



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Beverley Ellis
Interviewed by Stephanie Pennell

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IMPORTANT

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Oral History
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DB

T: +44 (0)20 7412 7404

E: oralhistory@bl.uk

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Interview Summary Sheet			
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[Track 1]

This is Stephanie Pennell, interviewing Beverley Ellis on Saturday, 30 May 2009 at the best Western Westminster hotel in Nottingham for the Unheard Voices project. The speech to text reporter is Cate Oates. Beverley, I wonder if you could please give me your full name, including your maiden name?

Yes, my married name is Beverley Irene Ellis. My maiden name was Grover, G-R-O-V-E-R.

Could you please give me your occupation?

I am a legal secretary.

Could you please give me the date and place of your birth?

31.03.1947, Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, a nursing home.

Can you tell me if you know your father's occupation?

Yes, do you want to know what it was?

Yes.

He was a painter and decorator, who eventually then became director of his own firm.

Thank you. And your mother's occupation?

My mother was a children's nurse, and never actually went out to work on a permanent basis.

Thank you. I would like to now ask you something about your background. Can you tell me about your family background, your grandparents first?

My maternal grandparents I knew very well. They lived in the same street, 50 or so yards away. I used to see my grandparents every day, I used to run errands for them to the local

shop. My father's father died from a heart attack when I think I was about seven, so I really only had minor contact with him. My actual grandmother died -- I never met her. I think she died very young, from I believe it was TB. When I say "very young", I think she may have only been 20 or 21.

Thank you. What about your parents?

My parents, very loving couple, lived in the same house ever since they were married, and they had a very happy marriage, my mother is still alive, my father unfortunately died at 61, he had a heart attack, and -- well, it was a very quick thing. My mother had gone out and when she came back my father was asleep in the chair, passed away.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

I have three brothers, no sisters. They are all younger than me. There is six years between me, as being the eldest, then comes my brother Graham, six years younger, then comes Nigel, who was five years I do not think than him, and then the baby, Clive, was five years after that.

And are you a close family with them?

Yes, we are very close, although we don't live now in the same area. My three brothers live within a radius of two and a half to three miles of each other, but after living in a place called Buntingford in Hertfordshire for nine to ten years Colin and I then moved from that area into Ascot, Berkshire, where we have now been for 30 years.

[05:08]

Thank you. Tell me about Colin?

I met Colin when I was 14 and he was 16. We met on a local park, he was with some friends and I was with some friends. We just 'clicked', I think the word is nowadays. We got engaged when I was 17 and he was 19, and we were married three weeks before I was 20. We have been together now 42 years. I had to think!

Do you have children?

Yes, we did have two, we did have two boys. Unfortunately we lost our youngest. He died in a car accident. In 2001, and he did leave two little boys.

How did you feel about the accident?

Devastated.

You mentioned the two little boys, who are they looked after by now?

Their mother, who has since remarried. But they only live a mile and a half away, and we see them regularly.

Do you have any other grandchildren?

Yes, I have two boys and a girl from my son that is now alive. They live literally less than half a mile away.

So have you managed to keep all your family together?

Absolutely. It was only last weekend they were together and three weeks earlier they were all together. We take them on holiday all together, so when we go there are nine of us, and, yes, the cousins get on extremely well.

[07:45]

Thank you. Can you tell me where you lived originally and where you moved to?

Before I was married?

Yes, just to cover the geographical areas.

Right, well I lived in Hoddesdon, which is a mile away from where I was born, and I was

living in Hoddesdon until I got married to Colin and then we moved to a lovely village called Buntingford, which was still in Hertfordshire and we lived in Buntingford for about nine to ten years and then we moved to Ascot, where we have been ever since.

I see, and what sort of communities were they, would you say?

Communities?

Yes.

Well, Buntingford was very rural to begin with. It did build up in the nine years we were there. Hoddesdon was a nice market type of town, small, but very pleasant, very nice.

Thank you. Can we go back to your education now.

Right.

From your younger days.

Mm-hm, yes.

Up through the whole range of education.

Right. There was a school in the same road that I was born in, or lived in, so I went to the tiny ones. Then the school was in the same grounds as the infants, so I didn't have to travel any further, and I was asked to please take my 11-plus but I did not want to and I begged my parents not to, because I didn't want to be the only one to go to a high school and all my friends went to the local secondary modern.

So I won them over, they said, 'fine, okay, we won't force you'. So from that, I went to -- I've got to try and think of the name of the school. Oh gosh. I can't think of it, I'm sorry, it has gone completely out of my head. But I was there, obviously, from 11 years until 15 and then I left school and is that righted on a job career basis.

So which was the job you went to after that?

I went up to London, in Lime Street, or Fenchurch Street, it was on the corner, EC3, and I worked as a typist, secretary for a shipping company.

How long did you stay with that company?

Four years. Then I got a local job at a place called Ware in Hertfordshire at a local builders, where I became receptionist, typist, et cetera. Then I got married. Four years I had off from work because in that time the two boys were born, 13 months apart from each other, so I eventually went back to work part-time. My neighbour, who lived actually next door to me, had a job as a legal secretary in a solicitors' office and she got me a part-time job that fitted in perfectly with the school run for the children and I had all the school holidays off, so I really was very fortunate.

Did you stay with that firm?

I stayed with that firm until we moved to Ascot, and then from Ascot, after six weeks of unpacking packing cases, I was beginning to feel a little restless, and I picked up the phone and it was the first time I had used Yellow Pages, I think; all the solicitors were listed and I took the local ones and phoned them up. On my second call, I got myself an interview. I went to the interview and I got the job, and I'm still there. Which is 30 odd years ago.

[13:20]

Excellent, thank you. Can you tell me about your leisure?

My leisure. Well, in the earlier days it would be going to watch the two boys play their sports, because you didn't have a lot of time for your own leisure, it was always going to encourage them in what sports they did, which we enjoyed. I was brought up in a sporting family, so it was second nature, basically. That, then, became going to see the grandchildren, because they are football and including the little girl, she is football mad, so we have a lot of times out in the open, if you like, in the bitterest of weathers, sometimes, supporting and shouting them on. I really don't have an awful lot of time for what I call "leisure". I enjoy going down to Dartmouth, which we have our holiday chalets there and we will often just say

'right, we will go for a long weekend'. We go for our holidays mostly there now, long with the grandchildren, of course, they come along, because having two chalets we can accommodate my son and his wife and their three children and Colin and I have the other two little boys. So there's no problem with them coming with us, their mother is quite happy for them to -- I think she enjoys it actually, it gives her a bit of a breather.

Thank you. Turning to religion, do you have a religious faith or beliefs?

Yes, yes, we are not everyday church goers by any means but Colin and I first started our courting, if you like, through a Methodist youth club and we went to many other Methodist youth clubs in the area. But my grandparents were very much of the Elim church, I don't know whether you know of the Elim church. I was confirmed at the age of 12, but as for going to church on a regular basis, I'm afraid, no, I think I'm like a lot of people: I find the weekends rather too full of everything else rather than church. But I do have a faith.

Where were you married, in church?

In church, yes, in the church I was actually confirmed in and baptised in.

Was this in the Methodist church?

No, this was Church of England.

Moving on again, do you have any political views or leanings?

Not particularly. I think I get cross, like everybody does, really, when you hear what's going on and you just wish you could pull the plug on those particular people and say, "you don't deserve to be where you are". No, I mean, I think probably I'm very much in the middle and I'm probably a liberal. But I don't go out and shout the odds about it, I just take it very generally.

[17:50]

Thank you. Moving on now, I should say at this point that you are a hearing partner?

That's right.

To Colin, who is deafened. Can we talk a little about Colin's situation now –

Certainly.

-- in relation to you and how you view it and how you react to the various issues that it involves.

Can you first tell me about Colin's hearing loss diagnosis, where and when it happened?

Do you mean his total hearing loss?

Well, the events leading up to it.

Right. Well, Colin's hearing started to play him up I believe in 1988, I think. He went to see a specialist and the specialist said, well, you have a problem in one ear, some growth in the ear, and possibly we will operate. I believe the next time Colin went, he had lost a certain amount of hearing in the other ear, so the surgeon was very reluctant then to operate in case he took away the ear that was not so bad, that then would only leave Colin with a little hearing. So Colin, for several years, just had one hearing aid, I believe, and I think eventually they tried two, but I don't think it made much of a difference. Initially, Colin's hearing loss, when it went completely, had happened around about -- let's get the years right. I'm just going to look at my notes one moment. I think it was about 2005 or 2004. He had had a very bad cold, and it had gone on and on and on for several days, even weeks. He had been to the doctor, the doctor had given him the usual sort of things, but basically said, 'oh, you know, just take a normal tablet over the counter sort of thing, because it will clear up'. It didn't, as such, and one day Colin had gone to Oxford, driving his car, and on the way there, once he had arrived, he realised he couldn't actually hear. So it was a wasted journey and he had to apologise to the person he was supposed to be meeting, didn't feel particularly well and started to drive home. He felt ill and he pulled off into a lay-by and actually had a sleep for about half an hour or so. He woke up, felt considerably better, drove back to work, whereupon his boss said, "go home, Colin, you don't look well and you are obviously not feeling very well". A couple of days later, I think it became the weekend, and we were going

on a Saturday morning to watch our grandson play his football. So we had got to the ground and Colin had had a normal breakfast, whatever, and he suddenly said 'I don't feel very well', and he didn't feel well, he more or less collapsed. We got him to the car and he, I think he passed out, I think he was unconscious, but he was being sick at the time, and it was a form of a slow motion sickness. He wasn't aware and it was very strange, it was -- I had never seen anything like it. We got him in the car once he had finished being sick and tried to sort of make him be aware of what was happening and where he was, drove him home, he didn't want a doctor called, he said no, he would be all right, and he lay on the settee for the whole weekend. He had lost his balance completely, just felt terribly ill. I phoned the doctors on the Monday, and she said to me, "can you bring him round" and I said, "well no I can't bring him to the surgery, he is a big man and he can't stand, his balance is so bad". "okay, she said, I will diagnose something for him", so she gave him some tablets. I phoned again two days later to say that he wasn't any better and I really was quite concerned and she said, 'do you think he needs to go into hospital?', and I said, 'yes, I do'. So she said, do you want me to call a ambulance and I said 'yes, I think you should', which she did and an ambulance did come that day and Colin was admitted into the hospital at Wexham Park in Slough and I think he was there for about five to six days. His balance didn't get really much better. He was put on a concoction of steroids and other tablets, around about 18 to 20 in all a day he was taking. Eventually they let him out but he was not any better in himself, his hearing had gone.

And going back on all these events, how did you feel from the very start when there was a sign of him worrying that he was not beginning to hear things?

Well, I think the worry is -- it hits you because you realise that you have now got to be that person's hearing, but also you have got to be aware of everything that he was doing, because you were frightened he might fall over, just literally frightened for his whole wellbeing, basically. It also became not a burden, don't get me wrong, a worry and a concern that I had to be totally aware of his movements and literally I had to take over the driving all the time, which was fortunate I can drive, so I was the driver, taking him to different appointments and that sort of thing, and of course you become -- I become the -- not the keeper, the one who is in charge, if you like, because it was me who could hear, me who could check if there was anybody, say, prowling around or someone was ringing the doorbell or the phone was ringing. There was just so many things that you take for granted when someone hears, that when they don't you have to become so alert yourself.

[27:06]

How did you feel when he collapsed?

I felt absolutely awful because -- well, that's my husband, that's my partner, and that's my life and, yes, it was horrible, absolutely horrible, because he wasn't particularly elderly to collapse, to look at him, you would really think there was nothing wrong with him, but there he was very, very poorly and in a very distressed sort of state.

Did you feel you could handle the situation?

Yes, in a way. I think I could handle what was going on, but you could feel that you yourself were being pressurised, not that you didn't want to be pressurised, but you knew you had to double up whatever it was you did before, you had to be twice, if not three times, better at it to compensate for Colin's lack of, if you like.

[28:26]

Thank you. Can you tell me about the medical staff that you were involved with. Was it your GP originally?

Yes, the doctor wasn't Colin's GP, it was one that was in part of the surgery, but it was not his actual doctor. I thought she was a little careless in not actually coming to see Colin, and I was quite taken aback that she accepted the fact that it was me doing the ringing, the telephoning, and she was taking my word for it over the phone, that an ambulance was needed, because normally they don't send for an ambulance unless a doctor has actually said, yes, you need an ambulance, and it wasn't a 999 call, because Colin hadn't got any worse than when he was first poorly on that Saturday. But he hadn't got any better either, if you see what I mean.

Yes. Moving on slightly, what happened after that? When he was in hospital, was he then referred to other staff?

Yes, he was referred. I believe Colin went to the Windsor hospital which is the hearing side,

I presume, of the practice, the King Edward VIII Hospital in Windsor and it was here he came across a very nice lady called Katrina, and she started to give him a course on the lessons, so every week he would go and have some speech lessons, and learn the alphabet and that sort of thing. Then she suddenly decided that Colin might well try to be in the LINK system, and she sort of sent off, I believe, to see if he could be a possible candidate for it, because she had had good responses about the LINK situation and the organisation. And, yes, eventually Colin did get asked if he would like to attend the LINK, along with myself, which is what we did.

What was your reaction to this -- to Katrina? Did you accompany Colin on these visits?

On several occasions, but Colin was trying to get his confidence back, and he would like to try and do driving the again. Now Windsor wasn't that far from Ascot so he decided he would like to drive himself but I was there as a back-up and if he didn't feel up to it I could take the time off work, my boss was very sympathetic and I would just say -- and sometimes I would just Colin off and go to work and then he would ring me perhaps two hours later because sometimes it was two hours, and I would just pick him up and take him home.
[32:31]

Thank you. Did Colin have lip reading tutors?

Yes, he did, he went to lip reading classes.

What was Katrina, the hearing therapist?

She was an audiologist I believe.

Did he have any hearing therapists to help?

Possibly but I wouldn't like to swear on it.

When was he fitted with hearing aids?

I think around about the '90s for one hearing aid anyway, probably late 1996/7, something

like that I believe. Then he had the two for a while, these I think were digital ones, but they didn't really seem to do an awful lot for him.

Did he think of other things like a hearing dog?

Not at that time, no, no. That came when we went to Link.

Let's talk about Link did you improve with him to Link?

I did, yes.

[34:00]

Do you want to speak a little of how you found the course there?

I found the course excellent. I was rather dubious, because I'm not an outgoing person, really, I'm very shy as a rule, and I didn't know what to expect, obviously. Well, Colin didn't know what to expect. But we arrived and we had a beautiful room facing the sea, we were met by lovely people who sort of broke us in, if you like, explained what was going to be happening, and we met the other couples, they were a nice lot, a mixed bunch, but very, very pleasant, very nice and at the end of the week we were like a complete family, having laughs and jokes and whatever. But the first day was obviously everybody was a bit strained because they didn't know what to expect. We had a choice of things that would be happening each day, but it was very good because you would have something in the morning then you would have a definite break for lunch, something in the afternoon and they were very strict on their timing, because you needed to be for the lady who might be doing the typing, as Cate is now, or you might have someone who was deafened that had come in to talk about their experiences, well they obviously didn't want to be talking for too long because it was very tiring and you get the eye strain because you are with watching people's mouths. We had a lot of fun, but it was also very serious in a sense and it was a learning curve, we all learnt something. There was a young couple there, very nice, that we got on extremely well with, and we had to put on these big earphones, like the old-type earphones, and we had to have the tinnitus sound put through our ears so that we who could hear could understand what our partners were going through and having to compete with. It was an eye-opener, actually, it

was an eye-opener, because you then were in a conversation with a deaf person and you were trying to lip read as well, and I mean if you hadn't done any lip reading, it was extremely hard to understand what that person was saying. So it made you take stock, I suppose, take a deep breath and think, "hang on, I've got to speak slower, and I've got to make my lips make more sense". We had one laugh when we had got these earphones on, because we had a break and the young girl I was with decided she needed to go to the restroom, so off she went, five minutes later she came back and she was in absolute hysterics because she had gone to the ladies' washroom and there was a coach party of ladies who had come to the hotel, they were all in there and they were looking at her aghast because she had got the headphones on still, she hadn't realised, and she looked like a mini mouse, she really did, and it caused such a hoo-ha we laughed and that sort of thing broke the ice and we became very firm friends. I think LINK itself is an extremely good organisation and it certainly helped myself and Colin to a great extent, I must add.

And what happened -- I get a feeling that you came home feeling very confident again?

Certainly, yes.

What happened when you got home?

Well, during that week, Colin had -- he had a bit of an experience. I don't know quite how else to explain it. He was feeling very down on the second day we were there, it was bitterly cold, there was actually snow falling, and during one of the breaks he went out to the beach, because it was just across the road, and he became himself quite upset but he didn't want anybody with him, so I had to leave him. I knew he was going, I knew where he was, but he just wanted to be on his own and I think he had an experience that somehow gave him a bit of courage, a bit of oomph if you like, to cope with possibly what life had delivered to him, and I think he actually looked at his position differently, in a much calmer, placid way I think and he often says to this day that he really did almost have some form of inspiration.

[40:32]

Thank you. Moving on a little, Colin had a cochlear implant?

Yes.

When was that?

That was in 2007, I believe.

Can you talk a little bit about it?

Yes. It was marvellous. We were referred to Guys and St Thomas's hospital in London, just to see the initial start-up of whether Colin would be a possible candidate for a cochlear, because not everybody is suitable. The particular audiology team up there were wonderful, they were a real team, a real partnership. There was about five of them, which we saw more or less on every visit, but initially the first visit we were told that if Colin was successful for a cochlear then it was going to take at least two years. So it wasn't going to happen overnight and there would be a series of appointments, but these appointments would probably be four months apart. But don't get alarmed, they said, we haven't forgotten you, it just that it takes that sort of time for each appointment to come up. So we got on the bottom step, if you like, and started off going up to London, and each time he saw three or four different people to do different things. Some were the tests to see if he had got any hearing at all. Some were like a lip reading form on a screen. Some were like, I believe, psychological, to check whether he could cope with that, and obviously also there was the medical side of whether his body was suitable to have it. Eventually we got to the point where, yes, he was going to be classed as okay to be put forward for the cochlear implant. In actual fact, that came through for August 2007. Unfortunately, we had gone on holiday, and Colin had come out with some form of a rash on his face, so we had to cancel the appointment, which was very distressing because you had psyched yourself up for it and then to be told, no, I'm sorry, it will be another five weeks at least. But anyway we got through that five weeks and eventually, yes, we went up to Guys and St Thomas's and he had the operation. I stayed in their accommodation, which was literally on site near enough, just a two or three minute walk away, so I was able to be there with him during the day and for however long it was before he was allowed out, which he had the operation on the Thursday, I believe, and he was supposed to have come out on the Friday. That's right, and it went very well, but he did have some problems with the wound itself healing, so he had to go back into hospital for eight days on antibiotics just to clear this particular problem up, but it was unusual, the doctor said there was only two he had had that year that had had this problem and one was a six year old girl

and one was Colin, so they were totally different.

[45:01]

Can I ask you how you felt over all this time, over the period of the build-up if you like to the cochlear implant happening and during the time of the operation in particular?

Well, I felt in myself that we were getting there, fighting, there was something at the end of the tunnel, there was that light, even though you couldn't say, until they had told you exactly that, yes, you were going to have it, you couldn't celebrate, but you were going in a good direction. Well I was absolutely delighted for Colin when, yes, we got the date and, yes, when he went in and it was wonderful. But the operation is a two-part thing. So you have the operation where they put the implant in, and then a month later you go back and they put the outer part on, so you are not actually connected for, say, five weeks. But again, you are hopeful and it's very exciting, because you are just hoping that you are improving to be able to hear, or Colin is going to be able to hear something after that five weeks. Initially I was a bit frightened and a bit scared because of the accommodation that I was in was very clean, but it was very isolated in a way. There was only two of us on one complete floor, and the builders were in as well during the day doing it all up. It was all part of the students' complex, I believe. But it didn't matter because I was so close to Colin that I thought, well, I can cope with this. But it was a bit nerve-wracking because there was cloisters underneath and a couple of nights there were a few drunks and of course the cloisters just made the sound extremely loud. So I just made sure I had bolted the door!

Were you there for the switch-on?

Yes, yes. That was very exciting. We were sitting in one of the little rooms and after going through the necessary procedures that she did on the computer to tune Colin in, as she called it, "I've got to tune you in and can you tell me how this is, how that is, are you hearing a loud noise, a screech, or whatever", and she got it to a certain pitch, and she said, right, she said you should be able to hear properly now. I want Bev to say something. So I just said something quite ridiculous, like "well it's about time you took notice of me", something like that, and of course he turned around and he said 'I can hear you', he said 'that's my Bev'. So it was very nice. And we walked out of there absolutely joyful.

[Break in recording]

So after Colin's switching on, what happened, did you stay in the hospital for a while or did you go home?

No, we went home. We walked out of there, and Colin could hear lots of different sounds. He was told that they would sound different to what possibly he would remember them, sing to home and listen to, say, turning a tap on, because that sound of the water running would not be the same sound as what he would have remembered it to be. So it was a question of putting the new noises to whatever it represented. So literally changing what your sounding was to a new sounding, because they said, "you could sound a bit like Mickey Mouse" because the pitch of someone's voice could be different to what Colin remembered it but it could still be a noise that he could associate with what was being said, like banging cupboard doors they said or walking along a pavement, you would hear like "click, click, click" and that would be someone's stiletto heels possibly on the pavement or a dog barking would sound, to him, different to what it did before. But, eventually, the brain acclimatises to it and tells you that that is a dog barking, even though it may not be like you remembered a dog barked.

How did you find his changing and his change of perception of all the sounds?

I found very it was exciting. I was excited for Colin but I was also very, very pleased and relieved that after all this time he had got what we had all hoped for and that was some form of hearing back, because it made him become certainly more aware of everything around him again, and it made him a happier person, certainly, to be able to hear something and take part in social life again I suppose.

[51:43]

So, thinking back, you mentioned that Colin had a particular moment when he was at Link?

Yes, yes.

And then he has just had another moment with a new sense of hearing?

Yes.

How did it feel to you, the two different people in that sense?

Well, I didn't know about Colin's experience, if you like, on the beach when we were at LINK. He didn't tell me that for some considerable time, in fact I would say possibly almost 18 months. He kept that to himself. I think he found it very personal, but I noticed a change in him. His cochlear implant, well, it just made you feel so much more joyful, happy, happy for Colin. It was also easier because the certain amount of frustration was taken away because before you tended to forget that if you walked in and he had got his back to you, you would say something quite silly, you know, just an ordinary thing and then of course you would realise, there's no point in me talking because he can't see me. Whereas now, with the cochlear, you can actually -- he can be at the sink looking out into the garden and I can come in and as long as my voice is at the right pitch and loud enough -- I don't mean shouting, but just loud enough -- he can hear me. That has made an awful lot of difference, because you have a communication and you can enjoy something together, if we are out in the car now I can say to him, 'oh, did you see that, that was lovely', or 'what a beautiful wild flower' or 'watch out there's something, you know, in the bushes'. There was no point me saying that before because I could say it but we had gone past it before I could explain to Colin in detail what it was and so it had lost its momentum. So it was no good me saying, "Oh, that was a lovely ...", when it was half a mile down the road, already gone and you know the moment was missed. So it is nice now to have an instant reaction, a response.

Thank you. Can I take you back a little to something I should perhaps have asked you before about when Colin had no hearing. How did you communicate then?

Well, we had do the alphabet at some point, and get the first word, if you like, and once he had got the first word with, I suppose, actions, he would possibly get the rest of what I was trying to convey to him.

Was this finger spelling?

Finger spelling to begin with. Also I mean a note paper and pad we never went anywhere

without a notepaper and pen and what have you, because sometimes it was easier and quicker to do it that way than to try and do the spelling and if he got hold of the wrong idea to begin with, it was very frustrating because you could go around a lot of different areas before you actually got to the point. So, by writing one or two words down first of all, he used to twig on, if you like, what was going sort of talked about or mentioned.

And lip reading?

Lip reading, yes, he often says now "look at me", not necessarily to me because I think he has got used to my voice or whatever it sounds like to him, and I do tend, I think, now to speak a bit more clearly to people, in fact I think I speak too clearly to people who can hear me, they probably think I'm quite -- I don't know what they think!

But, yes, I learnt to hopefully make someone who is deafened able to understand what I'm saying a bit better and I tend to slow down a bit now, whereas you know, before, you would just ramble off. So I have an understanding now of what it must be like.

Do you feel that's an achievement?

Yes I do, from my point of view, yes I do.

[57:32]

Can I ask you about your technology at home, could you say a bit on computers, the mobile phones, mobile text, does Colin have that?

Colin, through LINK again I believe, gave him the ideas of the phone, a text phone. We have one of those at home. Colin doesn't always use it, because if the person who is ringing knows him they speak clearly enough for him to be able to use the phone without the text.

We have mobile phones, that in fact was the first way that we could communicate if I was at work and Colin was at home, I bought him a mobile that it lit up so that if there was a text there for him from me then obviously he would know it was there. We had the fire prevention people come around and fitting the actual sensory type of fire alarms and also we have got a bell that flashes, the lights flash on and off if someone is at the front door. I think we've got more or less everything that is of use to Colin, actually, and they are all very, very

useful because if he is upstairs and the phone does ring, that also flashes, so he can see the flash, if he is in his office, and he will come down and answer the phone, whereas obviously before the cochlear there was no way he would answer the phone.

Do you have a loop system at home?

No, we don't.

How does Colin manage with the television? Can he now hear the television or does he rely on subtitles?

We have the text on permanently. I've got used to it now. But if I record a programme that he wants to watch, he can listen to it because you don't get the words up when you record a programme, you don't get the text, but he can listen to it like his *Springwatch* and *Country File*, I mean they were a must if he was not going to be in on a Sunday morning that had to be recorded and, yes, he can hear, and make out what is being said. But I wouldn't say perfectly, but enough to understand, I think.

[01:00:40]

Yes, good. Moving on now, can we talk about the impact of Colin's hearing loss. Ordinarily we might talk about it as regards to Colin but really we need to know about how it affected you. Colin's self-esteem was presumably very severely knocked?

Yes, I would say that is certainly the case, or was the case, yes.

How did you feel about this?

I felt very angry. I felt angry at his workplace, as well, because he was made redundant literally before he had the cochlear implant and I just felt that that was knocking a man down when he was already down and it wasn't actually necessary, I don't think, to have made him redundant. I think he was made a bit of a scapegoat because somebody else who was disabled in a different area was also made redundant at the same time. I just felt very angry with them for doing that, but Colin is a very jolly and jovial person and he is a very friendly

and outgoing person. I don't think he was down for too, too long, once he had got the cochlear that really did bring him up to sort of more bouncy and his usual self.

I had to become a different person in a way, because I had more on my shoulders to worry about with his deafness, ie more of the driving. Also I suppose the fact that I felt I had to go around and just check that the doors were shut, closed, locked, windows were locked. It became more of a role where I did the looking after him, whereas it seems as if roles had been reversed. That normally he would have been the one checking that I was okay, that he had shut the doors, locked the keys, et cetera, you know. Yes and it just felt somehow wrong that I was the stronger one of the two of us at that particular time and I didn't really like having to take a leader role. I did it, but I didn't want to do it to take away his own role in being head of the family, if you like. So I had to be a bit careful that I didn't overstep the mark, I think, and still let him feel that ultimately it was either his decision or he was doing it, rather than me taking full control.

Do you think it was a question of identity?

Possibly.

Him being a man and you being a woman?

Yes, possibly. You know, I think although we've always had a very good relationship and always jointly -- decisions were made jointly and we would talk it out and whatever, but there were times when I just had to say, 'no, I'm sorry, you are wrong this time, it's going to be so-and-so' because it was possibly myself putting my neck on the line, if you like.

Did Colin feel he had a label of disability, shall we say?

I think to a certain extent he did. I think he got to be quite an angry young man, or an angry old man, if you like, about certain things. Frustration came into it. Yes, I think certainly a lot of his outgoing-ness if you like was snatched away from him and he did certainly become far more withdrawn in himself, but also angry, I think, as well, which is part of the frustration. But I must say he has got it all back in a way of since his computer and writing, although he might not be able to speak and hear a conversation verbally with someone and have an actual argument with them, he does it very well on paper. The post office, I think, are very pleased

with Colin Ellis!

Did he feel any sense of dependency, do you think, on you?

I think that's inevitable. Yes, I think he did depend, because if someone rang up and wanted to ask just a simple question, he had to depend on me answering the phone before we got the text phone. You know, I mean a lot of people didn't realise that he was deafened, so you would get a call out of the blue and it could be somebody who was an old friend from years ago, a work friend, and it was down to me to have to explain the situation and, I don't know, I felt as if, in a way, I was taking Colin's -- what's the word I'm looking for? Taking away something that he should of himself been able and in a position to have done, and that was part of the fact that, having been deafened, that had been taken away from him.

Did you get to a point where you found a way of working round it on his behalf? So that it didn't feel quite so bad to you?

Well, I think possibly, I think I tried to make it a bit more light-hearted, "oh come on, it doesn't matter that much, you know, we can get over this, or well I can ring them back and I can tell them so-and-so", so I think, yes, I tried not to make a mountain out of a mole hill. I hope it helped Colin. Obviously you don't know for sure that it did, but -- it was difficult, I mean difficult for him. Not so much for me, although, yes, it was very frustrating at different times, but no, he had the worst side, he had the hardest part, not me.

[01:09:02]

Thank you. Can I ask you, in a way I've asked you this already, but maybe more specifically about your relationship with Colin, personal relationship. Obviously you are very close to each other?

Very close to each other, yes.

How has this been affected?

I think it has pulled us closer together. I mean we've always been very close, we've not been

like a -- too much of, like, lovey dovey, if you see what I'm saying, we don't go around clinging to each other and all the rest of it, but we have got a very good rapport with each other. We usually are thinking the same things. It's surprising how many times Colin has said something that I was just about to say and vice versa. Yes, it's almost like knowing what they are thinking, you know, it's weird. But we do, we have a very close relationship. We have always done things together. He used to play sport a lot, cricket, at the weekends, and with the two boys growing up ever since they were born they would be taken to cricket on Saturday and Sunday every weekend during the cricket season and they had a lovely time of it because you are on an open field you know and running around and there would be a social life as well with the cricket mates and, yes, so, yes, I think we get on very well. Yes, I would say we've got a very, very strong marriage.

You mentioned before about humour, do you feel that's an important part of it?

Oh absolutely, absolutely. We are in hysterics sometimes. Well you can't explain it but it's just there, it happens, you can say something silly like coming down on the train yesterday, I forget what we said, but we were like a couple of kids because we could both see the funny side of it, you know. Yes, we are lucky, we are very fortunate.

[01:11:27]

Yes. Moving on to something a little bit more serious now, to talk about the employment and financial aspect of Colin's loss of hearing. You are the breadwinner?

Well, yes, I'm the breadwinner in the sense of I am now earning, which I have done all my married life anyway, apart from the four years off with the children, I've always worked. No, Colin has his disability allowance, but that basically is all that comes in, but we are okay, we manage all right.

You feel you are comfortably placed?

Yes, yes.

Good, and the self-esteem that you have, that you both have, as a result of that, is that acceptable to you both?

Well, I consider Colin to be a very easy-go-lucky person, but with strong opinions and feelings, and he is not frightened to let people know if he disagrees about something. A very honest person. I feel I am probably the same, but I'm not quite so direct, if you like, whereas Colin would go and call a spade a spade I would be more inclined to back off slightly, I think. But I'm very proud of him, I think he has done extremely well, I really am. He has pulled himself out of possibly a terrible place, I think, he felt he was in. Whether he felt he had let his family down by becoming deafened, I don't know, you don't know how someone feels in their own mind, whether they still feel responsible for us but because he is deafened he can't fulfil that role again. If that's how he feels, which I'm sure it isn't, but it may have been, then that's not the case to the people who love him and respect him. So I think he has done very, very well.

Yes. Colin, I believe, is -- he has got a lot of interests, I think, hasn't he?

An awful lot, yes.

He has got an awful lot of projects going.

Yes.

Do you think that's helped him a lot?

I think so, yes. I think the computer, in the first place, is a great asset for him, because he is not cut off from anybody. He can talk, he can have a laugh, he can send photos, he can do his angry old man act if he wants by writing to Parliament. He is also on the neighbourhood watch scheme at home, so he is on that committee. He is on a police committee as well, where he advises the police how they should treat deafened people, at certain gigs they might have or attend. Yes, I mean I could go on, he has got several fingers in different pies. He is not bored, by any shape or form, he is certainly never bored. There is too much going on.

And all the things that he does, are you involved with them as well?

Not in the -- well, I mean not in the neighbourhood watch thing, because obviously he is on

that, but I would give him help if he wanted help in delivering leaflets or whatever. We haven't mentioned his train set either, have we? Which takes up a lot of his time as well in the garage. No, I don't help him with that! He loves his gardening as well, so of course that's another thing that we do both together, we do love our garden.

He does stamp collecting as well?

Oh yes, stamp collecting, again yes, which is his thing. I can't get excited about stamps, I'm afraid!

[01:16:34]

Thank you. Do you travel, do both of you travel?

We used to go to Majorca and Germany to see friends, we go to France two or three times a year for a few days, so yes, we do travel, we travel down to Dartmouth obviously to go to our holiday chalet, yes, I mean we are not frightened of travelling, it's just that we haven't been abroad very far, if you know what I mean, it has just been these local -- well, I call local, I mean Majorca is only two and a bit hours, but it hasn't stopped Colin from wanting to, he will get in the car and drive, go to the ferry, go across into Calais, we will do a bit of shopping, he is quite confident to drive and drive over there because he used to obviously when he was a young man, he used to take these huge great cranes across and go down to Alaska and goodness knows where so he has had a varied life.

Thank you. Moving on to the wider society, shall we say, we've talked about family, and relationships and how Colin and yourself have coped with that. Are you involved in support networks with Colin?

With LINK, yes.

With LINK, and the neighbourhood watch?

The neighbourhood watch I mean I would help him out if needed. He has only been on it for the last five or six months so initially there has not been a great deal to do on that, but, yes,

I mean I would help him on that. I don't have a lot of free time myself because working nine till five, Monday to Friday, it really is only my weekends and I have to go and see my mum, who is in a residential home at the weekends, so that more or less takes out a complete day, because by the time you've got to Watford from us and then spent some time with her and gone back home your Saturday and Sunday, really a big chunk has been taken away. So I don't have a lot of time for socialising, but we have friends where we will go to them for evening meals and then perhaps four weeks later they will come back to us and you know those sorts of things. I'm there for Colin in support and I'm the one who does the ringing up, telephoning, if it's got to be something that's got to be done there and then sort of thing.

Yes. You support your mother in the home?

Well, I've got, as I said earlier, I've got three brothers, but it's always been down to myself looking after mum more. I think that's a natural thing with girls. I'm also the oldest, so I suppose I would be more her age group, if you see what I'm saying, although she is 27 years older than me. But, no, mum and I had a fantastic relationship. Unfortunately she has got dementia and she is 89 this year, bless her, but she is a lovely lady and she is in a Masonic home in Watford and they look after her extremely well. I couldn't be happier for her if she had to go into a home which she had to because she was just unable to look after herself and we tried having her stay with us but it lasted about six months because the dementia then set in badly and we just could not leave her and she wasn't happy, you know. Her mind was running away with her, so she needed that 24-hour protection, which I couldn't do because of being at work.

[01:21:21]

Can I ask you about access and awareness as far as legislation is concerned. I believe that Colin is quite keen on this and watches it closely. Are you involved in this at all?

Not actually, no, because these are part of the things that Colin is on, the committees and things. This thing he is on with the police, he has made them well aware that they should have this and that for the disabled people. I'm not on it simply for the reason, I haven't been asked to. You know, I mean I haven't been asked to participate. I would support him, yes, I mean I think it's essential that these things are corrected and life is made easier for the

disabled.

And the discrimination as well?

The discrimination, absolutely, yes, yes.

Right. We are getting towards the end of the interview now, and I would like to ask you about your feelings on this project, Unheard Voices, and how you feel about it?

Well I think it's a good idea. I don't know too much about it because obviously I am the one who is being interviewed, and Colin is on the other side, if you like, he is an interviewer. So really I don't know too much about it, apart from the fact that Colin came back from going up to, I believe the oral library up in London, and was absolutely over the moon about it, and was saying what a good idea it would be, et cetera, et cetera. But we only have one -- well, no, I tell a lie, we have two computers in the house: one is Colin's which you are very likely to find him on nine times out of ten, so I don't get a look-in to the computer, but I'm not computer literate myself, so it doesn't worry me too much. But when I retire, I have been told that there is that computer in the other room waiting for me, so I think I'm going to get a crash course!

Finally, can I ask you if you have any plans for hopes for yourself and for Colin in the future?

Well, I would have hopes that we are going to have a long, healthy life ahead of us still, and especially to see Colin getting on so well with life now. I believe he is fulfilled in what he is doing, he enjoys it, he throws himself into it. I hope that, before too long, and I think it might be before the end of the year, that I myself may be retired, in which case it would be rather nice to have some joint retirement time together, although I think he might be the one who hasn't got the time and I will have it all! I don't know.

Thank you very much indeed, Beverley?

That's a pleasure.

For giving a splendid interview and for coming along today and thank you, too, Cate for

being our speech to text reporter?

Yes, thank you very much, Cate, excellent job.

I will stop the interview now.

[End of recording]