Hearing difficulties? On using phone live captions during conversations with hearing loss.

I have an update to this letter, originally a note to Glasgow Quakers. I have since found a range of instant transcription apps incl. language translation. The 2 I've researched are Caplo, which runs on iOS only but is cheap if, instead of paying monthly, you buy a 'pack' for £5 that gives 600 mins. Or Soniox, which gives about an hour free per week, or £30/month or £120/year. The latter for my uses is outstanding, I use transcripts & translation, with useful AI that provides summaries etc. Alastair

the Friends Quarterly

I thoroughly enjoyed my first ever experience of *the Friends Quarterly (FQ)*, with its lively and informed articles.

I was, however, concerned by Ruth Jones' phrase 'a pension "entitlement" as we have come to expect' ('Lifelong learning towards abundance', Issue 1, February 2026).

I do not believe we have 'come' to expect it, I believe as someone also born in the 1960s that it was the social contract, and that people paid their National Insurance in good faith as being their provision for old age and therefore rightly expected it from the outset as the deal.

Entitlement can have a flavour of something not entirely deserved or worked for, but many have worked in excess of forty years for their state pension, paying with their labour and their lives.

There are millions for whom this pension is their only provision. They don't have private pensions for a variety of reasons, among them low wages.

Increasingly, I hear people with private pensions referring to the state pension as a 'handout' or 'benefit', when people have spent their lives paying for it and for them it is not merely pin money.

The framing of 'benefit' starts to put the state pension at risk of being withdrawn by governments eager to claw back money seemingly from everyone except big corporations.

If the state pension is put at risk through this kind of ideology and language, then we will have vulnerable people experiencing destitution and suffering, and a poor/rich chasm even wider than it is at present.

Language matters.

I look forward to reading further issues of *FQ*.

Su Scotting
Devon Area Meeting

Hearing

I am not the only one in Meeting with hearing problems, and the following might help others.

My hearing loss, a genetic inheritance, is now 'profound' on most frequencies. It's why you see me waving around little Bluetooth microphones. These work very well for situations where I have control over the soundscape. It means I can participate in events when I am a main speaker and can take control of the soundscape, and keep discipline within it. They do not work well in other situations such as general meetings because people, understandably, don't know how to position them properly, or get impatient, especially if a discussion becomes energised!

Recently, you may have spotted me using another option in addition to a directional microphone. I point my phone towards whoever is speaking. At Meeting, I sit near the middle where I can pick up best from all directions. The phone now gives a live transcription (also called 'live captions'). This shows on my screen, which is why you'll see me sitting as if watching a video!

Live transcription is a relatively new feature. It came out on iPhone a few years ago, and at first was not very good. Now, however, it benignly uses AI that is built into the phone's operating system. This not only listens to the sound and picks out word-by-word, but it interprets what is being said from the wider context. It may correct a phrase mid-phrase as it guesses from the wider context what is being talked about. It also seems to be remarkably good at separating the voice closest to one when there are others in the background, such as coffee time. Those of you who have used Zoom with closed captions will have seen such voice recognition and interpretation technology in action. I had thought of suggesting that closed captions be turned on during Meeting, but the constant flickering would be a horrible distraction.

I have not used this on an Android phone, but those have the same feature: see *https://tinyurl.com/Apple-captions* and *https://tinyurl.com/Android-captions*.

May I add one other point? Helen Keller said that blindness cuts you off from the natural environment, but deafness cuts you off from your social environment. People tend to avoid opening conversations because they know it may be difficult with a lot of background noise. I'll often ask folks if they'd mind stepping aside to a quiet area, but that can feel too cloistered for some folks' comfort.

A further issue is that deafness means you don't get constant reinforcement of hearing people's names spoken. I now find that I only know the names of some of the old-timers, and even some of those slip with time. Long ago there used to be a board in the Meeting house with the names and photographs of regulars. Maybe it was taken down for a reason, but if there is no good reason, it would be great if some such thing could be restored. It would allow one to have a quick look before going up and initiating a conversation with somebody.

I know that there are others in our Meeting who struggle with hearing, so I hope this information might be useful. If in doubt as to how to set live transcription running, just ask one of the teenagers!

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