



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Patricia Middlemiss
Interviewed by Ann Thallon

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IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname:	Middlemiss	Title:	
Interviewee's forename:	Patricia	Sex:	Female
Occupation:		Date and place of birth:	1960, Kelso

Date(s) of recording: 23rd September 2009

Location of interview: Hearing Link Scotland Office, The Eric Liddell Centre, Edinburgh

Name of interviewer: Ann Thallon

Speech to Text reporter: Karen Schober

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

Well good afternoon, this is Ann Thallon interviewing Patricia Middlemiss on Wednesday 23 September 2009 in Edinburgh. The speech to text recorder is Karen Schober. Now Patricia thanks for coming along to share your story with us. To start us off could you give your full name and date of birth and where you were born?

Thanks for inviting me along. The name is Patricia Middlemiss. I don't have any middle names. I was born on the 24 July 1960 in Kelso so but I've been living in Edinburgh for the past 30 years.

Oh thank you, so you were born in Kelso. Now that's on the Scottish borders

That's in the Scottish Borders yes.

Can you tell me about your family?

Well my mum and dad - I'm the eldest - I have one sister who is two years younger than me and a brother that is six years younger than me. We all stayed round home in Kelso. My dad died 22 years ago and my brother has a wee boy. My nephew is aged 6.

So you're an aunty.

Yes, I'm an aunt.

So in Kelso back in the 1960's what are your memories of being a small child in Kelso?

Maybe one memory is was starting school for the first time. I think an ordinary primary school. I didn't go to any school for the deaf or anything. It was along the road, I can remember standing outside the room and going in to the school with the row of wooden desks with the leg and I always sat myself to the front of the classroom - I must have knew to do that.

So you decided by yourself to sit near the front and why do you think that was?

I think I must have thought to myself I did have a hearing loss so one of the teachers there, well they didn't know that.

So you were aware of having a hearing loss from when you were quite little then?

Yes uh-huh.

And apart from sitting at the front of the classroom, did you do anything else about that at the time?

Not that I remember no. I think the teachers and parents kept an eye on me.

And tell me did you enjoy school?

I did I enjoyed primary school yes. I got a bit bored at the end of high school but I did enjoy being at school in Kelso.

Did you have friends there?

Yes, not so many that I keep in touch with now. I've lost in touch but when I went to the high school they had a good friend. She wore hearing-aids - she was just a year older than me so I started wearing hearing-aids around the high school age, just before I started high school, so she was a good friend and very supportive.

[04:22]

Right okay. So what can you remember - what led up to you getting hearing-aids and that would have been primary 7 when you were about 11 then?

I do not know to be honest. I kind of expect it will be the move to high school, it might have been the trigger because at primary school you just had the one teacher, the same class friends and so on but at the high school it's a lot different - a lot more difficult because you are moving to a different room, different teachers, accent, different vocabulary, new subjects. I

think it helped to get to grips with the change to high school that's my feeling. I do not know if it's true.

Do you remember going to get a hearing-aid fitted? Do you remember the first memory of a hearing-aid?

Not so much the actual hospital. I didn't like the feel of it at first. I just had the one at first. I suppose it was a very self-conscious age. Now I wouldn't be without them.

But to begin with you were quite self conscious of it to begin with?

Yes, to begin with yes.

You mentioned a friend at secondary school who was older than you who had hearing-aids. Did you know anybody else in your class who had hearing-aids?

No. I suspect there were a couple of girls in the class who did have hearing loss but nobody else - we all had hearing tested at the same time in school but no one else had hearing-aids in class.

So you wore your hearing-aids. Did you wear your hearing-aids or did you just have it and not wear it?

I had it and maybe not wear it to begin with. Confession time! There used to be a teacher of the deaf - she would come in to the high school classroom to see if I was wearing my hearing-aid you know. 'Why are you not wearing your hearing-aid?'

So you were told off!

Yes, aye! Caught!

How did you feel about the teacher of the deaf coming in to the classroom?

A bit embarrassing to be honest. It was just the age that I was. It was a self-conscious age

Why do you think you were embarrassed and self conscious about wearing a hearing-aid?

Was it your age you were at or..?

I was about 11 or 12 more my age I think yes. And there was nobody else apart from the girl that was a year older than me. But I think it's more my age and being the only one in the classroom.

Can you remember anything about any reactions from maybe your family or the other kids at school at that time to the fact that you were needing to wear a hearing-aid?

Not from my family. They'd always been very supportive and the school too. Some of the school children were curious, what's that - what's that for? Why is it whistling?

Could you hear it whistling?

Sometimes sometimes.

Did it help you to hear?

Yes definitely, it took a while to get used to it - a good year or more probably and then started wearing it all the time.

[08:57]

How did you cope at secondary school when wearing your hearing-aid? What are your memories of secondary school?

I think I coped by sitting at the front of the classroom doing a lot of reading for myself, if the teacher didn't face you or you didn't lip read. I think if it was a subject I was interested in and I had a lot of reading like geography and history and modern studies. I never liked maths et cetera. I think I'd done a lot of studying myself a lot of reading for myself, any subject I was interested in.

How long did you stay at high school for..?

For 5th year.

By the time you were in 5th year you'd have been about 16?

Yes

What was happening in your social life around about then? So we're now about the middle of the 1970's, about 1976 round about there. What sort of things did you get up to outside school?

I might go - I had a couple of good friends - we went to each others house - take turns about. I wasn't one for going in big groups. I used to go to some music classes, music society. Scottish country dancing - that was through the school too.

So that's a very good exercise apart from anything else isn't it?

Piano

You played the piano?

Yes

When did you learn that?

I started learning about 9 or 10 and I got to grade 5 then I never did the grade 5 theory.

You did it for some time ?

Yes.

What about your hearing and the playing the piano and music - dancing - did your hearing let you do all the music you wanted to do?

I think the dance I relied on vibration or watching other people and following the beat. I got caught out if they were doing a wee display, public display - I wouldn't stop dancing in time, embarrassing! The music I think it is because, piano because I was near. I found piano hasn't two or three sounds so the two or three instruments playing together or two or three people singing trying to mix everything, it's jumbled up but I got on quite well with one sound at a time like the piano

[12:49]

So there you were 16 year old with your interests in life, what happened next in your life when you left school?

I left school. I was kind of bored at school because I never got on and done any going to college or anything but my first job was an office junior in an office in Kelso. It was an agricultural office invoicing section or the purchase ledger - I quite enjoyed that but there wasn't an opportunity for any development, started to get a bit bored but all I wanted to do was move to Edinburgh so I moved to Edinburgh

What took you to Edinburgh? Why did you want to go to Edinburgh?

I do not know. I've always liked Edinburgh. I thought it was a big thing to do - an adult thing to do. I was through Edinburgh a lot with hospital visits.

Hospital visits - what was that to do with?

Mostly audiology or ear nose and throat appointments.

What happened with your hearing at that point that made you need lots of hospital visits?

Mostly sometimes inspections. I used to have grommets. I had infection and kept an eye on my hearing-aid which were okay but I think the real problem was the infection then.

Did they explain to you what was causing the infection?

No, no. I reckon, I feel, I suspect it might be a genetic - think the aperture was too small and you know it just bunged up with glue ear in the grommets

You say it might have been genetic. Are there people in your immediate family with problems with hearing as well?

I think maybe one of my mum's cousins but no other immediate.

[15:53]

So there you were - I think big move to go from the small country town in to the big city. What age were you then Patricia?

About 18.

Tell me about that.

I applied for the civil service. Don't ask me why, because I always wanted to be a nurse and I just changed my mind at the last minute at school when we did secretarial practice and office studies and so on. I always wanted to be a nurse but I got the papers for the civil service so that was me.

Was that a good move for you?

A good move coming to Edinburgh I guess but not joining the civil service.

Tell me about the good things about Edinburgh when you moved there when you were 18?

I think there is slightly more going on here, a lot more places to visit because I like visiting a lot of places of interest and the galleries and so on and then we have got the theatres and cinemas. There is a lot more going on. And more exciting and the places and everything. We used to go to a lot of concerts and festivals the first few years and so on.

What sort of things did you like at the festivals?

The classical concerts, the orchestra, the choirs, choral music.

Is that a life long interest you've had with music?

Yes I still like music but I think more musicals now, more I like the musicals here than down in London, maybe I'll be in London to see some musicals Oliver, Jersey Boys and La Cage aux Folles. I think it's about some mad-woman so I'm going to 3 different musicals.

Give me the name of those again.

Jersey Boys, La Cage aux Folles and Jersey Boys.

Okay so you just told me the 3 musicals you've been seeing. So going back to 18 in Edinburgh, where were you staying in Edinburgh?

I stayed with my mum's cousin and her husband for the year and after that I moved in to a hostel for a couple of years, the YWCA hostel at the West End so it was nice and central and I met a lot of people there that I'm still in touch with today and friends to go out with. If there is an engagement party or hen party I've still kept in touch with a handful of the girls.

[19:48]

You were certainly central for the West end to get out and about with the girls. You were telling me about the civil service, tell me a bit more about that, what sort of job were you doing there?

Admin work. I started off in Exchequer office which is no longer there - the function of the department ceased away back in 1981. I'm now a member of the Procurator Fiscal office in Edinburgh which is the prosecution service for Scotland so if you're naughty there might be a police report sent in to us and I'm just doing very mundane work, pressing computer buttons.

And how do you like that?

It's pretty boring. I used to have more responsibility but everything has sort of changed now because, well I used to be in charge of all the machinery stationery. Now that's called procurement and I don't have a procurement qualification. I used to work in the library but I do not have an information management qualification so... things have changed so the people with qualifications that have moved in to the department.

How do you feel about that - how - what effect did it have on you that you were doing these things then you weren't doing them any more, you had less responsibility. How did you feel about that?

Pretty depressing and soul destroying. I like to feel I have a proper job in the office, a responsible role but the big thing I - another big thing for the office too which makes it a lot more difficult as well is the move to open plan. We never ever used to have open plan.

When did they change to open plan Patricia?

It might be 10 or 12 years ago now.

[22:51]

If we follow that up a bit Patricia - what stage was your hearing at 10 years ago? Because you had one aid to begin with so by the time it was 10 years ago, what was your hearing like then?

I had severe profound loss by this time.

And had that happened suddenly or gradually or what?

Gradually over the years. I had a mastoid operation

Tell me about that.

My hearing was very poor in the left ear

And what is a mastoid, what does that mean?

I think it's sort of bone that got infected so they had to remove a couple of the bones I think as well.

That had an effect on your hearing?

Yes. It made my hearing a lot worse

What impact did that have on your life at that time when your hearing got a lot worse?

I think I was pretty low, depressed for a year or two and then sort of picked myself up

You say that you picked yourself up, what other support did you have apart from picking yourself up, what other support did you have at that time?

Well I discovered lipreading classes and through them I got a lot of support. Both practical and emotional and got lots of support from the friends that I met there that I still keep in touch with a few of them on a weekly basis - a couple of the girls in the class, so finding others

Others in the same situation as you.

Yes the mutual empathy and support.

Was there anything from the NHS at that appointment that helped you, from hospital visits and so on?

Not really. It was before the time of hearing service systems so you were just given a hearing-aid and get on with it.

So the after care really didn't exist then, is that what you're saying?

Yes.

So what effect did all of this have on your job? You moved to an open plan office, your hearing had got severe to profound, you had two hearing-aids, what impact did that have on you in your work place at your job.

Well as one of the managers was saying yesterday it's not the ideal environment but what can I do. We have been through this with ACAS mediation and union rep support plus there is always like to get occupational health doctors and so on.

Was that helpful?

I do not know if the message gets through to my managers and colleagues.

So in terms of practical help in your work place, has anything happened in a practical sense that makes things more possible for you at work?

I do have a textphone in the office but I'm not got a role where I use it. I have occasionally used it if I want to make an appointment during the middle of the day. I have a vibrating pager for the fire alarm I think that's about it but email is great, probably the best way of contacting people by email but I think often it should go in hand in hand with awareness because there is no - I do not think there is much awareness amongst my colleague and it's all change change change and you know nobody knows to face me, face-to-face contact so that I can try a bit of lipreading or get their body language.

So you've got ideas.

I feel there should be more awareness

[28:37]

How could people get more awareness then? How could that happen, how could people in the work place get more awareness?

I do not think you can force people but maybe just half an hour out, half an hour, I do not think it would take long to give a wee awareness talk about good communication strategy

with deaf and hard of hearing people. The pros and cons of hearing aids and the pros and cons and the pros and cons of lipreading and hearing-aid, for anybody who is interested.

Because there are so many people - there are millions of people with hearing loss so you would think that...

Yes

That everybody should be interested.

Well I mean there's other people in the office with hearing loss, there used to be a girl - she's moved up to another floor now - we went to a meeting with her, I had a notetaker. I've started to get more note takers with me now. She used a note taker too because she was having problems with her hearing-aids.

Now a note taker then is a hearing person that comes along and takes notes for you and that happens for you at work sometimes?

Occasionally yes, occasional meeting or training day.

How do you find that?

Brilliant. It's wonderful because I wouldn't be able to cope otherwise. People are talking - they might not even be facing me. They might be away from my hearing-aid microphone too far away from my microphone. It's impossible in a group to communicate, extremely difficult, I'm better one to one, face-to-face so that's where a note taker is brilliant. Then you get the email notes afterwards so I do not have to worry about trying to take notes I just follow the screen. Wonderful service.

[31:20]

Are you working full time?

Part-time. I used to work full time until 2 years ago and I saw the Scottish Council deafness awareness course and that was done mostly on the weekend. I would do a Friday once a month and Saturday so after I completed that course I decided I would continue with that and go to college and do an HMC in Counseling.

Tell me more about that then, that was a bit of a departure.

Edinburgh Telford College and I had the most fabulous note taker. I wouldn't have been able to do the course without her support. I think it was fairly strange for us though because it was done in a group with hearing students, tutors that I've never met before and I think I was maybe the first deaf person in the class so it was a bit difficult settling in and the classroom was brilliant, do not try and communicate with the students and the background noise and hub, the big open plan meeting place was impossible so the social life was a bit difficult but the actual class, I enjoyed the course but since then I went part-time so I could go to college one day a week but since I completed the course there is still no word of me getting back to the office full time.

Explain more about that then Patricia. Do you want to be back full time, what's happening with the office?

I would like to be back full time on Monday. They have structure to my Thursday's and get some money I do not know if I'll retire in a few years but I'm missing being at college. Unfortunately I didn't get on another diploma course and the college are not able to do the HMD in Counselling so I had hoped to continue studying counselling and maybe even do that on a professional basis but it just not working out you know.

So do you have a plan if that's not working out at Telford? Have you thought about studying anything else or studying something else? Any more ideas if you're enjoying the studying?

I'm not thinking about studying anything else. I think if I went back to studying it would be the counselling if I could get accepted on the diploma course somewhere or if I was allowed to do the HMD, I think I would go back to doing that. I wouldn't go back to doing any business management or anything like that, no.

You've had enough of that.

Never interested me really.

[35:48]

Now you've got two hearing-aids now, what are the things you have at home to help you live successfully with your deafness?

Well I live alone so I think one of the important things is my vibrating pager. I do not know if that's a very trustworthy at the moment because I've had it a long time. It was supplied by I think the City Council - the Edinburgh Council paid for it - £220 to pay and it was installed by Deaf Action but the pager alerts me to the fire. I have two sensors in the flat so it alerts me to a fire alarm going off. It alerts me to the entry phone and the phone going so they are good to have, particularly the fire alarm when I live alone. I've got a telly but it's all different now because I think practically everybody can get the subtitles.

Can you get the subtitles?

Yes I get the subtitles. I rely on watching programmes with subtitles and I love BBCI player on the computer because it's subtitled. I think everybody can practically get subtitles now they have to go digital. It's part of the digital service you can just switch to the subtitles. Before that you had to have a teletext telly or video caption reader. I've just got an ordinary flat screen telly, switch on the subtitles. What else have I got? I rely a lot on email, I love emails and internet. I've got a textphone though to be honest it's not installed yet. Deaf Action need to put the cable round the door. They can't put the wire across the carpet of course, I wouldn't want to trip over it. I've got an amplified phone at the moment. I do not like long conversations on the phone or strange voices or accents.

How about outside in the community when you're doing your shopping or if you want to go out in the evening? What sort of difficulties and what sort of helpful things are there out there?

I like subtitled cinema, there's maybe not an awful lot of that, there might be quite a few cinemas in Edinburgh that have the facility but they might just show one or 2 films per week. It might be in the middle of a working afternoon but sometimes you can catch it on the way home. A friend and I went out to the cinema the other Sunday afternoon to discover the film hadn't arrived so we didn't end up going to the cinema but subtitle cinema. The theatre, the occasional captioned performance. I've always loved musical but since STAGETEXT the caption theatre I've been to a couple of plays - I've enjoyed that

What sort of difference has it made to you having the captions there?

It's given me access to the theatre. I'd be totally lost about the story I wouldn't know the story. I think some of my friends are better than me at picking up the story despite being deaf. Just looking and giving me more access to the theatre. You can pick up all the wee one liners and the jokes and so on. Unfortunately there is not an awful lot of caption theatre. You've got to be careful where you sit.

You've got to be careful where you sit Patricia. How do you mean?

You've got to be able to sit in a row where you can see the screen. Like too far forward in the front row you go, you stretch your neck, too far back you might have difficulty seeing. So you have to be careful where you sit and hopefully the staff at the ticket office will be aware of the seating arrangements.

You were saying earlier that at work you would like more of your colleagues to be more hearing aware. How about out and about in the theatre and in shops, supermarkets, do you find that the staff are hearing communication aware? Do you find that they understand the sort of help that people with hearing loss need?

Quite often not but it might not be the staff's fault. Picking up on the theatre, I can go dow - I will not name the theatre - and the staff at the box office say well sorry we never get told about the caption show. You go to the post office we have the screens up and no loop-system, no awareness, talking to a brick wall. There is one famous chain of newsagent, it amazes me it doesn't matter which branch you go into of this shop they do not seem to be aware of my needs. You can never see the till display screen. You can never see how much you pay. You

say "I can't see your till. I'm very deaf - can I see your till please?". They look, so I say can you write it down please how much - can you write it down but it's difficult - I feel you can't take it out on the staff because maybe there should be policies from the head office and awareness training from the head office.

So there are some things that can certainly be better.

Yes.

[44:09]

Now you've had an increasing hearing loss since you were quite young. Have you any thoughts about how it is for people now with a severe hearing loss compared to what it was like back in the sixties say. Do you think there has been a change in the way that hearing loss is dealt with?

Yes I think there have been big changes because they are sort of organisations like Hearing Concern LINK that tried to promote awareness, improve services, give support to people that have a hearing loss.

And have you had support from organisations like Hearing Concern LINK yourself?

Yes I have - there is support - yes I have. You can come to them for support and information and also I'm also a volunteer so in some way things have improved but there is still that awareness that has to get out. That awareness out in to the every area of the community, that sort of process is impossible.

But generally speaking

It's a big help to me and the services

If there was one thing then that you would change for people now, people who have got a profound hearing loss or severe hearing loss, there is one thing that you would change - what would that be to make things better?

Encouragement to continue promoting awareness and giving emotional and practical support. Technology is great, I like the human touch too, people being aware and people giving each other support.

I know that quite a number of people with profound hearing loss have had cochlear implant. Is that anything you've ever considered?

No I've never mentioned that to the hospital at all but they've never suggested it either. I do know a lot of people that have the cochlear implant; there are a few people from lipreading class that have implants now. There is one of the girls in the counselling skills class - she's waiting on a cochlear implant operation so it's something that's brought up a lot; you meet people that do have implants or considering them. I think I would consider it if I had no benefit from hearing-aids.

You find your hearing-aids really beneficial?

Yes, background noise or too far away. It's something I would consider. I know some people wouldn't consider it. You know one of my friends I'm seeing tonight she's thinking I have to write things down I am not having any operation I do not want them to fuff about with all this technology but I would consider it if I did have no benefits from hearing-aids. It would be for me, it would be my choice. I think you have to do it for your self, it's your choice.

Very much down to the individual.

Yes.

[49:08]

Can you tell me a little bit more about, you mentioned you were a volunteer with Hearing Concern LINK, what does that mean? What do you do?

I've been one for a long time. Before the merger there were two different organisations Hearing Concern and LINK. Hearing Concern maybe about 20 years ago I do not know -

since I started the training I was a Hearing Concern volunteer. I did actually get a lot of flack with more sort of base down in England, never really for up here but I did have the support for the audiology department here too. I used to have my wee clinic handing out batteries for old people. I done that through Hearing Concern.

So that was in the hospital?

No I went to the old people's centre but the hospital gave me the batteries and tubing.

Did you enjoy that?

Yes it was nice meeting them all. Most of the time they were playing dominoes and I think I had a gentleman with me who had a cochlear implant too but anyway that house is closed, that building is closed. Since then in the last couple of years I've been involved with LINK whose now Hearing Concern LINK so I done some training with them.

What sort of training?

I've been an outreach volunteer so I just met my first one so training was useful.

What does that mean an outreach volunteer. What does it mean? What do you do?

They maybe need practical and emotional support. They might need more information et cetera

And you go out to people?

I go out to people. I think a lot of it - I've only met one and I think it's more emotional support in that case. I think she was good at getting her own information about the groups here et cetera. Just emotional support she found living with a hearing loss frustrating.

[52:19]

Do you find, what about you Patricia do you find living with hearing loss frustrating?

Yes it can be yes. You have to repeat yourself, Why don't you look at me? Why can't I see your till, till display? or Why haven't you shown the subtitle cinema this afternoon?, you've got to.

You've got to plan more?

Yes you have to plan ahead yes. Maybe that's good or bad if people are an efficient planner but it's very frustrating having to repeat yourself all the time.

Can you think of any benefits you've had in your life because of your experience as a deafened person. Anything good that you would have missed out on if you hadn't been deafened?

I'd have missed out on a lot of opportunities. I would not have met friends through lip-reading classes or Hearing Concern LINK. I wouldn't have had the support I'd had if I hadn't met them. Obviously I took part in the counselling awareness project.

That sounds like you got a lot out of the counselling awareness project and that will help you with your outreach volunteer work then when you're giving emotional support to other deafened people.

Yes it does. As a volunteer we're not counsellors but we have got the skills to help in the role. It's the all play together, all work together. They seem to be pretty good the organisations working together.

Now I think Patricia you've covered a huge amount of your very interesting life. We're drawing to a close now I think. Is there anything else you would like to have recorded here today that we have maybe missed out on?

I think there is a big need for more counselling maybe awareness and more deaf counselors

Is there a deaf counselling service now specifically for deaf and deafened people?

There is a female one and a male one just the two I think.

Is that in Scotland?

Yes in Scotland. They have hearing counsellors that are deaf aware or have some language skills too but I think there is a need for more counselling service amongst deaf / hard of hearing people

Why do you think?

Because of all the issues they have - maybe difficulties with a member or the frustrations they have, or maybe they've got families that have never accepted they've been deaf and it can have a whole lot of issues that are specific to being deaf and when I did about grief and bereavement in college it struck me a lot of people with a hearing loss are excluded. You could go along to the church service or whatever and there was no note taker or loop-system. People might not talk to them because of communication barrier so they are not getting the support at the time of bereavement et cetera. I feel there are issues because the communication barriers and lack of awareness and frustration.

Can I ask you, do you feel excluded sometimes because of your deafness?

Sometimes in the office yes. I'm sitting in the wee quiet corner at the moment - keep saying you can come over to me or even say good morning or something but you know they are busy busy, there's no offence meant. You know it's not my style you know to come. We do not know you have to say good morning so it's not their style to say good morning or whatever. Obviously once the renovations in the office take place I could be moved out in to the actual main area but I'll be excluded with the background noise if I don't hear. If I don't see them, if they are hiding behind acoustic screens, I'm excluded then so I might as well be sat in the middle of some people, I'll be excluded.

I think you're saying that things are better now than they used to be but they've got a long way to go yet before.

Aye well.

Well Patricia it seems to me you're involved in helping things improve for people in similar situations so I'm going to draw this to a close now and want to say thank you very, very much -it's a great privilege to hear your story

Thank you very much for listening to my twitters.

I hope it has been a pleasant experience for you. Thank you very much. We're going to stop now. Okay.

Thank you.

[End of recording]