades in history and English, so I never really -- I had a very low level education and I was never very ambitious, I just wasn't very motivated to work, other than financially. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. The fact that I had a hearing impairment and sight impairment made it very difficult for me to get access to any kind of jobs, because at that time employers were not very well-educated and not very -- they were very particular about taking on people with disabilities at that time, so I would say that discrimination was quite rife in those days with regards to getting access to employment. I had a dual sensory impairment, and even though I didn't advertise that fact when I went to interviews for jobs, it was apparent because of my communication problems and the glasses that I wore in those days just after leaving school with bifocal and I had a big squint so it was quite apparent. But later on I started wearing contact lenses and then I had a behind of ear hearing aid, so it wasn't so apparent but I still

have difficulty accessing jobs which is why I started working with my father in the building trade. That was another experience in itself.

As you moved on to take your degree, was that a concern because of the difficulties of communication and hearing?

I never had any confidence; I never considered taking a degree because I never thought that I had the capability of being able to do so. It was only when I met a lady much later on in 1994, and she was the one who suggested -- because I was trying to leave Remply to progress, I wasn't getting anywhere, I was ambitious in work and I wanted to progress and I couldn't. She suggested that, you know, taking a degree and initially I just thought that, you know, it wouldn't be possible, but then when I looked into it a lot more they sort of talked me into -- they seemed to know about my abilities more than I did and whether I had the potential, so I decided to take the risk of leaving a full-time, permanent job at Remply and go into full-time education with a view to obtaining the degree and that's what I did.

Why the change? You struggled a little at school to get your qualifications and later on in life you've done quite well. Any reason for that?

What period are we talking about now then?

Well I'm trying to contrast the time between your school years, when you didn't get the qualifications to do a degree and move on, and later in life when you've achieved it.

And your question, sorry, what was the question?

What made the difference? Did you find that the education was better in many ways that helped you to sort of carry on?

What it was, at school it was a special school and during the first, I would say, ten years or maybe eight years of my school life we weren't doing anything to work up towards taking a qualification. The pupils were not taking qualifications and it was only when a new teacher started and he initiated and talked the headmistress into the importance of pupils leaving school with qualifications such as O-levels and when that started I was probably 13 or

14 years and very used to not studying hard in school. That wasn't part of the -- there was no school curriculum, you just meant -- well, there may have been a curriculum to the teachers but the pupils just learned from what the teachers decided to teach. But then O-levels were introduced very later on in school, and I found it very difficult to motivate myself to do the required studying in order to be successful in getting the O-levels. I never saw the importance of it until much later in life. I was never very ambitious. I always thought that I would never be able to get a job, employers won't be able to accept me, so I always went for the low-level type jobs anyway. I was never very confident in my abilities, in what I could do, until very much later. Between the time that I went to school and that I left Remploy to take a degree, my confidence had improved quite significantly and a lot of that was, I would say I would be thankful to Remploy for because I developed a lot of confidence in my abilities during the ten years at Remploy, because I began to realise that I was very good at picking up and learning quickly and picking up new ideas and problem-solving. So I began to identify my strengths in a working environment, but also I had the ability to learn as well, so by the time I decided to take a degree as an option then I was a lot more, a lot more, confident in my abilities than I was when I left school.

[09:35]

I want to stick with this. If you had been given more motivation at school and the school had had higher expectations of you, do you think you might have continued on into higher education straight away?

Yes, I think if we were encouraged to go into -- to do a lot of studying to pass exams, if we started doing that from an early age like they do at schools today, and I got used to that sort of studying, then yes, I think I may have gone into further education, but the difficulty was that going from a special school where your communication needs are catered for and then moving on to a college from that school, I think I would have found it extremely difficult to integrate and to manage within the colleges in those days, because they didn't have the support for disabled students or for students that had hearing impairments or sight impairments. There was no support there. So I mean I wasn't aware of this at the time, I'm just thinking back on, you know, of what might have happened if I had continued into education. So I strongly suspect that if I did go into college, then I don't think I would have kept it up because of the problems. I would be missing out on too much on what they were

teaching because there wouldn't have been any support there from the teachers and the students. That support became available much later, when I started the degree at Rempoy, because then I had access to communication support, and also the university was very keen on making sure that I was supported in ways other than just the communication support.

[11:58]

We talked earlier about your social life as a teenager, when you were chasing the girls, did you have any success, have you a partner today?

I was a late starter with regards to relationships with women. There were a few very brief relationships during my late teens and early twenties, but the first serious relationship I had started when I was 23. Yes, I don't really know what more to say about that, other than I was a late starter.

Do you have a partner today or not? Are you single?

Yes, I'm married. I have been married since 2003, but I have been with my wife since 1994.

Do you have any family?

No. I come from a large family, with lots and lots of nieces and nephews, so I've never really had a strong desire to have children and I don't think that it's right for me to have children just because either it's expected of me or it's considered the norm.

Your wife, does she accept your deafness or does she find it difficult?

No, my wife didn't even know I had a hearing impairment because she was so easy to lip read that I never found a need to let her know when I first met her. I first met her, it was just through dancing. I've always been involved in dancing, from disco dancing to line dancing and I met her through line dancing, but we didn't get involved until much later. So we sort of communicated as acquaintances, friends, through the dancing and she never really realised -- I don't know why she didn't notice my hearing aid, but she never really realised that I had much of a hearing impairment. I suppose it's because I could follow the beat of the

music quite well, because the line dancing involved partner dancing and you would change partners, and I never had trouble keeping up with the beat, I always had a good sense of rhythm and maybe people think that people with hearing impairments don't necessarily have a good sense of rhythm.

[15:41]

When you were a child, you had a body-worn box aid, what were the next steps in help provided for you? Presumably as an adult you followed that up to see if there were any advances? What was your response with the NHS?

The box hearing aid -- I found the box hearing aid, the hearing quality in the box hearing aid really good. It was only during my teens that I was conscious of it, because it was big and bulky and it interfered with looking trendy in your fashionable clothes and it was always noticed by other people and the object of poking fun at. People would tend to -- one of the things that they thought was funny was to sort of bend down and speak into it, as if they are speaking into a radio. So you know, one of the reasons why I tried to sort of hide it and make it not so obvious. So when they progressed from the box aid to the behind-the-ear hearing aids, I thought, you know, that was really good because it wasn't so obvious, but the quality -- I remember the quality of sound wasn't as good and I think that's because the box aid catered for both ears and they were very, very powerful as well. I think the behind-the-ear hearing aids were not so powerful, so it was pros and cons about having the box aid and pros and cons about having the behind-the-ear. As a teenager, I think behind-the-ear, for reasons of vanity, were much more preferable, I would say.

Did you actually wear behind-the-ear aids?

Yes. Well I had to. I couldn't -- I was so dependent on the hearing aids, the hearing aids made a big difference to communicating with other people.

So when you met the NHS to get those aids, did you get any other help? Were you referred to lipreading classes or did you get any help with equipment on at the present you and so on?

What period are we talking?

When you switched over, when you changed from the box aid to the behind-the-ear aid?

No, that's the only thing at that time that was offered. Lipreading classes never even considered it. I was naturally lipreading people anyway, and I never felt is desire or a need to go to lipreading classes, if ever there were any. I was never aware if there were any lipreading classes anyway and as for other help, no, I wasn't offered anything else other than the behind-the-ear hearing aid.

Did you feel there was any other professional help you wanted at that stage? Were you getting what you wanted?

Erm, hmm. I don't think there was anything else that could have been offered. In order for me to answer that question, I need to be aware of what else there was available, what else was on offer, so to say, you know, if I wanted anything else, then I need to be aware of what else there was. So I wasn't aware of any of the kind assistance to make communication easier for me at that time. So I never really thought, you know, about what I wanted, because I didn't think that there was anything there that I could want, if you understand what I mean.

Were you having any other sort of problems at that time, dizziness, balance, tinnitus?

No, not at that time. I experienced the occasional tinnitus that lasted maybe ten seconds. I experienced the occasional vertigo which only seemed to happen early in the morning after waking up and it was sort of very extreme vertigo and that only lasted no more than ten or 15 seconds and it would pass and that would be it and it was only occasional so I never thought it was a concern. That was during my teens.

At this time you presumably couldn't use a telephone?

No.

Were you offered any help in that respect? Did you find it any problem? Would you have valued some useful means of Typetalk or similar things?

They never had Typetalk in those days. They never had phones with volumes on. They didn't have any phones that, I believe, deaf people could use, or at least I wasn't aware of them. So I just didn't use it. I just didn't use the phone until much later, when they started introducing loops and you could get phones with loops and powerful volume controls and tone adjustments.

[23:10]

To what extent do you feel that other people have been willing to modify their behaviour to help you?

Are we talking about my teenage young days?

Well, I'm sort of talking now in your middle life, when you perhaps -- after your school years, you are sort of moving out into society. Do you feel other people have been obstructive, very obstructive, or helpful?

People in my -- when I was in my twenties I found that -- it depends on what it is that I wanted to do, whether people were obstructive. It's difficult to answer that, because I'm trying to think of particular examples, but I think in general I found that -- I was able to communicate fairly effectively because I could lip read and because my hearing aid, you know, in a quiet environment -- it really depended on the environment I was in. Obstructions were usually caused by your surroundings or whatever situation you were in, not necessarily people. People were not necessarily intentionally obstructive, because you know, they were not aware of my problems, but if they were then they probably would be considered obstructive in that their lack of education and understanding about my communication needs made it very difficult and in a lot of cases, if people had to make that extra effort, they were often put off by any further communications with me. So I found that when I met new people and they were initially very friendly and willing to chat, then I found that in a lot of cases, when they have to make an extra effort and they realise they have to make that extra effort, then they tended to, in a subtle manner, you know, avoid me. I was often aware of this, and probably more keenly aware than people realised. Once I realised that there was -- that people felt awkward in my company because of the communication aspect, then I would avoid them as well, so I never made the effort. I only made the effort with people -- with

other people that were prepared to make the effort. So it was always a case of being selective about who you made friends with and who you communicated with.

[26:50]

Can we move on a little bit now. You've got your degree. What was that in?

That was -- it's a long title. It's Public Administration and Managerial Studies. I didn't realise it at the time, but I knew somebody who was doing a degree and they were explaining what was involved in the degree and they made it sound quite interesting, but unbeknown to me at that time, it was mostly politics and I was very ignorant of politics. But once I gave up a job -- I gave up a full-time job, so I had to do it. It was case of not whether I was intelligent or clever enough, it was a case of how much work I was prepared to put into it in order to succeed. I was determined to succeed, because I was determined to get the sort of work that I really wanted to do and get some job satisfaction at the end of the degree. It would be something that would be extremely satisfying, because I never, ever thought it was possible that I had the potential to take a degree, because of my dual sensory impairment I always thought that that would make it much too difficult for me to get the information that I needed, get access to the information that I needed to be able to succeed in getting a degree.

How did things move on after that? Did you find it easy to get a job with the degree or was it still as difficult as ever?

I found it a lot easier than I did when I left school. I was much more confident. I knew -- whilst I was taking the degree, I wasn't sure what career I was going to take, because it wasn't a degree that focused on any particular area. So I had to think about what sort of work that I wanted to do, and I knew when I started to do a voluntary job in helping deaf people find work, it was a job club for disabled people and because I was out of work I went there and sort of got roped into helping people, other deaf people as well, find work. That sort of started the process of my career as an adviser for unemployed people.

[30:11]

Do you find that it was working with deaf people initially that helped you to move on there,

that you have peer knowledge of deafness, and you were working with people that had the same problem? Did you feel that was a sort of key thing to getting you moving on?

Yes, I was able to relate to deaf people in their circumstances, although a lot of the deaf people that I was helping were part of the deaf community, and their first language was sign language. So I had the added advantage that I had spent my life integrating within the hearing world and with hearing people, so I was helping deaf people that were not used to -- they didn't have that advantage. So I was able to act as their -- in a sort of advocacy role on behalf of deaf people and at that time there were phones -- I could use phones at that time, because they had phones that sort of made it easier for me to use. So I was able to telephone employers on behalf of deaf people and because I had done a degree, I was able to advise people on filling in their application forms and doing letters for them and interview techniques. A lot of the sort of things that deaf people didn't have a good understanding of that I did. So that's what made me -- one of the things that improved my confidence in my abilities is that I was able to integrate both with the deaf people within the deaf world and help them using my experience, and I was able to understand their situation a lot better than, say, hearing people would, and sort of connect with them. But also I was able to sort of integrate with hearing people in order to get the desired outcomes. So it was a really good starting point at that time, so when I started applying for jobs I had the confidence and the knowledge to -- I think I had the sort of experience that a lot of other people, hearing people, were lacking. So I think I had an added advantage, if you like, in helping people that are disabled.

During this time, was your hearing loss stable or was it getting worse?

Right, my hearing was -- my hearing loss was periodic. It started, I would say, during the last two years while I was at Remploy, I would start developing severe tinnitus and my hearing level would drop and that would last a few weeks, and then my hearing would go back to normal. It was like this over a period of years, so it didn't -- my hearing didn't get any worse, it was just I had a condition that would come and go, and over a period of time each time I lost my hearing and developed severe tinnitus, the period would grow longer. So I would just cope when I had severe tinnitus. Fortunately, during this time I had met my wife, who was very supportive, and I had no problems communicating with her, even when I had lost my hearing, because I could lip read her so easily, so my wife supported me through the

university and supported me through the times when my hearing was at its worst. But it created extreme limitations in my ability to integrate, to sort of maintain that confidence that I had in communicating with people, because my hearing -- you know, my hearing had deteriorated. But then it would come back again. So once it came back, then I would start to feel okay again and I would start my life as it was before my hearing got worse. This would come and go. There was no specific period, time period, it just happened. I would have a hearing loss maybe for two months, and then I would have normal hearing for one year and then it would come back again for six months and then I would have normal hearing again for maybe two years and then it would come back again for a year, and it would just go on like that. So I would never know when it was going to come back and the doctors, the consultants, even now could never diagnose exactly what it was. It was identified as some sort of Ménière's disease and I did a lot of research into what the condition was and it was getting gradually worse as I was getting older.

[36:44]

You wear an implant now. Can you tell us how that came about?

One of the consultants mentioned to me about an implant and I never thought that cochlear implants would benefit me because I knew people that had had an implant and it didn't sound like something that would benefit me, because implants -- now that I know that a cochlear implant can benefit -- it varies how much it benefits people. But the people that I knew who had cochlear implants, from what I heard, it didn't benefit them enough for me to think that I would benefit from it. I never thought that a cochlear implant would be better than when my hearing was normal. I thought that, you know, my hearing aids, I could cope with my hearing aids better than I could cope with a cochlear implant. So I never really considered it. But then, as my condition, this periodic condition, was getting worse, one of the consultants mentioned it to me, and initially again I responded with, I just don't think I would be accepted, because when my hearing is normal, when it goes -- because I always expected my hearing to go back to normal, so you know, I didn't think I would be accepted because I thought my hearing was too good to be considered for a cochlear implant. But then the deciding factor was when my hearing got worse, it lasted about six months in 2008, and it got better and I thought -- I thought it was okay, and then two weeks later it got worse again. Two weeks. That has never happened before. The period when my hearing comes back to

normal has nearly always been a long period, it has been a year or so. But then two weeks later. So this then rang warning bells and I thought I have got to look into a cochlear implant so that's what I did, I started having assessments and went from there.

How long have you had it now?

I have had a cochlear implant -- I was switched on on 3 March this year.

So early days, but do you feel it's giving you benefit?

I can honestly say it definitely, for me, is beneficial. As a matter of fact, it's better than when I had a hearing aid and the audiologist was amazed at how quickly I progressed because how quickly you progress seems to be dependent on your hearing history and I could -- I hear quite reasonably well with my hearing aids, and I recognised a lot of sounds anyway, natural sounds, like birds singing and the television, people talking, but the cochlear implant does that much more than a hearing aid, there are still sounds that I never could hear before. I could -- I can hear the clock ticking a lot louder than I ever could, I can communicate with people without always having to lipread, in a quiet environment, so it's definitely beneficial for me.

Do you feel that's benefiting you as a person, as much as your hearing? Giving you confidence and new ideas for the future?

Yes. I can give you some good examples. Even when I had my hearing aid and I would go out with my wife, if you went for a meal then my wife would be the one that would go to the bar and order drinks, and probably do the communicating. I would tell my wife what I wanted and she would do the communicating. My wife was very much the one that communicated with other people. Since I have had the cochlear implant, I have been going to the bar and ordering and ordering the meals, and I do a lot of the communicating as well. So the roles have sort of been changed in that I'm not so dependent on my wife with regards to communicating.

[42:13]

Can we just move on to a few general questions. Do you feel your life has changed

considerably due to deafness? If you hadn't been deaf, do you think you would have been a totally different person?

Yes. I wouldn't be doing the job that I am doing. I do not believe I would be doing the job that I am doing at the moment. I'm very -- I would say I'm very comfortable with people with disabilities, I don't feel awkward like some people may feel awkward and uncomfortable with associating themselves with people with disabilities, deafness, and it has made me -- I think it has made me sort of -- I think it has made me a better communicator, because during my life I have had to deal with problems and be determined in finding ways of dealing with problems and making communication with people easier. It made me realise that communication is a two-way process and I think that if I hadn't got a hearing impairment, that I would have been interacting with people that are not deaf and it's definitely built a character in me that has made me stronger, I think, in dealing with life in general. Also, I think it makes me a lot more optimistic, because the support that you get is always improving and the technology is improving, so it makes you optimistic about being able to cope with life and cope with deafness. It also tells me that the initial idea of integrating people, disabled people, within society, initially I didn't think it was a good thing, but now I'm beginning to realise that I think it's extremely good, but you know it has to be done in the right way. It has to be done in a way that the people -- in order for people with disabilities and deafness to integrate, they need to make sure that there is the right kind of support in place for these people wherever they are, and I think we've still got a long way to go with that and I like to be -- I would like to think that I'm involved in some of that raising awareness of what's out there and what support is available and making people believe that, you know, whatever your situation, you can do it because there is support out there. Like, for example, there's a lot of deaf people doing low-level types of jobs because they believe that they don't have the access to be able to learn and train in much more, I would say, challenging roles. I've used all the support out there to my advantage and that's why I'm in the job that I am in now, but it doesn't get handed to you, you have to work for it. So it has made me a sort of -- I think it has made me a stronger and more confident person, the fact that I'm not just deaf but I have a dual-disability, because it makes you a more determined type of person.

Communication and support have been one of your problems in life, but interestingly it seems that you have become something of an expert in communication and support for other people.

I think an expert is a bit of a strong word. I would like to think that in certain circumstances I can raise awareness and educate people in how to cope with certain circumstances, based on my own experiences.

[47:24]

What would you say is the single thing that has been most helpful to you during your deafness?

My wife.

A fortunate meeting, it seems to have come at the right time as well?

Yes. My wife has enabled me to access a lot more than I think I would have done. She was a big influence in me getting a degree. My wife provided me with communication support whilst I was taking the degree, as a note-taker and a lip speaker, and also she did it at work. Obviously she got paid, but I'm not sure how many people are aware that they can use their relatives or friends for communication support in a work situation or an educational situation. It doesn't have to be somebody with professional qualifications, it doesn't have to be a professional interpreter, because I always maintain that the best person for me to provide communication support is the one that I find it easier to communicate with. You know, it has always worked well that way. So you know, I think the past 15 years, that's the most single thing that has helped me to progress, you know, with the help and support I got from my wife.

Can I ask the opposite question now, what single thing do you think has been most unhelpful to you during your deafness?

I would say the first thing that comes to mind is noisy situations. We live in a very noisy world, and it's one of the main things that makes it extremely difficult for deaf people. Not necessarily profoundly deaf people, but people that use hearing aids and have some degree of hearing. A noisy situation is one of the most difficult things that a deaf person has – a hearing impaired person has to cope with. Even people with cochlear implants. It's very difficult to overcome that and it makes you very selective about where you go, it can make a difference to how you socialise, but it's not -- personally, it's not -- I've not been selective

about where I go, because in order for me to do the things I enjoyed, I needed to go to noisy places, like discos and dancing. So I would say that being in noisy places and communicating with people in noisy places is one of the most unhelpful -- or one of the things that makes it most difficult for people with hearing impairments.

[51:20]

One last question. We often learn from bad experiences. Has deafness strengthened you in any way, do you feel?

I feel that I have answered that question already. Yes, I think that ... because of the problems that I faced early on in life, up to when I was in my early twenties, it was a case of trying to find out how to overcome certain problems, and in order to do that you realised that you couldn't depend on other people to overcome certain problems, you had to find ways yourself. I think, in that, you start to build up a character, in order to overcome a lot of barriers and obstacles. I don't think it just applies to just deaf people or people with hearing impairments, I think it applies to a lot of people with disabilities that find that they have a lot of barriers to progress or to move on. I think that's one of the things that does strengthen your character, it makes you more determined. I think you find that when you talk to a lot of deaf -- people with hearing impairments, they tend to -- well, I think that if you communicate and associate yourself with a lot of people -- no, I don't really know what I'm going to say there. I can't think of anything else to say, but I do believe that, yes, it does strengthen your character in a lot of cases.

Okay, Dave, we will end the interview there. Thank you very much for talking to us.

My pleasure.

[End of Track 2]

[End of recording]