

*Firstly, I would like to apologize to anyone who has heard me talk before; I hope it doesn't get too boring for you.*

*I am dysphasic – that means I have a speech and language impairment. In my case, the most obvious symptom is that I talk slowly because I often have to search for the words - and some people don't listen – or perhaps can't be bothered to listen – to what I am attempting to say.*

*But now it's Christmas, the season of goodwill. So I trust you to lend me your ears and be patient!!*

*I also, so I'm told, am not good at grammar and sometimes – again I'm told – say things that are not appropriate. The trouble is that, with both of those things, I don't know when I'm going wrong.*

*So you have been warned!!!*

I'm sure that I speak for most dysphasics when I say that this disability is more than a bit frustrating.

It can be a big embarrassment talking to people – especially on the telephone.

I often can't find the words which I would like, so I end up stuttering across the sentence – or taking ages to finish it.

Then people try to finish it for me. Unfortunately – I am afraid to say – this annoys me – especially as they usually get it wrong!

For some reason, I don't actually remember much about my childhood, but I'm told that I couldn't speak - or understand at all - for quite some time.

Things have obviously improved – but, as you can hear, they are not perfect!!

My mother says that when I was around 9-13 years old I often used to bang my head with my hand and say, "Wake up mind!"

Or I would get very cross and shout, "I hate my voice!"

So, I suppose I must have been very frustrated, even then.

She also tells me that she used to get very upset because for a number of years she didn't know what was wrong with me. Neither did my grandmother, even though she was a *speech therapist*.

Apparently, other people, including the Health Care and Education people, suggested I was autistic or badly retarded, but my parents were quite sure I wasn't.

My mother says that finding AFASIC was what saved her sanity because she then knew there were others like me – and that there was an organization fighting for us and offering real support

Socializing is extremely difficult because of the dysphasia. I'm aware that it even stops the people I work with, or meet with in the clubs I belong to, who have known me for a long time, from socializing with me.

This is depressing – because we seem to be great friends when we are together.

A few years ago my Mother asked me where I would like to have friends. "Would it be among the dysphasics, the deaf, or the mainstream?"

I replied, "I don't think the mainstream world will accept me." – And I'm afraid I still believe that's true.

Getting work has also been very difficult for me – and probably is for most of us dysphasics. Perhaps the companies (or the interviewers) think the understanding problem will be too great. Or perhaps they just think we are mentally retarded!

Or maybe they are frightened off from accepting us just because they don't understand the disability.

They seem to stick to their opinion that at best we are a bit stupid – and at worst – well – I dread to think!!!

So, again, it seems to me that almost everyone in the mainstream world has got a lot to learn about dysphasia to fully accept us.

This is another place where AFASIC has been so important. I think that it must be a great help to all dyslexics when well-known people like the actress Susan Hampshire, for example, spoke out about their dyslexia.

But the fact is that our disability is speech and language and this obviously prevents us from speaking out for ourselves. Therefore we need the help of AFASIC to do that for us – and we need it badly.

After school, I spent nearly 10 years at different colleges. But despite gaining several qualifications (and a couple of awards) it didn't help me to get a job in I.T. which is what I want to do.

I enjoyed college a lot – but I have to say I didn't find it 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.

Not being able to get into I.T., I'm now a lifeguard at my local leisure centre.

Even though it sometimes can be boring just sitting on the side watching swimmers go up and down, I think I'm doing okay. At least there haven't been any complaints – that I know of.

But it only pays the minimum wage – and I would certainly rather be earning a lot more than that!!!

But in many ways I've been very lucky. I was able to get into a Speech and Language school in Nottinghamshire called Dawn House.

Also I have a very supportive older brother and sister.

And I was able to go on the AFASIC Activity weeks – for 20 years!! Not only were they very enjoyable, they also helped my confidence enormously.

My mother always said that one week with them brought me on further than a whole year at school.

Sadly AFASIC had to stop them for the older age group. I think it was because they ran out of funding.

But it's not all lost; we've managed to take over. I've organised some weekend breaks; and one of the parents - plus one of the helpers - has arranged a week away each summer.

Another thing I've been lucky in is that I've been able to do a lot of riding, water-skiing, swimming and karate. I also belong to St John Ambulance and am a qualified First Aider.

Before I end, I would like to give two very big "thank you's". One to AFASIC, for all their hard work for trying to change situation. And all the support they are giving – particularly to the young dysphasics around the country.

And secondly, I would like to thank the supporters of AFASIC – for their much needed support – and I really hope it will continue because there is still so much to do.

I know a lot has been achieved already, but I'm afraid it's only the tip of the iceberg!

Thank you for listening – and I hope you have a very happy Christmas.