

## EXTRAORDINARY WALL ~~OF SILENCE~~

### Show Information

*Extraordinary Wall ~~of Silence~~* is a bilingual production performed in BSL and spoken English. The performance is BSL led and all BSL is interpreted and voiced in English by one hearing performer.

*Extraordinary Wall ~~of Silence~~* follows the stories of three main characters; Alan, Graham and Helen. The stories are devised from 40 hours of interviews with Deaf people and each character's stories, and histories, are woven from what was shared with us and told through sign language.

### Key

**SPOKEN VOICE ONLY**

BSL / voiced by hearing performer in English

*Stage Directions*

**CAPTIONS – Appears as projected title card**

## **Deaf History 1**

### **Deb/ Giulio Tarra, President of The Milan Conference:**

“Gesture is not the true language of man which suits the dignity of his nature.

### **David:**

Gesture, instead of addressing the mind, addresses the imagination and the senses.

Moreover it is not and never will be the language of society . . .

### **Moira:**

Thus, for us it is an absolute necessity to prohibit that language and to replace it with living speech, the only instrument of human thought. . .

### **Matty:**

Oral speech is the sole power that can rekindle the light God breathed into man.”

All Deaf teachers were forbidden entry to The Milan Conference - except one. This ensured its outcome.

### **Moira:**

The conference decided that sign languages would be banned in Deaf education.

### **David:**

From then on, Deaf teachers were banned worldwide, and deaf children would be educated by hearing teachers and solely through speech and the written word, what we now call ‘Oralism’.

## **The Stories We're About to Present**

### **David:**

The stories we're about to present are devised from 40 hours of interviews with Deaf people.

### **Moira:**

We all know these stories - everyone has their own version. These things have happened to all of us – in one way or another - to all of us in the Deaf community.

### **Matty:**

So yes, it's not *my* story, personally, I am playing a character. But some of the things that happen to our characters, may have also happened to us. To me. Or to people we know. These stories, and histories, are woven from stories shared with us, through sign language...

## Alan's Story Part 1

### **Caption:**

Alan's Story, 1960's - to 1980's UK

*Alan's Mum dropping off him off at boarding school aged 3 years old. We see Mum neaten him up, fret a little, he clearly doesn't understand what's going on.*

### **Alan:**

For the first 5 years of my life I had no language; I had no idea what mum was doing with her lips when she spoke to me.

*Mum is leaving, saying goodbye, Alan grasps what is happening. He tries to go to her, but the teacher holds onto his hand firmly and won't let go.*

### **Alan:**

Mum had sent me to the 'Partially Hearing Unit' - attached to a mainstream hearing school. I didn't understand when they moved their mouths, or when they secretly moved their hands under the tables. I wanted to join in, but I couldn't. I had no language. I am profoundly deaf, I cannot hear a thing, but in this place I was 'partially hearing' and expected to learn to speak, write, read, and lipread English.

*Teacher sits Alan at his desk. Another kid start to bully Alan while the teacher's back is turned. Alan violently bites the bully who screams - and gets thrown out of the classroom.*

### **Alan:**

I got sent to the headteacher.

*Alan enters the room. Mr S grabs Alan's arm. He makes Alan touch him. Alan breaks free of his grip and we see movements expressing his feelings.*

### **Alan:**

Where I grew up

**Alan:**

There was a river with a path down one side and trees that lined both banks.

**Alan:**

There was one big old Oak tree.

**Alan:**

I remember my mother used to take me there for walks, and picnics.

**Alan:**

It was my favourite place. *(Pause)*. Anyway....

**Alan:**

When I was born, I was the most peaceful baby in the whole world.

**Alan:**

I would sleep through anything... No matter what noise my family made, I never woke up.  
One day my father came home from church.

*Dad opens door carrying a stack of religious texts. He trips and drops the bibles all over the floor. Mum "shhhhhh Alan's asleep!". Pause. Alan doesn't wake up, family confused.*

**Alan:**

That's when my parents realised.

**Alan:**

Even though my mum was worried, she still loved me and looked after me. But my father...

**Alan:**

He was terrified. He ran to church and prayed and prayed. He was incredibly strict when it came to faith. He was convinced that a Deaf son was a punishment for past sins - that he wasn't elected to go to heaven, but destined for hell. Dad dragged me to church time and again so he could *save* and *heal* me, his belief was founded in the Gospel of Mark...

## Deaf History 2

### **Matty:**

Early Christians believed Deaf people were possessed by demons, sure it's less common now, but the belief that Deaf people need healing, curing...?

### **CAPTION:**

The healing of the deaf man near the Sea of Galilee, from the Gospel of Mark.

### **David:**

Some people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and slipped his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit, and touched the man's tongue. Looking into heaven, Jesus groaned and said, "*Ephphatha* - Be opened."

### **CAPTION:**

**Ephphatha**

### **Matty:**

What the fuck, I'm still deaf?

### **Matty:**

Saving. Healing. Curing. Oh fuck off.

## Alan Story Part 1.2

### **Alan:**

My parents didn't know how to raise me. They sought advice from Health Professionals who, at that time, had no training in the field of language deprivation. They didn't know the years from 0 to 5 are a critical period for language development; they thought signing was not a language; and they were obsessed with speech. So they told my parents I should go to an Oralist school when I was three.

*Change of scene to playground. Sophie is signing to a friend about whether or not to go and say hi to Alan, eventually she plucks up the courage.*

### **Sophie:**

I like that new boy. He's cute! I really want to play with him

*Sophie introduces herself but Alan doesn't know how to respond. Sophie teaches him to sign hello.*

### **Alan: (to audience)**

Sophie was my only friend.

### **Alan:**

She was one of those friends that stay with you forever.

*There's a brief moment in which we see Alan with Mr Simmonds - then it's gone. Sophie takes Alan's hand that was previously held by Mr. Simmonds and he jumps back - as if scared.*

### **Sophie:**

*A, E - no not that one, this one - E, yes, I, O, U...yes!*



**Alan:**

As I approached my teens, life became more complex. At school they forced me to play rugby... I hated it. I felt very different from the other boys.

*Mum is doing her makeup and Alan comes and sits next to his Mum, fascinated by her make-up. Mum takes a tissue and wipes his face and fingers to remove the lipstick. Then Alan, finds the courage to take her lipstick and start to use it. Mum stops and watches him. Then she tells him off, he refuses to put the lipstick down, she slaps him. Tells him off.*

**Sophie:**

...then we went to the seaside, we watched the seagulls, and I had this amazing ice cream, and some rock -

**Alan:**

Some -what? What's that sign?

**Sophie:**

You know, rock, it's like this, long, and sweet, and

**Alan:**

No I don't understand - *(to audience)* Sophie gave me language. I would never sign as good as her, but at least we could communicate.

**Sophie:**

Alan - stop signing - STOP! -

*Mr Simmonds has seen Alan signing and marched over. Alan gets a telling off and sent to Mr Simmonds' office. Afterwards Alan runs away from school to his tree. His parents get a phone call from the Headteacher.*

**CAPTION (Alan's Dad):**

He ran away!?

*Sophie runs to find Alan at his tree, hugs him and comforts him. Sophie brings Alan back home*

**Alan:**

In the draw, my Dad kept a rope, it was long and thick as a stick of rock, like you get on a boat...

**CAPTION (Alan's Dad):**

Alan, you must focus on learning The Word of God. Focus on your speaking reading and writing.

*Scene changes to Alan alone at home in his Mum and Dads bedroom.*

**Alan:**

One day when my parents went out, I was left alone at home with my Mum's beautiful things...

*Alan starts to play with his Mum's make up. He goes to the wardrobe to try on a dress, and goes back for another one but the dress he touches transforms into Dad who has caught him, is furious and grabs Alan violently, shouting at him. Mum tries to pull him back, but he pushes her away, gets his belt, and goes to beat Alan. Mum steps in between them.*

## **Grahams Story 1**

### **CAPTION:**

*Graham's Story: late 1970's to present day UK*

*Graham playing the Incredible Hulk*

### **Graham:**

I remember my dad signing comics to me - I loved it - the one about the Incredible Hulk!!

He's running - the helicopters firing at him - the bullets bounce off him!!!

He leaps up - crushes the helicopter and throws it into the distance -

*Mrs Newman leaps up off the floor, moves the others away. And puts Grahams arms by his side.*

### **Mrs. N:**

Hello, I'm your speech therapist

*She opens a door and gestures he go through it, she enters to prepare the therapy session.*

### **Graham:**

Dark. Panels with pin-prick holes. A table. A microphone. A machine. A mirror...?

...anyway he throws the helicopter - lands, climbs out of the crater he just made - a little boy asks for his autograph, but when he signs he breaks the pen and the little boy cries and -

### **Mrs N:**

Good morning.

### **Mrs N:**

Ahh

**Graham:**

Ahh

**Mrs N:**

A little louder, a little more voice. Aah

**Graham:**

Ahh

**Mrs N:**

Lower, lower. Aah

**Graham:**

Ahh

**Mrs N:**

Good, good very good. Shhh

**Graham:**

Shh

**Mrs N:**

A little stronger, a little stronger. Shh

**Graham:**

Shh

**Mrs N:**

Good, good very good. Now Nnnnn

**Graham:**

Nnnn

**Mrs N:**

Good, louder, louder, stronger, use you voice. Nnnn

**Graham:**

Nnnn

**Mrs N:**

Ahh Shh Nnn

**Graham:**

Ahh Shh Nnn

**Mrs N:**

Good, good, keep going

*She gives him a microphone and headphones*

**Mrs N:** Now let's try La. LA LA Use your voice LA, LA.....A little lower LA (*repeats on and on getting more and more intense*)

### Deaf History 3

#### **CAPTION:**

Johann Amman 1669-1724

#### **Matty:**

Johann Amman was a teacher of the Deaf and the founder of Oralism. He said:

#### **Matty:**

1. The voice is a living emanation of that spirit that God breathed into man when he created him a living soul
2. Sign language is not a language
3. Deaf people are “automata” - living machines without souls, stupid, like animals

#### **Maira:**

Decades later, when colonialism was all the rage, his ideas proved really useful!

#### **Matty:**

The colonists thought: Deaf people are “savages” - just like Indigenous Peoples; we are the “civilised” race.

#### **David:**

Then they realised they could save, or ‘civilise’ the ‘savages’. For the more we “savages” could be controlled, the more useful –and profitable - we could be.

### **Grahams Story 1.1**

**MRS N:** *(scolding him at the same time)*

Don't you dare!

*Graham tears off the headphones and stops. They communicate in BSL/English at the same time*

**Graham:**

I've had enough -

**Mrs. N:**

Graham. Don't.

**Chorus** *(come forward and gesture):*

Ahh, Nnn, Shh, Ahh, Nnn, Sh -

**Graham:**

That was speech therapy...

*Graham stops chorus with a sudden gesture.*

**Graham:**

I was born profoundly deaf into a Deaf family, we all used sign language.

**Graham:**

We always went to Deaf club, and I met so many Deaf people. In fact, I'd never met a hearing person until one day when I saw two people speaking in the street.

*Chorus become hearing people chatting.*

**Graham:**

I asked my Dad: 'Why can't those people sign, why are they moving their mouths?'

*David steps forward to become Dad.*

**Dad:**

Well son, they're hearing people, that's what they do.

**Graham:**

Hearing people? Hearing? I'd never seen that sign before.

**Dad:**

Son, you'll find out more when you go to school.



**Classroom 1: Cat and Mouse**

**Teacher:**

Good morning.

**Teacher:**

What am I saying?

**Teacher:**

Graham! Stop signing!

*She bangs her hand on his desk, then ties his hands behind his back*

## Graham's Story 1.2

**Graham:**

When I got to secondary school I couldn't wait to move on.

**Mrs. A:**

Good morning.

**Graham:**

but it was just more of the same...

**Graham:**

Imagine if the Hulk was having speech therapy. Do you know what he would do? When that therapist was messing with his face, he'd get angry and turn green and huge, and she would have this massive creature in her hands. He would get that little woman, pick her up, tie her in a knot, and he would kick her right out into orbit...

*Mrs N comes back and notices he's not wearing headphones - she gives him a look, and Graham reluctantly picks them up to put them on.*

**Graham:**

There's a monitor in front of me, a train on the screen. A microphone. If I speak properly, the train moves.

**Mrs. N:**

"Beginning"

**CAPTION:**

"Beginning"

**Graham:**

STOP LYING TO ME - I CAN'T SPEAK WELL I KNOW THAT! SO JUST STOP IT!!!

**Mrs. N:** *(at the same time as Graham signs)*

STOP IT! Use your voice - USE YOUR VOICE!!!

**Classroom 2: Days of the Week****Student (Voices):**

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

**Graham:**

It's my last day at school and I can't wait! But before I can leave –

*Mrs. N interrupts*

**Mrs N:**

I want you to read this out loud, it's a quote from the great Alexander Graham Bell.

**CAPTION:**

"When one door closes, another door opens" - Alexander Graham Bell

**Graham (Voices):**

When one door closes, another door opens

**Mrs N:**

Very good. Again.

## **Deaf History 4**

### **CAPTION:**

**Alexander Graham Bell, 1847 - 1922**

#### **Matty:**

Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, but his real job was educating Deaf children using the Oral Method - just like his Daddy. You see, his mother was deaf. And his wife, a former student, was profoundly deaf too. So you'd think he'd appreciate Deaf people, right? WRONG.

#### **David:**

He was terrified that deaf intermarriage would *contaminate* the human race. Plato may have invented Eugenics, but it was people like Alexander Graham Bell that helped make it *really* popular.

#### **Matty:**

By the 20th Century, eugenics policies were authorising the sterilisation of hundreds of thousands of "undesirables" around the world - which included Deaf People. Next thing you know the Nazi's are marking Deaf people with a black triangle and the word '*blod*' - meaning stupid.

#### **Moira:**

Alexander Graham Bell used his telephone fame and fortune to campaign against "*the production of a defective race of human beings*", and *for* Oralism, leading to The Milan Conference.

#### **Matty:**

He argued that the success of the conference is proof of natural selection: that Oralism is fittest to survive.

## Graham's Story 2

### **Graham (voices):**

When one door closes, another door opens.

### **Mrs N:**

Very good, very good, very good.

### **Graham: (to audience)**

I'm supposed to meet someone called Jo? It's my first day at work. I'm surrounded only by hearing people. The only thing I could read on this letter was the address, my name and the boss's name.

### **Jo:**

I'm Jo, come with me.

*Moira takes him up and sits him down.*

### **Jo:**

Sit here.

*Graham gets up but she sits him back down - he wants to help/work and is trying to communicate this.*

*He leaves stepping down onto a bus - chorus create the other passengers using the sign for 'bus' in BSL.*

*In Deaf club.*

### **Graham:**

All day - ALL BLOODY DAY - "No, no, you just sit there" I did fuck all. So that night I went to Deaf Club.

**Graham:**

*(Downs pint)* I needed that. Fuck! Dad, that job is gonna kill me...

**Dad:**

Don't worry son, I've been through that myself, we all have.

It's hearing people.

You've just got to grin and bear it.

You'll get used to it.

*Graham is back to work, now on the conveyor belt... Everyone is at their task. Graham closes the box's lid. David tapes it together. Debs stamps it. Moira unloads the finished boxes onto a trolley. David gets Graham to do his work. Then, so does Debs, and Moira/Jo - he ends up doing everyone's job whilst the others are upstage having a tea break, smoking and laughing at him. Graham gets a full load of boxes on the trolley, wheels it DSL to DSR and then catches them all watching him. David tells him to keep going, and the others give him the thumbs up - and laugh. Graham gets angry and throws the trolley into the wall.*

*In the Jo's office:*

**CAPTION:**

**Jo: I don't care if it was an accident - you can't go throwing company equipment around.**

**Jo:**

I don't care if it was an accident - you can't go throwing company equipment around.

*Graham is apologising.*

**CAPTION:**

**Jo: This is your last chance. One more fuck up and you're gone. NOW GET OUT!**

**Jo:**

This is your last chance. One more fuck up and you're gone. NOW GET OUT!

*Graham leaves and we're suddenly at the work Christmas party. He is approached by Hannah. Graham tries to introduce himself - but she doesn't understand. So he asks for a pen and writes his name on a beer mat, then shows her.*

**Graham:**

Graham, what's your name?

Hannah.

*They cheers with their pints, and hit it off. Graham suggests they get out of there.*

*They go to the cinema.*

*They go for a meal CS, Debs plays the waitress. Chorus at a table upstage. Graham tries to order, the waitress constantly refers to his hearing partner. So he needs to order his meal through her. They cheers and find themselves in bed.*

**Graham:**

This is my girlfriend Hannah. We met at the work's Christmas party. She was the first hearing person who didn't run away from me. And she was absolutely gorgeous, she really made my heart pound -

*Lights go dim, Graham switches it back on.*

**Graham:**

Sorry, I've told her a million times that Deaf people need the lights on to communica -

*Lights go dim, Graham switches it back on*

**Graham:**

I keep trying to get her to come to Deaf Club with me, to learn a bit of sign language , but she says she's too embarrass -



*Lights go dim, Graham switches it back on*

**Graham:**

Our relationship was OK, but the sex...

*Lights go to blackout, when they come up again, his wife, Hannah is there (Debs) she tells Graham it's sexy time and turns the lights off.*

*In the dark, she tells him she wants him to go down on her. He doesn't understand.*

*Lights on. She mimes 'down', he thinks he understands.*

*Lights off Graham goes to all fours. Hannah is waiting for oral sex. Graham thinks she's going to do something kinky to him. They both wait. Confused he tries to find her in the dark.*

*Lights on Hannah, frustrated, explains, she clarifies she wants Oral sex. Lights off.*

*They bump heads, lights back on.*

**Graham:**

See what I mean? We just can't communicate.

*Hannah turns the lights off. Blackout. When they're back up Hannah is gone.*

**Graham:**

I tried my best, but in the end, she left me. And while all that shit was going down -

*Back at work, Jo gives Graham a box.*

**Jo:**

Take this and put it up there - row K - got it?

*He agrees. The platform rises, the chorus sinks down operating the machine and watching him go up. Graham steps up onto a high platform, and comes DCS. Chorus are sniggering behind him.*

**Graham:**

When I tried to get down again...

**Graham:**

They left me up there all day, it wasn't until the shift ended that they finally brought me down. The next day was my birthday.

*Graham is at the production line, chorus move in behind him. They give him a Birthday card.*

**Graham:**

It said "you're sacked."

*Graham gets angry and screams, he tears up the card and Hulks out, and beats up the workmates, punching them all to the ground in one go.*

*Graham walks forward and we see him on edge the roof.*

**Graham:**

I climbed up to the roof. I'd had enough.

*Graham jumps.*

### **Graham's Story 3**

**Graham:**

I broke every bone in my body. I couldn't move.

*We see four images of Graham in hospital UCS. 1. He is surrounded by medical practitioners doing tests on him. 2. Profile image - Dr. takes his temperature, another monitors. 3. Dr's are speaking to him with masks on - he cannot read their lips, they don't understand he is Deaf. 4. He slowly regains consciousness. Asks for a pen and paper - this takes time for the Dr.s to understand - he writes on the paper "I'M DEAF" - then they realise.*

**Graham:**

The doctors said my recovery could take years, but I was lucky.

**Graham:**

I had Deaf club.

*Everybody joins Graham DSC. Graham signs 'hello' to everyone, has brief interactions. Everyone is pleased to see him. Graham signs 'bright lights' and Chorus leap outwards, become the bright lights of Deaf club.*

**Graham:**

It's so brightly lit, you can see what everyone is signing, there is always so much going on, sign poetry, comedy, lectures, discussions, we share stories, and help each other get through life....it's my second home.

**Graham:**

I recovered in just a year, and not because of the doctors. Because of Deaf Club. All around the UK Deaf Clubs are closing, what would I have done now? I would have been fucked.

**Friend:**

Hey! Tonight's presentation's about to start.

**Friend (to *Graham*):**

You went to an Oral school. Go on, volunteer...

**Graham:**

The university were looking for a volunteer on a research project - they wanted to test literacy levels to see if depriving Deaf children of sign language ruins their education.

## **Deaf History 5**

### **Matty:**

In 1880, after the conference in Milan, the Times had enthusiastically declared “Deafness is abolished!”.

### **Matty:**

100 years later, when the Conrad Report was published proving Oralism had failed, it revealed that: the average reading age of a Deaf school leaver was 8; their speech was not intelligible; and their lipreading no better than a hearing person who’d never tried to do it before. The response from the media was...

*Chorus walk forward and encounter an invisible wall.*

### **Chorus:**

...an extraordinary wall of silence.

### **Matty:**

So our research continued this fight, and two years later...

### **Graham's Story 3.2**

**Graham:**

Guys, guys! Good news! I got the job at the university. Me! Me??? I'm gonna be a researcher in the department of Deaf Studies!

**Dad:**

Brilliant son!

**Friend:**

Next round's on me!!

*Graham is entering into his new office.*

**Graham:**

I've got my own office.

**Graham:**

I was busy from day one. Everyone signed and the work was great. A year into the job I met Paddy Ladd. He was writing a new book and developing this concept. "Deafhood". Deafhood? I'd never seen that sign before. None of us had. So he sat me down.

He explained how society is only focused on the ear, the voice, and on hearing. Trying to teach Deaf children to speak, to fix them. Not allowing children to be Deaf, but recognising them only as hard of hearing or hearing impaired. How we are shamed for our Deafness. And so our sense of self is diminished.

**Graham:**

How we as Deaf people submit to the control of hearing people. How we accept our exclusion from the conversation. And how we accept hearing people's misguided 'helpfulness'. He made me realise that sign language is a bona fide language - not something I should feel ashamed of, but be proud of. That now there were children out there being

taught in BSL, and that their language development was just like a hearing child of the same age. That Deafhood is a process, it's not just about sign language. It's about looking beyond the hands and seeing our humanity our shared history, our culture, and our language.

**Graham:**

I am not simply a genetic mistake. I'm not so different to you. I have a right to be here. We have a right to be here. It took me until the age of 30 to realise I have a Deaf identity, a culture. I decided to stop using my voice. My language is sign language.

*Graham puts a pint on the bar. The others join him and they drink to Deafhood.*

## **Deaf History 6**

### **Moira:**

Our history isn't just about Oralism. It's about how sign languages and Deaf people were once valued, celebrated, integrated;

### **Matty:**

We were signing well before Ancient Greece; all the secret hand codes and signs you find in ballet and mime and famous paintings - where do you think they came from?

### **CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

When a baby is born with hearing loss, parents and families often don't know where to turn.

### **David:**

You can see our history in the Deaf characters written into plays as far back as the 16th Century. In Deaf painters like Christophoro who taught Leonardo da Vinci

### **Matty:**

In the courts of the Ottoman Empire where spoken language was deemed undignified, and the Sultan's closest circle were Deaf signers.

### **CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

*It's kind of a loss of a dream and getting that news is really shocking, and it's sad.*

### **CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

At Alexander Graham Bell we work to ensure that parents and caregivers around the world understand

### **CAPTION& VOICE OVER:**

that today with hearing technology, their child can hear. \

### **Moira:**



You can see our history in towns like Martha's Vineyard where 1 in 4 people were Deaf and every person - Deaf or hearing could sign -

**CAPTION & VOICE OVER :**

*And so about two weeks after his first birthday he got his first implant.*

**Matty:** You can see our history in the Deaf comrades who fought and died in the French revolution, leading to the world's first government funded deaf school in Paris

**CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

And with speech therapy can learn to talk.

**David:** You can see our history being made every day by Deaf people fighting for their right to -

**CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

Through a developmental approach called listening and spoken language,

**CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

children who are born deaf or hard of hearing can fully participate in mainstream schooling,

**CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

transition to become independent adults, and succeed in the career of their dreams.

**CAPTION & VOICE OVER:**

Without limits.

## Helens Story 1

### **CAPTION:**

*Helen's Story, late 1990's to present day UK*

#### **Helen:**

These are my parents. Dad's a wannabe musician, and Mum's a secondary school teacher. They were hoping I'd be a musician when I grew up. Until they realised I was Deaf.

*Space changes to Parents visiting the Health Professional.*

#### **Helen:**

Straight away, they took me to see a health professional.

*Doctor starts to explain the situation to them.*

#### **Helen:**

My parents were told that their baby wasn't Deaf, simply hard of hearing. They were given three options: option one, speech therapy; option two hearing aids; option three - now this one really got my parents attention.

*Doctor explains option one. Miming speech therapy. For option 2 he moves centre stage and mimes the use of a hearing aid. For option three Matty and parents cross to DSR and Helen crosses to DSL. Matty mimes cochlear implant.*

#### **Helen:**

They were really excited - they thought a Cochlear Implant would make me a hearing person. Their decision was made.

*The parents sign a release form. Helen goes USC. We move to Helen's 'switch on' scene. Everybody moves forward. Helen is on the ground playing. Parents watching, doctor*

*preparing for switch on. After the switch on, Helen has a brief shock, but then is happy, and parents rush in to embrace her. Everyone is delighted.*

**Helen:**

At least, that's my parent's version of what happened. My version is quite different, as you'll see later...

*They go home. Mum and dad introduce sounds.*

**Helen:**

When we got home my parents couldn't wait for me to hear all the different sounds. Not everyone with a Cochlear Implant has the same experience, I can only talk about mine, it's very difficult to explain, but I'll try. Basically, you start hearing sounds through electronic signals. Your brain interprets those signals by matching them to visual cues. Together, the cue and the signal create the sound in your brain. There's a lot of training involved. *(Sudden fury)* Sometimes I wish I could take my implant out and -

*Dad appears and strums the guitar – trying to teach Helen*

**Helen:**

I couldn't hear the tune, just the noise of the guitar and I could feel the vibration - but I didn't care, it was nice to hang out with Dad.

**Helen:**

Growing up I had regular audiology appointments.

*We see the audiology test where Helen reacts to the played sounds.*

**Helen:**

And speech therapy.

*Chorus join her for speech therapy movements Ah, Nn, Shush, etc. She makes the scene disappear - changing it into a group of hearing friends around her, they're talking, laughing and joking.*

**Helen:**

But in groups, when everyone was speaking, I couldn't keep up.

**Helen:**

It started to give me a terrible ringing in my ears. It was really painful. Even if my parents allowed me to switch my implant off - the sound would stop, but I'd still have tinnitus. I didn't want to disappoint Dad though, so I forced myself to keep on practicing. At school I wanted to join -

*A teacher pops out of line and stops her.*

**Helen:**

I wanted to get involved with -

*Another teacher pops out of line and ushers her back to the line.*

**Helen:**

But at least I can play football. I love football.

*Helen and chorus play football. Matty is the referee. He blows the whistle, but Helen can't hear it and carries on playing. Eventually he comes on the field to stop her and tells her off. Helen responds angrily. Chorus turn and walk upstage like robots.*

**Helen:**

It was so humiliating. The other children started to bully me, calling me 'bionic girl', and "robot".

*Helen comes DCS. She starts to play the guitar, her frustration building until she smashes her guitar to pieces. Dad runs in to see what has happened, he gathers up the pieces.*

**Helen:**

And that was the end of my relationship with the guitar... My dad never really got over it. But time passed, I left school, and I went to University.

*University campus. Helen bumps into Graham. He says sorry and walks on. Helen arrives at a lecture and begins to prepare her papers.*

**Helen:**

I wanted to become a teacher like my Mum, but at a primary school, so I studied really hard.

*Graham comes over to her. He introduces himself:*

**Graham:**

Hi. Are you Deaf?

**Helen:**

WHAT THE FUCK?

**Graham:**

My name's Graham -

**Helen:**

I'M NOT DEAF. I am NOT like you.

*We return to the classroom scene from the start of her story. Helen walks from USC to DSC greeting the children as she goes.*

**Helen:**

Morning - morning! *(to audience)* This is my first day teaching in primary school *(pause)* with hearing children.

**Helen:**

So children, what colour is a watermelon?

*Helen turns round but addresses the wrong pupil.*

**Helen:**

Very good - excellent!

*Helen realises she doesn't know who was speaking, she has a panic attack. Helen comes forward.*

**Helen:**

I had a panic attack. You see there's this world where everyone uses sign language, but I can't communicate, I don't fit in. They call me "hard of hearing". Then there is this other world where everyone speaks, and I can't understand what they're saying. They think of me as deaf!? So which one is it? It's tearing me apart. Who am I?

*She runs upstage where she confronts her parents.*

**Helen:**

I went straight home. I said to my parents - *(To parents)* "Why did you do this to me??" They said they just wanted the best for me. The best??? We argued and argued - and for the first time I told my parents what I had experienced.

**Helen:**

I remember being in a strange room, with a bed. There were screens, and machines. I could see you outside the window. I couldn't understand why you weren't here with me?

*Flash back to two-year old Helen in hospital about to have the operation. They perform the operation on the watermelon as Helen signs:*

**Helen:**

Watermelons were being harvested 5,000 years ago in Egypt – you can see them in hieroglyphics. They were placed in burial tombs to nourish the dead on their journey to the afterlife. Back then, watermelons were a bitter fruit, and just one dominant gene was responsible for the flavour. But centuries of selective breeding, crossing several countries and cultures, changed the watermelon: the original desert crop was eradicated, and gradually replaced with the sweetest stock. *(To her parents)* I was two and a half when you let them slice my head open like a watermelon.

*The operation finishes. Chorus put the equipment away and then stand in a line upstage. Helen comes forward.*

**Helen:**

After the operation I was in the hospital for 2 weeks - people coming to check on me all the time. What I remember is my head covered in bandages, and it feeling really heavy on one side, and sore. It all made me feel so -

**Helen:**

I'm in a room. With pin-prick walls. On the walls there are posters - a high window with bars - traffic passing outside. And there are toys! Hungry hippo!

*The doctor test sounds on Helen*

**Helen:**

The sound was overwhelming. I wish I could take my cochlear out and smash it on the floor. I'm fed up. I've had enough. It's so painful. It gives me horrendous tinnitus.

**Mum:**

But you can hear.

**Helen:**

I can't *hear*! It's just noise. Terrible noise. I'm Deaf. I'm Deaf. I'M DEAF!!! I don't need to be fixed.

*Helen and Graham bump into each other again back at University.*

**Helen:**

Hi - do you remember me?

**Graham:**

Oh...yeah, I do. You weren't very nice.

**Helen:**

I'm sorry

**Graham:** *(He shows her sign for sorry as he signs)*

Sorry?

*Helen copies the sign.*

**Helen:**

Yes. I'm sorry.

**Graham:**

OK.

**Helen:**

I'm sorry I can't sign.

**Graham:**

That's OK, it's alright.



**Helen:**

Well, it's nice to meet you.

**Graham:** *(Smiles)*

*She leaves. Just before she's gone he stops her.*

**Graham** *(With communication difficulty between them):*

Hey - wait... So - you want to learn sign language?

**Helen:**

Yeah, I want to sign.

**Graham:**

OK. Well, why don't you come with me to Deaf club? Teach you to sign?

**Helen:** *(gestures that she doesn't understand)*

**Graham:**

OK. *(He tries again, slower, using basic sign)* I. Will take you. To Deaf Club. And you'll learn to sign.

**Helen:**

Sign -? You'll take me?

**Graham:**

Yes.

**Helen:**

Ok... yes, thanks.

*Scene changes to Deaf Club*

**Graham:**

This is Deaf Club, come in.

*They go to the bar.*

**Graham:**

Go on then.

**Helen:**

Red. Wine...please.

**Graham:** *(he shows her the correct sign)*

It's red

**Helen:** *(she copies)*

Red.

**Graham:**

Wine.

**Helen:** *(she copies)*

Red wine. Please!

*She is served a glass of red.*

**Graham:**

Oh look - there you go!

*(To bartender)* I'll have a pint.

*They are joined by the chorus at the bar.*

**David:**

Who's this?

**Graham:**

Why don't you ask her?

**David:**

What's your name?

*Helen fingerspells her name slowly and hesitantly*

**Helen:**

My name is H. E. L. E. N. Helen.

*They applaud her with Deaf clapping, cheers and move.*

**Helen:**

It was here at Deaf club, that I gradually learned sign language. And I became much more confident. It was here that I learned about Deaf history and Deafhood. And it was here that I began to feel like I belonged. I joined our local Deaf football club - and I LOVE it. The other week we beat a hearing team, they got so pissed off – turns out, Deaf people can play football really well!

*We return to the classroom scene again. This time Helen is happy. She hands out whiteboards to the kids.*

**Helen:** Good morning! Good morning! *(to audience)* back at the school, I had an idea. I gave all the children whiteboards. It really helped with communication. They loved it. And they started to pick up sign language. But how much better would be if sign language were on the Curriculum across the UK so that we could all sign? Just Imagine...

## Alan's Story Part 2

### **CAPTION:**

*Alan's Story Part 2, late 1960's - to 1980's UK*

**Alan:**

It's my 18th birthday - Sophie's taking me out!

*Sophie is in her bedroom putting on make up - Alan enters, they play around getting ready to go out.*

**Alan:**

Too much?

**Sophie:**

Where we're going, you're gonna fit in perfectly!

*They enter a gay bar, Alan is nervous, Sophie encourages him and they stick together tightly, she shows him the place, and they begin to dance. A man comes over to flirt - Sophie gestures that they're Deaf. The man invites Alan to have a drink - Sophie pushes him into it, he's terrified but does it. Then at the bar the man touches Alan's hand - Alan can't take it and runs out of the bar. Outside a gang recognise him and beat him up. Sophie, who's come running after him chases them away, then helps Alan to get home - cleaning him up before he goes inside. One of the bullies, Tom, comes to Alan's house, knocks on the door, and Alan's dad opens it.*

**Tom:**

Hi, is Alan in?

**Dad:**

Who are you?

**Tom:**

I'm Alan's boyfriend, Tom

**Dad:**

What?!

*Alan's dad snatches his hand away and slams the door shut - Tom bursts out laughing with his mates and runs away. Dad grabs Alan, and whips him with the rope, but Alan takes hold of it, and hits back at his dad - he gets out of control and he can't stop hitting his father until he's a wreck on the floor. Alan, ashamed, takes the rope and runs. He gets to his tree and throws the rope over the branches.*

*The next day Sophie comes to Alan's house, says is Alan at home - but he isn't. Sophie is worried as Alan was not at school... she remembers his favourite place. But when she reaches the old oak tree, he is hanging from it, dead.*

**Helen and Graham****CAPTION:**

Helen and Graham, Present day

*They are both at home, feeding and playing with their baby daughter, Bethan.***Graham:**

Where's Daddy? Here I am! And where's mummy? Ah?! Ehhh - there she is!!!

**Helen:**

Me and Graham got married four years ago, and Bethan was born one year ago. But there have been many challenges...

*We flashback to Helen giving birth in hospital with Graham there beside her.***CAPTION:**

Last year

*Helen gives birth, then after photos, a nurse comes and takes her baby away. Graham and her try to ask what's going on but there's no interpreter - so Graham goes after the nurse...Helen panics more and more, and grabs the nurse who comes to test her blood pressure trying to find out where Bethan has gone, it builds and builds into a change of space.**We're in the Dr's office***Dr:**

We meant no harm, it was just a simple test

**Helen:**

What test?

**Dr:**

A 'newborn hearing screening test', free on the NHS, and it's harmless

**Helen:**

But it's less than 24 hours since I gave birth??

**Dr:**

Because there is a history of deafness in both your families -

**Helen:**

I was not informed about any test – its disgraceful, the nurse just took her away without asking

**Dr:**

You *were* told, according to our records

**Helen:**

We're Deaf – telling us doesn't count – it's your responsibility to ensure a good interpreter can help you to communicate what you want to say to us in sign language

**Dr:**

I'm sorry if there was any misunderstanding... at least now you know that your child has profound hearing loss

**Helen:**

She hasn't lost anything, she's Deaf, and we're delighted she's Deaf

**Dr:**

Yes. Well... I'm obliged to inform you that permanent hearing loss can significantly affect your baby's development. Finding out now gives Bethan a better chance of developing language during the critical period, speech and communication skills –and, we can also look at hearing aids, cochlear implants, and soon, we may be able to offer gene therapy –

**Helen:**

I know what our baby needs. We'll make sure Bethan develops excellent sign language and communication skills. We'll give her all of the options and allow her to choose when she is *ready*. Are you seriously suggesting we implant an intrusive device into her brain – How is that ethically sound? Great - hand me **your** child and I'll cut it's head open! I never suffered because I can't hear – but I went through hell because I was denied my Deaf identity. There's no way we will ever let that happen to our child.



**Deaf Future? Let's bloody hope not...****Moira:**

Half of all cases of deafness have a genetic root. A mutated gene - one single *wrong* letter in the genetic code - can result in profound deafness in children.

**David:**

Now, high precision gene editing tools like "crispr" can disable problematic genes.

**CAPTION:**

Simon Waddington, at University College London

**Matty:**

"Incurable and often untreatable diseases are now within the scope of gene therapy...Oh – and we also recognise the importance and remain mindful of cultural considerations within the deaf community as the work moves forward..."

-- **END** --