



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Wesley Ball
Interviewed by Stephanie Pennell

British Library ref. C1345/44

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/44

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname:	Ball	Title:	
Interviewee's forename:	Wesley Garside	Sex:	Male
Occupation:		Date and place of birth:	1944, Stoke-on-Trent

Date(s) of recording: 5th April 2009

Location of interview: The Bruntsfield Hotel, Edinburgh

Name of interviewer: Stephanie Pennell

Speech to Text reporter: Lynn Allen

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

Recording format : WAV 16 bit 44.1 kHz

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Stephanie Pennell interviewing Wesley ball on Sunday 5th April for the unheard voices project at the Bruntsfield hotel in Edinburgh. The speech to text reporter is Lynn Allen.

Wesley could you please give me your full name?

My name is Wesley Garside G-A-R-S-I-D-E, Ball B-A-L-L.

Could you give me your occupation or former occupation?

My former occupation is office manager special branch Lothian borders police.

Could you please tell me the date of your birthday and the place?

30th April 1944 in Stoke-on-Trent.

Could you please give me your father's occupation?

Chemist.

And your mother's occupation?

Wife and mother.

Thank you. Moving into the interview then, I will give you various questions moving on to family background. Can you tell me something about your grandparents?

I don't know my wife's grandparents, because we moved from England to Scotland when I was 2 years old. I know my father's mother because I saw her twice when she came up for a holiday. Other than that I haven't seen any of my grandparents.

Can you tell me a bit about your parents?

My parents, my mother died when I was 11. I think they would call it cancer nowadays. My

father looked after me from that point and we became like brothers as opposed to father and son. My own brother is 18 years older than I, and is now deceased. My sister is 14 years older than I, and she has crippled with... from movement.

Arthritis?

Arthritis sorry I forgot.

Are you or were you close to your brother and sister?

No. Because of the years difference. They were like courting, were married and away from the house. So, I can only remember living with my mother and father, and then only my father.

Thank you. Can you tell me about where you lived, the area and your home?

I have lived in Armadale in West Lothian for 62 years. The first year we came up to Scotland we lived in Harthill, which is still in West Lothian. I have only lived in two houses when I was younger, that is the one in Harthill and the one in Armadale before I went into the forces and got married. And then we stayed in the church house in Armadale after I came out of the forces.

And what was the area like?

In those days it was a small mining town. Nowadays it's fairly large. They have built 34,000 houses this last five years and the town is getting now where we don't know each other whereas before we knew everybody.

Did your father work?

Could you put that question please? Ah yes, my father garage graduated from Oxford as a chemist and went to work at Marsdens tile factory where he designed new colours for the tiles. When the war started he was requested to be in charge of Swynnerton ammunition factory where they made ammunition and bombs. After the war he went back to Marsdens dens and

when my mother took ill in those days the doctors advice was always go to Switzerland or Scotland for fresh air. And my father was head hunted to come up to Scotland and he accepted, and brought my mother and myself up to Scotland.

[06:46]

Can I ask you, what was your reaction when your mother died, how was it affecting you?

It hit me very badly because my mother and I were extremely close. My mother had many operations and coming home from school I always used to lie with her on top of the bed when she was in the bed, just being with her and supporting her until she got over the operations. But we were very close. When my mother died I felt a terrible loss. In fact, I would put it on a par with the loss of my hearing.

Did you have any friends you could turn to?

Not then. I was unfortunately called a swot and didn't participate in all the youthful activities. My main source of interest was books.

I was going to ask you about your education. What did you feel about your school time?

Remembering I was not deaf at that time, so my schooling was very good. I went to Armadale primary school, I became the docs at 10 and a half and moved to Bathgate Academy where I studied and got 7 A levels and then that was the time my mother died, round about, and I wanted to get away from things, and I joined the army. But the army wouldn't let me serve as a soldier and I worked in the Ministry of Defence where I then took management courses and examinations. Later in life I became a local preacher in a Methodist church, studying with the Methodist church. Then because the interest was so great to me, I went to Hull University, where I obtained a Bachelor of Divinity and a Doctor of Divinity. Since then it has just been work associated things until of course my deafness, when everything stopped.

Can I take you back as to why you could not get into the army?

No I could get into the army because I was in the MoD, but the recruitment people wouldn't let

me serve as a soldier on the front line or anything like that because they attributed my academic studies to be more important they were to be used in the Ministry of Defence.

How did you feel about that?

Very good, it meant that wore civilian clothes, lived in Whitehall and had a marvellous time. I travelled the world, doing audits on numerous paymaster accounts and it was a very happy time.

What sort of people did you come across in your travels?

Mostly they were very friendly. Some were dishonest, after I had audited the books I had to report and arrest and bring home. That was an unfortunate side but having said that the law is the law, and you have got to abide by it.

What about leisure did you have time for leisure?

What is leisure? When I was working I had no leisure apart from preaching in a Methodist church and taking groups, talking about theology and lecturing on theology. Those were my interests then and photography at that time. But since becoming deaf, I have stopped the photography side, because it hurts me when I go into the country and I can't hear the birds or the babbling brooks or the little rivers or the seagulls. So, painting the countryside does not have the same appeal any more, because it makes me more aware of my deafness.

[12:17]

On the subject of religion, do you feel that it has given you an inner strength over the years?

I think I am very lucky, because these last six or seven years I have been granted the peace that God offers and I look at things very much in a different light. I don't have any worries, I don't have any concerns, I don't have any enemies because I have found that peace. I think that I am very fortunate in having three lives, one as an able-bodied person, one as a disabled person and one as a deaf person. Not many people get the chance to live three times.

Thank you. And on the subject of politics, do you have any interest there?

I am in fact a Liberal by choice. I am not sure about the politics of today, because gone is the old system whereby they were concerned about the public and the people in the constituency. Nowadays they are more concerned with how high they can go in politics, how much money they can earn and what their retirement pension and after-speaking events they can take part in and earn more money. If you look at the past Prime Minister, he earns £400,000 for two and a half hours lecture. That £400,000 would be better serving the deaf people, paying for the sign language classes.

Thank you. You mentioned about your disability, can you tell me a little about that?

In 1980, December, I took my sons, I was the Captain of the Boy's Brigade at that time, I took my sons to collect my wife who was visiting an elderly couple. On the way the car skidded I crossed to the other side of the road and went on the embankment. I put my older son behind the steering wheel and my younger son and I tried to move the car. My older son explained to me that there was a bus coming and I immediately got my older son and my younger son on to the grass verge and I stood in front of the bus as it went down waving it down. The bus didn't stop it hit me hit the car and the car went on top of me where the first ambulance covered me with a blanket and left me for dead. The police went to my wife and told them that I was dead and my two sons were in hospital, and then the Fire Brigade came because there was a suspicion of fire in the car and the Boy's Brigade officer who was on duty as a fireman that night asked where the big fella was because I used to be 6 foot 2. He said under the blanket and he lifted the blankets and there was blood coming out of my eye socket my right eye was out and then they got another ambulance and rushed me to hospital where my wife saw me on the stretcher being hurried very quickly into theatre. My wife turned grey overnight and I eventually came out of the coma on April 28th. I had for the next 7 months to be in traction at the hospital before the Health Service paid for a holiday for me at Butlins holiday camp in Ayr where I could recuperate a bit and have physiotherapy in the pool and then it was back to Princes Park Road for another 4 years of operations. I have got steel femurs and steel hips a steel implant in my skull.

How has this affected you throughout the subsequent years?

The doctors wanted to take my legs off at the beginning, but I was very lucky to meet a man called John Cochrane. A consultant orthopaedic surgeon who performed operations in Ireland due to bomb blasts. And he took my case up and rebuilt my legs over the four years using a plastic cement which he brought from America at £6,000 a tube and also the metal work specially at this end, because normally the steelwork in somebody's leg is actually straight it is in a straight line, whereas mine is curved like the femur bone. So, I was very lucky to have such a man and we have stayed friends now for many, many years. I find it difficult at the beginning, because it is an effort, I have no feeling in my legs, in my hips, so I had to watch when I had a bath and since I have taken Meniere's disease, which is sort of wandering all over the place in a sort of dizzy spell, it is very hard to know where my feet are because I cannot feel them. And it is very hard to know where I am really sometimes I cannot feel myself.

Thank you. Can I go back a little, because I have not asked you about your wife. Can you tell me where you met your wife?

Where I met my wife? I met her at the church youth club in Blackridge which is 2.5 miles away from Armadale. We had invited their youth club to go to theirs. And it was a dance and a buffet and a get together and my wife took me up for early days choice and I thought it was only right to take her up for the next dance and having enjoyed the two dances I asked her if she would like to go to the pictures that Saturday and we have been together ever since.

[20:51]

Lovely. Moving on now to health care and the hearing loss. You mentioned Meniere's disease?

That is correct.

Can you tell me about that, can you tell me how it manifested itself apart from dizziness and how you had it?

Well round about May/June of 2007 I was severely depressed in a way about the symptoms I was getting. And I went to my good friend Philip Hill the doctor and he said 'Wes I am sorry to say that along with everything else you have got, you have got Meniere's disease'. And that

is the first time I knew what Meniere's was. And as with his usual graceful manner he said 'and of course there is no cure for it so I am sorry son you will just have to put up with it'. Anyway, shortly after everybody was telling me I could not hear, and I got an appointment with an audiologist and the doctor there gave me a row because I was 70 per cent deaf in both ears and had not brought it to him earlier but as I tried to explain to him that my deafness had only occurred over 6 months and of course since then it has got worse and now I am between 95 and 98 percent deaf.

And were you -- where were you when you discovered this?

I had medically retired from the police having had two strokes, so I was in the house, I like to garden and I was over-balancing all the time and this worried me. Because the DVLA were very, very kind after I took the strokes, and I was inspected in Edinburgh hospital and eyesight clinic and out of the ten people that attended that day I was the only one that was allowed to keep my licence. They sent me a lovely letter, and said that my doctor would check me if I was going any distances so therefore they would let me have my licence, to keep my licence as long as I kept on local areas and if I didn't feel very well not to drive, and if I was going a distance like today, I had to see him first thing this morning to make sure that I was okay. The funny thing is I get Christmas cards from the DVLA now and I phone them up in January and thank them. They look after me.

You mentioned your strokes?

Yes.

Can you tell me when you had those and the forms that they took?

1980 and 1982, sorry I have got that wrong. I have got that wrong sorry I apologise. I have not got that right but it was '90 and '92 I apologise Lynn please forgive my poor memory.

And how did you feel when you were having a stroke?

Helpless in the beginning, because I kept falling over to one side. My speech was impaired and I lost the power on the left side. I have got a lot of it back but I am still weak on the left

side. But as I said earlier, the grace that God gives me is for me to accept these. I know in the Bible Paul kept on asking God to take away his afflictions because Paul had a very bad back. And God said to him that his grace was sufficient and I believe that, God's grace is sufficient to overcome.

And when you had another stroke...?

Yes and that was really the nail in the... what is the saying, I forget it the nail in the coffin that is right. Because I couldn't carry on with the Special Branch because my duty was Royalty Protection and V I P protection. So therefore I would endanger the Royal's life, or the V I P's lives by not being as quick to either defend or to be aggressive towards anybody that was trying to do harm. So, that time element was sufficient for me to realise that it would be better for somebody else to do the job and I was medically retired which unfortunately was very upsetting which although I knew it was right I had worked all my life, and then I felt useless. And I did more lecturing and more preaching until of course I became deaf.

[27:36]

So overall what was the effect with all the things that you had. What did you feel, were you able to channel it through into your religion to give yourself some purpose in life?

It made my choices in life very restrictive. I became more reclusive and because distance, stairs, movement was difficult I limited it to as little movement as possible. Motorbility have helped me with a motorbility car, the DVLA have helped me tremendously my doctor and my surgeons have helped me. And it is only because they have taken the time and the patience to rebuild me and to give me physiotherapy and help with speech therapy and everything else that I felt, well, if I didn't react to that then it would look as if I was being selfish because they were offering a lot. So therefore I had to make sure that I used their expertise and their knowledge to make my life better than it was. It did that, but of course it does not take away what your mind thinks and how you feel. You feel pain when you walk; you feel pain when you first get up. You become accustomed to it. Funnily enough my pain threshold now is very, very great to my detriment once because I was having the eave of my hut then back on because it had come off in the wind, and I didn't realise until my daughter said there was blood all over my elbow that I had hammered my thumb on to the hut. I hadn't felt it. I had to pull it off with

the pliers again and went to hospital. It was funny.

[30:40]

You were talking about the doctors who had been looking after you?

Yes.

Was everybody helpful?

No. My own doctor, Phil Bell was in fact in the hospital on his last year of university becoming a general practitioner in 1980 when I had the accident. So Phil and I have known each other since then. And when he became a GP at Armadale, we got very, very friendly. Since my health has deteriorated quite badly I see Phil once a week and not only is he a friend he is a great doctor. But other medical staff have problems with deaf people and once I had to point this out to Phil, because coming into the reception you normally tell them Dr Bell 3 o'clock and then they look down at the computer and speak and of course when they did that I couldn't hear them. So I eventually I thought I am going to have to say something so I explained it to Phil one week when I went in for my appointment and it was just before lunchtime. So he came out with me and asked the receptionist to bring all the staff down and explained the them that I was deaf and that when you talk to me to look at me not at the computer. I then said to him 'but Phil, you have a loop system' and he said 'no we have not'. And I said to the receptionist 'you have a loop system don't you?', she says 'yes' and Phil said 'where is it?', she said 'under the counter, the charge has definitely faded but we don't use it'. That is the type of thing that happens. It is the same with the chemist they have a sign saying they have a loop system but they have not got one because you shouldn't have the sign if you have not got it but never mind. The hospitals are the same, when I go to hospital the receptionist there doesn't have a loop system, which I complained about and they have now got one thankfully. They have got the budget for it. But it is very difficult, audiologists most of them cannot sign, it is strange to them and of course it is awkward for me because hearing people do not know what deafness is like. They can train as an audiologist because there is the biological reasons why people are deaf and they have moulds of ears, eardrums and they can precisely tell what the parts are called, what happens to those parts. But they don't know what happens to the individual that belongs to those parts and how they cannot relate any more or

hear any more. So, there is a difference between knowing the illness and knowing the patient. I think it is very important that the patient should be foremost rather than the illness. I used to remember in hospital when they had the ward rounds the consultant orthopaedic surgeon, John as I said to you before, would come round with his entourage of doctors and he would ask one of them to look at my x-rays because they did this every week of course I was there seven months so I mean it was just a case of talking football with John. But he said to these doctors that were learning talk to them, and they always used to talk to my legs that were in the traction and John I remember throwing away the sheets one day down the ward and said to these doctors that is not the patient, the patient is at the top of the bed. If you talk to him then the bones will heal. If you talk to the leg it will take a long time for the leg to heal. And I think that is true with Deafness. If you do not understand it and if you do not talk to the person then the person's disability is not attended to. I don't think anyway.

Thank you. Can I move on now?

Yes.

[36:06]

To talk about what we might term as interventions, specifically the hearing aid?

Yes.

Do you have one hearing aid?

I have two hearing aids.

Two and how do you find them?

The first ones I had at the beginning because I was 70 per cent deaf were not too bad at the beginning. And then I was getting increasingly difficult to hear and I had to buy this personal loop system for £75 out of my own money. I kept going back to the audiologist and saying 'my hearing is getting worse'. 'Well, you will just have to put up with it' the nurse would say. And eventually my lip reading tutor went to Saint Johns hospital and got this audiologist called

Rochelle. So, she very kindly passed my name on and Rochelle asked me to go in for a which can which I had been trying to get for about a year and a half.

So, within two weeks of her knowing about me I was asked to go in and they discovered I was over 80 per cent deaf and she changed the hearing aids and the moulds and she then saw me every month up to last week so far and she said I was 95 to 98 percent deaf. She took two more moulds and I am getting a new set of hearing aids when the moulds come. Now, it is only since I have had Rochelle that I have been able to talk and to get assistance from the audiology department. What I find strange is even in the surgery in the doctors or at the audiology department they never look at the person in a sense of 'what can we do for him or her?'. And it was only through my lipreading that I got in touch with a deaf counsellor. But I think a deaf counsellor should be, this information should be given to the patient by the audiologist and by the doctors, because a lot of people do not seek help because they think they can manage. And then they go into depression. I would say the majority of deaf people not hard of hearing people but deaf people, the majority of them have got depression because they are not helped to understand that deafness you have got to go through a grieving time with your deafness. As I said I lost my mother. It is the same grief. It hurts. It is close, it is all around you, you cannot get rid of it. And if they can't converse with people then there is nothing else but becoming depressed. So I think it should be offered on contact with a deaf person at audiology or at the general practitioners. It is up to them if they choose to take it up, but if the offer of the literature should be given. I also think there is a problem with deafness, because everybody things when you are deaf you are hard of hearing and that is not the case. You know, the number of people that say, 'my wife is starting to shout at me because I was hard of hearing, but what they didn't understand was it made no difference whether they are shouting, I couldn't hear them'. I think there should be a difference between hard of hearing and deaf and profoundly deaf. I think the deaf and the profoundly deaf should be better looked after by the health service. And I think the sign language classes should be free, the lipreading classes certainly are free. But I think they should get more help from the Health Service because deafness and profound deafness is very severe. Hard of Hearing is different. People still hear things, because the hearing aids make it possible. It is like if you need glasses, your sight is still there, you are not blind so the glasses help. And the hearing aids help people who are hard of hearing. But if you are blind or if you are profoundly deaf or deaf it is a different story. And people do not realise that. I am sorry to be so long Lynn.

[41:40]

Don't worry. That is fine. Do you have any particular views on cochlear implants?

I am open to any suggestion no matter what the subject, but my doctor Philip has said that he does not think it would be advisable for me because of the metal implant I have already got and because of my health. I have problems that can cause a problem in that theatre like I have got chronic asthma, I am diabetic and because I have got sleep apnoea I have got to sleep on the machine they put oxygen into me otherwise I'll stop breathing during the night so there are other things that are wrong with me. He does not think that what I would gain from it would be very little because my deafness has happened over 3 and a half years I am going to be 65 on 30th April. It takes years to understand a new language through a cochlear implant because it is different sounds. I don't hear sounds as it is, so... I don't think it is a worthwhile course of action for me and it would be using up money that other people could benefit from. But, I hope to be going to this LINK residential week this month and I think they have people there who will talk about it. And give the literature. So I am quite open-minded to listening to the talks, to take the literature to read it and then talk to my doctor again. Because, you see I don't think I can get sound back, I am going to get a strange sound. I am going to get a different sound from my grandchildren than I can remember them talking to me. I can get them talking to me one-to-one in a small room when I have this on at full power and I have got my other extended microphone up to their mouth I can pick up their voice, but with a cochlear implant it is tinny it is mechanical it is not them. And I would lose the personal relationship, the language. I am sorry, I am sorry.

Have you thought about hearing dogs for deafened?

Yes I have. And I think they would be of great benefit to me. However, my wife hates dogs. I seem to be thwarted all over the place.

I think you should perhaps try and do a little more persuasion.

Have you ever tried persuading with my wife!

[45:18]

Moving on a little now to communication methods.

Right.

You mentioned signing and lip speaking. And finger spelling, can you talk to me about that?

I went to lipreading classes and I have done now for two years. I took up sign language classes last year in September which cost £180 which I was lucky that the ILA gave me the grant for it. I have got more confidence with myself knowing that I am picking up a small amount of sign language because I can speak to deaf people. My grandchild who lives close in Armadale who is 11 she is starting to pick up sign language speaking to me by sign. My wife picks up certain signs now, when I ask for certain things or when I answer certain things, gradually she is picking up the key elements of the conversation. So to me it is a lifeline. The other problem is as I have said to you before that my level 2, which I should start this September is going to be £280 and although I can get a £200 grant from the ILA I'm still £80 short. I cannot get it all and I don't understand why profoundly deaf and deaf people have to pay for their sign language, because out of my class of 17 there are only two people who are deaf. Myself who is profoundly deaf and another person who is very hard of hearing. The remainder are hearing and speaking people who work for the council. So, they can get it free, the council pays for it. It does not commute with me. I have regarded it to two MSPs they do not seem to be interested whatsoever. But I think they are worried about deaf people being many thousands, whereas what I am talking about is profoundly deaf and deaf, which there is not that many compared. To me it is very, very strange. I go to hospital in 1980 my operations were free, my physiotherapy was free, the bags of cement they brought from America which cost £8,000 was free. But now they am profoundly deaf I have got to pay for what I need. Where is this free point of contact? Hardy would jump in his grave! Hardy-used to be the Prime Minister.

[49:05]

Okay. Moving on now to touch on the subject of technology which is using computers, mobile texts may be and television text. Do you have any of those facilities?

I have a computer, which I had before my deafness. I email my deaf counsellor and a friend of

hers who I met at one of the LINK functions when they asked me to take a woodwork class. Mary is her name. So I email Mary. But we are talking about a sort of twice, three times a month, because I see my counsellor every fortnight anyway. She wants it to be every week but I have told her that other people need counselling too, so if I need her during the second week I can always email so just to see me once a fortnight.

Other than that, I have no contact other than my own family, especially my son in Darlington who will occasionally email to one another. I have the fortune of having a telephone with a volume switch on it which boosts the volume and I am able to put my personal loop near it, next to the sound and I can hear them if they speak slowly and with a slightly raised voice. That is the only technical things I have.

I was interviewed by Deaf Action in February of last year. And the lady said, Jackie Black, said that I could get a flashing alarm clock, a flashing telephone unit, like earphones for the television with a higher volume and a doorbell which flashes. In November of last year I acquired what the state of affairs were because I had not received anything. I am a member of the Disability Equality Forum in West Lothian and through my council contacts I spoke to the high sheriff who was the manager of the district council who deals with the grants for deaf action. She phoned me and said my name wasn't down on the list. And I said well I was assessed in February. She says 'well leave that with me'. I said 'well I have just had an email from Deaf Action saying that I can't get the television or the alarm clock now because you have reduced your grant'. And she said 'well that is rather mischievous because we have not'. She said 'I will come back to you'. So she came back to me the following Wednesday, this was the Friday, the following Wednesday and said 'have you heard anything yet'? I said 'no, not a thing'. She says 'leave that with me, watch this space', that was the words. I thought how am I going to watch this space if you are on a phone you silly woman!

Anyway on the Friday Deaf Action phoned up and said they were getting the four items on the Monday. They duly arrived. Late December. In January I phoned up and said 'two of the items are not working, I am still waiting'. I think Deaf Action is a complete failure. There are many people in my lipreading class think the same. You see, I think what is wrong with Government-funded things is these resources pay lip service to the laws but they do not do anything. They do not achieve anything. I think it is the same with a lot of organisations they pay lip service to the law but eventually they do not actually help the disabled or the deaf or the blind, very limited help is offered. And any help that is offered for the blind and the deaf they have got to pay for it themselves. So I very much disillusioned with Deaf Action. I am grateful for my counsellor, I am grateful for LINK because this is my second thing with LINK

and I am hoping to go on the LINK intensive course as well. So that will be the third they are the only organisations that have helped me. Sad to say that as I say a lot of people pay lip service to the law but that is all.

Can I ask you about text services on the television and in cinema and even on the stage?

I don't go to the cinema and I don't go to the theatre. I watch channel 80 which is BBC news on the television. I have got a television my wife bought me I have in the kitchen where I can sit as close as I am now to this unit, whatever it is called. And I read the text underneath on the news screen. It helps me to keep abreast of what is happening. I am afraid I have not much favour with newspapers, because they propagate stories to sell the paper. I am more interested in fact than supposition. And I find the BBC news getting information from Reuters is far more factual. I am a very logical person I am afraid, and I have respect for professionals who are professional, but am I afraid I have little patience with people who profess to be professionals and in fact are very much amateurish.

Thank you. I think we will take a pause there if that is all right?

We will have a pause. I will be quite happy to have a pause.

[Break in recording]

[57:40]

Moving on now I would like to ask you about your -- the impact on your hearing loss. We have talked a little bit about it, but can you tell me about how it affected your self-esteem?

It devastated it, because having had to accept that I was not just hard of hearing but I was profoundly deaf and the audiologist said I could lose my hearing completely, it's like coming to the end of reasoning. You have the blast, the shock and the after waves as of a bomb. It continues and it continues. My self-esteem dropped radically. I lost confidence in lots of things, especially conversation. Especially going to church, because I can't hear. I can't lecture any more, I can't preach any more. I used to be the vice president of the Provost which meets every Wednesday morning but because of my deafness, and because we have a speaker

every week it becomes a useless venture. Because I don't glean from it as I used to. The importance I have in life is knowledge and I can't get knowledge from speech or from sound. I used to like classical music, well I still do like classical music, my problem is I can't hear it. What I have a tendency to do now when my wife goes out is to put the classical music on the computer and I put my hand on the speakers and feel the vibration. And because I know what CD I have put in to the computer, the vibrations coming through my hands reminds me of the music. So, you try to accommodate your problems, but you can never compensate for them. Have I gone off the subject?

How has it affected your identity?

My identity.

Yes?

People avoid me because I am deaf. They are embarrassed if I come into close contact with them because they know I am deaf. I deal with the deaf sign which gives them the opportunity to realise before they actually come close to me that I am deaf and it gives them an option of avoiding me. It also helps me a sense because in two ways, less people talk to me that I meet on the street, and also means when I go into places where I have got to confront people face-to-face, because they can read the sign they have then got more of a tendency to look at my face when they speak. As an individual I am the same person that I was, but it is only inside of me. You seem, well I seem to have had building blocks round me for protection of my deafness. But I remember vividly my professions, my speaking in the past and you can't come to grips with that loss. If somebody who has communicated all through my professions and not being of a manual nature then to lose that is far greater than somebody who works alone in a job in a factory, or as a sheep farmer or whatever who don't have a continual one-to-one discussions or group discussions.

My life has always been hearing and speaking. Now, it is thinking and dreaming.

How do you regard the disability status or the handicap status?

The disability has and always will be a very much limiting to my life-style. It is pronounced, it is obvious. I must say that the majority of people don't have patience with disability. I am

sorry to say that. But it is true. You have cars parked in the disabled bays that have no badge, you have got people using swing doors in supermarkets or elsewhere that open for a disabled but everybody uses them because it is far easier for them, they are becoming more lazy. There is no respect for the disabled, the deaf or the blind apart from those people who work within the organisations, who deal with that disability. But again there is limits because very few people who are involved in those disabilities have the disability. It is like the Disabled Equality Forum, they have a loop system but the man that comes in to repair it and to check it is hearing. He does not use hearing aids so how can he possibly attune them correctly? Many times those of us who have hearing aids go there and we cannot hear a thing because it is not set properly. But how can people set them if they hear? And don't use hearing aids. It is like having a piano tuner who is deaf. You can't do it.

[01:07:09]

Can I ask you about your personal relationships with those closest to you?

My wife, who I have known since we were both 17, is part of me as I am part of her. During my deafness, because I have known my wife for so long lipreading is very easy. And also there is an untouchable relationship where we can understand one another's needs and wants and questions you are about to ask you can anticipate a lot more because you know them very, very well. My wife, though, is very shy and she took breast cancer and she just got on with it and when she came out of the Western General she was off only off for a week after the operations and started back to work. You see she thinks about my deafness I should just get on with it as she got on with her breast cancer. The reason that there is a problem is because she does not understand deafness. I don't understand the threat of breast cancer that she must have had. But one can still communicate at that stage. But she thinks I should just forget about everything and, you know, don't go to lipreading, don't go to sign language and just get on with it. But the problem is you cannot get on with it if you have not got anything to get on with. So, that is why I am very, very pleased that she has put her name down to come on this course with LINK, so may be she will may be understand better.

As far as my three children are concerned, they avoid speaking to me because I am deaf. My friends completely avoid me because I am deaf. My grandchild or children should I say, speak to me and I have got to have a close proximity with them to understand them through my personal loop. But if there is noise roundabout I have got to take them out somewhere in

another room where I can converse and hear them. My granddaughter that escorted me who is 11 has started to pick up the sign language and I think she will be in the future my source of contact. I pray that is so because I need somebody within the family that later on will be able to communicate with me when my hearing does eventually disappear. I think relationships can be very much strained through deafness, through blindness. My wife becomes frustrated because I haven't heard. Sometimes she comes in the front door or knocks at the door and comes in, and the next thing I know she is touching my shoulders and saying 'didn't you hear me shout'? And the number of times I have had to say 'I am deaf'. And it is hard for these people who have known you for all those years to accept that in the last 3 and a half years I can't hear them. It is hard for them as it is for me those who are close. Those who are not so close, like sons and daughters who live apart from me they see the distance as an advantage. And the fact that they say well I cannot hear him on the phone he cannot hear me on the phone so I won't phone him communication becomes zero. Am I going too fast Lynn, you have got lovely red hair.

[01:12:20]

Moving on to finances?

Oh.

Would you say you were comfortably off and able to live within your means.

I am able not to have any debt. However, because I have not got my pension yet things are quite hard. The wife and I do get housing allowance. I have a motorability allowance. But we find things very restricted. We don't do much at all apart from buying clothes we need and enjoying the food that we eat. We don't go on holidays any more. We can't. I can't understand what people say, they are not interested to talk to me. So it becomes a one-to-one again. Well if it is a one-to-one you may as well stay at home. So, things are limited. Any monies that I had I have eventually given to my children to help them through life and to the church. What I have is sufficient for my needs, for my wife. We have already paid for our funerals so we have not got a problem. God is gracious and God is kind he won't let me starve.

Do you have disability living allowance?

Yes.

Moving on to education and life long living -- life long learning, do you follow that at all?

My problem with my learning is, because my main subject now is theology, which is a something I was learning before, I read the Bible of course every day but also read theological books. I can discuss imaginary with the book their comments to how I look at the problem. So sometimes I talk to myself, about statements I read in the book. With regards to life long learning, the only learning I think I can now have is sign language. I know enough about lipreading but I will still continue to go. And then learn about life because I am trying to learn about living a deaf life and that is hard, it is a hard subject. It is harder than theology. Because in theology discussing about something, but deafness is nothing. You can't hear, there is nothing there. So, what you are trying to look at is an empty space. And empty spaces are not very interesting.

Moving on to access and awareness, you have mentioned a little of that, can you give us a little more detail?

Access again people pay lip service to. By disabled people they abide by the law by putting a bell at the door saying if you are a disabled person press the bell. My chemist shop has got the bell so one day I was really mischievous and I pressed the bell because I am disabled and I was in my little scooter and she came out and said what would you like Mr. Ball, and I knew what she said because I was lip reading. I said I am sorry but I am deaf. She said the loop system is inside I said but I am disabled I am on the outside. She got the point as an individual, but Lloyds the chemist as a company not interested in the point. I think that it is difficult to comment about people who are trying, because if they are sincerely trying then it has got to be commendable. But as I said earlier, a lot of people just pay lip service and they do not want to have the expense of changing things or the patience to be able to put that extra effort in conversing with somebody. I am afraid it is like a waiter coming to you with a tray but there is nothing on the tray.

[01:19:09]

And what about discrimination, again you have touched on it. Are there things that you have found because it is the law now are there things you have come across that are blatantly discriminatory?

Discrimination is all over. The reason for it is very simple, the majority of people are not deaf, the majority of people are not disabled and the majority of people are not blind. So, therefore, one caters for the majority. That is how the world is, and always will be. The minorities are put to one side. Years ago the minorities were put in asylums, put out the way, deaf people, people with illnesses; they were just put out of sight. Today I don't know, it is just as bad. They don't put us in asylums but they put us in a corner and label us, you know. And that is hard the take at times. And that is why I try with as much patience as I can to make people deaf aware. And disabled aware. But, because the majority are neither disabled or deaf, they are really not interested. They are more interested in themselves. Now the problem is conversations. I could stop and have a conversation with Lynn who is taking these notes in the street somewhere and I could be saying something which has got quite significance. However Lynn is thinking of what she is going to be doing that day, what other interests she has, what other pressing engagements she has so really the communication is not connected properly. Because the person speaking is really being avoided because the other person's life is different and their importances in life are different at that present moment of time. I have always said in my life that it is the responsibility of the speaker to make sure that the hearer has understood what I have said correctly. Now, today people say things to deaf people, but they do not ensure that the deaf person has gained actually what was said and understood what was said. So the deaf person goes away with half the story or even less than half the story because the speaker does not take the responsibility of making sure that he or she is understood what they have said. That is life.

[01:23:06]

Thank you. We are approaching the end of the interview now, and I would like to ask you about your feelings on the unheard voices project and the work you have been involved with today?

My first comment is that as I e-mailed Linda I think it is important for a person who has

become profoundly deaf over a shorter period of time, 3 and a half years, that that should be heard. And in a different manner from those people who have been deaf for a long while. There is a difference, there is a shock attitude to it because one's life is changed so drastically at such a late stage in life, then the life-styles are torn apart. So I think very much that my views on this subject could well be of importance to such a project. I have got to thank Lynn for her efforts today on the text which she is providing, both for the interviewer and interviewee, I have got to thank the project for lunch and for all their help and assistance. I think that if the information gained today is used properly, dismembered and then understood and rebooked then people who are hearing would have a better understanding of those who are deaf. So, there has got to be an advantage. My main concern is that the advantage is limited to Hearing Concern LINK and I hope that is not the case but that the British Library can take up some of the points raised and use them in their world. Because even in libraries there are problems in many places. There is very few talking books. There is very few books with large print in my library I can't have access because I am disabled because there are steps. These things by law they should have been changed. But they haven't. So I think there is more dialogue to be had with organisations, with counsellors, with Government, with companies to make them aware that although I am deaf and disabled, and not too healthy, I am still a human being, I am a God's creation and everybody is my brother an sister so why don't they treat me as such.

Wesley thank you very much indeed it has been a most moving interview and I am deeply touched by all your words. I would thank you very much indeed for coming along today it has been wonderful.

Thank you very much.

And thank you too Lynn for working with us.

[End of recording]