



# Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Valerie Tait  
Interviewed by Sarah Smith

British Library ref. C1345/65

## IMPORTANT

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## Interview Summary Sheet

**Ref no:** C1345/65

**Collection title:** Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

**Interviewee's surname:** Tait

**Title:**

**Interviewee's forename:** Valerie

**Sex:** Female

**Occupation:**

**Date and place of birth:** 1955, Ipswich

**Date(s) of recording:** 12<sup>th</sup> August 2009

**Location of interview:** Royal York Hotel, York

**Name of interviewer:** Sarah Smith

**Speech to Text reporter:**

**Type of recorder:** Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

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**Total no. of tracks:** 1

**Mono or stereo:** stereo

**Total Duration:** 2 hr. 28 min.

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**Interviewer's comments:**

**[Track 1]**

*I'm Sarah Smith and I'm interviewing Val Tait on Wednesday the 12th of August 2009 for the Unheard Voices Project and we are in the Royal York Hotel, is that right? In York. We don't have a speech to text reporter here today, and are you lip reading me? Val will be lipreading me. So, if you could just say to begin with, your name, including your maiden name.*

Right well my full name is Valerie Joy Tait and my maiden name is Richards.

*Ok great thanks, and your occupation?*

I'm a hearing therapist and lipreading teacher.

*Ok and your date and place of birth*

I was born on March the third in 1955 in Ipswich in Suffolk.

*And your mother and father's occupations?*

My mother worked in insurance and my father was a weighing machine repairer and adjuster.

*A weighing machine repairer and adjuster? Fantastic*

Yes

*Fantastic*

He worked for Avery Scales

*Oh wow, and was that based in Ipswich where you were born?*

That was based in Ipswich, so when I was about ten we moved to Norwich in Norfolk which is the next county. Hm so yes scales don't talk you see, so it was the perfect job for him.

*Yes that's right, because your father had a hearing loss*

Yes my father was quite profoundly deaf by the time I remember him, he must have been about twenty one when I was born, so I would remember him in his twenties and he was quite deaf by then and by the time he was thirty he was profoundly deaf really profoundly deaf

*Right can you tell me a little bit about your family, who was in it, what they were like?*

Right well I've got a brother and a sister. My mother died young, and my father married again very quickly so I actually have five or six step brothers and sisters and a step mother somewhere. When Dad got married again his mother and my step mother's mother at the wedding realised that the two families were already related. It's a bit like that in East Anglia; everybody is related to everybody else! That's quite funny! My mother's family are partly German, her father was Spanish, and her mother was German.

*Right*

So I'm a bit of a mongrel!

*And your brother and sister, are they older or younger than you?*

They're both younger than I am and my sister is, my sister is deaf, as I am. My brother has a little bit of a hearing loss but he actually has spinabifida.

*Right, is that from birth?*

Yes though not seriously as he has always, he has always worked although I understand that as he gets older the condition will worsen and he may end up as a wheel chair user.

*And you all lived together as children?*

Yes we all lived together, the last time I lived with them was just before I went off to university, so a long time ago now.

*Yeah, so you're the oldest in the family, and is that a position that you enjoyed?*

Well, you always get the, when are you going out, take your little brother and sister with you business, and it's made me very responsible, especially not having any parents you always feel that as the older sister it's kind of up to you if there's a problem, to sort it out. And I suppose that's why I became a therapist really, to get paid for doing it!

*Can you tell me a little bit about where you lived, you said you lived in Ipswich to start with?*

I lived in Ipswich to start with, yes. My family were very, how can I call it? My family were very devout. They were non conformists, they belonged to a sect, if you like, like a group of Christians called Strict Baptists. In East Anglia you don't get many Church of England people, most people are non conformist so they're Baptists and Methodists and people like that, and my family were all non conformists. My grandmother was one of fifteen children and her parents were Salvation Army and my great grandfather who was also deaf, was the town alcoholic, and he was taken to a meeting by my great grandmother who promised him a pint of beer if he would go to this Revival meeting with her in a tent you know with an evangelist and all the rest of it, and he went, and he was, as they say, converted and he came out and he poured the beer into the gutter and he never touched another drop and he joined the Salvation Army he became a lay preacher and he was a, he made sweets, and he used to go round the villages with a basket of sweets selling them and preaching!

*Fantastic! This is your grandfather?*

My great grandfather, he was apparently quite a character and as I say, he had fifteen children.

*Fantastic. So is this family very close, have you done a lot of research or are these family stories?*

No I haven't done a lot of research unfortunately because my parents both died very young, my mother got cancer at thirty nine, you do tend to lose touch with family and also I've moved a great deal, I've had thirteen homes in my lifetime, my husband's job means that we've moved around a fair bit and you do tend to lose touch.

Unfortunately, that's also one of the things having an education did for me I was the first member of my family to even get O' levels let alone go to university and it just cuts you off completely from your family, it's almost as if you, you suddenly come from a different kind of world, it's a shame really.

*Do you feel that was a negative thing then?*

Do I feel it was?

*A negative thing?*

I feel that side of it was, was negative but I also feel the education gave me so much I wouldn't be without it for the world! My sister and I are extremely close, which is lovely and being deaf as well is another tie - we text each other by mobile every day, yeah every day, so yes, I think education does that to you, it opens doors into worlds that you wouldn't otherwise have seen. If I hadn't had it, I'd have done what my , the rest of my family did, become a hairdresser, work in a shop, possibly even stayed in the town I was born in, you know, where as I've travelled and I've had some very interesting jobs and I've met fantastic people; I've been very lucky.

[07:29]

*So your schooling, did you have any hearing loss as a child?*

I had a bit of a hearing loss as a child but it wasn't picked up and despite my father wearing great big body worn hearing aids, nobody realised that the fact that I didn't always hear what went on in class was not because I wasn't listening or that I was stupid but because I actually couldn't hear and one of my earliest memories at school was getting slapped around the head for not listening which, you know, is enough to put you off school for life! Fortunately I always liked reading, I loved reading and I was ill a lot as a child, I spent a lot of time in bed and I spent a lot of time in bed reading. I remember I was about eight and I read Jane Eyre for the first time and I was absolutely hooked

*At eight years old!! Wow!!*

I told you I was a great reader! I still am. Everywhere I go, I have a book and I think it was reading that saved me really because you don't need ears to read, and you can learn a lot through reading that you might miss in a lesson so I was very good at school in English and History and Geography. I can read and write French but I can't speak it, but I was hopeless at maths and science because the maths teacher or the science teacher always either had their back to the class writing on a board or working over a demonstration. So of course I missed a lot of that, and to this day I'm practically innumerate and I don't really understand science at all! So when I did hearing therapy training I had to borrow my daughter's biology textbooks to find out about cells and things like that because I just hadn't a clue! Hadn't a clue, but yeah, of course, in my day I went to grammar school and you either did arts or you did sciences, you didn't tend to do both so I did sort of Latin and things like that rather than science, which has been very useful actually because all the medical words you use are often Latin and it comes in handy.

*Did you enjoy school?*

I did and I didn't. I got bullied rather a lot because I'm epileptic as well as deaf and children don't like anyone who is different. I was quite an ugly child and again children always pick on someone who is different. When I got into the sixth form

though, it was suddenly like being a round peg in a round hole for the first time! It was lovely.

*Wow, and what made the difference?*

People in the sixth form were at school because they wanted to be, and they wanted to learn. In the lower school, you were there because you had to be, until you were sixteen sort of thing, and I wanted to learn, I always loved learning and I did well at it and was rewarded for it, whereas in the lower school, you know, I wasn't like a lot of the other girls and I was hopeless at games and it was one of those schools where you had to be good at games but epileptics have no co-ordination so I couldn't do any of things that other girls could do, you know, run and do gym and stuff and for some reason, for some reason people used to think that was a terrible thing not to be able to do that so, silly really, but anyway, in the sixth form it was great and the higher up I got, you know, when I got to university it was even better to be surrounded by people who loved books and you know, to be rewarded for being able to write essays which was just about the only accomplishment I had!

[11:10]

*Where did you go to university?*

Southampton. University of Southampton, yeah. They were just starting, they had a brilliant medical school there and they were just starting doing the cochlear implant work which of course I didn't realise at the time. I went there and did an English degree.

*What was the best thing about that?*

Being let loose in the most enormous library I have ever seen in my whole life and just spending three years reading from one end to the other! That was fabulous!! It was there that I realised there was something wrong with my hearing; I didn't actually really comprehend what it was. I used to sit in the front row of lectures and I found that I couldn't understand if I sat a bit further back, and I thought maybe it's my

concentration, you know, I thought lots of things, I didn't really think that it was the hearing, I knew something was wrong though, but being an English degree, it was fine, you can just read if you can't hear the lecturer, you go off and read books instead, so it was alright. But that was when it first came home to me, there's something not right here, but I didn't know what and at the time the epilepsy was so bad and my mother was dying; I had other things to worry about, so...

*How did the epilepsy present itself?*

Oh when I was fourteen I started having seizures, and you know, obviously you can't always control where you have them so it used to be a bit annoying for other people; I know that the school wanted me out and wanted me sent to a special school but my mother wouldn't have any of it, she wouldn't let them do that!

*Good for her! Good for her!*

Well my mother was one of these people, I often tell this story, you're either alive or you're dead, and as far as my mother's concerned if you're alive, there's no excuses; you have to do everything everybody else does! It was tough, but it was good for me, you know and I'd, I'd be ill and I'd be in bed and then she'd be "Right! Now you're better, up! Back to school!" you know and I'd be "Oh, I'm tired, I have a headache" and she'd be like "So?! Get your uniform on, off you go!" and it was really good for me, really good for me, because otherwise I'd have been tempted to use the disability as an excuse and I would never have done half the things I've done, so in a way it was an advantage. It gave me lots of time on my own and I had one or two teachers who were really really brilliant; they used to just basically encourage me, give me lots of books to read, you know, and they were really nice and it never made any difference to them – I was just me, and that was nice, that was nice. So yeah, I had some, I had some good times learning and when I die I want my ashes sprinkled in a library!

*Maybe we can arrange it in the British Library! Perhaps...*

Oh yes, one of my favourite places!

[14:12]

*To go with your recording, maybe! We'll see what they say! So, the hearing loss you had as a child, was that just something that was missing, did you wear hearing aids? Or was it just...*

No I didn't, in fact, stupid thing really; I suppose what with everything else, no one checked the hearing. And it wasn't until I got married which I did, I met Phil at university and I got married the day after I passed my finals!

*Well done!*

Yeah, and that he noticed it and he said, "you know, you've got to do something about your hearing", and I was like, "yeah right, yeah ok". I didn't think it was that bad.

*Do you know how much you were missing?*

Yeah, I was missing about sort of 80%!

*Right, so it was really quite bad*

It was terrible! I really had no idea. I had a phone and I used to pick it up and go ooh there's nobody there, and put the phone down and eventually of course, it dawned on Phil that he could hear the phone and I couldn't so that was something wrong there. And when I went to the doctor, he did the tuning fork test, have you seen that?

*No,*

They get the tuning fork and bang it on the desk and put it to your ear just behind your ear and on your forehead and he did that, and he said "which is louder, behind your ear or on your forehead"? And I said "I can't hear it at all"! And he was like, I think we better send you for a hearing test! He was really shocked.

*Who did that? Your GP?*

My GP. And one of the things he said was, I went in and said, my husband thinks I can't hear properly, and he said, well you can hear me, Because what he didn't realise was, I was lipreading- what I didn't realise was I was lipreading! And the first sort of inkling I had, I think, was I was doing playground duty and I was one side of the playground and realised that I could hear a child speaking at the other end of the playground. I remember saying to my husband triumphantly, see my hearing is fine! I can hear this child the other side of the playground. And of course I couldn't, could I? I was lipreading them. So it was a kind of weird mixture.

*So was it denial or just not realising?*

I think it was not realising and also a lot of people when they lip read, they supply a voice, right, so I can sort of hear with my hearing aids in I hear vowels and I can't hear consonants so I'm getting half what people say and then you, your mind kind of supplies a voice to go with it, so, for example I love watching the CSI programmes on television but I never have the sound on because Phil can't stand them so we have the sound off and the subtitles on and I give all of them English voices!

*Do you?!*

Yes! And it wasn't until my daughter said something, she's a fan as well, I realised they're Americans!!

*Yeah that's right!*

To me they're all English!

*It's probably better, your version is probably better!*

Definitely yes! Gil Grissom sounds like somebody from Oxford! (Posh voice)

To me, in my head!

*So you think that you just picked up lip reading as from a child?*

Yeah, yes you see my father was a brilliant natural lipreader, he never had a lesson and he could lipread. My mother was standing behind him once when he was looking in the mirror shaving, and I don't know what he said but he said something that rather annoyed her and she said "Silly old fool!" only she didn't say it out loud, she just mouthed it and of course he lip read it! Well, that row went on for days!! It was hilarious! But he was that good, yeah, he was that good!

[18:03]

*And he'd lost his hearing at what-*

And I think I inherited it!

*Yeah, and at what point had he lost his hearing?*

When did he lose his hearing?

*Yeah..*

I've no idea, because as I say, he was always deaf to me, he was epileptic too, but nobody talked about it. He just had 'funny heads'. People in those days didn't talk about it. You probably know diabetes was the same; it was something people didn't talk about, and if you'd inherited it, you kept very quiet. It's, it's strange to think about but even now when, when I go and see a specialist and they want my family history, I just haven't got it.

*No*

I haven't got it because people didn't talk about things.

*No...*

I have no idea.

*And your mother's hearing was fine, was it?*

Mother's hearing was fine, yes, yeah she was fine. She was one of these people, and her family too, where she came from an incredibly healthy family, nothing wrong with them. She was slim, she didn't smoke, she didn't drink, she ate a healthy diet, she was incredibly active and she got cancer at thirty nine! Which is why I tend to be a little bit resigned; if it's got your name on it, it's got your name on it and I'm not going to spoil my life worrying about it or go without things I really enjoy because it might make me live a year or two longer.

*So you were really quite young then when your mother was ill with cancer.*

Yeah I mean I was eighteen and my brother was fourteen and my brother, it just completely destroyed him. Completely destroyed him. He became like a different person and he just disappeared. I don't know where he is.

*Physically, you don't know where he is?!*

Physically I do not know where he is.

*Right*

Physically I do not know where he is.

*From that time when your mother died?*

It was mum dying, dad marrying again within a few weeks, and my brother was the youngest and he was the one who was at home and I think he found it very very hard, and within a few years he'd just disappeared and none of us know where he is

*Right*

And I think my mother's illness and death were very hard for him to take as a teenager. I know at one stage he was actually looking after her and I mean he was only fourteen years old, nobody should be asked to do that at fourteen

*No*

It was awful

*Was it a long illness that she had?*

Mmm yeah it went on for about, she died at forty three; so it was two or three years. Unfortunately while she was dying I was pregnant and living hundreds of miles away and not at all well and I couldn't even travel. I was in and out of hospital the whole time. It was really tricky, very tricky.

*A difficult time*

Hmm, these things happen.

[20:55]

*They do. So what age was it you got married, about twenty one?*

I was twenty one, yes. I had Becky at twenty three having been told I'd never have any children

*Really?!*

Yes! Yes, I was told I couldn't have children, I have something wrong with me and so we didn't think about it. I mean I told Phil, obviously, when when he wanted to get engaged and and you know obviously you have to be honest with people. So we get married and then I start getting a stomach upset. I kept going to the doctor with this wretched stomach upset which would not go away and then I went to see him one day and of course I'm losing weight, I'm being sick and I'm feeling like death warmed up,

went to see him one day and he does a few tests and he said you're four months pregnant! Well, I was absolutely, I couldn't – I said "Are you sure?!"

*I bet! The thought hadn't even crossed your mind?*

No! No, or his- until that point!

*No*

No and I remember going up to Phil's office where he worked, he was a civil servant at the time, and walking into a lift full of people and saying to Phil "We're having a baby!" and then everybody in the lift cheered! It was absolutely, it was, it was just so unexpected, everybody was totally shocked. And pleased, of course! Yes, it was a total, total surprise. I don't know who was more surprised, me or the doctor!

*And were you well for the pregnancy, other than the usual?*

I wasn't too good, no, I wasn't very well. I couldn't keep anything down and I was in that hospital, it's very interesting because Charlotte Bronte had the same problem and it triggered tuberculosis in her, and she died of it and the baby too, so I was pretty lucky really, to live in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Absolutely!*

Yeah it was great actually; I was reading Mrs Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Bronte during pregnancy and thinking "Ahh! At least I'm not Charlotte Bronte! Thank God for modern medicine!"

*Yeah, so you were in hospital for some of the pregnancy...*

Yeah I was in hospital, and when I was at home every afternoon I had to go to bed. I used to go to bed with a cup of tea and the radio; I had better hearing in those days, and listen to Women's Hour and knit, and it seemed like a total waste of time, but you

know, obviously it did, it did the trick and all the medication I had to keep downing, but there you are! As I say, lucky we didn't live in the nineteenth century!

*Absolutely!*

So, yeah. Funny thing is, we never had any more.

*No?*

No.

[23:22]

*So you have one daughter, Becky?*

One daughter, yeah; Becky.

*And how old is she now?*

Becky's thirty one!

*Well done!*

Yes. She's thirty one and like her father; very very clever, and at the moment training to be a nurse. This will be her third degree

*Fantastic*

After which daddy and I hope she's finished! She's really good actually; she's putting herself through university by working at weekends as a carer for people with learning difficulties and she, she was working with Mencap and she did this qualification in caring for people with learning difficulties. It was ever so funny because she told me they, when she started the course they asked her if she needed help with writing essays; I thought that was ever so funny, such a bright girl. Anyway, so she finds it

very interesting. She works with a diplomat's family who have a daughter who is in her twenties who has a learning difficulty and has a mental age of about two, and Becky goes every weekend and looks after her to give mother a break and she enjoys it and I've been with Becky once; I was visiting Becky in London and the mother invited me around and you could see how fond the, I was going to say child but it's not quite the right word, is it? It, it was touching how fond Becky and the young woman were of each other. It really was, she's going to miss Becky when she goes full time into nursing, but hmm it was lovely. It was nice to see she's turned out caring.

*Yeah*

Because you know what teenagers are like.

*I remember!*

The world revolves around them.

[25:07]

*So when Becky was a small baby, -child, how was your hearing loss then? Did that have much effect?*

Not too wonderful. The thing that absolutely gives me nightmares even to this day was Becky was a toddler and we lived in flats with a garden, and she came to the front door, she'd been playing in the garden, she came to the door and she said something and I didn't hear her, so I said "yes dear" as one does, and she vanished! By the time I got back to the window where I was working in the kitchen, she'd gone; it was a matter of about a few seconds. I searched the garden, I went out in the street, we lived on a main road, searched the street, I was asking everyone to look for her. In the end I phoned Scotland Yard I phoned the police and they put me through to Scotland Yard. I phoned my husband, he came home from work, we were all frantic searching for her, then suddenly she appears holding a lady's hand and she had been to the bank to get money for her piggy bank and they wouldn't give her any, she was

only three, but the lady, a lady in the bank had very sensibly asked her who she was, and Becky knew her name and address and she brought her, brought her back, and of course by this time I'm practically hysterical and her father said to her, you know "What have you been doing?" and she said "Well, I did ask mummy first and mummy said yes!" and it was at that point I thought I have got to get, I've got to get something done about my hearing! This is absolutely awful and it was at that point I went back to audiology to, to see what they could do about the hearing aids. I mean, she could have died. So, and people don't realise that, always. You work in a hospital and you think of hearing loss as being something fairly minor and you know, what difference does it make to a person's life, and in some ways, no it doesn't make a huge difference, you can still do lots of things and enjoy life and so on, but in a situation like that, it can be life or death! So it's very hard to forgive yourself for doing something like that. Anyway Becky survived.

*Does she remember it?*

No! No, no- the thing she remembers, is me having a seizure in the high street and she went into a charity shop because I'd always told her if you go into a, if you know you can't find a policeman go into a charity shop because the people there are really nice. Yes so she went into a charity shop and said "My mummy's got a bad head, can you call the ambulance?" And so they called the ambulance and she got a ride in an ambulance! And she remembers that because it was such fun and when daddy came to the hospital she'd got a bag of sweets a picture book, she was playing with the nurses she was having a wonderful time and he said "Are you alright Becky?" and she said "I had a ride in an ambulance!"

*She wanted to know if you could do it again, the next day?*

Yeah, that's right. So she was, I said to her once "It must have been terrible for you, growing up with a disabled mum!" and she said "No! It wasn't because I thought all mums were like you; to me that was normal." And then she said and I've never forgotten it, she said "I could have had a mum like Rose West. She's perfectly normal physically, but she wouldn't win a mother of the year award."

*Quite right! Quite right.*

Yeah! So it made me realise there are worse things for a child than not being a hundred percent fit.

[28:44]

*Yeah, that's right. Before we start talking about your hearing loss in a bit more detail, religion has obviously played quite an important role in your life, not only as a child, but you've mentioned earlier on that you're married to a minister, is that right?*

Yeah

*Can you tell me something about that- do you want to?*

Right, hmmm. Well, growing up in a religious family you obviously, you start off by conforming; you go along with it because it's the way you grow up and I did and I was a very good little girl and I used to win all the prizes at Sunday school. Then I got to be a teenager and started to think for myself a bit more and decided I was an atheist! And I went off to university an absolute militant atheist, it was quite, it must have been tough for my parents, but they very wisely didn't say anything on the subject and I was very ill, I was very ill, it was just before I went up to university and I had, I had to have a major operation, and I nearly died, and it made me, I had this very strange sort of experience, I think a lot of people have it when they're very ill and they're under pain killers and things and it made me realise that there was a kind of bit of me that was observing the bit of me that was in pain; so my body was in pain but my mind was quite clear and it made me realise that I was more than just an animal, right? I was actually a person, and this person had a sort of value and it made me start thinking about maybe, maybe there's a bit more to things than I realised, and then when I was at university, obviously I was trying to come to terms with disability and I met a girl one day who was crying in the kitchen where I lived in a hall of residence for young ladies, in those days and she, I said "What's the matter?" and she said "I've just been told I've got epilepsy." I said "Oh! I've got that!" and we had this really long talk and we became great friends and it made me realise that, that it wasn't

a punishment; it was I had it for a reason, and the reason I had it, was so that I could help other people. And when you start thinking your life has a purpose, obviously you start thinking about there must be someone who's created this purpose. So I started going back to church again, and I met Phil, and what struck me about Phil was that if ever I was ill, he was the only person who would visit, he was the only person who cared about me, and he was a Christian, and it made me realise that actually, you know, he despite being a Christian almost, he was very nice! And I remember him coming to visit me in hospital, and you know how people bring flowers and things, he brought books, so that's definitely a man after my own heart!

*Yeah!*

So

*He knew what he was doing!*

Yes! He'd summed me up well, hadn't he?! And we'd got friends, I had to go home to convalesce, I'd been in hospital yet again, and I had to go home to convalesce and he wrote to me and we became friends and things sort of progressed from there really, and we got engaged and his, his father's a minister as well, so he came from the same sort of background as I did, the same sort of church and we got married when I was twenty one. He went off and became a civil servant for a few years while he was doing his theological training, and then he went to a church in London, shall I say we went to a church in London. We were there for many years, about five years ago he comes home and said "We're going to another church" sort of thing, that's quite funny really. So, so different, such, such a big culture shock.

*So is he a Baptist minister?*

He is a Baptist minister, yes, and his father is a Baptist minister, well he was; his father's eighty four now and retired, but he was.

*It's a type of Baptist church that fits in quite well with the strict Baptist upbringing you had*

Well, yes we had lots of things in common; the only thing about strict Baptists, it sounds horrific but all strict means, is that in many churches, when they have the communion service, you know, the bread and the wine, anybody can, can, can take part if they want to, you just have to say you do. You can go into York Minster and take part really, but with a strict Baptist you have to be a member of the church; they have to know who you are. Right?

*Right.*

And that's the only difference.

*Oh, really?*

Yeah

*So it's not that strict?!*

No, it's not that strict, it doesn't mean sort of doom and gloom and everything, no, it's just about the way they administer what they call the sacraments. I don't really understand a lot of theology, don't tell Phil, but I think where it says, you know, "In my Father's house are many mansions" about heaven and so on, I think really one of the things perhaps it's talking about there is that we all have different ways to find God and what you do is, you go with the kind of way that fits in with your kind of personality, so our daughter is a member of the Church of England, well she did a history degree, got a great sense of tradition in the past, she loves beautiful things, I can quite see why she worships in the Church of England, but I go with what I grew up with; it's familiar. So, you know, and we all have different ways to think. I'm not saying it's the only way, but it suits me and it helps me make sense of, of my life.

*I think of the Baptist church as quite a happy religion, is that, is my understanding right?*

Yeah! Yeah, I would say that Phil's church, is at Hardwick in Stockton, and Hardwick is one of the toughest council estates in Teesside.

*Right*

[35:00]

His previous church was in St John's Wood in London, so you can see the difference. There's about a hundred people in membership, I think and we have meetings a couple of times on a Sunday and then every night of the week there's something, so it's the boy's club on Mondays and the girl's club on Tuesdays on Wednesday nights, there's a tremendous amount going on. I help with the youth club for girls, teenage girls, because when I was a teacher, I used to teach teenagers, and I really like doing that. I won't lead the group, they asked me to, but I said "I can't!" because I can't hear what they say some of the time; it's a big drawback actually. What with the accent and the high pitched voices, I am totally stuck sometimes! But I go along every week and we do things like, we do cooking or as they say "cooking" up here! Cooooking. So we do cooking, we do craftwork, we take them on outings, once a year we take them on holiday to the seaside and for some of them, you know, they just don't do that sort of thing, you know? We take them for barbeques in the park, you know, they have great fun, and also we have a time of devotion in the middle which is usually a bible story and some discussion about it. For some of the girls, it's the first time they've really thought about ethical issues, I'm not talking about Christian issues, just ethical issues, like, you know, why is it not alright to take anything I find lying around, why I should really hand it in or why taking drugs, for example, is not a terribly good idea, and all that kind of thing, so it's quite, I hope, useful. The local police love it, keeps the kids off the streets. I think it's a really worthwhile thing to do. Really worthwhile. I love it; it's great fun.

*Yeah, and the girls that come, do they all come on a Sunday as well, or do a lot of them just come for the group?*

No, none of them come on a Sunday until recently, until a few weeks ago, none of the girls came from church families or came on a Sunday. They all came off the estate.

*Fantastic then!*

Yes, so the language, I was quite glad I was deaf really! So the language had to be, I don't mind what you say but please don't say that in church! We had to have a few basic rules

*Yeah*

One of them was no swearing, no bullying; other than that we don't really have any rules. We don't mind noise or mess or you know cheekiness or anything like that, but you have to sort of put your foot down on a couple of things. Obviously we don't allow smoking or drugs or anything like that on the premises and our tuck shop has soft drinks and sweets and crisps and things in it and not anything else but yeah you have to have a few basic guidelines but other than that we're relaxed with them. It's kind of interesting listening to them talking about their lives. We try and give them something else, you know, for some of them, not for all of them, but for some of them nobody in their family has worked for three generations. For some of them they've grown up not just without a father but without a grandfather or uncles or any male relatives. For some of them they've got mums and grandmas who've never worked, who've left school with no qualifications and so on, and what we try and do as well is to say "There are other things out there. There is another way of living", you know, and one of our girls is going to be a teacher now, I'm so proud of her and you know, sometimes you, you get somebody who says "Ooh I'm going to be a hair dresser or beautician" Great go for it! Anything that's going to give them a, well, give them an opportunity really.

*Yeah*

Give them something else in life, you know?

*Yeah*

And it's great, it's lovely seeing them, and we've actually got girls now who are granddaughters of the first girls who used to come!

*Fantastic!*

Yeah, lovely, isn't it?!

*Wow! That's great!*

It is nice.

[39:25]

*So, you- going back to Becky, going off to the bank*

Oh yes, poor Becky

*And this being a bit of a trigger to you saying right I'm really going to sort this out-*

Scary!

*Do you want to tell me what happened as a result of what you did?*

Well, I went, the first time I went to have a hearing test, you'll laugh! The guy said to me walking down the corridor in front of me and talking to me, so that was the first problem; of course I couldn't hear him. And then he said "Tell me what you can't hear." And I said "That's a bit Zen really, isn't it?! How do I know what I can't hear?" you know, it was quite funny really! And I wasn't even told I'd got a hearing loss or anything, I was just told I needed hearing aids, and I said "Well, am I going to see the doctor? I'm in my twenties, am I going to see the doctor?" "No, what for?" "I want to know why I've gone deaf." "Well, you know, don't know really.". Ok, so I get the hearing aids and of course I can't get on with them, I cannot get on with them because I didn't really know, you know, how to wear them, how to get the best out of

them. I couldn't, I couldn't manage with them so I sort of stuck them in a drawer really.

*So these were behind the ear~*

Behind the ear analogue aids. By the time I had the incident with Becky, I, this is when I had to go back and see, and I said "Look, I've got to do something." So I had another go. This time I succeeded in wearing them a bit more, just because I was so determined! I've got to do something! Still not really happy with them, still not coping.

*What is it that, that's difficult to get on with?*

Well, what they do, what they used to do, in audiology was put two hearing aids on you and turn you out of the hospital, right? Well, the first hospital I went to, the audiology department was a portacabin in a car park on a main road, so for one thing doing a hearing test was a bit iffy, because I wasn't sure what I was hearing I walk out of the hospital with two hearing aids in, two powerful hearing aids, into a car park on a main road, and the noise was so loud! I couldn't bear it! Nobody told me that you kind of get used to them; what I tell patients now is- try wearing them just for a short time every day in a quiet room, extend the time, extend the place you wear them, eventually you can wear two of them for some of the time, two or three hours perhaps- then try going out! Don't try walking down the main road with hearing aids when you first get them, because you can't do it! I hadn't quite got the hang of the fact that you still need to look at people when they talk, you know, I didn't realise that you had to wear them every day, and obviously I'm still thinking of myself as a little bit hard of hearing, because nobody told me how deaf I was; it was only once I had the hearing therapy training and looking back and realising what my audiograms looked like, think yeah, I was quite deaf, no wonder I couldn't hear, no wonder I couldn't cope. There was no communication tactics, I remember saying to them "Do you know anything about, I mean is there somewhere I can get like a special doorbell, so I can hear the doorbell and stuff? "Dunno!" and that was it, really!

[42:58]

*Were you living in London at this time?*

Yeah, yeah I was living in London.

*So you were really just given a pair of hearing aids and that was it?*

And that was it. And they were so almost rude about it, you know? I mean sort of harsh, it was as if it was like it was no big deal and now I'm in the job I realise that if you have a young woman coming in with a family history of hearing loss and a young child, you know, they should have been pulling all the stops out to make sure I got the best sort of hearing aids, they should have made sure I had some rehabilitation, they should've tested Becky. Nobody tested Becky. So it was really quite frustrating for some years until I, until I was having serious trouble teaching. I got to the point where I just thought I can't cope, its so hard

*What did you teach?*

I taught English, A level English in a girls' school. I was having trouble coping in the classroom with the background noise and so on and the girls very high pitched voices, so I went back to audiology and I was really quite demanding and they must have put a really horrible patient in my notes or something...

*I don't they are allowed to do that?*

I don't think they are allowed to do that. But they probably thought and I got different hearing aids and that was a bit better clarity and I went to lipreading classes, and I went to lipreading classes because I was waiting in the waiting room which in those days, I had progressed. I am now in a cellar in a hospital, it was disgraceful you know, you went in the main entrance and there was this beautiful swish room with all glass sides, and that was where you got private hearing aids, carpeted and everything, you go down to the basement through a dingy corridor to a little room where there was two seats to wait in and that was it and that was NHS hearing aids, and I actually knew people who had gone to the hospital to get hearing aids, and thought they had to

get the private ones. So they'd got their you know referral letter and their NHS appointment but come into the main entrance and saw hearing aids, gone over there and ended up buying private ones. That's how bad it was.

*Do you think it was deliberate?*

I hope not, I think it was just careless, but it was awful wasn't it? Yes so I was waiting in the ghastly waiting room and they'd got a copy of One In Seven magazine

*Which is the RNID magazine*

Which is the RNID magazine which I perhaps shouldn't plug here..

*You can as much as you like*

And they'd gone a article about lipreading classes, and I thought I didn't know you could learn to lipread, because my Dad didn't, he just could you know. So I thought "this is marvellous". So I stole the magazine from the waiting room, isn't that awful? And I took it home and I said to my husband, "look, look you know you can go to lipreading classes", and he said "what an excellent idea". So then of course I tried to find a lipreading class, and everyone is like "no, no, no such thing"

*Now what sort of year are we talking about here?*

Well let me see I must be getting on for about 27 by now. Its awful isn't it how many years go by?

*So this is the 80s, 80s*

That's' right, so eventually I tracked down a lipreading class at a place called the City Literary Institute in Holborn in London and of course what I was trying to track down was not just a lipreading class but an evening lipreading class because I work! Eventually when I did find them they were during the day. Because everyone with a hearing loss is an old lady right Yeah I know terrible isn't it? So eventually I found

this class and you know, my lipreading teacher was Penny Beshitzer, who absolutely wonderful lipreading teacher and she said because we became great friends later on, she said the first few weeks I just sat there with my eyes tight shut holding onto my chair because I was so frightened. I couldn't even open my eyes.

*Oh no! What were you frightened of?*

I'd just lost all my confidence I suppose. I had no confidence at all, I was very nervous. And eventually I learned to open my eyes and look at the person speaking, and I took to it like a duck to water, within about a couple of terms they'd put me in the higher class for advanced lipreading. I could already lipread a bit, I hadn't realised.

*Because you'd been picking it up?*

It was the beginning of a whole new life for me it really was. That's where I learned about equipment I learned about lipreading, other class members were giving me tips. I learned how to clean my hearing aids and look after them properly. I learned how to get tough in audiology departments.

[48:04]

*So the care for your hearing aids for example isn't something you'd been given and guidance on by the NHS.*

No. No. No.

*What was your opinion of the NHS at that time?*

I was grateful.

*Right*

Because I didn't know anything else and it was better than nothing. But I'll give you one example, so simple. I get, I'm sorry about this, but I get a lot of ear infections and I get a lot of itching in my ears and eczema. And so for years with two hearing aids, I could only really wear one, because the other one usually had eczema and then one would clear up and I'd have to wear the hearing aid in that and then the other would start, so I only had one in most of the time. And when I started as a hearing therapist at the age of 40 I'm sitting at my desk one day rubbing my ear, my boss comes in, what are you doing that for Val? 'My ears itch' I said pretty miserably because it was very uncomfortable. And he said 'have you got non-allergic ear moulds?' And I said "what are non-allergic ear moulds?" "Come along" he said, "I'll make you a pair". I've had non allergic ear moulds ever since.

*This is once you were a hearing therapist? You didn't know until you were a hearing therapist that you could get non- allergic ear moulds?*

Right

*And perhaps if you hadn't become a hearing therapist...*

I would never have known, no. And more recently when I moved up here I didn't have a job right away. So I'm back to being just an ordinary patient aren't I? My ear moulds got really manky, right? So I need new ones, I know I need new ones, I'm a hearing therapist. I've had these two or three years, about time I got another pair. So I go off to my audiology department. 'please can I have new ear moulds and this little whipper-snapper of an audiologist who's old enough to be my grandchild probably looks at them and says "no, they're fine, they'll do" and gives them back, and I very nearly said, "don't be so", you know, "don't just fob me off because you want to have a cup of tea, rather than deal with me

*You should've said, don't you know who I am?!*

Well I nearly did, but I didn't. I just said "oh ok thank you very much". When I started this job at Newcastle the first thing I got was new ear moulds, so you see you're very much at the mercy of who you see. Now in a good department right,

everybody is trained to be very conscientious and so on, but in a department where you've got say a lot of locums, or where you've got people who are not always kept up to the mark then you can get very badly treated, I think. And one thing that really annoys me is that if you don't know what you want, you can't ask for it, so you don't get it. In some departments and I think that they should be a bit more you know, if your patient is complaining of itching ears you should be saying, "have you got non allergic ear moulds" if your patient says their hearing aids hurt, you should be adjusting them, If a patient is distressed and can't get on with their hearing aids you should be trying to find out why. You shouldn't be thinking, Well I can give this person 5 minutes and then I'm going to have my tea break. I'm not saying they're all like that, I just saying there are some like that.

*And in departments like that or with members of staff like that, what would you put that down to, what is the reason they don't do it?*

I think, there are some people and it's the same whatever job you do, yes, I can think of teacher like it ok, having been a teacher. Where they are just there for the money, they don't care about people and they are very lazy, and if you get someone who is lazy you have had it right? Unfortunately you know, however good a department is, there's always going to be one or two people who aren't quite as good. I'm very lucky at the moment I work for an excellent department, but there are places where you know the budgets tight and they haven't got enough staff to go around, and the staff are under pressure and over worked, and it must be very tempting to cut corners I think. I also think it's a failure in imagination. Right. Now, people with an arts training are used to using their imagination to problem solve. Scientists aren't so good at that,. I don't know why not, but they're not right? And sometimes you sort of need to give them a little jog and to say how have you thought about or you know, and some people just never seem to think, how would I feel if that was me. Which I think is a really important part of the job really, I remember when I was training a very nice consultant said to me, "never, never forget what it feels like to sit in that other chair". He was a nice and he was verso good, and that's something I have always remembered, always remember what it feels like to sit in that other chair and be the patient.

[53:11]

*Do you think it is possible then for someone who doesn't have an experience of hearing loss to be a good hearing therapist, audiologist?*

Oh yes, perfectly possible. There are just one or two. I go and give a lecture every year at University of Swansea to the MSC course. Who are training audiologists, the first year I went I gave my talk about profound hearing loss and rehabilitation and so forth, Any questions? Little hand goes up yes. And the guy says, "why when people have a hearing test and their hearing has got worse do they get upset?" And I thought he was winding me up, but he genuinely didn't know. And what I do with that kind of person is I say, "how would you feel if you were told you were going blind, and every time you went for an eye test your sight was worse". And he said "oh my goodness I would feel terrible" and I said "well that's what it is like to lose your hearing" and he said "I never thought of that". Isn't it interesting?

*Is there something missing on the course?*

Well that's why they get me in and part of the course is run at Swansea by a hearing therapist which is great isn't it? So yeah that's why you need hearing therapists and of course I need audiologists. When a patient comes to me I can give them all the empathy in the world but I cannot adjust their digital aids for them. In the old days; analogue aids, screwdriver I could fix them. But digital with the computer programming I can't do and I need my colleagues you know, its all very well me saying "yes I do understand you are having a problem with your hearing aids", but I need to get the audiologists in to adjust them,. So you need each other, you need to work as a team. And in some departments that are very good on that, we do in Newcastle it is very, very much team work and we all have different specialities, we've got a balance clinic, we've got a tinnitus clinic. We've got a bone anchored hearing aid clinic. You know, we have different specialities we run support groups you know, things like that. But not everybody has got all the strengths and I think you have to recognise that.

*So is there a good head of department then that ensures your department works well?*

Yes, you need, we have a very good chap Tom Davison who not only is he a brilliant audiologist, he is a very, very clever man and good at what he does, but he is also good with patients he's got people skills and he is good at motivating staff, and he is good at doing the budget. Now this is fantastically important because someone like the manager has to get the budget for training for staff, yeah for equipment, you know for best kind of hearing aids and it takes a very clever person to do that, and you know, I mean I am absolutely amazed we fit bone anchored hearing aids at the drop of a hat, in all my years at London I never had a patient who had one. You know, its awful isn't it to think of. We only used to get one or two people going for a CI, here we get loads of people going for implants. Yes, we automatically fit bi-laterally, in London we were fitting one aid you know. I mean hopefully things have improves now with the new digital aids and the new, new sort of motivation and planning in audiology which has been going on over the last few years, huge difference, new training, better qualifications for staff, better equipment, better hearing aids you know. But it used to be absolutely awful, audiology was the Cinderella of departments you know, Because you don't die of hearing loss, and people with hearing loss aren't cute.

*So who is that not taking it seriously enough? The PCT?*

Yes, its PCTs you know, and also the government and I think that one of the things we had to sort of get the dept of health to see was that with an increasingly aging population you're going to have more and more deaf people right? And I remember in my old hospital I was deputy manager of the department I remember the finance officer coming around and saying to me, why do you keep fitting hearing aids and I said well, we can't cure deafness ok? Because we can't cure deafness people are going to carry on needing hearing aids and unlike a lot of things in the national health service, they have your appendix out, you've had it out you don't need it out again, but with a hearing loss is once you've got it chance are you're going to be deaf for the rest of your life, and that could be another 20 or 30 or 40 years, so they're going to go on needing hearing aids, hearing aids don't last 40 years, they last 5 or 10. "Ah so why do you need to fit two?" "Because you've got two ears." Ah. Well can't you cut down next month?" Well if the consultants can stop sending us patients to have

hearing aids fitted and if all of the patients don't have their hearing aids go wrong then I can cut down next month. "Ah, she said I see what you mean. Because she couldn't work out why we ordered hearing aids every month. So you had constant battles with finance and the department. Now if you've got a good manager who can put a good financial case, who can get a budget and keep the budget up to standard then that's fantastic. I mean, we worked in London in a department which got flooded out so we were moved to a disused ward. And we were there for three or four years, whereas in the department we're in now, they were painting the walls this week, yesterday. I didn't think they needed painting, but you know maintenance is really, really good there, they don't wait until, like we had in London a hole in the roof literally. We had cockroaches, a hole in the roof, little bugs that someone took home on their clothes and they had to have their house fumigated, we had a lift that jammed and when it was working it had the phone to call for help which had no amplification, and this is in audiology so if any of our patients got stuck they wouldn't have been able to call for help very easily. Oh dear, it was it was unbelievable but it was due to the fact that the budget was inadequate and had been steadily run down over the years,. It needed a huge injection of money into audiology across the country and that is what happened with the new directive, which the major charities were responsible for getting frankly.

*And what year was that?*

It was when I moved north so 5 years ago now. The big charities for deaf and hard of hearing people made a big effort and campaigned for digital aids and they pointed out to the government that to have digital aids you needed more staff, better trained staff, you needed digital hearing aids and you needed equipped departments. And you know some places. Do you know where my sister had her ears tested? She had her ears tested in a cupboard. In a London hospital. And it was a cupboard where they kept trolleys. So all the time she was having her hearing tested which wasn't in a sound proof room. People were coming and getting the trolleys out

*That's unbelievable*

[01:01:03]

It is isn't it? Now you imagine having an eye test like that? Or going to see an oncologist in a cupboard?

*It just wouldn't happen would it?*

Or it would only happen once. I once saw a patient in a cupboard, and I once saw a patient in the hospital coffee shop. Well, they couldn't manage the stairs and the lift was out of order, so I took them to the coffee shop and bought them a cup of tea, which is probably the sort of thing you would get sacked for now.

[01:01:34]

*So in your own like then, at what point did you decided to change from being a teacher to become a hearing therapist?*

I was coming up to my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and I realised I'd been having this little contratante with the headmistress, who basically said, "when you went home last night you left the lights in and the heating on and left the windows open" and I started to apologise and then I realised hang on a minute I wasn't in that classroom yesterday, I was over in the sixth form block. Oh she said and then I realised this was happening all the time that I was getting the blame for things. I thought I had got a very large chip on my shoulder and was getting paranoid I now realise of course that this is common experience for disabled people in work. When you are a therapist you get this all the time with patients telling you what happens. And it made me realise that teaching had got a little bit, I like the children but working with staff was getting harder and harder, I was getting shouted at because I wouldn't use the telephone. One member of staff said to me, I don't believe you can't do anything about your hearing loss you just don't try hard enough. It was just one thing after another really, and it was time to get out. My hearing loss isn't going to get better, it will probably get worse. So I need to do something now. I went home and said to my husband, I need to do something, and he said why don't you train to be a hearing therapist. Now gong to the lipreading classes at the city lit they used to have a prospectus every year with all of the courses in. I was looking through it one night and said to my husband "ooh look

a hearing therapist, do you know what a hearing therapist does?" and reading it out to him and saying that's a really interesting job but didn't think anything else about it. So Phil said why don't you.... No one will mind that you're deaf and the penny sort of dropped really. And I also thought, this is what I needed when I went deaf, this is what my father needed when he went deaf, you know and I suddenly realised it was a very useful job, so it was partly that and partly, it's a good job for a deaf person

*So you hadn't had a hearing therapist?*

Oh no, no.

*You just had a what a GP?*

A GPO a consultant who couldn't have cared less, and audiologist and my lipreading teach, and the best of them all was the lipreading teacher. Yes absolutely fantastic. From Penny's class I went into Patricia Shennon's class, a very well know lady in the lipreading world. Fantastic teacher. When the Inspector Morse series did a programme. The silent world of Nicholas Quinn which was one of the stories and the main protagonist was a deaf man, they asked professional advice the BBC did about a lipreading class and it was Patricia they consulted.

*Ah Very good*

Yeah it was very interesting, she was a real expert and still is a real expert. And her mother had been a lipreading teacher too.

*So can you sum up for me what a hearing therapist is and what a hearing therapist does?*

Well. Short version is a hearing therapist provides rehabilitation for adults with acquired hearing loss, right so, it's people who are over the age of 16 who go deaf and are not born deaf. And people whose main language is speech not sign language, a whole different world that is. So that's what I do, what it covers is tinnitus, balance, rehab. with Cochlear implants and bone anchored hearing aids, equipment,

communication tactics, lipreading, referral to LINK, and Hearing Dogs and things like that, I do hyperacusis work.

*What does that mean?*

Increased sensitivity to noise. Some people, it must be wonderful actually. Isn't that a horrible thing to say because it's not really? But they are so sensitive to noise they can't bear it and my job is to help desensitise them. Obscure auditory dysfunction. I do quite a lot of that in Newcastle which is very interesting. This is where people have, you test their hearing and it's quite normal, or as we say, within normal limits. But they say they can't hear. Right. Yeah, and there's sometimes a psychological reason for that. There's sometimes a sort of slight brain problem for that, You know, the brain, the part of the brain that processes speech isn't working properly, or there may be in fact that they've had in fact supersonic hearing and much better than average and its now just down to average so in fact they have had a drop in their hearing but it doesn't show up on a chart

*Oh I see*

So if your first hearing test when you're thirty and it shows up as average, we're going to say you've got normal hearing. But when you were 20 it might've been better than average. You can tell there's a drop and you're worried about it, but we say to you 'your hearing is fine

*Right*

Psychological things like I remember when I was training there was a child who had been being naughty or something and hadn't done what Dad said and he smacked them and said are you deaf or something and then they couldn't hear. I mean it sounds amazing doesn't it, but obviously there a psychological block, and the therapist at the time was working with them and getting them back to be able to hear again

*So your function is to talk to people, or to allow people to talk to you, about different things, and then give advice?*

Yes. Yes. Give advice, yes. And it is very practical stuff. I do a lot of counselling as you will appreciate. I do a lot of listening, which for a deaf person is quite funny isn't it? Yes I do a lot of listening. But I also do a lot of 'have you thought about a flashing doorbell?', 'have you thought about a hearing dog'. 'Do you know how to use a television aid or a loop system. Would you like to see I've got one here and you can have a go with it'. Things like that, obviously you can't tell people what to do, but you make suggestions. It is very positive because you would be surprised how when you have a problem whether it is loss of hearing or migraine or whatever how all the sort of faculties for problem solving seem to shut down in panic so I have sometimes said to people, 'well you can write it down' or you can get people to write it down for you. Well I've never thought of that. You know they are intelligent people, its just that you know you panic, I was the same, I was the same I couldn't work out what to do. My GP is ever so clever I mean he taught me something. I was sitting there one day and he was talking to me and I said I'm really sorry I didn't catch that, and he typed on the computer, turned the screen round and I read it and I just thought 'how ingenious'. So you know its sometimes thinking laterally about problems. I also do things like; I can't give benefits advice, because the benefits are always changing. But I can tell people where to go to get access to work, where to get the benefits. Who to talk to you know. Other charities are great, put them in touch with Social Services that kind of thing. It is very rewarding and it's very rare that I can't finish a session with a patient and feel there's progress made. Even if it's just new ear moulds or their hearing aid adjusted, or you know showing them how to deal with condensation in the hearing aid tubes. That's a big one! The new aids get hotter, it is something to do with the computers in them I'm not sure what it is but they tend to get hotter they are using more power and they get condensation in the tubing more easily, and when they do that they just shut off. And patients will panic, just imagine both your hearing aids just 'pop' and then they're not working and all it takes is taking them off and giving them a shake, or taking them apart and using a little puffer like bellows to clear out with air the condensation and you can teach people to do that, and it saves them coming all the way to a repair session, or panicking about their hearing aids when they are on holiday, and that's part of my job as well. You know, audiologists haven't always got time to tell people, sometimes people forget as well. So I tell them the same thing and then they remember it that time. It's really rewarding I enjoy it so

much, at the end of every day you feel it has been worthwhile. Of course you have your heart sink patients and I have had terrible cases, people with tumours that are inoperable, people young people who have had meningitis and have gone suddenly totally deaf and their life's suddenly kind of like, they've got to build it all over again,. The sort of thinking you do at LINK and that's really shattering for you and for them. But no it's a very rewarding job, I can recommend it to anyone.

[01:11:05]

*And when you went to do your training at the City Lit you knew that, I think you said your husband said to you, they wouldn't mind a deaf person doing it. Was that your experience?*

Yes, it was absolutely marvellous actually. And city lit have got flashing light fire alarms, loops in the room windows, not windows mirrors on the corners of the stairs so you can see them even though you can't hear them. It was like heaven for a deaf person being there it really was. Some other people on the course were also deaf and I realised with a great sigh of relief that a deaf therapist was nothing unusual which was marvellous absolutely marvellous. I realised of course once I'd got out of the college how good they were because I was back in the normal world like this and struggling again. But the college itself was a really marvellous place, marvellous place.

*How long is the course?*

Then it was a year, but now it is a degree course so it is two, three years. It went up to two years as a diploma and now its three years and a degree. Which is good but in my day, what could happen was somebody like me being an English teacher could train to go and be a hearing therapist. You need two a levels and a good general education. Now you need two or three science a levels, and you can't kind of cross over from other professions so easily. What you sometimes get is people with physics degrees going off to do an MSC in hearing therapy, But you don't get someone who has been a teacher, or speech therapist, or a writer like yourself to go off and decide to be a hearing therapist, and do you know I think that's a shame. Because the older ones on the course, OK what I found was it was harder for me to learn because I was 40. I

couldn't hear as well as some of the younger ones, so that was hard too. On the other hand, I had got things like life experience which they didn't have. I knew how to write an essay,. I knew how to do research I had been through one or two things myself so when confronted with patients who were distressed t didn't throw me as much perhaps as is I was 18 or 19 just out from my a levels and not had much happen to the,. I had a friend like that, she went through the whole of the beginning of her life and she'd never had a bereavement she'd never failed an exam she'd never failed her driving test, she came from a lovely family, she had a beautiful home, she had a handsome and wonderful husband, nothing ever happened to her. And then her first child was born with a very, very unpleasant birthmark, portwine stain? And it completely knocked her she ended up hospitalised with depression. Yeah, because she'd never had to cope with anything before. She got over it thank goodness, and she was well and she went off to be a social worker, interesting isn't it? But until that point she'd never had to deal with anything, and she didn't know how to.

No.

Made me realise that I'm quite lucky actually!

[01:14:31]

*Can I ask you about your connections with the charities that you mentioned for hearing loss?*

Oh right yes

*Because I know that you have been involved in lost of different things in lots of different places.*

Yes I suppose I have been over the years. That's my mother again, she was a great believer in, 'you take out, you've got to put back'. You have to put something back into society you owe it to them, right? So I have always been involved in voluntary work. I was a brownie and a guide and a ranger guide and as I got to be older in the ranger guides, I started helping with brownies, so I have always done that I helped

with Norwich Organisation for Active help when I was a student. I helped in the office when I was first married I helped with meals on wheels for a bit. Again in the Office, doing the money. It was quite easy, the meals were 50p and even I could add that up- it was brilliant I quite enjoyed that. And then, what else have I done over the years. Oh hard of hearing Christian fellowship. I was on the committee for some years, but not any more because their meetings were all in London, but I still write for their magazine, then the St John's Wood Good Neighbours charity which was the local charity that helped people in need in the area. They used to hold meetings in our church and that's how I got involved. Hearing Concern of course, been involved with Hearing Concern for a long time. RNID. Yeah. Erm, what seems to happen is for example someone emailed me the other day she works for the British Acoustic Neuroma Society and she emailed me would I write an article for a magazine, so I said yes. And that's the kind of thing you do for a charity which I can do. You know I'm not a millionaire or I'd write a cheque. I wish I was! There's so many people you'd like to help. But I can write them a little article, and that's a great help because with the little magazines you can't afford to pay people for articles. They have no budget at all do they?. They run on a shoe string don't they? So I can do things like that, Sometimes I sit on committee. I was on the committee for the Meniere's Society when I lived in London. My father had Meniere's disease among other things, poor old Dad. He had hereditary hearing loss, he had Meniere's disease, he'd worked in the RAF as a Youngman, not worked in the RAF he was called up and mended engines so he had noise damage. And he got ear infection sand then he had chemotherapy.

*So your father had cancer as well?*

Yes. I mean talk about talk about getting struck by lightening twice. Yes Mum was no sooner dead than he was diagnosed with it. Poor old Dad. Yes, so. Mum had breast cancer and then stomach cancer. Dad had chronic lymphatic leukaemia. Which in you know, some people can do quite well with that but he wasn't one of the lucky ones unfortunately, but he had all these things with his ears, but that is why I was interested in Meniere's disease, because he had it and I still am you know, I try and go to their conferences when I can and I read their magazine and so far. I have just started a balance support group in the North East because there isn't one. We get people coming from Durham which is a long way to come to Newcastle for meetings. When

we had our first meeting we had a sort of day where we got speakers in and the Meniere's society were really good and provided us with lots of magazines and leaflet and posters and things to publicise the event. Marvellous. Because they really are the only charity for balance, which as you know with work for the LINK is a big problem of hearing loss for some people. So it's great. So I have always been involved with charities and I think they are important.

[01:18:46]

*Do you have problems with your balance?*

Not problems, but I am extremely clumsy and again I don't have much coordination and I get vertiginous migraine. When I get a migraine attack I get vertigo, so one of the first symptoms I'm going to have a migraine, is not everything goes round and round, but I feel as though I'm standing on the edge of a cliff and I'm going to fall over. So I do get balance in that sense, but I'm very lucky, because I only get migraines once or twice a month, which is pretty good.

*That's pretty good?!*

Oh crumbs yes!

*That sounds dreadful!*

No not really because I've got this wonderful medication and if I take it in time I'm alright. I have some in the bag, everywhere I go I've got spare hearing aid batteries, little repair kits, migraine tablets, you know. Oh yes

*Keep it all with you*

Oh crumbs yes.

[01:19:41]

*So, obviously being in the business, you know a lot of strategies, you know what you would advise yourself to do if you were a patient in lots of different circumstances, and you come across as a very matter of fact, positive person. Are there any times when you haven't got the answers for yourself?*

Yes. Oh of course. For myself. Yes. I think everybody would say with any kind of health problem that you have good days and bad days don't you. You have days when you can cope and days when you think you can't. I have days when it's as if I can't hear anything. When I'm tired or so on, And I find it very difficult to lipread and some people voices are harder than others. It's isolated instances really. I remember, I remember being on a train going to work and they made an announcement that the train would not be stopping at my station. Well of course I didn't hear the announcement. So I didn't get off at the station before and change trains. I just went straight on and I'm suddenly panicking because I don't know what's happening. So I got off at the next station along and I went to find a member of staff 'what's going on?' and they told me and I was ever so distressed because I was going to be late for work. And I sat on the platform and cried and thought. This wouldn't have happened to me if I wasn't deaf. There have been silly things like realising that every time you have your hearing test your hearing is worse. This is why I don't like having hearing tests and I try and not have one until my colleagues chase me off to have one. 'Tell me you've had another hearing test Val, come on' Because it is worse every time and I sort of I think it was when my friends children were starting to have their own children, so my friends were now going to be grandparents and I realised that by the time I have grandchildren, if I have any and they learn to talk, I won't be able to hear them. And that's. I don't know why but that suddenly sort of hit me to think that, That there would be some things I wouldn't hear. I don't panic about the future too much because I always find the future generally takes care of itself and you think you can't cope with something and it happens and you do cope with it. That's always been my experience, of it, so what ever happens I'll manage some how. I kind of find it frustrating sometimes and people are, most people are brilliant but you will occasionally meet someone who can be very unpleasant about your disability and most time I can cope with that, but there are some days where it really gets to me and I can't cope with it and I have to go off and calm down. Erm, I had one woman who came wit her husband, he had otosclerosis so his gradually, the little bones in his ears

are going spongy and his hearing loss is gradually getting worse. There's an operation they can do, but they generally like to not do it instantly and in the meantime you'll have a hearing aid and then they'll operate and so on; and I said something about him having a hearing and she said, he wasn't allowed to talk of course. She said, "no he's not having a hearing aid". And I said "but it would be so useful. I mean you've got children you know, think what could happen if he can't hear what the children are saying, it might be something important", thinking of my own child you see. Things like hearing the doorbell, using the telephone carrying on at work. No, she said, no he's not wearing hearing aids, hearing aids are for stupid people like you. And it was like 'oo' and I got through the rest of the session I don't know how, but I was awfully upset afterwards, it seemed like totally uncalled for, but obviously poor woman she was in denial about her husband's problem. What upset me as well about that was that I could actually see that she would walk out on him. I expect you've experienced that with LINK that for some people their hearing goes, their marriage breaks up. Not always but sometimes. And I'm told it's true with all disabilities. I'm lucky that Phil, Phil takes things in his stride very much. He's sort of, of the 'you've got epilepsy, I've got chilblains' school of thought. Everybody's got something, and what difference does that make? He's totally, totally brilliant and whatever happens he doesn't get fazed. You know, I remember standing there with the consultant holding Becky and him saying "I'm terribly sorry Mr and Mrs Tait she has a hole in her heart" and I'm like...just fell apart on the inside, not on the outside just on the inside, and Phil's very calm and just saying 'u-huh' what exactly does that mean? And then he goes home and looks it up.

[FIRE ALARM]

*There's a fire alarm*

Oh is there?

*I'll just press pause*

[01:25:00]

*Can I do that again sorry? So we just had a brief pause because of a fire alarm practise and Val was telling me a story about a man she met on a railway station platform.*

Well you know your mother warned you about not talking to strangers. Well if you're deaf you are always talking to strangers, because you can't cope in public without asking for help sometimes. Well this was a hearing person asking me for help. He asked me when the next train was due and I explained to him that we had just missed one, but I didn't quite catch what he said and I had to ask him to repeat it, and I told him I was deaf and he was surprised. Like a lot of people he didn't think I looked deaf. And then he said to me 'well, I run this festival every year and what's the best thing for deaf people to understand what is going on' and I said 'oh, speech to text reporter and he said 'what's that?' so I explained its someone who sits at a special keyboard and everything that's said, or nearly everything that is said, goes up on a big screen and everyone can read. And he said that's brilliant how do I get hold of one, and I said well they have a professional organisation but I can't remember what it is called, but if you get in touch with the RNID they will tell you, so he gets his mobile out, calls the RNID, calls his secretary and organised it. And he is Peter Florence who runs the Hay on Wye book festival every year in Wales there and it was totally brilliant and he was so pleased, because he'd been told that he needed a BSL interpreter but they'd found when they had one that no one was using it. Well he then said, was what would be really great is if we could have some deaf writers. Of course we'd been talking books by this point as you can imagine; he's got one under his arm and I've got one under my arm and we're both interested in writing and so on, and so when he got back to me he said they were having David Lodge and one or two other people to speak, about their work which was really, really interesting. And they had a Speech To Text Reporter for the first time, and they put it in their programme and whatever you call it, they said that with the help of the RNID they'd got a Speech To Text Reporter at the Hay-on-Wye Festival for the first time. Peter then emailed me to say that it had been a great success and they asked people if they had been using the STTR and he said all these hands went up. And I almost said, well I told you so, because one in seven people have a hearing loss. And it is marvellous and it just shows you doesn't it that someone like that who is so well educated, but had never heard of STTRs. So always speak to people on trains.

[01:27:54]

*You often find don't you that people's first reaction when you say you've got a hearing loss, or for me, when I say I work for a charity that works for people who have a hearing loss. People say 'do you do sign language, or people say 'my aunty does sign language'. I'm really quite interested in the dynamic between the deafened community, if you can call it that, and the BSL community. Have you got any particular opinions on that?*

Well it's a very sensitive subject as I'm sure you know, and I can only speak for, as it were, my sort of area. Erm, I come from a long line of deaf people, great grandfather, grandmother father, father's brother, sister me, and we are all what they call oral that is to say we lipread and we wear hearing aids, the thing is you see that if I learnt sign language, it would take me a long while to learn it. It is a language, I mean what I say to people is how many years did you do French at school and most people say oh five you know, And could you go to France and read a French newspaper without a newspaper and they say well you know. Because for most of us our French is at the 'un tasse de café s'il vous plait' type which means we could get by and most French people wouldn't laugh at us too much, but its not really fluent. And to be able to communicate well in another language you need to be fluent. The other problem I find with sign language for me is that if I went to Tesco's the girl on the till probably doesn't know any sign language. So if I go to the till and I sign to her, she isn't going to sign back she's going to speak. My family are all hearing, I mean my husband and daughter, that area of family are all hearing. They don't sign, so for me to learn sign language as a person with an acquired hearing loss as it were, I know I went sort of deaf as a child, but my first thing is speech so for me deafness is acquired. I would need not only to learn sign language but I would need Phil and Becky to learn sign language and I would need n interpreter with me wherever I go, its juts not feasible, just not feasible. So for me sign language is not a workable option. I do know a bit. I did a couple of years of sign language and I can hold a very, very basic conversation, it's useful occasionally with the odd sign. If you are with a person like myself, I'm with a person like myself and they know a bit of sign language, you can eke out your lipreading with a bit of sign. Fingerspelling is good, fingerspelling is good. Quick to

learn, and you can use that on anyone. So it's not very practical. The other thing is although I have friends who are members of the Deaf community, and we get on very well, on the whole, on the whole the local deaf club isn't very welcoming of people who have gone deaf. Right. Or erm, so that can be a bit tricky as well because you think, I thought when I got to the point, about 40 you know maybe I should start thinking about sign language going into the deaf community. You would think that you would be welcome but you're not because it's a cultural thing, a language thing. To be a member of the Deaf community you have to be a part of deaf culture, preferably born deaf, sign language as your first language, gone to a school for deaf children, possibly even married a deaf person and of course you know, I just don't come from that kind of world and I wouldn't fit in. It's difficult. It's very difficult so with my patients I advise. I always advise lipreading and communication tactics, I never tell people not to learn sign language, if they want to learn some then great, but I do point out to them that they may be a little disappointed when they find how few people use it. Of course I say to them oh course by all means go to the local deaf club, but I don't say 'but you won't be very welcome there, because of course they might be' but I found it is like two separate worlds really. It's sad because we ought to have a lot in common but we haven't. I remember being at a United Kingdom council on Deafness meeting, UKcod meeting, I was on the committee for years, golly. Anyway so I was at this meeting and you won't believe it but hard of hearing and deafened people sit at one side of the room and Deaf people with a capital D sit at the other. Not intentionally but you tend to sit with your friends if you know what I mean. Someone who had lost their hearing got up and said, it was a bereavement to lose one's hearing, and all the deaf community people were up in arms, up in arms. And then the person who went deaf said 'well how would you feel if you lost your sight?' And the deaf man who was born deaf got up and said, obviously you have to imagine some of us are speaking and some of us are signing, and there's an interpreter here. Said 'do you know I never thought of it like that'. Because they do not see deafness as a loss, but as something to be proud of as a different language, whereas for us it is a loss, you know, we could hear or in my case I could hear better. We understand a bit about sound we know what we are missing, but for some of them they don't and they don't feel as if they are missing anything and they don't want it back. SO that's why its quite parallel lines really. We're close but we can never really meet it's a shame it's a shame. I think we can fight some of the same battles though.

*Yeah, and have there been occasions when that's happened?*

Yeah, when we fought battles for Cochlear Implants because some, some, a lot of deaf community are not keen on Cochlear Implants on the other hand they feel they should be available for those who want them. And we fight the same battle for benefits you know DLA is a case in point. It is so difficult to get if you are deaf. And yet it's a disability just like any other and I've got patients one of my patient said the other day she's got a daughter who has I think a couple of fingers missing and this daughter gets DLA and having two fingers missing make no difference to her life at all in respect of being able to earn a living, and all the rest of it. I'm not saying it doesn't make a difference, because obviously it does. But in respect of education, earning a living the amount of money she's got coming in, no difference at all. Whereas the mother's gone deaf and can't get DLA and the first that happened was she lost her job and you think well you know, surely DLA should cover this kind of thing but it doesn't. Or it's very hard to get. What you find with DLA is that I reckon nearly everybody is turned down for it the first time you only get it on appeal, and what I say to people is when you got o the appeals tribunal request a palantypist. It frightens them to death on the tribunal and makes them realise just how hard it is to communicate,. If you go along and thing I'll be ok because I'll lipread and I'll get them to say things again and I'll get them to write things down. That won't work. You have to go on your won, don't take your husband or wife to interpret for you, and ask for a palantypist. And use them

[01:36:02]

*Its awful to think of those people like you were in your early 20s who didn't know what to ask for, didn't have a friendly hearing therapist like you to say "you must do this and do that", like you said earlier on, if you don't know what to ask for, then how do you get it?*

You don't know how to get it. I mean I didn't get in touch with the RNID in my 20s and 30s Why not? Because it's the Royal National Institute for Deaf people and I'm not deaf. I'm hard of hearing, or I'm deafened or deaf with a small D but I am not

deaf. It never occurred to me it was an organisation for people like me. I'd never heard of any other organisations at all, you know you are sort of vaguely aware there are organisations for the blind, and for people with Cerebral Palsy and so on. But didn't know there was all that stuff out there for the deaf, and I couldn't find them either you know, you at one time if you went into an audiology dept and asked staff they wouldn't have a clue, they wouldn't know what you were talking about, and what they used to do, what a lot of people tend to do is 'no, no such thing' But now you know, it's a lot better most audiology depts. Have a rack with leaflets in they are usually RNID leaflets with all the different in about getting equipment and tinnitus and so on, they also have a poster section which you know you get the posters from the different charities and you put them up. That's one of the things I like to do and so on.. But a lot of audiology depts. Are just bare walls and few out of dates copies of punch or something,. Nothing that is really helpful. And I think that's just as much a part of your job actually to tell people about different charities, you can't do them all there are hundreds of them, but at least if you can point people in the right direction. I think the internet is good for that. You don't need ears to do that and if you Google deaf charities you'll get hundreds fantastic.

[01:38:07]

*I was going to ask you about the way you've seen technology change over the time you've had a hearing loss. Has that had some impact on you?*

Yes marvellous. I mean better quality hearing aids, smaller. Better quality sound. I can hear more now than I've ever done. In a way in a funny kind of way. Speech is hard and all that but I hear more environmental sounds than I used to. Absolutely unbelievable.. There are still things I can't hear and I think I've never heard. I remember Becky saying, one day as she poured a glass of lemonade. She said I love hearing the bubbles fizz" and I said "do they fizz"? That's something I have never hear in my whole life and I suppose I never will. There are some sounds I never heard until I got the digitals. I remember standing by the sellotape dispenser when somebody tore a bit off and saying good grief what was that,. That was the sellotape and hearing the trolley rattle, amazing really. I know it might sound like a nuisance to you, but if you'd not been able to hear it before its like whoa, you know. So that's

good. There's more equipment for things like flashing lights textphones, palantypist, all that kind of thing. The disability DA means that more public places have got loop systems, they're not always working but they've got them and that a start. And then what else has changed? Well, there's are benefits available if you can get them it's a bit of a catch 22 but you know they're there. And also the internet has been marvellous because email gives us equality of access totally, no one has to know you are deaf to use it, like they do with an old fashioned text phone, mobile phones and texting you know, brilliant. And event firms like Argos. Do you know Argos have a disability website?

*Do they?*

Yes if you Google Argos and disability or something, you get the disability section of their catalogue, wheelchairs and things

*I didn't know that*

Things are a bit more affordable than they were,. I mean the flashing light doorbells that I have got is one of the portable ones, so I've got a bell push and then I've got a little box I take anywhere in the house and it goes off like the last trump Phil says. Phil got that from Argos for me. Now at one time you could only get that from the RNID or some place similar. Connevens, Sarabec people like that and it would be about £60. Phil got it from Argos£20

*Fantastic*

Yeah, more accessible and more affordable which is fantastic.

*More mainstream. Feels less like you are a special case*

Yes. Yes. And they are also making things a bit less cumbersome and ugly, a bit more like the kind of thing you don't mind having in your home. Now me I don't care it doesn't bother me at all, but I do know people who wouldn't have equipment because they said it was ugly. Which I think is a bit, I think there's a bit of getting your

priorities wrong there, but you know, some people do feel like that you know. I get a fair number of patients who say things like I can't use subtitles on TV because my husband doesn't like it'. 'Well he's not deaf' you know. But I do get that. My sister's husband, I bought her an amplified phone and he got rid of it because he didn't like it because it was ugly. It looks exactly like an ordinary phone but he is a bit of a pain like that and you do get that sometimes with hearing family and partners that they won't have stuff in the home, but the new stuff is sort of slicker, more attractive looking so people are more inclined to have it, which is great isn't it?

[01:42:08]

*Yeah it is. Can I ask you about what's obviously there's been a lot of moves forward in various things in technology in getting benefits and things, erm, but what would you like to see happen in the future, for people with a profound hearing loss that they have acquired?*

I'd like to see more lipreading classes, I think I anything there are getting less of them, yes. And I would like to see those. I'd like to see hearing therapy and lipreading classes offered automatically to people when they get a hearing loss. Ok most people are going to say no thanks and that is fantastic but I think it should be rehabilitation, should be automatic. I believe in some Scandinavian countries it is but you don't just get hearing aids you automatically get offered hearing therapy and a lipreading class and you know these things should be like a matter of course, not like you have got to track it down, find out about them in the first place, track them down then discover they are only going to do them in the daytime, or they are going to charge you £80 a term. One of the colleges I work for lipreading classes were free, they are now going to charge I think it is £80 a term and I said hang on a bit, but they said, but they are free if you have a deaf family member. Why would learning lipreading be any use to my husband? How would that help me? 'Oh' so like oh right ok. And OH alright but you have got to prove you are deaf and I said oh great I'll just show you my hearing aids then? Oh no you have got to have a letter and I said are you going to ask wheelchair users to do that and there was this long pause, I'll have to ask she said anyway a few days later she came back and said yes we are going to ask all disabled people but I would bet anything you like that in fact hey hadn't thought of that and it was just deaf

people they were going to ask. And me having raised that they realised hang on a minute we could be held up for discrimination here its got to be across the board. Fair enough fair enough I'm all for equality so we have got to prove that we are deaf and that means you being your brown book along or a letter form your GP and if you need a letter from your GP he may well charge you for it

*And it is one extra barrier as well, it's one extra step*

And I very much feel that lipreading classes should not really be part of adult education, where they are looking at learning money through them, they should really be through the NHS. If you, god forbid, have an accident and need a wheelchair, you don't got to your adult education to get one. If you need to use to white stick because you've gone blind you don't go to adult education to use it. So I think the rehab should be a bit more logical then people will know how to find it. I think it should be automatic. I'm not saying that because it is my job, I'm saying that because as a deaf person that was really what I needed, I mean hearing aids they are great and I wouldn't be without them they are marvellous but on the other hand in a funny kind of way I could manage without hearing aids, but I couldn't manage without the other things, and there will come a day when I have to manage without hearing aids, but I will still need the other things. Its interesting isn't it?

*You said that you thought that lipreading and hearing therapy should be automatic?  
Is hearing therapy not automatic?*

Well no because what the audiologist are chiefly concerned with is diagnostic testing and fitting hearing aids, and they do not routinely offer hearing therapy as part of that. If it strikes them that the patient has a particular problem they will say 'would you like to see our hearing therapist about so and so'. Consultants don't mention it either as a rule. It is not automatic, it is only if a patient has a particular problem they will say 'oh perhaps you'd like to see your hearing therapist'. Normally what consultants refer patients for is tinnitus. I see loads of tinnitus patients, I don't automatically see a lot of people with hearing loss.

[01:46:48]

*When you see those tinnitus patients do you talk about other things as well as the tinnitus?*

Oh crumbs yes. Not all of them have got a hearing loss, but those of them that have, I jolly well make sure I cover that too. Oh crumbs yes. It's whatever the patient comes to me with I try to cover everything.

*Yes*

Yes. Because I feel that you know I've got a one off opportunity, well I don't actually because I have them back for repeat sessions, but I think that this is my opportunity to make sure everything is ok. Because it is very easy I know myself for people to lip through the net, we all did. We all did. Do you know my sister, was worried about her little girl's hearing, my niece Charlotte and we'd noticed Cath and I that if you spoke behind Charlotte she could not hear you, and Cath said to her GP can Charlotte have a hearing test because we have a family hearing loss and I think Charlotte has a hearing loss. Nonsense said the GP, so do you know what she did. She walked into her local audiology dept and had a tantrum, my sister is very good at that, she had a massive tantrum you know screaming and carrying on and they did a hearing test and found she has a slight hearing loss. Now that is quite wrong, that should've been automatic. There is no way that child should've fallen through the net. Or mine either for that matter. Becky got a hearing test because she paid for one. She was worried about her hearing. No that's wrong, the first one she got she was worried about her hearing and the consultant I worked with gave her a test and saw her for free, which was very kind of him, I was going to pay him but he wouldn't take any money. Nowadays she goes to private clinic a on Harley Street she pays £50 and she has a regular hearing test every two years. Just to make sure her hearing is alright, because there is no way she can get that on the NHS

*That's wrong!*

It is wrong, anyone with as strong a gene as that ought to be being looked at . Yeah, so you know, it is surprising people can fall through the net very, very easily I

sometimes see people with quite profound hearing loss and I think why is this the first time they are being seen, what happened to them? How have they been managing all these years. Its awful and its terrible when you meet people who say, some of my Durham class have said to me that they gave up their job because they couldn't cope with their hearing loss and work and they didn't know you can get things like a text phone they didn't know about Access to Work if they had known they would've stayed in work.

*It's dreadful.*

Just think about that. But when you also think about you think what that is costing the country, a fortune isn't it? Yeah Whereas Access to Work would actually work out cheaper. I always tell people that when they say I don't like asking for things. I say it costs less than keeping you on benefits and that cheers them up a bit,. Its economic really isn't it. I'm talking as a therapist about self respect and satisfaction and being independent and everything, but from a economic point of view for the government it makes sense, because that's mostly what they are interested in. I hate to say it but that's what it is all about when it comes down to it. Its economic I mean that's why they're having this great drive about obesity, I suppose somebody somewhere probably cares about the health of the nation, but actually it's an economic thing because people who are ill cost more.

[01:50:29]

*Erm, just we're probably coming to near the end now. But I just wanted to ask you a little bit more about Phil is your husband's name isn't it and Becky. I mean, it sounds form the things that you've said that they're supportive of you and encouraging of you. Can you either put me right or tell me a bit more about that.*

Yeah they're fantastic actually. Phil is one of these people who believes I can do anything. Which is tremendously if you like empowering. Because what you can find sometimes is that people assume you can't do things, and with any kind of disability you also assume you can't do things, my GP when I was 14 said to my mother, I might have been 15, 14, 15 said 'she'll never work, she'll never go to college, she'll

never drive a car, she'll never marry, she'll never have children. Because of the epilepsy you see. My mother was upset, I wasn't too thrilled but I was determined to prove him wrong. And I did, I have done all those things. He did die unfortunately he was an older boy so I could never go back and tell him I'd proved him wrong. And that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to go back and tell him right I've driven a car and I've been to college....If you're not careful that can happen and I've seen it happen a lot with people and I didn't want it to happen to me. My grandmother never went on holiday never drove a car, never worked since she married or had a hobby or did voluntary work or anything she just lived at home and she read books until she went blind, she couldn't watch television she stopped going to chapel which she loved, you know can you imagine what her life were like she lived until almost a hundred. Her life must have been so boring, frustrating. And I didn't want to get like that. Bu the thing I love about Phil is, Phil's line is 'of course you can do it'. So there are times when I say 'I'm not sure if I can do that; and he'll say 'of course you can do it, you go for it' and that's really nice you know. He does do things like if we are in a railway station and I'll say you get the tickets. He'll say 'no you get them' because I have to manage, but there are also times when we're in a restaurant or something and I say can you order and he'll do that? Which is fine. He's got a nice sort of balance. He is very good about equipment he doesn't mind about that having it around the place, he is quite ok with the fact I'm going to get deafer, he's very, very good I don't think it fazes him. One of the things he does you see as part of his job is he visits a local hospice regularly to visit people, I don't think illness or even dying frightens him like it does a lot of people, it doesn't revolt hi8m, right. And that's very important I think because sometimes people do find disability repulsive. I don't, but you can see it in their faces when you tell them. I have to say to people sometimes, it's not catching you know and they get all embarrassed but you can see them sort of back off you know. Becky has grown up with it so tends to regard it as normal and I think I was quite concerned as a teenager we had one or two moments I remember her saying one parents evening, please don't come to parent's evening you embarrass me because you are deaf. My husband just said, leave the room please Val. Right I though ok, I went off and I sat on the bed going 'sniff' later on Becky comes up all pink around the eyes, and she says, when you come to the parent's evening tonight can you wear your black jacket because you look smart in that and he wouldn't tell me what he had said to her, but she told me many years later you should be proud of your mother for what

she has achieved not ashamed of her.. I am ashamed of you when you talk like that. And that was fantastic I can remember a couple of things like that but that is all. Other than that she has been pretty good, and of course as an adult she has been marvellous, a lot of what she has done in her life has been compassionate and caring for people. I remember her going to work at St Paul's, was it her first job after university? and she went there and they said she'd actually put that she had a deaf other and they said 'that's really interesting' you know and 'what have you sort of learned from this',. And she was on about how you communicate with people

### *Fantastic*

It was great, and when disabled people visited the cathedral they used to get Becky to show them round because they said she was really good. And that was nice to think of wasn't it? That she was, that she, it was positive, so yes I'm ever so grateful I couldn't have married anybody that didn't think of disability like that, as it were something normal not anything to be afraid of, and something you take in your stride. The funny thing is though when we moved up here, they have a what they call an induction service you know your husband the minister is inducted into the church I think the church call it read in, it's a special service and you have a bit of a party as well. It was a big occasion and Phil had to make a speech and stuff. And Phil said, we are here because I have an adventurous wife. I said I'm not adventurous, and he said yes you are, much more so than I am. And that was ice because I don't think I would've been like that so it's great. And it has been nice over the years too, I mean I used to love classical music my mother was a pianist she played awfully well. She had a finger missing though after a road accident so she could never be really professional but she used to play for church and Becky has inherited it, Becky is a musician too, and I used to love music, but I can't listen to it so much anymore. I used to sing as well in a choir, but I don't so that anymore I can't pitch the note. And I miss that, but what Phil taught me was how to look at pictures, so now I go to art galleries instead of concerts.

### *That's lovely*

Yeah, it is great. He used to lecture at the Wallace collection in London, on his, it was his hobby on his days off. He's an expert in 18<sup>th</sup> Century French Art he knows a lot

about it and he used to do guided tours and he got them putting a loop system in the lecture theatre and he got them doing signed tours and I think Lorraine Callow went there to train the staff in deaf awareness and she said something afterwards to Phil and he said I think you know my wife, Val. Oh yes! Because you know,. And that was kind of nice, it introduced him to a whole different world. But he's been very proactive. We've got a loop in the church and things like that.

[01:58:17]

*Since you've been there?*

Yes, Since we've been there and it works! And he's been very helpful when I've come to him and said things like, I've got a patient who wants to go to a family wedding but she's afraid she won't hear much, so he's taken me through all the things that the clergyman can do to make things accessible and he's said what kind of church it is and I say Church of England. And he says find out what sort of service they're going to use, which hymnbook you know so she's knows in advance he'll have sermon notes, get him to run off an extra copy photocopy them if necessary because most of them use computers now you see, he always has copies of his sermons written out that he can give to people who have a hearing loss. He's been very helpful like that. Sometimes I have a moral dilemma; a patient will tell me something and I just don't know what to do. And I'll think about it and say to him 'supposing someone said to you...' so I will turn round and say well what would you advise and he is very good like that, because sometimes people have guilt for example, I feel I am being punished and that is why I have lost my hearing. Now, you know, I can say 'oh of course not' but he is very helpful at taking me through the arguments about why that is a load of rubbish. So it's really, its basically shit happens to good people! That's the argument for that one, because it happens to everyone.

*So there's a bit of team working going on there?*

Yes, I think I've been helpful over the years, I think this is one of the reasons that he is quite interested in disability access in church as we've got large print books we've got disabled access toilets we've got a loop system you know he is very interest in

that and he is now very keen on Alzheimer's his very interest in how do you cope with an aging congregation. We've got a lot of old people in the congregation and they've got different disabilities and things like Alzheimer's and so on. In what sense does the church take care of people. I think it is swings and roundabouts, yes he must get very irritated. I know he does, because he says to me once. Deafness is the most irritating disability for other people. And what he said was, I don't know why but with blindness you don't say to a person well just concentrate a bit harder and you could read the small print, but with deafness it is almost like the person is doing it deliberately so he said you do feel very frustrated sometimes because they hear some things and not others. If you heard nothing at all it would be relatively easy to remember that, But remembering what you can and can't here, and remembering certain circumstances are very difficult to hearing, but he has got very good over the years and he is excellent at you know the old 'does he take sugar?' When we first came to Hardwick a lot of people said 'would Val like a cup of tea? And he said 'ask her yourself!'

*Quite right!*

Its nice isn't it you know, because I have had a lot of, you get you see a lot of the overprotection side people over-protecting their family members, which is nice of them they do it because they love them but its not very helpful

*No*

So I'm proud about that, they are both very clever Phil and Becky, they both think a lot of each other. I have tried really hard with Becky so that she didn't miss any hearing stuff just because I wasn't interested in it. So she has had you know, she has always had CD player and ipod and so on, she and Phil love opera and he's taken her to the opera. When he goes up to London on business he and Becky always meet up for a meal and go out to the opera. Yeah its great. I occasionally would go with them, but not every time, but they go and sometimes they say- we've got tickets and there's a signer and its English National Opera so you'll be able to lipread and it's the front three rows.

[02:02:40]

*So you go?*

Yeah I'd got to that. I'd try to make sure that they had that special time together that they weren't missing out because I think it is pretty awful if you say, no you can't go to the proms, because they love the proms. Becky is going this week. You can't go to the proms because I won't enjoy it. You have to say yes you go, I don't want to go to everyone but I'll come to one of them with you. I don't want to go to everyone. I think that's important otherwise you are being selfish and you are manipulating your family. I hate that don't you when you see that? My grandmother was a bit like that. Yeah. My mother used to say 'Grandma enjoys ill health'. Laughter

*Yes. I think I know some people like that!*

I get tinnitus patients like that. Boy, they can't go on holiday, none of the family can go on holiday because they have got tinnitus. Why can't you go on holiday if you have got tinnitus, Sorry. And they can be very manipulative like that. Everyone has got to be quiet because they have got tinnitus, no one can have the telly on because they have got tinnitus, you know. I mean, come on. You sometimes wonder that someone doesn't put something in their tea. But I have always thought I don't want anyone glad when I die, I don't want them breathing a sigh of relief and saying thank goodness that miserable old bat is deaf.

*Good for you. Is there anything else that you particularly want to say. Anything you feel that I have missed. I mean clearly we haven't discussed your whole life. Is there anything important you want recorded?*

[02:04:40]

Erm. We haven't mentioned the writing

*We haven't*

No.

*Do you want to?*

We can do can't we, as its part of my work with LINK. I suppose that grew out of the fact that I always wanted to write ever since I was little. But I realise doing an English degree that I actually wasn't in the same league you know. When I was younger I wanted to write but I realised growing up and getting it and developing critical faculties that I hadn't got what it took. Not to write fiction I mean. And the non fiction came about because as a hearing therapist I was always being asked the same thing over and over again, so I ended up writing it out for people. And after writing it out for the 50<sup>th</sup> time I thought I need a handout so I would write a handout and then other people would say to me, you know that handout you have of tinnitus do you think I could have it. So that kind of started. Then the RNID asked me to do a column, I'd done one or two other little bits for them. They asked me to do a column, that was pretty surprising I wasn't expecting it. I was at home alone, go the email and I thought there is nobody in but me and the dog and I tried phoning round, I could use an amplified phone in those days. Nobody was in were they so I had to just tell the dog about it, and the dog was very impressed!

*So you write a column for*

The RNID

*In their One in Seven magazine*

Yes, I'm the agony aunt. People write in and say things like my hearing aid goes beep beep beep, why does it do this? I give the answer or I've got tinnitus is there any treatment for it and so on

*And how regular is the magazine?*

Every two moths so that is good. What's amazing about that is although I'd written fro other things over the years, I've written for theological magazine sand small

articles on writers and so on. I had never been paid before. And this was my first payment. It was like whoa! Yes, it was absolutely unbelievable that was really incredible. Then they send a letter around saying is anybody interested in writing a book about tinnitus for them and I didn't take any notice of it, it was just a general letter and then a few weeks later I got a personal letter from them saying are you interested. This was sort of July and they wanted it by the end of September and I thought I can't do that in that sort but I asked a couple of colleagues if they would work on it with me, Glynis and Keith and they said they'd love to, so I wrote back and said we were interested and we got, as it were, the contract to write it and it took off from there really, with me writing as it were to order. Most of the time I don't get paid, sometimes I do which is nice. But it is just really amazing the sort of thinking that I've done three books now. So the second one I was up here and hadn't got a job so Bunty and I talked for ages about writing a book. There is no book for hearing therapists

*This Bunty Levene*

So we thought we'd write it ourselves so we did.

*And what is that book called?*

Impairment to Empowerment. We couldn't think of a title you know. We just brainstormed it one day in York, and it just suddenly; you know came together like that. And that was great and what has amazed us is that yes hard of hearing and deaf people read it but it is also gone on the reading list for the courses for hearing therapist and people like that lipreading teachers so professionals are using it. It is ever so funny because one GP reviewed it and said it was a bit simple and I nearly wrote to him and said, we actually it wasn't written for you it was written for lay people. The anatomy in it would be a bit simple for a GP. So we are really pleased. We wanted it to be useful. But here we are you know. One thing leads to another. I find my attitude is generally say yes, if it doesn't turn out you can always change your mind, you don't have to do it again.

[02:09:17]

*Can you tell me a little bit about your third book, your telling it like it is?*

Yeah, I felt that the second book was about two experts telling people what could be useful. Which is ok, up to a point. It was sort of basically information where do you get a loop system from or how do hearing aids work, yeah. But it occurred to me that plenty of people were coping without the aid of hearing therapists and how did they cope, how did they manage what things had they found that helped. I wanted deaf people to tell their own story. A bit like this really. So Damien was very keen he was the chief exec of Hearing Concern at the time and asked me if I would work for them for a year, and rite the book research and write the book and *I did and I reckon I interviewed, I forget how many about 150 I think*

*That is a lot. And were they all people that you knew, or?*

Gosh no. Most of them were stranger. England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, I went everywhere.

*How did you find these people?*

Well we asked in the magazine and also I started off with colleagues and asked have you got any patients I could interview and they would say yeah sure come along to our hard of hearing club or to my lipreading class or come along to the tinnitus support group or some hospitals actually invited me into the waiting rooms. I sat in waiting rooms chatting to patients. That's how I got the Newcastle connection. A friend of a friend of a friend knew Tom Davison and said can Val come and do some interviews and he was brilliant. He was like Yes you can come you can talk to anybody you can go behind the scenes we don't mind what you print be completely honest. It was good, it was very good and that way I got a wide selection

*And what sort of things did you talk to people about or ask about?*

I had different areas; I wanted to ask them about equipment, about work, about education, about social life and about family life. Those different areas and I had a

little questionnaire for each area which as I say people didn't stick to and you'd often start them off and say I'm quite interested in finding out about you know how you live with hearing loss form day to day in your home for example and they will start off with that then tell you all about work, so I often had to change half way through what I was doing. Nobody said they didn't want to talk to me. Nobody said you can't print that, Everyone was very encouraging and helpful, it was quite an eye opener really to find out how revealing people were prepared to be. It was very humbling too, how people were coping. I met a guy who had a sight problem and a serous hearing problem but he was getting his pilots licence. That was amazing. I was quite prepared to have hobbies like, sounds awful doesn't it like embroidery and basket weaving and stuff like that but people were doing all kinds of things like astronomy and flying and camping and climbing mountains and it was really interesting to see that hearing loss didn't actually hold them back which I think is great. Obviously you tend to expect hard of hearing and deaf people to be in the world of audiology and ENT but a lot of them weren't a lot of them we're not they were all over the place.

*And can you tell me the purpose of the book?*

It was to have positive suggestions about how you can cope and live with hearing loss and also lots of positive role models because Bunty and I find that a lot of books are so depressing you know you ask people about hearing loss and its like 'I had this horrible GP and this dreadful consultant, and my boss sacked me and my husband walked out and my children don't speak to me. Which may be true but there is another side for every patient you get like that you get another person who say the opposite, what I felt was you needed a bit more positive stuff. That the personal depressing stuff is very useful to write but it is not very helpful to other people. Not unless you want to shoot yourself. Do you find that?

*It's interesting. It is making me think about what we've done in this project. I think people enjoy the opportunity to get the bad things that have happened to them off their chest, but perhaps the end result isn't that it will help other people. There must be a certain extent to which hearing somebody else's sad story makes you feel a bit more validated in your own?*

Yes it validates your own experience, makes you realise you're not alone and you're not a freak. But there are things about hearing loss like. If I didn't have a hearing loss I wouldn't be doing the interesting job I'm doing, I wouldn't have written the books, I wouldn't have met so many wonderful people. I wouldn't have had the experiences I've had I wouldn't have travelled. I have a hearing loss and I can't enjoy music anymore, but I have a wonderful appreciation of painting and sculpture, I have a terrific sense of smell, and I don't know of that is because or just something that I have cultivated as a result of the hearing loss, so you know there's all kind of positive thing. I don't wake up during thunder storms or car alarms, or snoring. All the sounds that irritate other people I don't get. I can switch sound off. If I'm travelling on the train and the sound is irritating can take the hearing aids out. I would rather have hearing but if you see what I mean it is not all negative. It is not all negative.

[02:15:33]

*And a lot of people have said that they would really, really love their hearing back, and are you one of those people?*

Mmm. I feel like that programme, comedy programme well yes minister and no minister. In some ways possibly I would but in another way no because it wouldn't be me. Its so much apart of me now that I can't really imagine life without it. Same with the epilepsy I can't really imagine life without it. I would be a different person, and I'm not surer I want to be a different person. Yes, in a way I would like me hearing back, but in another way it's not important. You see the most important parts of my life are my family and to tell you the truth books. And my family still love me just the same, even if I go completely deaf which I probably will one day and books are still accessible whether I can hear or not. And things like the world of the imagination you understand, you've done an English degree you're a writer too. The world of the imagination is more important to me than anything else if you see what I mean. So the fact that I can't hear the noises in York station is not important to me, whereas the fact that I can sit down and read War and Peace and imagine the noises in it are important to me. Keats said it better. 'Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter'. Is that *Ode on Greek Urn*? Could be?

*You would know*

That's what Keats said. So it sounds a bit mad. It's very, very difficult. It's like being asked would you rather be a man. You can see the advantages of being a man, yes. But on the other hand if I was a man I wouldn't be me I wouldn't have had Becky.

*So there is quite large extent of having come to terms with it then for you?*

Yes, having come to terms with it and living in the world of it if you see what I mean. I'm a very lucky person because I had very positive role models of deaf people. My father always worked my father was a lay preacher my father was greatly loved not just by his family but by friends and other people in the church and people he worked with he was a very loveable person. You know? So I had a very sort of positive role model there. And it never occurred to me that their hearing loss would stop me doing things. It was only when I sort of went into life that I found it did stop me doing things. It knocked my confidence a bit and what I've found over the years is its not just circumstances that stop you as people try to stop you. Um? So if you have a very positive and supportive manager like I have at the moment and I had in London then you can do anything. But when I worked in a school with a very negative attitude then I was severely limited in what I could do, but not because of the deafness but because of their attitude to it. The last teaching job I had when we first moved up here. A local school asked if I would do a term. They had a teacher who was ill, so I did a term. They actually had a deaf unit in the school, yes with deaf children and they had an interpreter full time who worked there. And we had an assembly and the new staff had to introduce themselves and I saw the interpreter and he was interpreting for everybody I did that. And the deaf kids were like 'ahh a deaf teacher' it was a wonderful moment, how things have changed. A different attitude. My hearing was worse than it had been in my first teaching job. But it was a different atmosphere and it was a positive place to be. I suppose if Becky had inherited it I might've felt a lot worse, because you would blame yourself which is stupid, but you know like mothers do anyway. That's another thing, getting things in proportion, you know, mother's blame themselves anyway about the way their children turn out. If she was deaf I wouldn't blame myself about that. It's what mothers do. There are limitations about what I can do. I can't be a switchboard operator but hey I can't be Miss World either.

Everyone has limitations it is learning what yours are and what you just think are limitations but can be overcome. I think that is a difference and certainly in the world I move in, which is the world of hearing loss. I think it's a funny kind of thing, it is actually an advantage, patients have a hearing loss and I have a hearing loss, they sometimes tend to listen to me more because they think I know what I am talking about. I think my colleagues just as much know what they are talking about and are more highly qualified than I am sometimes. But sometimes for a deaf patient, having a deaf therapist can be an advantage. And I remember my first patient, interview I went along to the hospital and one of the doctors said to me, how do you think you are going to cope being deaf, and I said I think it will be a great advantage. I'll be a good example for deaf patients. I thought about that before hand. I knew he'd ask that. Always say to people, if you are going for a job interview, and you have a hearing loss, think about what they are going to ask you and be prepared. Have they got the equipment in place, do they know about Access to Work, have it all at your fingertips and then they don't panic so much, so you know. Funny kind of way no I don't think. I honestly don't know, it's like cochlear implant I get asked that a lot. Would you have one? And I honestly don't know. I can manage ok at the moment why would I want one. If I went totally deaf, maybe I would think about it but I don't know it is a big thing. It is a big thing for a very uncertain gain.

[02:22:15]

*Yes But it is not something that you would be suitable for at the moment is it not?*

No they would say I have got too much hearing I cope too well with hearing aids.

*So it is not a decision you have got to make yet?*

Yes it's not something I actually need at the moment, or something I actually want at the moment,. I mean I, people like me are a bit odd because I am such a good lipreader and I am very good at cheating people think I hear a lot more than I do. It comes as a shock to people, people at church spent five years getting shocked at what I don't actually hear. When they first knew me they thought so what she's deaf? She doesn't seem very deaf. But it is years of coming up behind me to say something and

I am totally oblivious that makes them realise yes she is deaf isn't she. It is quite funny really. I find that it is very important to tell people because they can get so hurt if you are apparently ignoring them. I nearly said 'do you find that, sorry?' well you get like that after a while, you tend to assume that hearing people who understand what you are talking about are really deaf?

*Say that again.*

I tend to forget that my hearing friends aren't deaf.

*Oh I see*

I tend to assume because they understand what I am talking about and they are very good with communication that actually they are really deaf.

*Whereas some people think you are so good at communication that they think you can really hear!*

Its funny isn't it

*Shows that communications the key thing*

Communication is the key thing yeah, and I find good will. If people have good will you can manage. If they are the kind of person that hasn't got good will then you are sunk. Do what you can, you are sunk! Because they are just not going to make the effort to help. I had a really good example of this a really nice girl called Jo. She lost her hearing totally in her 20s she lives up in Glasgow and the RNID got in touch with me because she had been in touch with them and said help. And they got in touch with me and said, she'd been told there's no hearing therapists there's not help for her, she's just got to get on with her life and she is totally deaf. And I'm like this is quite mad, this is stupid, or course there are organisations in Scotland that will help. I was going up to Glasgow on business. I emailed Jo and I said if you like we can meet up. So we did. We met up in a coffee shop in Glasgow, it's the name of that street that I cannot say, its really long and everyone who goes to Glasgow knows it, but you have

to be a Glaswegian to pronounce. Killermahockey street or something,. It is really weird. Anyway so we met up in this coffee shop and obviously you know, strange waitress Glasgow accent and I said sorry can you say that again because I am deaf and Jo said you are so matter of fact about it and she said, and she said it again, she said, I said Why wouldn't she? She wants to sell the coffee if she wasn't helpful I would walk out and find another coffee. That was lesson number one going in, I didn't think about it like that but afterwards I could see that that was what was happening. When we went into a restaurant I had the old notepad and pen out writing things down for her, I taught her how to fingerspell. We were fingerspelling to each other. Halfway through the evening I notice the waiter is doing the same he is writing things down. We had a wonderful evening. She told me it was the first time she had been out of the house since she had lost her hearing, except to the hospital for appointments. She said she didn't realise it was possible to manage without your hearing. And I said yes it is. I said if you have got goodwill, now if we had gone in a different restaurant and they had been a snotty or hadn't written things down we'd have been a bit stuck, but because we were somewhere where people quite friendly it was no problem. It was quite interesting. Taught me a big lesson actually, didn't even have to ask.

### *Brilliant*

So basically I would say that it very much depends you know. I've got a supportive family, I'm in a great job, I've got fantastic friends, you know. So deafness is I can live with it. But supposing I lived on my own, I was 83, my daughter shouted at me and got cross when I couldn't hear her. The GP hadn't got time for me. I couldn't put my hearing aids in well because I've got arthritis,. You can see it is a different proposition, then I'd probably be very happy to have my hearing back. So I don't think I've really answered that have I?

*No you have you've answered it very well. So is there anything else?*

I don't think so, unless you can think of anything

*It has been absolutely fascinating and I don't think you have got any justification at all in assaying you've only had an ordinary life.*

Funny isn't it

*We all think our own lives are boring, but they are all interesting, yours has been interesting definitely.*

Funny really. I suppose nobody seems special to themselves but they do to others. Because people who do seem special to themselves are a different kind of problem and I send them to a psychiatrist.

Well thank you very much Val and I will switch it off now.

[End of recording]