



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Annie Parkes
Interviewed by John Hirst

British Library ref. C1345/49

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/49

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Parkes

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Annie

Sex: Female

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1949, Newcastle

Date(s) of recording: 30th May 2009

Location of interview: The Westminster Hotel, Nottingham

Name of interviewer: John Hirst

Speech to Text reporter: Lynn Allen

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

Recording format : WAV 16 bit 44.1 kHz

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Mono or stereo: stereo

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Interview notes:

[Track 1]

This is John Hirst interviewing Annie Parkes on 30th May 2009 for the Unheard Voices project in Nottingham. Our speech to text reporter is Lynn Allen. Now if you want to stop at all would you put your hand up, and we'll then have a pause. We will anyhow have a pause. After, say, It is now quarter to eleven, about quarter past eleven or so, just to give Lynn a chance to recover from her hard work. Will you be watching the screen, or will you be watching me? If you're not happy about something, just say so please because we don't want to feel that this is going wrong in some way that you're unhappy about. IS that alright?

Yes that's fine

Can you please for the point of view of the record to get the thing clear, first of all give us your full name?

Annie Parkes

And have you had an occupation at the moment, have you had a former occupation, are you working?

I always worked until my husband died. We worked together. I have not worked since he died, no.

No all right we will talk about that again later. Can we have your -- the date and the place of your birth?

The 3rd of January 1949.

And your place of birth?

Newcastle.

And your mother's occupation?

My mother was in service.

And your father?

A coal miner.

Excellent thank you very much. That gives us a sort of basic idea of your family. Can you tell us something more about your early life?

Tell you something more about?

About your early life when you were a child and your upbringing?

When I was about 2 or 3 years of age I went to live with my Nanny. She was profoundly deaf and her name was Melinda she walked with a sweeping brush upside down with all rags wrapped around it on one side and a walking stick on the other. She developed cataracts, I didn't know they were cataracts at the time and she became completely blind as well as profoundly deaf. But we stayed together and we lived without electricity in one room and she used to light the gas mantle in the evenings and she didn't turn it out until I had gone to sleep. And I didn't realise -- we slept in one bed together and I didn't realise until years later what it must cost her to get out of bed to turn that gas mantle off. I was very selfish in some ways towards her. Once I went to my friend's house and they called the lavatory 'toilet', and so I went back home and my friend was coming to us and I couldn't make her understand the word toilet and so I became very agitated and nasty towards her because of that. And so life's turned full circle now but she was very, very lovely and she did everything she could. She was in her 70s and she did everything she could for me. Her name was Melinda and she was a very kind and gentle person. That is it.

So, how long did that continue, then? You talk about your very early life?

Pardon.

You said something about your very early life?

Yes until I was about.

What followed after that?

Until I was about 16 I believe, yes.

And how about school?

Yes I went to school I went to a church school. The Church of England school. The church women used to come to my nanny's and so I went to church and learned my passages or whatever it is called and things like that, yes.

And you were quite happy at school?

Pardon.

Were you quite happy at school?

Yes, yes.

Do you think it was a good education?

What I didn't learn at school, the church women came to my nanny's and learned me. It was different in those days.

And what about when you left school what age did you leave school?

I was 14 and a half when I left school.

[06:50]

And then you went into service or a bit later than that?

Oh no, no I went into a cotton mill.

Where was this?

In a rewinding shop in a cotton mill, yes.

Any particular experiences about that you would like to tell us about?

The women were very rough, very rough women. And I didn't belong to that sort of woman. They took me in the toilets once and stripped me down, because I used to wear liberty bodices and things like that, that women didn't wear any more. But they were all right; they were kind enough afterwards when you got to know them. But I didn't belong with them sort of women.

So how long did you do that job then? It sounds as though you were a bit unhappy there?

Until I was 17. Yes 2 and a half years.

At that time you had no problem at all with your hearing?

I always had problems with my ears yes.

We will come on to that a bit later. Following on, then, after you had left the cotton mill, what came next?

I ran away to Birmingham. My nanny died.

That must have been very sad?

Pardon.

That must have been very sad for you. How did you feel about that or would you rather not tell us?

Life -- life became I don't know how to explain it, survival, survival I had to survive. I had to survive.

Had you got support from anybody else at that time. It sounds as though you were lonely and having a very difficult time?

The vicar's wife, Mrs Ramsden, before my nanny -- they took me into care just before and she came and fetched me back. And she stood in front of the door and said 'anybody disturbs them', we thought she was wonderful, 'they have got to get past me first'. She was a little bird like woman and very bossy. And she was the vicar's wife so she had a good say in everything. And she believed in people who had the same blood staying together. She believed in blood ties very strongly and so we were lucky in that respect.

That sounds good. She was one of the people that had a good influence on your life, then?

Oh yes, oh yes she was very good woman yes.

[11:10]

What happened after that, what happened after this, what was the next stage in your life?

I ran away to Birmingham. I went to New Brighton first where we had always gone with the Sunday School. But there was no work there and so I went on to Birmingham. I got a job in a hotel there. And then I met a lady named Beth and I went to live with her and her husband and worked in the factory that she worked in.

So she helped you there then?

Pardon.

She helped you?

Yes, yes.

Yes. You did say earlier on that you had been married. When did you meet your husband?

I met his father at the hotel where I worked. His father had been widowed and he was very bereft and I knew how that felt. His father was as lost as I was. He was very lovely my late father-in-law.

Okay tell me something else about that. About your relationship, if you were a bit hard of hearing at that time, was that a problem for you?

Erm, the only problem there has ever been really I never mixed with people like, I don't know whether that was my upbringing, the church women or what. I never mixed in groups like other people did. I don't know why. I am better one-to-one, better one-to-one.

And then you get married. What age were you when you got married?

About 20, 20 years. We lived together for a while first.

And whereabouts were you living after you got married?

In a house in Smethwick near Birmingham.

And how many years was that?

Oh quite a while, I can't remember, about 10 years we lived there together.

[14:50]

Anything else you would like to tell me about that time. I am trying to get a picture, you know, of your life developing. You have had a lot of experience already that you have told us about is there anything else that you would like to tell us about, or as time went on?

I tell you, I made a friend and she was a young Sikh bride who lived next door to me. She was about 17, she was 3 or 4 years younger than me. And we became very close friends. Probably because she was foreign and she spoke more slowly, we could understand one another and she was very beautiful as well, incredibly lovely looking. She was a young Sikh girl and very lovely and her manners and everything were very nice, very nice. She didn't swear or anything like that and that is how I had been brought up. There was a lot of swearing went on in those times and that and I didn't like it because of the church women what they had instilled in me. She was very lovely and we were very close friends. And we were short of money in those times, and she took me down to the shops, which were all Indian shops, and she took me in and introduced me and she said 'if you are ever short of money Annie, go in and they will let you have what you want and you pay them when you can'. We couldn't do that could we?

Rather different to nowadays, when everybody tries to do that don't they?

Yes.

Did you have -- have you had any family of your own, have you had any children?

We had the children, two girls, yes. And there was two girls from my husband's first marriage.

And did you all get on well together?

The older one, not so much, no. But the younger one from my husband's first marriage, they welded together, they are still very close now.

What about grandchildren, have you?

Yes. I have got one from my husband's first marriage and two from my eldest daughter and two from my youngest daughter. Five. Yes.

Do you meet up with them fairly regularly?

Yes. Well my one daughter lives in Leeds, and the eldest daughter -- the youngest daughter from my husband's first marriage lives in Cyprus. But my youngest daughter lives in Telford.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your sort of life in general?

Pardon?

[18:44]

Anything else you would like to tell us about your life in general, any particular hobbies you have had or interests other than work and family?

No, my husband was a loner, he didn't mix he was worse than me. And I nursed him for a good ten years before he died. And then I became ill myself afterwards. But I do realise that I am going into the last phase of my life if you like, and I do realise I have got to force myself to mix with people, to -- because my life is very lonely. I have got to get out there and mix with people. And when I went to the LINK at Southport all the people who were there with me supported me through my two operations that I have had and they kept writing and sending me letters and things. And that helped me a lot. They were very nice like that.

Just let me go back to ask you about your husband's illness. Was that a result of his work as a miner?

No that was my father who was a miner.

Your father was a miner, sorry your husband?

Yes he was a builder my husband he was in the building trade.

How had he -- how did he become ill? Was it something connected with his work it sounds like a long-term illness?

It was, yes. He had arthritis in his right hip. And then it collapsed and his hipbone collapsed and it went up into his body and he also was a chronic -- he suffered with chronic airway disease that is what they called it. He was 53 years of age when he first went to the doctors. He only went because I told him that I was going to leave and even the doctor said that he was unique because from the day he had been born until that day he had never seen a doctor in his life. He was very fierce and wouldn't give in, we went to get a pass for the car a disability pass and I said to him 'you don't have to put it on but just tell them how it is'. And he wouldn't let me go in the room with him, and I saw through the passageway there were two doctors there and when he come out I said 'how have you done?' Have you got it? He said I don't know they are writing to me. He said but they think I am marvellous he said they can't believe what I can do.

What was your reaction to that?

I said 'you didn't have to tell them everything'. He said 'yes they couldn't get over it what I can do'. He was doing all the actions as well. But they sent a letter to say he got the disability badge, which he did need very badly at that time. He also talked posher than the queen. My late father-in-law had walked from Pontypridd in Wales as a child when he had been pushed in a push chair to braids village in Oldbury, West Midlands. And the whole village walked together to work on a steel rolling mills in Tiverdale. And so when they got there, the women were forbidden to speak Welsh any more, they got -- they were in England now and they had got to speak English and my husband's grandmother said well 'they are not going to speak like the Brumes are they?', and so she made -- he talked posher than the queen he couldn't help it. He just spoke posher than the queen, it was how it was drummed into him really. And my husband was also a very good pianist he was trained from a very early age on the piano with him being Welsh. And he was a very good classical pianist. It was like bells

tinkling I used to tell him and the Moonlight Sonata was it? He used to play that a lot because I could hear the tinkling on the piano somewhere and it sound like bells to me. And he was very good. But he always wanted to learn, his hero was a man named Fats Waller and he told me that although he was 30 odd stone, he was always happy and a musical genius because he couldn't read a word of music, but he was a brilliant composer and a brilliant pianist. And my husband used to try and try to copy this man, and I bought him some books on how to Honky Tonk, but he could never get it because he had been trained so classically.

Was that musical skill was that passed on to any other of your family?

Pardon?

Was that passed on to any of his children your husband's musical skill? And his?

Yes my daughter, my one daughter my oldest daughter, yes. Yes. And my late father-in-law was a singer, because my husband had a piano but my late father-in-law only had his voice. And boy oh boy did they used to use it when they were altogether. They were Welsh and they loved to sing. He had a wonderful family my husband. Yes.

[26:46]

How many years were you married then before your husband died?

25, 25 years.

And did the fact that you were hard of hearing at that time, did that have any effect on your every day relationship? Did it cause problems?

Well, my doctor wrote to the hospital because he said that my husband did -- it was very complicated, my husband was physically disabled and so I did everything for him in the end. But, at the same time he was doing things for me without me realising. He held all conversations because he had a wonderful way of talking and he was better at it than me. And

he used the telephone and so my doctor had someone come to the house, she had been specially trained at it, a young woman, and she said 'what was going to happen to me when I was left alone?' because he had completely taken over all the conversations and things. I was just in the background. And I said 'well I'll go on, that is how life is'. Well she said no, she said 'you must -- you must use this hearing aid and start to speak for yourself' because we got so used to it you see. We were together all the time and so if you just look at someone who you have been together with a long time, you know what they are thinking and that. And because I looked after him physically, best I could, he was a bugger, but he took over with the -- I used to love and sit and watch him with his talking and that because he was so much better than mine. And she said it was wrong and so she put the hearing aid in and she said 'now Annie, I want you to go upstairs to the toilet she said have a wee and flush the chain'. And so I went upstairs to toilet to the bathroom, I had a wee and I had never heard myself wee before. And then she said and then when the chain flushed well it wasn't a chain now, when I flushed it, and then I went to the door and opened the door and it threw me back into the bathroom because I had never heard the door squeak and I didn't know what it was. And so in later years it became more of a -- not a problem, because he took over like I took over for him. I can't explain it any different than that. We were just one of a pair really or two of a pair, two for one. I had a very happy marriage in most respects he was a very stubborn man who wouldn't give in, he never gave in. That is how all of them were. Although I loved them all they were very stubborn people who didn't give in somehow, so that is all I can explain the best really. Welsh miners who went to work in the steel building mills in Oldbury. They built their own chapel I have still got the plaque at home now I don't know what to do with it. When I am gone I don't know what will happen to that. We had to go and fetch it before they demolished the chapel.

[31:37]

Now Annie, just take me back right to the beginning of when you first experienced anything to do with deafness? Was this right you say in your report here that it was right from the time that you were a young child. And you said just now that the first time you heard the door open or pulling the chain?

No, no it wasn't that. My nanny was a very honest person and I was brought up very honestly. But one day in school the teacher, the teacher had been giving me some books for free to take home they must have been scrap or something were not going to be used again. And he always seemed to talk a bit without moving his lips well. And I took a book home that I thought he had given us, I didn't -- we used to pass the books down the desk like that and I thought he said to keep them and I took the book home and I took it back to school the next week to read, because it was a good book in the playground and I had to go in the headmaster's study and I had the cane for keeping the book. And my nanny was very upset because it was a Church of England school, and we were sort of lived under the church if you like in some way. In some way. And so I didn't -- I never got over that really having the cane, because I was sure he said to take them home and I got it all mixed up.

How do you feel about that?

And nanny was terrible upset terrible.

That was upsetting?

She was really angry with me. She didn't know I was a bit deaf, because she was profoundly deaf, that is all.

From this time on, did your hearing get worse or stay the same?

Yes -- no I noticed that if people spoke to me from behind I didn't hear them.

And what generally was your reaction to that?

I didn't have a reaction.

Did you ever ask?

It was just the way I was, wasn't it really.

Did you ask people to repeat the question, or did you just rather tend to ignore what they might have said, just not worry too much about it?

I did worry about it in a way, yes. I did worry, I didn't like being different to people, no. I was different in a lot of ways, in a lot of ways I was different to other people. Yes.

I mean with that experience, at the school, were there other experiences that were awkward for you?

Yes the headmaster lived in the school grounds and he had a little bed in his front room and he said 'Annie when you get like you do, he said go in there nobody will take any notice and lie down until you feel a bit better'. That is how they did things then really. And also the milk in the mornings, he used to come into the school classrooms and it was a time when all the Scottish people came and the Polish people from -- and they came into where we lived and he used to point to the children he would say 'extra bottle of milk, extra bottle of milk' and he always included me because I was very tiny and very thin at that time and he used to say 'extra bottle of milk' and so that was how the headmaster ruled. And my nanny never cooked she never cooked a meal. She had been in a fire before I knew her, and so she never cooked. Sometimes she would cook a little bit of bacon and a tin of peas so we had meals off the church women really and meals on wheels and she used to save it for me. But we always lived properly, we always had a cloth on the table and we used to mainly have a slice of boiled ham and a very thinly sliced tomato and she did the tea in a teapot and a milk jug and sugar it was always very nice. It wasn't like it is now in front of the telly and we always lived properly like that. Yes. And the fire she wouldn't have the fire very high, she used to panic if she saw the flame coming off it. And so that was because of the fire she had been in I think. And when she went into hospital, I thought they took her a long way away, three bus rides away, and I knew that she couldn't manage without me. But they wouldn't let her stay at home anymore. I saw a mouse the first thing I saw in the room where we lived, and then I came home and how we lived properly, she had got a white pudding basin and she put the tea in there, tea milk and milk, a lump of cheese in there and some pieces of bread and she was spooning it into her mouth. And then they said she had got to go into this place and I could only go on a Sunday, because that was the only day and it took me all day to get there and

back. And I went there one day and I said to the lady, 'she wants to go to the toilet' and she said 'she does not, she has just been'. I said 'she is asking to go to the toilet' and so she took her and when she came back she said 'you were right, she did want to go to the toilet'. And then they put her to bed and she stayed there all the time with her hands like in a prayer. And we learned each other a secret sign so that we knew each other just in case anything bad happened and I gave her this sign and she didn't reply. She had gone past it and I knew that it was all over really.

She just lay there but she wasn't there really, even though she was still alive. As you do. And so that was her really it was very sad that time. But she learned me to be strong we had a good strong bond and life goes on.

Remarkable woman.

Pardon.

A quite remarkable woman.

She was. The secret sign was something she would practice with me month after month and then at the end she didn't reply. But she was in her 70s when she took me on, she was wonderful. Yes. But like you have social workers now and all these people in there, we had the church women who sort of protected us, the vicar's wife and yes. I can remember the man named Harry, I have forgotten his second name, and every morning he opened his parents' shop. He was deaf, stone deaf, he had been in the trenches in the First World War and he was stone deaf and he had been gassed he had had the gas. His nostrils were all funny with it. And he used to open the shop every morning. It had all old fashioned brown shelves all around it and no stock in that shop, nothing. He used to lock it up every night, it was what he was used to. Gave him something to do didn't it? Carried him on.

[43:10]

Going back to your deafness again, you say here that you first sought help from the National Health Service at the age of 20.

Yes, yes.

And what was?

My husband made me go.

What help did you get then?

They gave me a hearing aid that you stuck in there, inside and put the -- I have just seen some similar ones out there, yes.

How did you get on with that?

I didn't like it. I didn't like it at all. It was like echoes, echoes, you had to turn it up and turn it down it was like echoes it is very hard to wear a hearing aid. People think that you just put it in and that is the end of it but that is not the case at all, is it?

When you explained this to the national health people, did they try to help you about that at all?

Oh not then no, you just put it in and that was that. No, no you wouldn't get help like that.

You say that you had problems that caused your hearing loss?

Yes.

Can you tell us something about that?

Well, after my husband died, or just before, I started to fall down. When I fell down I could not get back-up again and my daughter came to see me, the youngest daughter who I have got a very strong relationship with, and she said 'mum' she said, she said 'you are not alone', she

said 'a lot of women have to go through this'. She have said 'you just have to get on with it she said just because dad has died you must stop this drinking', she said you must get on with it and I said and so that was the start of it really and so when I went out anywhere, I was just falling down all over the place and so my doctor sent me to see Mr. Cullen, my ear, nose and throat person. And I told him what had happened and that and he said 'you will have to accept it, you are going to go deaf and that is that'. And so it started to get worse this falling down and dizziness and things and so my hearing therapist, who he had sent me to, Sylvia Roberts, and my doctor, Dr Perry, both wrote him a letter telling him that they were both very concerned about me. And Sylvia Roberts wrote would he please send me for an x-ray. A scan, a scan she called it. And so when I went to the appointment, it was an hour and a half late, and the sister told me that he was not coming himself, the young man was coming. Oh before that a young man had seen me, Mr Cullen's surgery and he said I hadn't got an infection in my ears because I kept having infections as well very bad infections, and he said 'you haven't got an infection, he said go through to the technician and we will do a test'. So when I went through to the technician he said 'we can't do that test because of the infection in your ear'. I said 'go and tell him then because he has told me I haven't got an infection'. And so Sylvia Roberts and my doctor wrote him a letter, oh and he charged in that day. He didn't half charge in. You could see the anger in him, Mr Cullen, because his assistant had not turned up and I was the first one in. I was the first one in. Oh he was banging his fist on the table, 'what do you expect me to do about it? And all that you are deaf you are deaf there is nothing we can do about it'. He said 'I am going to write to this here miss Roberts and see what she says about it telling me how to do my job and Dr Perry having a go as well'. So, he did send me for a scan in a big tunnel thing, Selly Oak I had to go all the way across Birmingham to get it done and then that was on New Year's Eve I went for that. And in the March I went to the doctors because things were getting no better and I said I have had no reply. He has not wrote to me with another appointment or anything. So a letter came just after that to say that there had been no -- they found nothing wrong on the scan.

[49:34]

So, my doctors just kept giving me antibiotics and things got worse and worse and then my face stopped working. Boy, you don't realise how you need your face until it stops working!

I couldn't frown, I couldn't frown I remember that. And I looked in the mirror and it was awful, awful. And my eyes stuck out in my head and I couldn't close my eye. I couldn't lift my eyebrow, my cheek went flat and I was having to put food on my finger open my mouth like that and shove it in. And it was like I had mumps all down here. So I went back to the doctors and anyway he said, this young doctor from South Africa he had come, he was only a locum, he said 'well he said you need to see a consultant straightaway'. He said 'it is going to be 3 or four weeks before we can get you in'. And my daughter saved my life, they kept trying to talk me into paying and seeing somebody the next day and I said 'I am not doing it'. I wouldn't do that again. I said 'I am not doing it I said I want to see somebody on the national health' and so my daughter said to him 'why is it that she can't see someone for that time'? She said 'when I have someone come to me' -- because she was the manager in NHS direct -- she said 'I phoned the hospital and I can get them in usually the next day'. He said 'oh I never heard of that before I will try it while you are here'. So they got me in the next morning and I had to have emergency surgery. Mr Skinner, the new consultant I saw at Shrewsbury came running on to the ward taking his jacket off as he was coming. And he said 'we have cleared the surgery for you', this was 4 o'clock in the afternoon, he said we are going to operate straightaway for you. And he was a gentleman. Mr Skinner was a gentleman where Mr Cullen was a nasty, nasty, horrible man. And so afterwards after the operation I realised that Mr Cullen had not given me fair treatment. If you employ a plumber and they bodge the job you fetch them back to do it properly or you do not pay them do you? And so and my daughter said I said 'I am going to see a solicitor about it, it is not right what this -- I said he treated me horrible as if I didn't exist really, he didn't care'. Thumping he was really angry and nasty it was awful. That day when he was thumping his fist on the table banging it away, when I came out the technician came and put his arm around me he said 'never mind it could be worse'. I said 'what do you mean?', he said well you could be married to him! And I always remember that, I thought then afterwards I realised they had all heard him, they had all heard him having a go. And to cut a long story short, it took me four years of writing letters to something to do with the NHS that they brought up in Manchester. I had to keep writing and they got in an independent team and then they slammed him and everything, Mr Cullen but he never apologised. He never came to me and said he was sorry. And my daughter said you have got to stop keep going on about it mum. I said well he nearly killed me and the X rays they sent me I went to Birmingham for were nothing to do with

infections nothing at all. He had sent me all that way for the infection. But he must have got told off I was told after he had got his fingers wrapped for it the report they sent to the hospital but it took me four years constantly writing letters.

And I wrote to him every other Monday when I came out of hospital and I realised something was wrong, I wrote to him every other Monday and he never replied to one letter. I didn't write nasty letters I just wrote asking him what he had done and what he thought of the job? But he never replied. But by that time I was with Mr Skinner, who was a gentleman.

Mr Skinner my consultant was a gentleman. And so I was -- he said you can stay here or go back to Wolverhampton I said I will never go back to Wolverhampton I will never go where nobody smiles and there is all nasty short temperedness all the time. I said I will never go back there. That is how I stayed with Mr Skinner.

[56:09]

And then Mr Skinner said to me he said 'Annie he said I don't want you to go to your doctors any more with your ears'. He said 'if you get something wrong he said get your daughter to phone my secretary and I will see you straightaway'. And that is what we did. He never refused to see me he was wonderful really, to do something like that. But the second time Mr Skinner missed it all! My hearing in my right ear started to go down. Every time I went to see Mr Skinner, every three months there was another drop on the thing, the test that they do. And so he sent me for a brain scan it must have been clear I think but I don't know what happened there. But he said 'Annie' he said 'I think you need a cochlear implant'. And so I said I don't know, I said I had lost all confidence really. Mr Cullen made me feel like subhuman he was horrible, horrible. And he made me feel like I wasn't worth bothering about as if I was -- so anyway he said 'will you promise me Annie that you will go' and I said 'yes'. I will go. He said 'well you have got a choice of three hospitals, Manchester, Nottingham or Birmingham'. I said I will go to Birmingham my husband was a Brummy. So I went there and I said to the scientist, this young man, I said 'will you do me one of them tests, them power tests?' He said what is that, I said where they test the power, he said 'yes all right if you want one' he said 'we don't usually do one these interviews' but when he did the test the power had gone, there was no power there. And I was told later that was a sign of inner ear infection.

And so I saw this Mr Reed with a team, there was four or five people in the room every time we went, but they all had smiles they were very nice people. And he took me in the microscope room and he said 'oh' he said 'you have got some water on your eardrum some fluid on your eardrum he said don't worry about it he said it will probably clear up on its own'. So I went through all the tests at Selly Oak, all these different tests, brain stem response test, and all that and when I went to see him he said 'all the tests conclude that you need a cochlear implant'. He said 'but while we have been doing the tests we found that you have got these growths behind the mastoid bone'. I said 'what do you mean', he said 'you have got these growths' I said 'well what are they?' He said 'I don't know', he said 'I won't know but the problem is to get at them we may have to create a cavity' he said 'and you have already got a cavity in the other ear' he said 'you might not be able to have the cochlear implant'. I said 'well' -- he said 'I want to operate straightaway'. I said 'well is it necessary?' I said 'have I got any choice?' he said 'no Annie', he says 'you have got to have it done and you haven't got any choice'. And so I went into Selly Oak, into the hospital it isn't Selly Oak it is just up the road from it the University Hospital I went to in Birmingham I have forgotten the name of it now. But anyway I went in there, and do you know what he did, Mr Reed on the night before my operation? He came to see me and touched my hand and asked me if I was alright. And then he said 'would you like me to close a window'? And I thought what a wonderful man to do something like that. I told him afterwards, I said that little thing made me feel so secure, just something small like that.

Then when I was lying there before they put me to sleep the Indian doctor who worked with him came up to me and said 'Annie, do you want to say anything, do you want anything at all before we put you to sleep'? And I thought how nice. Two such big people like and it made me feel, Mr Cullen had made me feel like nothing really, and yet these two men were taking so much trouble with me. But my daughter sat there and she sat there for 6 hours the operation took of hours to do because of this cavity thing or something I believe. And so he told my daughter afterwards that the whole area was full of infection and yet the brain scan never brought it up the one I had had with Mr Skinner. And so that was that really.

But after the operation in the afternoon, later on, Mr Reed came again and said 'the operation was a success Annie, you are going to be all right'. And I thought just little kindnesses like that. And then he said we will have you in December and do the cochlear for you. And so that is what happened. But when I went to see him for the last time, because he's finished

with his job now, when I went to see him he said 'Annie', he said 'you have had these operations and that he said tell me what difference it has made to your life'. I said 'well', I said 'because it has given me confidence, I said and I sat alone too long. I would like to talk to people and have a laugh with them like I did with my husband'. I said 'what I didn't like my husband did it and I sat listening to it all if you like'. I said 'I am not solitary like that, I have got to get out in the world and speak to people'. And so, that is what I told him that is what the cochlear was giving me. And he took my hands in his hands and he said 'you do that Annie', and I put my hand on top of his and my other handed a I said 'thank you very sincerely Mr Reed'. I said 'you have gone far above what you should have done for me'. And he kept a wonderful happy ship. All the people who worked under him were really nice people who always had a smile. That Sister of Mr Cullen's she was a coloured lady and he didn't realise that deaf people can see what he can't see. Because when he was ranting and raving and she sat there I saw her head and her neck went back, she was shocked at how nasty he was. And so if you are deaf you sometimes have a blessing like that you can see what other people cannot see. Do you agree with that? But Mr Reed was wonderful person. And he told me the last interview he said any time 'Annie, anything at all, anything worrying you he said phone up I will see you as soon I as I can'. I have got two consultants who both told me that and that makes you feel secure really doesn't it? I think so anyway. I think well I am really lucky there. But he did say these growth things might come back he does not know, nobody knows that is what he said. But it is best not to think on that. It is best to think the lovely sunshine and going to the seaside and things like that really isn't it?

[01:06:45]

That was the most moving story. That was really moving?

Was it? Mr Reed is a wonderful person and so was all the people who work under him. Very very very caring, very lovely people. I never had nothing but a smile off all of them. But that Mr Cullen, he comes from Scotland he wants to go back-up there as well.

It is not very long since you have had your implant. How have your friends and family who have met you since you have had it how have they reacted?

Well I know Jewson's Builders Merchants very well because we were in the trade and I went into Jewsons about 2 months after I had it done, and I bent down in front of the counter and the lady said something and I heard it. And that is how it has been really little things like that. I think my family is relieved because my son-in-law never lost his temper with me really but some people do don't they? I used to say 'can you write it down for me please because I can't tell what you are saying'. And a lot of people they would keep going with their hands and mouth and trying to get it, and I would say 'but I can't make it out'. That was the worst when people said 'it does not matter'. You could always tell that it does matter. That is the worst isn't it? When they say that.

When you meet people for the first time, do you find a difference there?

I don't meet a lot of people, but I am going to start to do that. I found with the LINK people, I am on about the ordinary people who I met there, the one couple have invited me up to their home and I have been afraid to go. I have always made an excuse. But in the next month or so I am going to force myself to accept the invitation. I don't really want to go into someone else's home and that, but I have got to do that in my life to give me some -- my nanny was completely in that room and she didn't bother with anybody except me. But times have changed now, you cannot live solitary any more. And I am nosey I like to know what is going on and things like that. And so I have got to start to get out and meet people. Yes.

You have not had your cochlear implant very long, are you still having sessions to test to see how it is working?

Yes, yes.

[01:10:22]

Do you find things are improving each time?

No I haven't found that. No. No what I found is this, I is heard so many people say that but

with myself I found this, when they first did it she said 'can you hear me Annie?' I said 'I can'. And she said what am I saying? And I went home and I was I can hear now I can hear. And it was like I was on cloud 9 for 2 or 3 months after. And then every time I went to do the test with them I was showing off because I was so good at it. I started to -- I was so good at the tests they gave me and the last test she gave me she said 'Annie' she said 'you are doing better than people who have been doing it for 2 years she said you are that far advanced with it'. And I was really pleased about that. But just lately, I have started to criticise it a bit. My granddaughter has got a strange little voice on her, I had not heard her voice before, she is only 3 -- she isn't 3 yet. I don't know, I have started to realise how vulnerable I am. I didn't realise that before so much going on with it all since my husband died and that. Everybody comes to a time when they realise their own vulnerability don't they? And I realised when I take it off at night if someone comes in I keep thinking of strange faces going to go over the bed at me because I wouldn't hear them break in or anything. But then I think well look what I can do now, I have come here I am talking to you aren't I? And so there you go. I am not like my nanny, she never spoke a word or anything and my husband always used to say when I moaned about him he used to say 'think of the little children, think of the little blind children' and I used to -- so I often think about that when I am having a good moan about myself. Because it does not do any good does it? You have to push yourself on like. But he always used to say that. 'Think of the little blind children'. And he was right.

Are there any other particular sounds that you have managed to hear that you had not heard before? Bird songs or music?

So loads oh yes the birds yes. The black birds outside I love to listen to those. But there is also a mating pair of those magpies, have you ever heard them? I never heard them before, what a ruddy noise it is. But it is nice to hear them, oh but what a noise they make though! But the black birds yes, yes. And I stood by my cooker and I said to my daughter what is that funny noise going on everywhere, she said it is you, she said you keep you have always done it. I had never heard it before the 'click click click' of the ignition I didn't know I did it before. And now the granddaughter's voice I have never heard it. It sounds a bit 'Wha Wha Wha Wha' what because she is young and female I suppose. Men's voices are much better than ladies' voices do you find that? And so yes.

Are there times when you think it might be a disadvantage, if you know what I mean? Do you have problems in traffic or when there are loud noises or can you adapt to that?

I can't manage when there is a room full of people, you don't do you? I can't manage that. With the traffic, I ignore it. I can shut it out somehow. Do you find that? And so disadvantage, I can only think of the advantages, but I have started just lately and I shouldn't really criticise it should I? I have had Rolls Royce treatment and I am here aren't I? And so there you go. Life is very precious isn't it? And so it is human nature isn't it to criticise everything really when you shouldn't? And so therefore I have criticised it a little bit, only in my own mind. The battery stopped, I thought it was a battery charger and then I realised I took it all the way down to Selly Oak, and then I got back home with a new one and realised it was the battery so I had to go all the way back again and I realised they only give you 3 batteries don't they? And so, what can I do with that I wish I had had the one with the throw away batteries so you can build up a store of them. I said to the lady 'does this happen often?' she said 'very rarely but all the batteries had gone at once' none of them, so... and it is a lot of money when the batteries give up on you like that a lot of money as well isn't it?

[01:17:12]

What do you think about the future now? You say that you will be able to mix more with other people. You are going to see and stay with people that you wouldn't have liked to go to stay with before because of the hearing problem?

I have got to start.

Do you feel now confident enough that you have you can so to speak blossom out, that is a strange expression?

No, no but I don't think it has got a lot to do with the deafness. My husband never mixed with people and my nanny didn't either, they were not mixers definitely not my husband, he was a loner if you ever had one. No, but I realise I am on my own and so, therefore, I have got to go forward because you cannot give up on life. And I have got to start to mix with people.

I went to Weight Watchers once, a long time ago, and the lady who ran the class was very well spoken and I made all the women laugh by telling them how much they had lost or put on before they came to sit down. I got on very well with them. That is my next obstacle is to start to mix with people more. To join clubs or something, yes.

You said earlier that you went to the church school which had a great influence on your life. Do you still go to church are you involved in church activities?

No, no. No. I was never religious. I went to the church school but I was never religious, no.

What about other groups of deaf people?

Yes. Yes I am going to have to do that, I am going to have to do something like that. People who have got an understanding the same as myself.

We must just say something about LINK. I think I am right in saying you have had a lot of support and help from LINK you want on the LINK course?

Yes, yes I did yes.

Have you anything particularly you would like to say about that?

It is a very good course it was very intensive and very well run. Yes. In every way, yes.

And did you keep up with anybody who was on the course with you?

Yes all the people who were on the course with me, they all wrote and helped me while I was in hospital. Some of those people want me to go and stay with them, yes.

Have there anything else you would like to tell us? You have told us a wonderful story, is there anything else you would like just to talk about before we close?

Not really anyway. Life is about change isn't it? We have got to change with things whether we like it or not. And sometimes I think of the future, getting older, being so deaf, these growths coming back but really and truly it is a wonderful life really isn't it? For all of us, for everybody.

Are you happy to end on that note it is such an optimistic note are you happy to end on that?

That is it.

I didn't tell you anything too down did I not really, no it is the truth isn't it?

Of course not.

There you go then.

Thank you very much indeed. Thank you both very much.

[End of recording]