



## **My name is Iain and I live in the Northeast of Scotland.**

I was born in Stornoway at Lewis Hospital in 1963, and in 1966, when I was three and a half years old, I contracted Cerebral Palsy (CP) following a severe bout of Asian Influenza during the pandemic of that virus in the mid-1960s.

During that time, Asian Influenza swept across Britain with lightning speed. Certain areas of the country were more severely affected than others.

It is not uncommon for a young child to be diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy as a direct result of severe brain trauma, and an extended high fever can cause such trauma.

Up until then I was able to walk and run, and I spoke unimpaired. I was like every other able-bodied child of that age.

No doubt I was a well-behaved saint!

I attended a 'special school' as it was called for my education. In those days, disabled children, irrespective of their mental ability, went to what was blatantly referred to as a 'special school.'

Looking back on the education expectations for 'special' children in the 1970s, I don't think the academic bar was set very high, and as a result, the scholastic expectations of the pupils was quite limited.

This is the sad part, in my opinion, for anyone with special needs who grew up in that era, or who faces a similar situation today. Academic prowess wasn't seen as very important, but it is! Every child of every ability should be motivated and challenged to learn whatever they can, to explore their interests, and to achieve without limitations so they can excel to the fullest extent of their ability.

Because of my limited early education, I can state unequivocally that my academic achievements are due to my determination and wanting something more than a simple education.

I am not critical of the teachers who did their best for their students, as we represented a wide range of cognitive abilities. They worked in an old-fashioned environment that limited what they could do as teachers.

All children should be encouraged to achieve their potential. Every child should be encouraged to achieve academically whether they are a child with disabilities or an able-bodied child.

Parents of children who suffer from Cerebral Palsy, or young adults who have the condition, must insist on the best, or at least equal, educational opportunities for their child as other children receive. Parents, be your child's strongest and best advocate! No one will ever love your child more than you do. Be tireless in your pursuit, just as my wonderful parents were.

Everyone has the right to achieve and be whatever they want to be. I am not saying everything will be easy, because I know from lived experience that it won't be.

I am not writing this because it sounds nice or heroic or politically correct, but because I was a child with Cerebral Palsy.

I realised at a relatively young age that a good education and academic qualifications were key to my future.

In the 1970s, when I was being educated, old-fashioned views of disabled children and the standard of educational achievement they should be "allowed" to attain was not given much

thought or importance. Education was entrenched by the so-called professionals who thought they knew best because they read it in one of their outdated books.

When I passed my driving test, I began the process of re-educating myself. I joined an Adult Basic Education (ABE) class to gain the basics which I lacked. Do not be scared to start learning the basics as a good grasp of the fundamentals is essential, particularly in mathematics. While attending ABE classes I attended, as a mature student, a fifth-year class at one of the High Schools to study English. After leaving ABE a couple years later, I enrolled for a number of courses at the Further Education College. The courses ranged from biology to mathematics, and were held during the day and on certain weeknights. I wanted to get as varied an education as possible because the educational opportunities afforded to me in my younger years had been very limited. I had an insatiable hunger to learn more about anything and everything. I took a First Aid course three times over nine years. The first course was to become certified. Then, I had to renew my certificate every three years. It was a sight to behold watching me fall out of my wheelchair to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on a dummy, but in nine years, the only casualty I ever treated was myself! I was certainly gaining a lot of educational variety in the courses I studied. To be honest, I'm not sure if I've ever used some of my knowledge. For example, I learned calculus and have never found I needed that knowledge.

In 1991 I joined the Open University (OU), and thirty years later I am still an OU addict. Every student had to study at least one foundation course as part of their degree, so I studied the science foundation course titled Voyage of Discovery (S102). The science foundation course covers four of the sciences: biology, physics, chemistry and Earth science.

I enjoyed studying the sciences, but decided to study biology in greater depth, particularly human biology and specifically neuroscience: the study of the human brain.

The OU now has a Visual Online Platform where students meet, chat, attend tutorials and deal with any other OU business. This means I can do everything from the comfort of my home without bothering about transport and access. Online education opens the door for all students, no matter their ability, and removes all barriers to getting an education.

I still have the total determination and passion to fulfil my academic potential and dream. I just applied to study for my PhD with the OU.

My message to anyone would be to follow your dreams and achieve what you want.

I did it, and you can too!

The path won't be easy, and you won't get opportunities handed to you on a plate (I never did anyway!), and you might have to create your own opportunities, but if you are determined enough, as I was, you will succeed. This is true for everyone, isn't it, able-bodied or not. We make our own luck, as the old saying goes.

For this reason, I have great respect for The Open University: they provide disabled people the opportunity to achieve their true potential in their own accessible environment so that they can compete with the best of the best in just about any field.

Thursday, 15th June, 2017, will be forever embedded in my brain as the day my life changed. I never could have imagined to what extent. The day started as every other day, but it would prove to be anything but an ordinary day. I would end the day lying in Intensive Care in an Aberdeen hospital with a ventilating tube down my throat.

Getting up that morning did go wrong, and now I must live my life as a severely disabled person. I have lost my cherished independence and am unable to do anything for myself physically. I must rely on carers to look after me. I cannot drive anymore, and that is the hardest pill I've had to swallow, as I loved driving and foolishly thought I would always be able to drive. It is natural to think

if only... but life is full of 'if only' moments, and nothing will ever change the fact that I cannot do as much for myself now as I could before. This is the here and now, and whether I like it or not, that's how things are. I must play the hand I'm dealt. That is exactly what I have decided to do and not sit around wallowing in self-pity. It is much better to carry on being ambitious and achieving things.

My brainpower has not been affected in any way. I am still as sharp thinking as I ever was, probably even sharper.

Boy, that's scary!

I did not suddenly become academic overnight. It took years of dedication and commitment, and I am not going to sit back and do nothing just because I need help with the mundane tasks of daily living. Who doesn't want a little help with those anyway?! My dream of earning a doctorate degree is going to happen. That's a no-brainer as far as I am concerned. My accident has robbed me of many things, but ambition and pushing the boundaries are not amongst them. I have not lost any of my sheer determination to accomplish what I set my mind to. Sit back and watch others achieve things while I do nothing? Not a chance! I am here to make my mark in the world as long as I have breath in my body. Becoming a published author is yet another notch, and I also hope to motivate and inspire my readers to set the bar high for themselves too, no matter their ability or disability.

My published books are: *'10 seconds That Changed My Life & Wheels Galore! Adaptive Cars, Wheelchairs, and a Vibrant Daily Life with Cerebral Palsy by Iain M MacLeod.'* Both books are available as an eBook, Paperback, Hardcover and Audiobook from Amazon and other book retailers.

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Iain.

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