



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Jean Morgan
Interviewed by Fran Walker

British Library ref. C1345/48

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/48

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Morgan

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Jean

Sex: Female

Occupation: Retired hospital biomedical scientist

Date and place of birth: 1946, Birmingham

Date(s) of recording: 30th May 2009

Location of interview: The Westminster Hotel, Nottingham

Name of interviewer: Fran Walker

Speech to Text reporter: Cate Oates

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

Recording format : WAV 16 bit 48 kHz

Total no. of tracks: 1 **Mono or stereo:** stereo

Total Duration: 8 min.

Additional material:

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Interview notes: The interview failed to record; only the last 8 minutes of the interview were captured although there is a full interview transcript that was created by the STTR at the interview.

Okay, this is Fran Walker interview Jean Morgan on 30 May for the Unheard Voices project in Nottingham and the speech-to-text recorder is Cate. Before we start, can I ask you your name?

Jean Morgan.

And your occupation?

I'm retired now.

Your previous occupation?

I was a hospital biomedical scientist I think was the proper term.

And the date and place of birth?

15 January, 1946. In Birmingham.

In Burma?

Birmingham.

And your mother and father's occupation?

My mother was a teacher, she had done other jobs, she trained as a teacher when she was in her 40s. My father was a consultant metallurgist. Shall I describe that? He used to go round firms that made baths and gas stoves and things, telling them what had gone wrong with the manufacturing process.

Oh right, okay. Well that leads us very nicely into the first bit of the interview, which is a little bit of background about you. So you've said what your parents did, and that you were born in Birmingham. So can you tell me a bit about your family? There was your parents and you, who else was in your family?

Well, I have a younger sister. And I remember both sets of grandparents, because they lived in Birmingham and we saw quite a lot of them.

Right. And whereabouts in Birmingham did you live?

We lived in Kings Heath until I was about 6 and then we moved to Northfields, so this is all the south side of Birmingham in the suburbs.

Okay, so can you describe one of those houses to me?

The one we lived in when I was a child, it was a small detached house in a cul-de-sac, or a little road. It didn't get much traffic, because you couldn't drive through. We had quite a big garden at the back, and if you went down this little lane between the houses you got on to the main Bristol road, which was a dual carriageway, and it used to have trams running up and down the middle. But they took the trams off when I was quite small, I don't remember them very well, and they replaced it with a bus service which went into the centre of Birmingham, which was about eight miles away. And then in the other direction, was Austin motor works at Longbridge, with where they made the Austin cars and Rover or whatever it became after that. Nearly everybody around there, all the men, worked there, at the factory.

Okay, and as a child, what kind of child were you, what did you like doing?

I think I was very shy and not very happy. I was hearing, I had got my hearing then, but when my younger sister came along I felt very much pushed out and I wore glasses from when I was very little and apparently I was very short-sighted from quite a young age, I don't know whether I was born like it, I think I had measles when I was two but nobody realised this until I started school. I think they gathered I was quite clever I taught myself to read off a soap powder packet, so I could read when I went to school, but I was in the post-war bulge, so it was quite difficult to get me a place in school because there were so many young children then. We moved from Kings Heath as I say to Northfields when I was about six so I had only just started school and I remember my mother trailing me by the hand all around Northfields and there were several schools and they were all full and the one I ended up in I think there were about 50 in a class and everybody is always amazed when I say this, there were so many children, there were over 40 all the way through primary school anyway.

What did you enjoy about school? What did you like? Or did you enjoy your school?

Not very much, no, no. What I enjoyed most, when I was about eight or nine, because we were so overcrowded we had classes in other buildings, not the school building, and we had -- I dropped my necklace, it doesn't matter -- we were in a hut behind the local community hall, we had a class, and it was too far from the school playground, so we used to play in this sort of rough field, with trees and shrubs and long grass in it instead of in the yard and I really enjoyed this. We had all sorts of games we used to pretend we were riding horses and the boys used to play war, they were the British fighting the Germans and the girls had all sorts of other games.

So growing up just after the war –

Yes, that's right, yes.

So did you feel that had any impact on your childhood?

Oh I'm sure it did, yes, yes. People tended not to talk about it a lot, I think, but it was all shortages that they had had and we still had, actually, but I wasn't aware of it, I mean apparently sweets were rationed but I didn't see that as a hardship, you had sweets as a special treat. I used to go home for school dinners and I just don't know how my mother did it, I used to walk a mile home and my mother had some food, I can't remember what it was, I think we used to have liver quite often, and it was always ready and I had to walk a mile back to school, every day, that was lunch time.

But when I think it was in my last year at primary school, we moved, they built a new school, which was a bit further away, so I had to stay for school dinners, and actually we used to get more food in primary school than secondary school, I practically starved at King Edwards, I always say they used to give us just enough to sustain life.

And then moving on to your secondary school?

That was it, I went to King Edwards.

After school what did you do?

I went to university in Cardiff, I went to do biochemistry, so but I didn't like it so I changed to do microbiology. My headmistress was very keen that somebody should do biochemistry because it was about the time they discovered the structure of DNA.

So what inspired you to become a scientist?

Reading the life of Marie Curie, I think, and my father was a scientist.

Right, and after university, what did you do?

Well, I wasn't sure what I was going to do when I went to university and while I was there. I thought some sort of scientific research, and then I decided I didn't really enjoy that very much. What I really did like was, as part of the microbiology course we went on a field trip to the Brecon Beacons and we were looking at all the little things that lived in the rivers and the caves. I found that really interesting, but what we were doing was actually ecology, it was called ecology, but there was no such thing in those days, it wasn't something people talked about, you couldn't have a career in it and I had also become a committed Christian and I felt I should do something medical. My best friend at school very much wanted to be a doctor, but I hadn't then, I thought I don't want to spend five years training for this and doing really horrible things, you know, operations and things, but after I had finished at university, I thought maybe this is what I should be doing. So, to cut a long story short, I got a job in the blood transfusion service in Manchester.

Right, okay, and how long were you there?

Three years, because it was -- I think it was a three year contract. After that, you had to decide were you going to make your career in blood transfusion or do something else.

And I didn't really want to make my career in blood transfusion. I felt it was a bit too far removed from the patient, if you see what I mean.

And so –

So I also felt at that point I should come back to Birmingham for a bit, so I looked for jobs in Birmingham, and there was one in the flu, influenza research laboratory in the university. Does that make sense? They were doing research on flu.

So you did go back to research?

Yes, but I hated it. I was the dogsbody, really, as a laboratory technician and, yes, well, I stayed there for 19 months, I stayed there that long because the professor had gone abroad for six months and couldn't give me a reference.

So then I got a job in the laboratory at the eye hospital in Birmingham.

And how was that?

It had very good and very bad points.

What were the good points?

It was very interesting work, I quite liked being in the city centre, it had a lot of advantages. Working in the city centre, I was obviously living quite a way out. It was interesting, you met all sorts of different people, you felt you were doing something useful.

But you said there were bad points as well?

Well, the people mainly! The other staff. Perhaps I shouldn't go into details!

And all this time your hearing was normal, was it?

Up until now, yes, yes.

When did you first start to notice any problems?

Well, at work, in the eye hospital, because some of the people I worked with were having problems making me hear. I wasn't really aware of a problem myself, but they kept saying they were talking to me and I couldn't hear them.

And how did you feel about that?

Well I wasn't too bothered, but we had one secretary who was sort of quite pushy and she said I ought to have it investigated. We did do -- there was a -- the ear and throat hospital in Birmingham then was just around the corner, and we used to do their blood tests. So she said, "get somebody at the ear and throat to have a look at you" and they said, you will have to have a letter from your GP. And he said he didn't think it was worth seeing anybody at the ear and throat, he said it's just catarrh, I have had it since I was a medical student, you can't do anything about it.

So what happened next?

So Val the secretary said, "don't take that for an answer, tell him to give you a letter for the consultant at the ear and throat". So he did, very reluctantly. He said "who do you want to see" so I had to go back and ask Val for a name and they did see me, and they put me through all the tests they had then, hearing tests, a caloric one, when they power hot water in your ear. I don't think they still do that.

Is that when they squirt hot water?

That's right, you are lying down and they see what's happening to your eyes or something and that shows the inner ear function.

What did the tests show?

They said well it's not catarrh, but we don't really know what it is, we will review you in a year. I think -- I'm not sure whether they prescribed me a hearing aid then. I think they did. Yes, they did.

And how did you feel about having hearing aids?

I didn't find it was a lot of help, really.

What kind of aids were they?

It was -- I think they call it the BE11, behind-the-ear, you know, a bit like what I've got now actually, but the older version. It must have been just the one ear -- I think it was just the one ear that was affected.

Right, and so you carried on with just the one hearing aid. What happened next?

Well, after a year, they reviewed me again and I think they had said it was neuro-sensory deafness, they thought it was that, but he didn't know what was causing it. And the doctor I saw at the ear and throat that time, he was doing various tests and he noticed I had lost my blink reflex.

Can you explain what that is?

Yes, he could touch my eye with a bit of cotton wool and I didn't blink. And this obviously worried him, as this obviously meant something serious, but he didn't know what it was and I didn't know what it was. I mean he didn't say what it was. And I didn't know what it was. I don't think it was him, I think it was the consultant, said they wanted me to see a neuro-surgeon, and I would be sent a letter for this. I spent several months thinking I had got something fatal, you know, or really serious and couldn't really talk to anybody about it and I was going on a course because I was trying to get further qualification for work and because I really wanted to go and work abroad in a third world country, but everybody said get your fellowship and I was having a struggle passing the exams. Being in a small hospital, they weren't getting the wide experience -- I wasn't getting the wide experience. So I went on this course in Bristol, which was supposed to be two weeks, and everything went wrong the first week. So I came back home, and there was the letter asking me to go and see the neuro-surgeon at what was Smethwick nerve hospital which isn't there anymore, and I asked my vicar to pray for me, because nobody seemed to know what was the matter then. Anyway, they did a cat scan at Smethwick, and they might not have told me all this if I didn't already work for the NHS, but they came back and said you've got a tumour in there as big as a hen's egg, haven't you had any other symptoms?

And had you?

Well, no. So they said we will take it out as soon as possible, we won't know whether it is malignant until we've taken it out. I think they must have done that the next week. They said you will be deaf that side, the side where the tumour is, and you will very likely have some facial paralysis, we may have to graft a nerve in later. So they did the operation, my colleague at the eye hospital afterwards asked me how long were you in the theatre for and I said I've no idea, but I think it was about four or five hours. And -- though I was in intensive care for two days when I came out I think. And they had to teach me to walk again, because my balance was all over the place, and I did notice a hearing loss, but it seemed to be more the other side. I was hearing things really distorted, and I kept saying, "I don't think I can hear in the other ear, not the side you've operated". And they said, "oh well you've probably got some wax in, have it syringed when you go home". I'm trying to remember how long they kept me in. I know they did the operation in the beginning of December, I think, and they sent me home for Christmas, but I had to be fairly quiet and not have too many visitors at once. I think they found out that I had actually lost my hearing the other side, and I never really got a satisfactory explanation why, they didn't seem to know. I had got some hearing in the ear that I wasn't supposed to be able to hear with. I believe it's something to do with where the nerves cross over in your brain, as related to where the tumour was. So once I could move about and that had all settled down, I was off work for six months, but the ENT consultant was a man of very few words, he never said very much -- oh, they did take me back into hospital, not at Smethwick, but in the Queen Elizabeth, the general hospital. Yes, he was there as well, there was an ENT department there, I saw the same man, and he said, "well we will take you back, we can possibly give you some treatment that will improve this", but he didn't say what it was going to be. When they admitted me and the junior doctor was coming round to take my details, I said "what is this treatment, what are they going to do?", and she said, "we will give you steroid tablets", and a pint of intravenous dextran, every day for a week. In your arm. So I said, what's that supposed to do? And she said, with an Indian accent, it expands the plasma. They thought I might have a little clot left from the operation. So they did that, and I was walking around with this cannular in my arm in between treatments, getting very bored, and they were supposed to be giving me regular hearing tests but they didn't. It's a teaching hospital as well, so they had all the students around and I got a stomach infection, so they all came and prodded my tummy, and after ten days, not a week, they said, "look, we will have to move this cannular or your arm will get infected" so I said please don't put it in the other arm. Anyway, they said it doesn't seem to be doing any good, we can't do any more for you here and

you will have to live with it. So the ENT consultant said, "we can send you on a rehabilitation course in Eastbourne", so there was a social worker at the hospital then, I don't think they have this situation now, they certainly don't seem to have social workers who particularly deal with deaf people and she arranged for me to go on the Link course in Eastbourne.

When would this have been, this would have been in the late 70s?

Can I have a look at my notes? I think we decided it was 1979. Yes, the late 70s, as you said. Yes, June 1979 I found all the papers for it.

So when Link was quite young?

That's right, yes.

So what do you remember of Link? What was your course like?

Well, it was excellent, it was quite hard work. They thought I was very brave because I had come on my own, and everybody else had brought a family member. There were, I think, 12 Link guests plus a husband or wife or somebody. My parents took me down there, but left me there. It was for two weeks, actually, but we had a break over the weekend, there weren't actually any activities but we organised our own little trip to the beach.

Tell me some of the things that you did during that fortnight?

Well, before we went -- well, before I went, we had to fill in a form with a little bit about ourselves and what our interests were and did we work and our families and so on, and what our hobbies were. I said I went to church and I liked cooking and birdwatching and cake decorating, I think I said, rather than cooking. So I was also -- I was always very shy anyway, and I was really nervous of trying to talk to somebody, especially if there were a lot of people around, and especially with the hearing problem. I had got this hearing aid, but I wasn't finding it very helpful because one of the follow-up visits to the ENT consultant, he said have you got a hearing aid and I said, yes, because I had had one before I had the operation, and my hearing had got so much worse I thought it wasn't going to be any help. But he said, well why don't you wear it then? So I think I was wearing it but I wasn't finding it very helpful. But at

Link they said it can be good, even if it doesn't help you to hear other people, because it helps you to monitor the sound of your own voice because my parents said I was talking much too loudly all the time and I still do apparently! I've still got it, you would get a little invitation card, saying "you are having tea with Mrs So-and-so on such and such a day at such and such a time" and you went off and it was probably a convict's wife who talks about cake decorating or something like that -- a vicars's wife not a convict's wife! But they also organised me to have an interview with a microbiologist at the hospital in Eastbourne to talk about whether I could go back to work and what sort of problems I would face, and we had sessions on various hobbies we might like to try like painting, clay modeling, photography and they also organised -- so one of the Link volunteers took me to a meeting of the local RSPB group talk on the birds of Beachy Head or something like that, and I did all my birdwatching on my own, I used to go off in the woods on holiday and so on or down to the beach, I never thought of joining a club or anything. When I got back to Birmingham I looked into that. What else did we do? We had some quizzes. I had forgotten but apparently I won a prize, there were views of different places in Europe, and I think I gather I won that one but we had another one where we had to walk all around Eastbourne and see if we could recognise photographs of little bits of building and things.

And did you meet Rosemary McCall when you were at Link?

Yes, because she was very much involved in the whole thing at the time.

Have you any memories of her?

Well, yes, I mean she was there sort of introducing everybody and welcoming them and so on. I think she might have taken me to church, actually. But afterwards, we wrote to each other for years and years, she wrote me personal letters, very encouraging ones, she wanted to know everything I had been doing and what problems I had, and in fact I found some of the letters which I had more or less forgotten about before. I didn't bring them, they might have been interesting, because she said things like -- because at one point I was going out with this chap and we went to the theatre together, you see, and I said, well I'm not sure if I can hear, and they were bringing in -- they had loops in some buildings, but the town hall in Birmingham, which was the big concert hall then, they had this big sign up saying "we have a inductive loop" and it never, ever worked. Yes, I've seen that!

They never do.

Absolutely. No, the loop in my church works very well actually. I do find that helpful and I have been to some banks where it works very well. Not all banks, but some banks I find it very good. But, yes, this business about the theatre, I said we were going round all the different ones in Birmingham and my boyfriend was finding out whether they had loops or infrared things and so on, and we were going to make a list and she said oh I think there's great possibilities in this, you know, let it be known which ones have better access for deaf people. It has been formalised a lot more and Stage Text has come in of course, which I've found out a bit about.

And have you been to see some plays with Stage Text?

Yes, yes.

You've mentioned a few times in passing church and religion, so what part was that playing in your life?

Oh, quite a lot, I was quite involved with the church and when I had this operation coming up I went to see my vicar, and I said, please would you pray for me because I've got to have these investigations and I was afraid, well I thought I had probably got MS actually. So we just went into the vestry and he prayed they would find out what it was and I wouldn't be frightened and I would be able to tell somebody in the hospital about my faith, and all those things happened and then he came to visit me while I was in the hospital, other people from the church came to visit me in the hospital and at home, and I found that very supportive. I had a friend, and she hadn't been a particularly close friend before, but she went to my church, but she started giving me a lift, when I felt well enough, she was give me a lift to the services every Sunday in her car, and that got me back into things. I remember at the Link centre there was -- one of the volunteers there, I think he was a local curate or something, and he said, did this affect your faith, having this happen to you, losing your hearing suddenly like that, did it cause you to lose your faith? And I said, oh no, I thought how sad that that should happen to anybody. I mean, if anything, it strengthened mine. It made me aware that God could heal and help people. I mean some of them at church said, oh why don't you pray for God to heal you and bring your

hearing back and I thought I don't know whether this is right to do that and I did and I've come across people who said oh we don't think it's right for you to be deaf, you should have more faith, come to this meeting or that meeting, and you can feel quite pressurised in that way. And also I met this nice young lady, who very recently had become a Christian and she said, I feel I should pray for you to get your hearing back, and I said -- at that point I felt I could say, well, why do you feel you should do this, and how will you feel if my hearing doesn't come back? So we really had to go into all that and I had some more chats with the vicar about this, and I said, you know, what do you think about this? And he had had some surgery, I forget what for, and he said, well, if you have life-saving surgery, it is bound to have some effect and I think this was it, you know, there wasn't any other cause of it, so my life had been saved. I mean, potentially this was a malignant brain tumour, they didn't know potentially until they took it out and when they got it out they said oh it's not malignant we've got it out and there's no reason why it should come back.

Okay, so after your time at Link, what happened then? You saw a microbiologist who was going to talk to you about your job options. What happened?

He said probably I would be better staying in the environment that I knew. There was probably help I could get with a phone, I think they said I should go to the Birmingham institute for the deaf about equipment -- oh that was another important thing they did at Link, was they showed you what equipment was available, like adapted phones and doorbells and alarms and things like that. I can't remember actually what was actually available then, because so many other things have come in, but what was available at that time, they showed us and talked about. So they seemed fairly happy for me to go back to work and see how I got on and I did get on fairly well. I think they had to put something in so I could hear the phone ring if I was not in the room where it actually was, because if I was next to it I could hear it with the hearing aids in. But otherwise I couldn't.

Could you hear when people were talking on the phone?

Yes, yes, but what I found I had to do at that stage was to take my hearing aids out and actually hold the phone to the good ear. Now this was a bit awkward because the good ear is the right one, and you naturally hold your phone to your left one especially if you are right-handed and you have to write things down, so it was quite awkward and also taking the hearing aid in and

out all the time. Because I can't use a phone like that, I feel quite jealous of people who can.

And apart from the phone, were there any other issues at work?

I think they had to sort of -- I could see them when they were talking to me, because I was lip reading to some extent. Oh, the other thing was they said it would help you to go to some lip reading classes, this is what they said at Link, what I think the ENT consultant had done, and so I did.

How did you find those?

Oh very good, very helpful. But the ones I went to at that time, it was at the -- they call it BID, Birmingham institute for the deaf, and I had to go in the evening because I was working full-time, but I think that's when they were probably. The teacher was -- the headmaster for the school for the deaf the other side of Birmingham. So he did all the talking, which I now realise was not necessarily a good idea.

So you didn't get used to reading each other?

Other people, no, quite. But we enjoyed it, it was quite fun, and we also used to exchange information like where you could get hearing batteries from or there was one person on the course -- I don't know whether I should mention names, he was a GP who had gone deaf, and he was still working, and he was very into all sorts of technology -- neck loops and all sorts of amplifiers and things -- which he used to tell us about, or bring in. Not really as part of the course, but just when we were talking amongst ourselves. So after two or three years, I could lip read the teacher perfectly, but nobody else! So I stopped going. I felt I needed to practice on other people. I think I've got Rosemary McCall's books, because she certainly did produce some books and things on lip reading, didn't she? So those were very helpful too.

And in your work environment, how were you managing, how was your communication? How were you managing communication?

Oh, it was okay then, because most of the time I was in quite a small lab with only one or two other people, not many people came in and out, they were all scared to because we had got

nasty germs in there. One of my colleagues had previously decided I didn't get on very well with the patients, that was her decision, so somebody from our department had to take the blood and the swabs from the patients, but it usually wasn't me. So I knew what I was doing and I was quite happy getting on with it on my own most of the time. We did have a few problems because sometimes some of the doctors used to phone up for results and things, and they expected you to know who they were by their voice, especially the consultants, and I couldn't do that. I couldn't and can't tell people apart from their voice on the phone, even if I can hear them. I mean I can hear them on the phone but I can't tell who they are, usually. And the consultants expected you -- they got quite stroppy if you didn't know who they were.

And, in yourself, how were you feeling about it, about your hearing loss?

I don't know, I think I was in denial for a few years, judging by what's in my diaries. To start with, I thought, "I don't think I can face being like this for the rest of my life", that was just after the operation. And then I thought, well I will take one day at a time and that was really how it went on I think.

You spoke earlier about wanting to work abroad. What happened?

Well I thought well I'm not going to be able to do that now. I was already having a struggle trying to get the qualification. I felt that God must want me to do something in England, well, Britain anyway. I read something about somebody who used to go to my church before I went there, and he had wanted to be a missionary in China, and he went deaf, so they wouldn't let him go. Well, the organisation wouldn't have him in China. But in fact he encouraged lots and lots of younger people to go abroad as missionaries. So I thought perhaps that's my role. Something like that, and I don't need to go myself. I quite like travelling, I always did, so I have actually been to China but only for a holiday. I didn't carry on trying to get more qualifications.

Right.

I really needed to stay where I was. The problem only really arose when the eye hospital closed.

And what happened when the hospital closed down?

Well, they said they were going to take all our work to another hospital, a bigger one. They built a new eye unit there, at the general hospital, for the patients and the doctors, but the pathology work was going to go to the pathology department at the new hospital. Or the other hospital, it wasn't a new hospital. And they could take one or two of us to work there, but not all of us. So at one point it was between me and my colleague, and the other hospital, City Hospital as it was then, said they would give each of us six months' trial, so I went first and while I was there, John, my colleague, decided he would take early retirement instead, because he was a bit older than me and he was two grades up, so he would get a better pension than me, and they probably couldn't give him a job on the same level. I thought, if they offer me the job at City, I will take it, so I did. They said yes, yes, we will have you. Although the chief said if I had been in your shoes I would have taken early retirement. But I was only 50 and I didn't think I would get another job anywhere.

Right, so that would have been in?

It was 1994.

80s, 90?

1996 When the hospital closed. I remember that because the same year my mother died, it was a dreadful year.

Yes.

Because we all felt, when the hospital closed, all of us had worked there because it was a small one, it was like a bereavement for all of us.

Yes, yes. So you were at the new hospital and did that -- were there any changes?

Yes, it was very different. It was much bigger. If you worked in pathology you didn't have any dealings with the patients, you were just in the pathology building. So you got a tube of blood and a form with a name on. Or something else, a bottle of something else perhaps! The

people were actually all very friendly, the people I worked with. They were probably the nicest people I had worked with, and very helpful. But we were all very stressed, there was always too much work to do. I had that little bit further to travel as well, because I used to go to work on the train and I never learned to drive, I had trouble learning to drive, I couldn't really cope, even when I was hearing. I was hearing when I started to learn to drive, but I couldn't really get on with it, and when I had lost my hearing, I thought, no, I'm definitely not going to cope with this. So I used to get the train to the centre of Birmingham, which was fine when the hospital was there. But to get to Dudley Road where the other hospital was I then had to get a bus. So it took over an hour to get there and over an hour to get back. So that was quite tiring as well. I did ask, after -- let me see -- I think five years, apparently, I didn't think it was that long, if I could go part-time. But that wasn't really more helpful. In some ways it was even more stressful because I was trying to squash all the work into a shorter time and I didn't like to sort of clear off and leave a job half done, or for somebody else to finish off. It would take ages to explain what -- where I had got to. So anyway, I did take early retirement eventually.

Right?

My boss thought I might get retirement on health grounds, she thought I had a good case. But the occupational health department didn't. They were most unhelpful and I spent a year in limbo, off sick, with depression officially. Then I thought, well, I do feel a lot better but I'm not going back to work. So I took early retirement.

So what do you do now, what's your situation now?

Well I'm very happily retired looking after my dad. Who is a very healthy 90-year old. Well, he is on lots of pills for his heart!

What else are you doing at the moment?

Well, at the moment, at the actual moment, I've got all my relatives from Canada staying either with me or a friend up the road.

Oh right.

They are celebrating dad being 90.

Okay, so tell me a little bit more about how your family reacted to your hearing problems.

I know they didn't come to Link with you.

No, but they brought me down there. I don't know, they've always been very supportive in this situation. My mother never really sort of talked very much about how she felt about anything. I never felt we were very close, although I actually lived with her for a very long time, but we couldn't talk about how we felt. I couldn't share with her ever about how I felt about things. If I ever tried to –

So who did you share that kind of feeling with?

Friends, usually. I had good friends, particularly in the church.

And on a more practical level, how did you manage living with your parents? Were they able to make adaptations, communicate properly, or were there difficulties?

Well, I always had to keep reminding them and I still do, be in the room with me, face me, don't try calling from another room. My father is very happy to chat on the phone for hours on end, so I'm not. The same year that the hospital closed and my mother died he had a heart attack, quite a serious heart attack, and fortunately I had done a first aid course so I realised what was going on, but he was in hospital for a while, and I ended up having to get somebody else to make my phone calls because people kept phoning up all the time to see how he was, and I was taking my hearing aid in and out and it made my ear so sore I had to have time off for an ear infection this time. Now I've got the digital one, and a phone with a telecoil in I find I can use the digital one on the T thing, I can hear quite well. I couldn't get on with it, with the analog, I just couldn't find the right position for the analog and it was easier to take the hearing aid out except that doing it all the time -- I got this a bit at work as well, that sometimes if there was somebody else there when I was at the big hospital if there was somebody else there they would answer the phone for me, they didn't mind doing that if they were near it.

How long have you had your digital aids?

That's something else I would have to check, probably only about two or three years.

Oh right, and how do you find them in general?

Okay, yes. I think for me it is better than the analog. Yes, on the whole there may be some situations where the analog was a bit better. Oh, yes, because I like being able to change the volume on the analog and I had to go back and ask them if I could have that adaptation on the digital one, and people say why on earth do you want to change it yourself. Because I did find too much noise, I can't really stand too much noise.

Do they have a function for background noise?

Yes, yes. I find that very useful, actually. But I have had to get used to it a bit, undoing the little switch thing.

Okay, going back a bit, we were talking about your friends being more supportive than your parents -- or they were the people that you confided in. What kinds of things were running through your mind then?

I don't know whether I even told people what my thoughts -- when I got ill. Of course I didn't really feel ill before I had the operation, I felt much worse afterwards!

But in the years since your operation, maybe?

Well I have met other people with a hearing loss and I've found it helpful, you know, being able to talk to somebody. For quite a long time, all the support I was getting with that sort of thing was in the Link newsletter and writing to Rosemary. There was another colleague at the eye hospital, a radiographer, who had hearing loss, and he used to get hold of stuff like the RNID magazine and various things, because I hadn't seen it before, which I used to read. Or we would talk about our situations. Then in the Link newsletter they advertised a challenging deafness course, I think when they first did it, when they first did it in Birmingham, so I was working at City Hospital then and I asked my boss if I could go, because I would have had to take time off work, and she said, yes, if you think it will be helpful, certainly you can have the

time off. So that was -- they were doing it in Birmingham, in Selly Oak, which was quite near where I lived. The place, it was called Breakthrough, a centre, and I knew of this centre but I hadn't actually been there or had any dealings with it. They did the course there, and there were one or two people around who already were involved in things at the Breakthrough and they suggested I came to -- well, it was officially a deafened contact group, in fact it was a lip reading class, but apparently I found out the history since and it was a meeting as a social group and then they all decided what would really, really be helpful to them would be to have lip reading classes. So they got a lip reading teacher and it has been carrying on for years, actually, in more or less the same form, but it's not -- Breakthrough became Deaf Plus and then they moved out and they didn't have the building anymore, it belonged to the German church, and they didn't really want us there, actually. So we meet in another church now. There are actually two lip reading classes: there's the ones who have been coming for about 20 years, and another group that have -- they meet in the afternoons -- and another one that started very recently, with the same teacher, they meet in the mornings. But the original contact person is trying to get them together and have a few social things.

And you are still involved are you?

I still go to the afternoon group.

And what about a general circle of friends? You said you've found a few people that are deaf that you can talk to but how do you feel with your general friends?

Well, the one who used to take me to church I still see quite a lot of, and some of the people she knows. But I don't go to that church now, and neither does she. But we meet, there's a group of us who usually go on holiday together once a year, sometimes get-together at other times. I've got two friends at church -- in fact for a while I used to -- I said one or two, it's not just two, there's a few, there was one I actually met at the church I go to now and we got to know each other because we found ourselves sitting in the front row fiddling with our respective hearing aids, and discovered that we had both worked in hospital labs in Birmingham, and knew a lot of the same people.

So a lot in common?

So we got quite friendly, yes, but she has made other friends now. Oh, the other person I see most of is somebody else who worked in a hospital lab but not the same as me and she did go and work in Africa for about nine years, I think. We met at church originally. She went and worked in Tanzania and was sent back home because she got ill.

Can we stop a minute?

[Break in recording]

We were talking about your friends. Well, really sort of summing everything up, how do you feel -- what do you feel the impact has been, what impact do you feel the hearing has had on your life, if you can look and see a parallel universe with you hearing?

Oh, that's very difficult, I've never really thought about that. I don't feel it has been entirely negative, losing my hearing. I think it has opened up some other opportunities. I mean, going to Link did a great deal for my confidence in other ways,

[Track 1]

because I was very shy and lacking in confidence before, even without the hearing problem. They made you go and talk to strangers, and try new things, so I might not have done that otherwise.

So what new things did you try?

Well, I did join the RSPB Birmingham group, we have had some very interesting trips, birdwatching. And talks and things. I've met some nice people.

And you cope okay at the talks?

Yes -- oh, yes, it can be difficult. We do have a member of the group at the moment who is profoundly deaf and brings an interpreter. So -- well, for various reasons I did learn some BSL recently, attitudes have changed a lot about that, because when I first went to Link they said, oh don't bother with that. Then, when I went some years later, when they had a weekend, everybody seemed to know some sign. So I had actually learned to finger spell when I was at school with my friend who then became a doctor, and we used to finger spell under the desk when we weren't supposed to be talking. So I knew that, I just needed to refresh my memory a bit. And I did do BSL level one, just a couple of years ago. So I use the interpreter for practice at the RSPB meetings.

Right, right, and presumably some fairly technical vocabulary?

Well it's quite fun because the interpreter doesn't always know what we are talking about! And she has to spell it as to how it sounds to her, which can be a bit difficult, on the spur of the moment.

Okay, and I know you have been involved in Link, is there any other support groups that you have been involved in?

Well, I say, there's this one in Birmingham with the.

I thought that started off as a Link one?

Oh, I didn't think it did. It was Breakthrough, it was the Breakthrough one.

Yes, that was just me misunderstanding you then. And has your hearing got any worse since the operation?

I don't think so I think it has stayed much the same. It might have got a little bit worse as I've got older.

Okay, I think is there anything else you wanted to talk about?

No, I don't think so, thank you. Unless you want to hear about all my Canadian relatives!

Another time maybe! Okay, thank you very much.

[End of recording]