

As a child, my natural curiosity and desire to learn, to gain knowledge and explore the hidden mysteries of the world, was what compelled me to learn to read. It still makes me smile to think of how often I lay reading under the bedcovers when I was supposed to be asleep, entranced by what lay hidden between the pages of my treasured collection of books.

I was diagnosed with profound bilateral congenital sensorineural hearing loss when I was three. The attitudes and policies of the 1970s era I grew up in were riddled with discrimination, and I received no support during my years of isolation in mainstream educational settings. I was forbidden to learn BSL or interact with other deaf children. My family was poverty-stricken after the loss of my father, and he was then replaced with a violent alcoholic stepfather. I struggled to cope then and even more so after I left home at 16. Despite all of this I never completely lost sight of my desire to gain the qualifications and skills to enable me to live and work within the Deaf community.

Many years passed, and when my youngest child began nursery schooling, I started to reflect on my life, and I realized that all I had ever wanted was to learn sign language and interact with other Deaf people. In taking my first steps in this new world, I discovered what had been missing from my life, and I now have a very strong desire to be able to communicate with other Deaf people in our own language. I want to learn BSL very badly – and I know that to learn it well will require spending a significant amount of time studying – so I have enrolled at the Deaf Studies program at UCLan, which has been highly recommended by many Deaf people. I feel very lucky that I have the opportunity to explore my identity, and learn the language and culture of Deaf people.

I have taken part in two BBC television programs, including a Deaf Education Special, and a BBC Radio 4 program called “Learning to be Deaf”, in which the producer and I visited my old PHU, where I talked about my experiences there and in mainstream education. I found it hard to talk about such personal experiences, but I also felt it was important to do, because it may help others understand some of the many challenges Deaf people face in their lives. It is my hope that by studying at UCLan, I can make further contributions in bridging the gap of understanding that exists between Deaf people and those who can hear.

Receiving a scholarship award would be an extraordinary honour for me. It would enable me to achieve all of my dreams without the additional burden of debt when I am finished my course. It will make an enormous difference to my life, and I hope to the lives of others, when I have completed my studies.