

eBook/CD in British Sign Language/English

No One Told Me I Was Deaf

Written and Signed
by Frank Essery

DeafEducate

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"I think Frank is deaf," said my eldest sister, concerned, to my mother, but she rebuffed the idea of having a deaf child after giving birth to five healthy children. Sister set out to prove it by collecting all the pans and deliberately throwing them on the kitchen's old tile floor - bang, bang, bang! Mother went into the living room to see if I was being distracted. I wasn't. I squatted on the floor staring at the flickering black and white tube.

My mother feared the worst and she took me to the Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital, where a doctor confirmed that I had no hearing. My mother had never experienced in dealing with a deaf child. I contracted measles when I was 11 months old causing me to have no hearing at all in my left ear and a hearing aid to support my right ear. I had an operation on both ears to see if the surgeon could correct my hearing. Only he was just messing around and poking my ears. As a result, I was throwing up all day in a ward and complaining of noises in my head. I was 6 years old. I

couldn't understand why they were doing it to me; maybe they never told me that I was deaf.

Throughout my childhood watching TV was the only way I could communicate; the TV presenters stared at you and focused on you. I sat up and concentrated on their facial expression: excitement, crying, anger and emotion. I related to them, whereas I couldn't with my family and especially with people on the street as they looked at me, saying "Aw, you poor thing" and turning away from me. I only saw their blank faces. My best memory watching TV was of a presenter creating art, plasticine and using scrap paper to make shapes or statues. It was called "Vision On", but I didn't realise it was especially for Deaf children. The presenter certainly knew how to communicate with Deaf children. Unfortunately, my family did not take any notice of it; they could have had an opportunity to learn how to communicate with me. Instead I stuck to one word from 11 months until I went to a nursery especially for

deaf infants and the word was "Mummy!" - not the words "Poo Poo!" I never knew why I was different from others; perhaps they never told me that I was deaf.

My father took me to the nursery for deaf infants at Crown Street. Being two or three years old I sat on my father's lap and for the first time I saw other deaf children - one child playing with toys, one drawing and one doing paintings. The children were playing with the toys and as I couldn't communicate with them, a child gave me a toy, another child took it away from me and all hell broke loose with the children taking, pulling, hitting and strangling each other! I didn't understand their form of communication as I was used to my brother and sisters, so they left me alone to play. After watching deaf children waving their arms toward me, I screamed and fell asleep in my father's arms...or did I faint?

When I was four years old, my mother, being a devout

Catholic, took me to the convent. Entering the room I was surrounded by nuns and saw their black habits from toe to head. I stared at their feet wondering where they were. I slowly looked up and saw their glowing faces. As the nun pulled out her arms and reached out toward me, I screamed. I didn't fall asleep but hid behind my mother's legs. My mother must have been frustrated as she received no support in how to deal with deaf children apart from receiving the NDCS magazine, 'Talk'. I didn't understand why my mum was so frustrated toward me but then no one told me that I was deaf.

At the age of three or four, I went to Alice Elliott School for Hearing Impaired Children. Looking back I looked up the dictionary for the meaning of 'Impaired', Impaired means damaged or weakened, "Am I a damaged or weakened child and useless to society?"

I have a number of fond memories of the school, apart

from when I nearly got stabbed by a child holding a canteen knife to see who was the boss, but I was saved by a teacher. I trapped and crushed my left middle finger at the door and I proudly showed it off with a rude gesture. I damaged a toilet door to show my strength but the Headmaster showed me his strength and smacked me. I slapped my teacher's bottom and she put me in the corner and scolded me for being naughty. A teacher caught me signing during playtime and put me in front of the classroom saying that if I signed again then my fingers would be cut off. All this before I was seven years old. I never knew why I loved the school so much. Maybe they never told me that I was deaf.

My home life was quite unusual, as I could not understand the proper family traditions or culture. For example, as a child my father took my two sisters and me to the Grotto. They seated me on Father Christmas's lap, he was well covered up and I could only see his glassy eyes. I tried to

lipread him but his nylon beard kept moving up and down so I would see his lips then they would disappear and I would see them again then they would be gone!

Back home my father made me excited saying Father Christmas was coming down the chimney but all I saw was the fire and the flames roaring so hot. He told me to make a list of things that I wanted for Christmas. I was thrilled and excited. I wrote them down carefully spending an hour on it and making sure my parents understood it. I proudly handed over my list to them. My father folded my list and threw it in the fire. I was dumbstruck! "Father Christmas," said my father happily, "has your list." I actually saw the list thrown into the fire and I could see the piece of paper in flames. I argued with him but he kept insisting that Father Christmas had the list. Who was Father Christmas? Who was this bloated guy dressed all in red suit and who never shaved? Then again no one told me that

I was deaf.

The Headmaster of Alice Elliott wanted me to move to Birkdale School, near Southport, as a boarder because I could use my voice as speech. Given a choice either to use my voice or to sign but that teacher had threatened to cut my fingers off for signing...mmm not much of a choice! My mother refused the idea of sending me away from my family. I ended up in Joseph William Primary School - mainstream Partially Hearing Unit (PHU).

The nightmare began. It was a completely different environment to Alice Elliott School. No more children seated in a semi-circle but faces forward with 30 of us in a classroom. No more waving arms to get attention but teachers shouting pupils' names. No more wandering around the room and looking at other faces but only the teacher's face. Trying to read teacher's lips for hours and hours could only make you tired and naturally I missed out

all the information.

The classroom was too small for 30 of us. The room was only suitable for 15 or less. At one time Mr. Jenkins giving a talk on a subject said, "Today ... mumble ... read through ... mumble ..." I continued to read his lips so hard, "I want... mumble ... need ... mumble." I started to drop off. The next thing I felt a vibration transmitting through my body as it got stronger and stronger. Startled, I looked up and saw Mr Jenkins climbing onto pupils' desks and sort of "stepping stones" toward me! Remember the room was small and the desks were cramped together. He landed on my desk and I could see his Hush Puppies shoes standing on my desk. I looked up and saw his worn threadbare polyester trousers and looked at his cup stained print patterns all over his shirt with his knitted tie and his hair dangling on his shoulder. My mouth became dry. Finally, I saw his not-so-happy face. I didn't know whether I should scream and hide behind my mother's legs or fall asleep in

my father's arms but neither of them was there. So I continued to stare at his face as if we were having a blinking game, if you blinked you're out. I must have blinked a thousand times a minute.

Playing outside during dinnertime, I tried to get involved with hearing children playing a war game that I copied from a war film. We played together and went over the top exceeding ourselves. Only we were stopped abruptly by the Headmaster, Mr. Wallard, who called us into his office. He was scolding each boy as there were six of us in the line and I was the last. Mr. Wallard said, "Do you understand?" The first boy nodded so I tried to lipread him and thought he said, "Under-dance?" I looked at the first boy's feet to see whether he was dancing, he wasn't. On to the second boy, again I looked at his feet but he wasn't dancing at all, then the third, the fourth and finally the fifth. I thought that maybe they would dance later on, I didn't have a clue about how to dance. Mr. Wallard asked

me again, "Do I under-dance?" I gave this a great thought and said, "No". He grabbed my left arm and swung me round. He raised his hand and smacked my leg. Maybe I should have said, "Yes" and maybe I would learn one or two things about tap-dancing. I never understood why I wasn't able to follow the boys and be like them. Still no one told me that I was deaf.

I moved to secondary school after staying at Joseph Williams School for 6 years instead of 4 years because I was behind in my learning. The PHU teachers believed that I was useless as I was not able to speak properly. They tried to use all sorts of hand touching to my mouth, my throat and my nose saying 'k', 'zzz', 'm' or 'sh'. Maybe they were hopeless mechanics who couldn't tune up my voice.

There were 1,200 pupils in Highfield Comprehensive School. It was such a large school and a thousand children were wearing black and polished button uniforms. I saw

ten different teachers every week. Some had beards covering their lips; some had upper lips stiffer than their bottom ones making them impossible to lipread. Some teachers moved their heads and were not able to keep still, some were harsh and some used disciplinarian voices sending shivers up my spine. They had eight levels of abilities - level one being very able to level eight being not so able. I was in level three for maths but I couldn't go any further because of the English used in the maths class making it difficult for me to understand. I was level six in English so I said to myself that if I worked hard I could move up but I couldn't and it got worse. I was stuck with the English teacher, Mr. Prince, who couldn't be bothered to write on the blackboard. All the pupils had to listen to him and wrote while their heads were bowed and I couldn't copy from the person next to my desk because it was unreadable. I was the only person in the class to lip-read. I was so frustrated and it was like being in a fairground at a stall where you had a hammer and hit animals popping

up and down, here and there. I lipread the teacher and got something like, "I want you to write 2 sides." Head down. Wrote it. Looked up. I missed something and then caught "motorways." I wrote it together and I read "I want you to write 2 sides motorway." It didn't make sense. At this point, I never bothered to learn English and had no motivation at all. I was demoted to level 7. It's all thanks to Mr. Prince for not encouraging me to learn English which was really important for me, I see now. Funnily enough, he was the Head of the English Department. I left school at 16 without taking any examinations because my class was in the 14 - 15 years old so I missed out - really bad for me. I never knew why these pupils were not equal to me because then no one told me that I was deaf.

I left school wondering where could I go? My father used to tell me stories about him in the Second World War. He was in the Royal Navy and saw the world. I too wanted to see the continents. I thought I should try and join

the Navy and I told my father my plans. He was aghast and tried to persuade me not to go. I was adamant so off I went to the Recruitment Centre in Derby Square and tried to sign on with the Navy. My father tagged along. I finally went to see the Navy Surgeon; he gave me a hearing test with an amplified radio and a headphone. The Surgeon tested me and said, "No go" then he asked my father if he knew how deaf I was? He handed over the headphones to my father, and he eagerly put it on. As the Surgeon switched on and off, my father jumped and was shocked, he couldn't believe how deaf I was. Looking at them I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about.

After all, schools discouraged me to learn sign language and encouraged me to use my voice and I didn't socialise with deaf children. I blended in with the hearing world and imitated hearing people to be one of them. All failed. Maybe they knew something that I didn't; like they never told me that I was deaf.

Despairing, with nothing to gain for the future, they suggested that I should go to a hearing college. This was just like my old schools, unbearable. One day, on the off-chance, I saw a circular letter about a College for deaf people in Doncaster. Intrigued, I read the letter. I decided that I wanted to go there.

On the first day at Doncaster College for the Deaf, my parents and uncle and aunty dropped me off. My mother said to me 'You be good' and I nodded. As they were leaving I was really excited and my heart pounded fast. I thought, "Was I nervous or has the adrenaline kicked in?"

Having supper on the first night, I could see so many new and old students signing away to each other. Looking at them had brought back memories of signing when I was in Alice Elliot School, I checked to see if there were teachers with pairs of scissors to cut their fingers off - nothing!

They were free to express using their own language without prejudice, without fear and without discrimination. I started to remember my signing but I was very rusty. I started off by finger-spelling my name and eventually it started to come back after 9 years of signing absence. Once Deaf, always Deaf! My feeling good started to come up. But it could not go on! Something was bound to happen to destroy all this.

On the first day of my first class it was Maths. The teacher was Mr Boyce and the students were making an awful noise, yet he turned his back on us and wrote on the blackboard. What! Most odd. It seemed to me he took no notice of the rowdy students. It could not be true and I expected that he would turn around and hush them. I was prepared to lipread him. He turned around, lifted his hands and signed away! Impossible! Was he deaf? He must be as he signed as a deaf person would sign - fluently and naturally and not like a hearing person stilted and

awkward! Eh! Never in my life had I met a deaf adult. Only deaf children who were being blended into hearing society with them believing they would become hearing. I thought - maybe I was wrong about him being deaf, maybe he lost his hearing only recently, maybe he had an accident and lost his hearing, maybe, maybe. Stop, I told myself! I was in turmoil. All I had to do was to find out. I raised my hand and I asked him. I didn't know how to ask him: with my hands or my mouth. Awkwardly, I asked, "Are you Deaf?" Mr Boyce smiled. From his expression, I knew he found nothing unusual in being asked about his deafness and that I was not the first to ask him. He explained. He became deaf when he was a child and struggled to get a good education. He went to university and gained a degree achieving equal status as his professional peers. He attended Galludet College in Washington DC in America, which was for deaf students only - it was only one of its kind in the world. He eventually became the teacher that he dreamt of being.

What inspired me was that he signed! Never did he feel it was wrong to sign whereas I thought it was dirty to use sign language and must be hidden away from the public. This had certainly made my day that day to meet a deaf adult.

I attended my next class, which was English, and Miss Jones was the teacher. She started to teach by signing and she was deaf too! She went through the same experience as Mr Boyce and she attended Galludet College too. This was becoming too much for me. There couldn't be that many deaf adults and what's more deaf adults doing well academically and professionally. With Miss Jones, my English surely would improve compared with Mr Prince!

I felt I was in a dreamland- nothing like what I had seen all my life then suddenly I had a Maths teacher who signed and an English teacher who also signed! What more could I ask! Yet looking back, I feel sad now because I was then

17 with little or no qualifications and now I had the most perfect educational opportunity before me - I only wished I had that when I was young.

Later on in the evening in the Community Room, I was eager to meet up with new student friends and I proudly signed away. There were some staff watching who were responsible for us, one of them was deaf, yet another deaf adult! I explored further to see whether there were actually more deaf adults out there. I asked her and she replied that there were lots of them and Doncaster had a Deaf Club. Eh! Not even for Hard of Hearing learning to lipread? So there were actually deaf adults out there. I continued to explore and entered into the wide deaf world. And I discovered there were actually deaf people of all ages signing and they met daily, weekly and monthly to share news of the hearing world, debate deaf politics and gossip about people. They were so relaxed and enjoyed themselves - why? Well, they were among deaf people

themselves.

During my childhood and early teens they threatened to cut off my fingers. They tried to tune my voice to satisfy their hearing. They tried to mould me into a person acceptable to members of the hearing society. Only in return, it had depressed me, made me frustrated, almost illiterate with nothing to look forward to. A blank future.

Stepping into the deaf world and culture had opened my eyes. I felt my heavy burden being lifted and I started to have plans for my future. They have given me my Deaf identity.

They had given me confidence. They told me that I was Deaf.

System Specifications

Operating system:

Windows 98

Windows ME

Windows 2000

Windows XP

Windows Vista

Screen Resolution: 1024 x 768 pixels

Troubleshooting

When the CD is loaded, it should autorun.

But if it does not autorun, then do the following:

Click

Start

Click

My Computer

Double Click



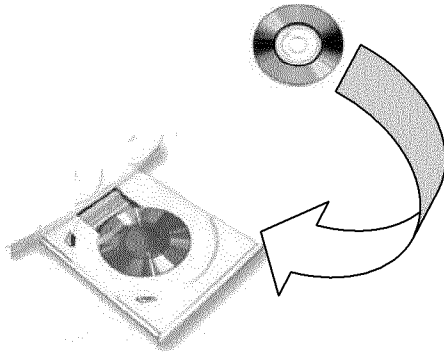
CD Drive

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Load the CD into the CD/DVD drive to get BSL translation.

The Brian and Simon Series
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