

Article by Rachel Townsend

Growing up with Cued Speech

I was born profoundly deaf into a hearing family. As a toddler I found it hard to learn English but I left school at the age of 18, having gained good A level grades and attended the University of Reading where I studied Mathematics and Physics. I left University with a 2:1 degree and work in the engineering industry, currently as a Product Engineer in Infra Red detectors.

The breakthrough in understanding English came when I started at a school for the deaf and teachers and family began to use Cued Speech with me. At the time Cued Speech was little known but it was believed that learning English – which was easy through Cued Speech - would provide me with opportunities in later life. It has! I was soon able to communicate with my family; it has helped me learn the English language and how to pronounce new words. I went on to have a reading age on a par with my hearing peers.

Cued Speech is a simple system which uses eight handshapes in four positions near the mouth to totally clarify lip-reading. Hearing people cue as they speak in order to make their speech easily understood by deaf babies and children.

When I reached 9 years old I had sufficient understanding of English to move to a Partially Hearing Impaired Unit in a mainstream school which gave me access to the hearing world. Speech therapy was provided and Notetakers were used to enable me to follow some classes. I progressed well through GCSE's and went onto 6th Form where I did my A Levels.

I do not need to use Cued Speech much these days. An excellent by-product of learning Cued Speech is good lip-reading skills. My father still uses Cued Speech when trying to explain any new words or concepts.

Compared to my friends who learned BSL instead of Cued Speech, my voice and speech are very clear, as much emphasis is placed on talking while using Cued Speech. My speech is clear enough for me to even communicate with foreign travellers while overseas. If I had been a BSL user, I would have found it very difficult to communicate with them. Similarly when it comes to learning technical subjects – it would have been impossible for someone to explain the concepts involved in many engineering subjects via BSL.

As an experienced adult cuer, I feel very strongly about the benefits of Cued Speech and how it has helped me immensely in my day to day living. My hope is that Cued Speech can be recognised and offered to deaf children and adults alongside BSL.

Cued Speech can be learnt in about 20 hours, and tuition is arranged by the Cued Speech Association UK, a national charity. For information and training contact www.cuedspeech.co.uk or 01803 832784.