

*'From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were; I have not seen
As others see; I could not bring
My passions from a common spring.
From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow; I could not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone;
And all I loved, I loved alone.*

*'Then - in my childhood, in the dawn
Of a most stormy life - was drawn
From every depth of good and ill
The mystery that binds me still...
And the cloud that took the form
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)
Of a demon in my view.'*

Edgar Allan Poe

I am dysphasic. This means I have speech and language impairment.

For some reason I don't remember being very aware of it until I was about 15 years old - although my mother tells me I used to get very frustrated.

I attended Dawn House School for seven years - until I was 16. Dawn House is a residential speech and language school in Nottinghamshire. I had a lot of friends there. Of course, they were all dysphasic as well.

I then went to the FE College in Dunstable - which is near my home. At first I was in a special needs group and was top of the class. This made a change and was rather nice!! But I soon got bored so they gradually moved me into mainstream classes.

I didn't find college easy. I had great difficulty in understanding what was said by my tutors in the classes - and they were far too busy to help me out very often.

I couldn't write fast enough to keep up with the notes, so that meant that if I missed any of the notes in the class I had to ask my friends. I didn't like doing this because they needed their notes themselves. But we plodded on!!

I am afraid to say that when I finally went for the BTEC National IT Applications course I failed the first year. But I did it again. And now - after seven years at college - I have passed the whole thing. At least I have passed all the bits I was able to take!

Now I am hoping to go to Portland College - which is a residential college for the disabled. I will be doing a "training for work" course. Hopefully that will lead to an interesting job. I don't like being bored.

When I left school I had to make new friends - among non-dysphasic people.

I love meeting people, and being with them, but I found it hard.

The trouble is that very few people understand this disorder - so they don't find it easy to accept us

Some dysphasic's speak slowly - which makes non-dysphasic's impatient. So they interrupt us. It is very frustrating not to be able to finish what you are saying.

However, I did have lots of friends at college. And I still have lots of friends in the clubs I attend; - but they hardly ever phone up to ask if I want to go out with them. But it's coming on.

One thing has been very important to me and that is the AFASIC Activity Weeks. When I come off one I am already looking forward to the next one.

I've been going on them for eighteen years and next week I am going to be a Link for the younger ones.

These Weeks have helped my confidence a lot - and they have helped me to keep up with the friends I made at school - and to make new ones.

I've been very lucky. I managed to get a place at a school that is specially for this disability.

I was also lucky with Dunstable College. The Special Needs Coordinator helped me a lot. The staff did too. They worked it so that I only had to take the bits of the diploma syllabus that I could manage.

I've also been lucky at home, because I have been able to do lots of things. I water ski. I ride. And I work with horses. I used to be in a swimming club. I'm still in a diving club - even though I don't dive!!!

All this has stopped me being too lonely.

So I am very grateful to everybody who has helped me.

My mother says AFASIC has been a great help. She says they have given her a lot of advice and support and she doesn't know how we would have managed without them.

Certainly from what I have seen they are doing a lot of good work. I know some of you have helped them to do this by giving them your support. So I want to thank you as well.