



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Steve Scott
Interviewed by Fran Walker

British Library ref. C1345/56

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/56

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Scott

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Stephen

Sex: Male

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1947

Date(s) of recording: 31st May 2009

Location of interview: The Westminster Hotel, Nottingham

Name of interviewer: Fran Walker

Speech to Text reporter: Lynn Allen

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

So, this is Fran Walker interviewing Stephen Scot on 31st May for the Unheard Voices project in Nottingham and the speech to text reporter is Lynn. Okay before we start the interview I would like you to tell me your full name?

My full name is Stephen Paul Scot.

And your occupation or your former occupation?

My former occupation was a production director controlling a wall covering company.

And the date and place of your birth?

The 24th of the 2nd 1947.

And your mother's occupation?

My who.

Your mother's occupation?

She was a housewife for most of her life, prior to that when she was a youngster, before she got married, she would have been a secretary.

And your father's occupation?

He was a policeman, he finished up as being a superintendent in Leicester police force.

[01:36]

Okay. We might come into that in a bit more detail in the interview which is going to start properly now. So if you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and about your

early childhood?

I might. Right, I was born in a place called Ridings in Derbyshire, but I was brought up throughout Leicestershire because my father, being a policeman, as his job changed he moved round the County of Leicestershire from time to time, the most we ever stopped anywhere would be about five years. In my school time, the most I ever stopped at any school at any one time was 3 years, so it did have a fair amount of disruption to my education.

And was that an issue for you?

No, but I was always the new boy if you know what I mean. People did used to try and pick on me, but usually it resulted in just taking somebody outside giving them a smacking and the rest laid off you then so no it wasn't a big problem! Although it was fairly disruptive towards the educational part of my life. I left school at 18, and went on an apprenticeship as a silkscreen printer. I progressed through that and then I became well became what they call a redule is printer a wall covering company then I worked my way through that operation to become production director. Now, that is about that.

So what kind of things did that involve?

Which ones? The wall covering.

Yes?

Well printing wall coverings well you can imagine, there is not many walls in here is there. No, well it involved the good part about printing wall products as opposed to screen printing, screen printing used to be physical used to hurt. It was a question of drawing a squeegee across a screen mesh and pushing the ink through. Whereas wall covering when I went into that, you pressed a button and then the paper came in right and printed six colours in register and then rewound itself. So, that was great. So I enjoyed that a lot.

[04:32]

Right. And tell me about what was going on in your life apart from work?

Well at that time I used to do a fair amount of gardening in between working and then but work was like to some extent the greatest part of the life. I used to work some obscene hours, anything between 10 and 15 hours a day on a lot of occasions. So anyway, over a period of time I did find this thing called caravanning, which was superb. It gave me a new lease of life it took my thoughts away from work and actually with a big lump on the back of a car, it made me think more about other things, other than working and I have been doing that now for nearly the last 25 years. And it is brilliant. When I was 55 I was made redundant because there was a downturn in the business, and obviously a need to reorganise the company. I took early retirement, and I managed to do more caravanning than ever through since the last 7 years in fact.

[06:10]

Right. And are you on your own or have you got a partner?

Yes, my I have a wife she is one year older than me. She worked as a secretary and until we met and then after the first year of marriage we had our first child and she has never worked since.

Right.

So she is now 60 and retired obviously and I am 60 now, 62 and retired.

And when did you meet?

When did we meet? Oh a long time ago, about 34 years ago in a pub basically, in a nightclub. So we gelled and that was it.

And you have got children?

I have a daughter -- I have a daughter that is I daughter that has moved to Australia and a son that lives in Norway. They were both born on the same day two years apart. That shows some production director doesn't it?

Very controlled!

So they have got the same birthday.

[07:47]

Okay, so when did your hearing loss start?

When did the.

When did your hearing loss start?

When I was 56 we were caravanning in Spain, went over the mountains from France to Spain, and I noticed a drop in hearing as if I was on a plane whereas if you have some wax in your ears and it closes up you can't hear until you get down the other side. Oh, consideration well that didn't go fully, but it did sort of well detract from the hearing and when we came back I thought I will go and have my ears syringed out and the nurse said there was no wax in there and put me on antibiotics and then I went deaf overnight then. I want to see the doctor after that, the day after that, and he sent me to see an ENT consultant. Two weeks later I think it was. And then I have never been in hospital in 55 years and I was in hospital after one hour talking to him for 5 days of tests as an inpatient. In that time they did blood tests and all sorts of other little tests and an MRI scan, plus an operation to drip feed into my ear steroids but to no avail I came out after 5 days no better off than when I went in. So when I saw them a month later at the ENT clinic, they took the swab out of my ear and they thought perhaps it may have been an insect bite which had given me a viral infection, it could have even been lime disease but they didn't know. And to this day they still don't know. At that particular time I met a woman called Ena Martin, who was the audiologist the chief audiologist at Leicester Royal Infirmary. And she was very helpful and she said that you -- well to cut a long story short, that you ought to go to LINK for an intensive operation,

intensive rehabilitation in fact. Which we well I didn't think anything of it at the time, but eventually the next meeting we had with my consultant he almost recommended that I go, so we did. And we went I think I have written it down somewhere but I can't remember the dates, went for a week there, which was very helpful, very useful and it taught me to deal with the DLA, also taught me about signing, lipreading and generally how to cope with being deaf. And also put me in touch with the idea that I may be able to have an implant. So, armed with that, I came away with it I started lipreading classes, I applied for assessment for an implant I filled all my DLA forms in, I went to I think we started a short course on signing as well. So we actually met all the criteria that they had actually laid down for us. And so I am very grateful to the LINK operation for doing that for me. And that is basically where we are. I met my consultant after that, I insisted that he put me forward for assessment at Nottingham which he duly did because he didn't know what to do with me and then I was transferred over there and eventually I got an implant, which was switched on and it is absolutely brilliant. Absolutely can't say enough about it. Although it has not been without its problems, but without it I would have had nothing. That is it up-to-date.

[12:33]

Right. Okay let's go back over some of that in a bit more detail maybe. You say you came back from holiday and it felt like wax at first, how were you feeling then, just that how were you feeling?

Well it just feels like sounds were distant. Like as if you are on a plane when you go and your ears pop, you could come back down and they give you some like sweets usually to eat so it felt a bit like that. So it looks like everything had been decreased in sound noise and quality, softened if you like down to about 50 per cent of what it normally was.

Up hum. And but were you worried or?

No I just thought I have had it we had been up in a plane before I have had that before so I was not worried about it. And I Venn when I was talking to Ena Martin when we were talking through the Deafness I thought at some point it went like this, it will come back like that. But it never did.

And when you were in hospital, were you still hopeful that they would be able to restore your hearing or was...

Yes, yes, yes I thought well I didn't think there was anything serious really. Apart from the fact that I have never been in hospital so five days in hospital was quite a shock to the system.

And when did it dawn on you that this was actually going to be a long-term thing?

Well about six months later really, when I had still had not got anything well still couldn't hear.

And how did you feel about that?

How did I feel about it? Well it was difficult because it was very difficult for the wife. The thing is me on my own it was no problem, but for the wife it would be worse because she would be talking to me and I wouldn't understand what she was saying. Everything at that particular time had to be written down or virtually written down, otherwise unless it was very basic she couldn't attract my attention. So it was like disastrous for her much more for her perhaps than it was for me. So, difficult, a change in life style totally. I used to go out on a regular basis and be part of a conversation with other people now I have got nothing. So yes, it was a pain but I had to put up with it. The only trouble is that the wife had to put up with it as well and the people round me. I lost most of the friends that I used to have, or what I thought were friends. Difficult to make new ones as well, because of the -- it is too difficult to talk to a group of people and try and push or be picking everything up so it was everything was very mono.

[15:55]

Uh huh. And you say you lost most of your friends, can you give me examples of that?

Well people that used to you know you would have casual acquaintances then people who

were more friends. It was just more difficult to interject into conversations so you ended up not dog it or not going to the same places any more because it is like because you were just left out. Not because of their fault, because of your fault because you could not be part of the same operation. And they didn't understand either, and generally it becomes too much trouble to actually deal with you I thought at the end of the day. And so sooner than be that one who was the nuisance I would fade away. This has made an awful lot of difference, but it still has its limitations and a group conversation.

A group conversation is still difficult?

Very difficult. Maybe okay in a room like this, with about four people, but anywhere with any sound at all is like death you know you just cannot pick it up. You would think I could err wig most people's conversations with this smart microphone but you can't I can assure you it is like stick it to the wall and listen to everybody else but you can't do that. It is like all microphones, it elevates all sound it does not discriminate really does it.

But you know it has made a difference in your ordinary conversation like when you are just with your wife?

What this thing (indicates implant)

Yes?

The implant, yes absolutely. It made 100 per cent change from having nothing and a notebook and a bit of lip reading, to having a reasonable conversation. We don't get it right all the time, depends on whether the kettle is going, or the dish washer is going or the washing machine or the television is on, or even just the fact that there is no carpet on the kitchen floor because it bounces the signals so I can get it wrong.

[18:46]

Right. And what other equipment do you use apart from your implant?

Well prior to that, well with equipment I have a loop do you know what that is, it is an induction loop mobile induction loop which sits around my neck for the wife this is for the car because it is better than saying/turn left. And that it is basically it works with a two way radio which she can talk in hers and it goes straight into the T coil into my implant. So, we can talk and it cuts the background noise of the engine out. So that is a piece of equipment which is most useful especially on a long driving journeys. I have a dreaded satellite navigation system which helps considerably which I can hear and I can see. I have my doorbell and also the fire alarm system and the burglar alarm system, and what else? Are hooked up to a what they call a silent alert, which buzzes if something goes off, so I can see what it is. Plus the fact the wife has one of those she can press and it sort of buzzes up to tell me that she wants the talk to me. This young lady is very good here. This is very fast. Yes. Yes. And so someone for someone who has lost their hearing in the last few years, you have not really experienced of when that kind of equipment didn't exist, but what is the most useful thing for you then? The implant?

Yes absolutely 100 per cent without that I could say my life-style or quality of life would be deceased by at least 75 per cent in terms of talking, hearing and communication.

You have got -- were you already retired when this started?

Yes.

But what kind of hobbies were you doing, what kind of hobbies had you got or what were you doing in your retirement time?

What was I doing during my retirement? Well just being early retired because I had been retired about 2 years could be by the time this happened, obviously I took a lot more caravanning, a lot more holidays type of thing, a lot more visiting and erm so really not much different to what I am doing today.

So what kind of impact did your hearing loss have on those activities?

Well, as I said before my biggest activity was communicating to people so that it was

devastating. The impact on that. So it really did limit it did curtail my sort of wings quite considerably. And also may I just say that we did find it fairly difficult going to shops and dealing with well anything. I mean, you go if you wanted to order a meal it was okay if you could order a meal that said I will have steak and chips but when they started asking do you want veg with it or do you want this when they start asking 20 questions I was just left cold. No chance you know, so I really did rely on other people to make or ask or sort the menus out. And in shops as well, if somebody started talking about what the money was and things like that, I definitely lost it then. Shopping was definitely dodgy.

[23:22]

Yes. And I know you went to lip reading classes how did you find those?

Pretty good. They helped considerably but I was one of the few people there that was totally deaf, so it always was more difficult for the other members of the group and also the teacher to make sure that I was aware of what -- if you can't understand the questions you can't answer if you know what I mean. But they were very good for me and they did help me through it and they had varying degrees of hearing loss there. But nothing as bad as what I had got.

And what kind of tactics did the teacher use the make sure you were involved?

Sorry.

What kind of things did the teacher do to make sure you were involved?

Well in fact after she had finished discussing whatever it was with the team she always turned to me to make sure that I understood perfectly what it was and I had to repeat back what had been said if she thought I didn't understand she would repeat it again or even write it on the board. To make sure that I did understand it. And she did that for a very -- well considerable period of time, which did slow things down a bit for others I think everybody had a good time with it.

I think everyone is always glad to see it written on the board?

Yes, well I think most of the stuff she was doing she was writing on a board as well. All the answers to everything was written on the board. And the questions to that matter, you know. So it was mainly, because it was a varied group of different people of different hearing losses, it wasn't just I didn't feel out of it because I was the only one that was totally deaf.

[25:28]

Okay. Tell me a little bit more about your implant and the process you went through first of all when you were assessed and then when it was switched on tell me a bit more about that?

Right. If I can remember rightly, which I can't, I was sent for my first session was at Queens -- no, Ropewalk where I was assessed with audiologist and everything their chief audio scientist I think they called herself in the end and she decided that it was pretty good. I had a nurse test as well she checked my ears out. What else was there? Oh they checked me out and they said they found I had got high blood pressure as well just for good measure. So that was the first part. Then I had two or three more interviews and also an E parenthesis test or something to see if the brain the auditory nerve was working plus an MRI scan then they decided they were going to do it and it would occur I think it was going to be in May. Then they cancelled May, because they couldn't find a bed and then they put it back until early June and then that was cancelled again. And then it was I think it was in June in the end or July, but it was the third time lucky and they did it. So I went into hospital, at 7.30 in the morning, they operated around about 9.30 and I woke up about 12 o'clock. Everything was hunky dory, perfect. They took an x-ray of it the day after and I went home. I waited for two weeks, I went back to see the surgeon, had a look at it and he said it was okay. And then the day after I went to Ropewalk again and then they performed the switch on process with the signals that come through the and I could hear those the 'dit dit dit dit' it seemed a bit Morse code-ish to figure out the quality and strength of what I was hearing. Then they switched me on and jangled some keys around I could start to hear again and it was like wonderful absolutely like a miracle. And so we had half an hour walking outside, talking seeing how good it was. And it did take a little bit of getting used to do say the least. And then over the year, the months and what have you, I went I think monthly for the start and they did the tests

and they said that through the tests that I was one of the top well top implantees, that won't come up will it or no it hasn't that they had come across and I was doing exceptionally well which was brilliant. It has not been without its problems in the process of working hard work, I have gone down a couple of times basically because I think it gets damp, a bit sweaty and what have you now and again. I think it upsets the internal bits and bobs and sometimes it ends up being very difficult, very infuriating when it does as well. But having said that, they were always very very quick to replace it, I just or retune it if necessary. The good part about it is when you go to an airport you can't go through the scanner, so and also they probably have to hand search you, just in the case it wipes the map off and so you usually get fast tracked through the airport which is pretty groovy. So there is a good point to it. And the good part is you can take the wife with you anyway.

Well that is an advantage?

Well it is helpful.

And so how long have you had the implant then?

About 3 to 4 years 3 years haven't I? About 3.

Oh right?

3 and a bit years perhaps. It is in here somewhere I may as well have a look. Right implant, 27th June 2006. So that is about 3 years isn't it.

[31:04]

And what other professionals have you seen while you have been going through all this?

What other.

Professionals?

Have I seen? I have seen word, I think is it what are the word people call themselves, I have seen the audiologist and the technicians that do the testing. I have also met a social worker there and also what do you call them, speech therapist. And that is about it. I have not met anybody else. I don't need anybody else well don't really need anybody else I suppose.

And who was the most helpful, because I think in your questionnaire you described the support of some?

Say that again.

You say the hearing therapist was particularly helpful if your questionnaire?

The original one Ena Martin she was very helpful insofar that she put me in touch with link, she also helped me through the early stages before I had an implant getting used to lip reading and also -- and she also gave me a little thing called a tactile, I don't know quite how it worked but it used to buzz. It was good, anyway lipreading was excellent she helped me and it made life a little bit easier for us.

So, going back, what was the tactile thing what did it do, it buzzed when?

What did it do? It cam paired to this it is like in the sort of distant past. But what it used to do you would have a microphone on it and it buzzed and the buzzing worked with the voice sound and it was buzz buzz buzz and you could actually looking at lip reading tan buzzing you could start to figure out the words from it, from the buzzes. Because it buzzed differently.

Right I have never heard of that okay?

No, I have still got it at home really. I wouldn't recommend it it is not the easiest thing you could ever try to learn to do. But people did and I did actually find it useful. It used to buzz on your wrist, and it the longer the words the longer it buzzed so to speak and you could actually pick short bursts of different word lengths with the lip reading it did help.

Amazing.

Oh yes. But I wouldn't recommend it.

Uh huh?

Not compared to this.

[34:00]

So in that period before you had the implant you had got that, did you have aids at all?

No I have never had, you can only magnify something the hearing aids there was no hearing at all there, no residual hearing at all so I was deaf from the start. So you couldn't have hearing aids.

Right. And at LINK, tell me a bit more, your wife went with you?

Yes.

And what kind of things did you do at LINK?

LINK. Well, if nothing else it is the best holiday we have ever had I think me and the wife together it was brilliant. It was a full day of operations, lessons, experiences which went from signing to lip reading to exercises, exercises to relaxing exercises to information on equipment that was available. Interviews about whether an implant would be possible. There was interviews on DLA and how to get assistance from that. And there was general group operation as well, which was very very good. And there was also some people there that had suicidal tendencies I think, which was there was a bit of work and therapy on that. So, it was a very very useful more than useful course. You know. I mean you can't -- I can't knock it it was brilliant.

[36:05]

And you say you went on to apply for DLA?

Very difficult.

Tell me a bit about that process?

DLA I don't know where they do with these women well I don't know about women or the people they have at the DLA, but they are so I don't know, pedantic and oh, they just do not want to give you anything. And they have a set of rules and they know they can be flexible, I was Deaf I was in extremely difficult situation, I wanted to buy equipment I wanted to upgrade my computer and everything else, and anybody would think the money was theirs personally the way it went on. We ended up going to or I ended up contacting Ronald, Roland plus a lady called Celia Davies of the eaf centre, who came round to see me and was immediately filled all the forms in again for me and sent up. They still refused to give it, this was going on a bit now, they still refused to give me any so we took them to appeal. And I was due at 11 o'clock for appeal she rang up at 9 point 30 said they had already discussed it and they had dropped the case and I was to get middle range of care and middle range of mobility. So, we had gone through all that lot and it seems to me you had to go to the brink before you get there. And I mean, I took on holiday with me the forms which took nearly all week and one week's holiday and then I had to go and photocopy it to post it off to the DLA people. It is unreal the amount of information they have.

What kind of things?

So it was very, very difficult. I suppose it should be easy, but Gordon Bennett most difficult. And the help that I got from Celia Davies was exceptional and from link as well. I think it was Deborah Sabri, I am not sure. No, Debra something like that. Anyway we got it in the end. They took it off me since, since I have had an implant.

They have taken it away?

Well taken half of it away only got the mobility now, the supervision part of it. Whereas I

can fall over and stuff like that and I have to be supervised to an extent. Anyway that is there.

[39:16]

So you have balance problems?

Not a serious one but I have been known to tilt over now and again. I don't know whether that is to do with drinking you know what I mean! . No I don't think so.

And what about tinnitus, do you suffer from tinnitus at all?

Yes, I have tinnitus in this ear which sounds like for all intents and purposes a Welsh male voice quires tickling along it is not usually a very difficult one to get rid of I can usually drown it out by thinking of something else. In this ear sometimes and it is more difficult I get like a distant jet engine taking off. And what it does in fact it intensify it is microphone hearing I have got and it makes things very, very sort of loud and the thing is it is distracting, so it is difficult to think. But apart from that I can hear the alarm [siren passing] that is a siren going off; yes anyway. That so but generally speaking it is not a big problem the tinnitus although I have got it. Sometimes it is a bit heavy at night now and again.

And now you have got your implant, how are things with your wife now and your friends?

Well, yes everything is a lot better but again it is still has its moments in a noisy environment. Well, the difference is like well 75 per cent better than not having it on. I mean I used to write books and books of notes and people used to write to me as well and it was you know you felt daft and stupid whereas now it is not so bad at least I can pull somebody to one side and say can you say that again for me. And I can understand in most cases. Or at least I have got a better clue using the lipreading as well than most people have.

And so people are you getting your friends back again, do you feel you are fitting in more or do you feel that people?

Well yes the thing is yes I suppose I am. The thing is I try to avoid situations now where it is too noisy where I go. What is good that contego I was talking about earlier on I can take that with me now, and I can give it to a person who is talking to me and it cuts out most of the background noise because they can talk directly into my T coil. Which is helpful as well. So, yes I would say that yes. And no life is a lot better than it was let's put it like that.

[43:02]

Okay. And you still go caravanning?

Oh absolutely. I have only just come back. You are very lucky to catch me here today because I was caravanning up to yesterday and I am going away again next weekend hopefully to Cornwall depending on my trip to the Leicester Royal Infirmary.

Tell us a bit about some of your caravanning trips?

Sorry.

Tell us a bit about some of your caravanning trips then?

Well they usually are in places that most people don't go to, which is good. You can't get into. They are usually places where I like to go as a rule, otherwise you wouldn't go there would you? They usually end up the situation us is you get there you get up in the morning take the dog a walk, have breakfast then do a bit of touring round the area, back for a B B Q in the afternoon, take the dog a walk again and may be have a few drinks round the old or down the pub. It tends to run that way.

You go together or you go on your own?

Oh I go with a couple of very good friends. We can go and we do go on our own from time to time. Not everybody can get the same amount of time off as I can. But we tend to meet up with a couple of like minded people as well which are not Deaf by the way and we do all right.

That is what I was trying to find out. Good. And is there anything else you would like to tell me, any other areas that you think we need to cover?

Would be interesting. Well, no not really. I don't think there is much to, I am enjoying life to the full as best I can at any rate. I have not got any reason why I should go back to work or should go back to work. I want to carry on doing this for as long as I can. I have got a nice little garden at home with a greenhouse and providing I don't go away for 7 weeks it is all right. But I can get the people round the corner to look after my tomatoes.

Okay. Right well thank you very much, thank you Lynn.

[End of recording]