

Female mature student BA Hons Spanish and French University of Paisley

(HE Voice1)

Studying languages at the University of Paisley has for me been the fulfilment of a long cherished ambition. At school where I studied French, Latin and Greek. I was an academic student, a high achiever and I assumed that I would go on to study languages at university. However, my mother announced at the end of my fifth year that as I wanted to be a teacher she was not prepared to fund my studies at university. Teacher training college was a less expensive option and was also a shorter course. This was a real blow but in those days one did as one was told. Student rebellion had not yet arrived, let alone any sign of women's liberation. I enjoyed teaching but early on in my career I moved from primary education to teaching English as a second language. I obtained a CELTA qualification and eventually became head of a bilingual support service that provided courses for a wide range of students. I found myself in the somewhat ironic situation of preparing and presenting students with masters' degrees for the University of Cambridge Proficiency in English examinations.

I continued to study languages in my spare time. I attended classes organised by the Alliance Francaise I also undertook certificate courses in German, Italian and Spanish. In addition I studied Dutch, Danish and Modern Greek with home study courses.

I enjoyed travelling in Europe and quickly discovered that the ability to read and speak the language of the country I was visiting enhanced the experience enormously. It's amazing what you can find out from notices in shop windows or town halls! Who could ever forget 'Tilting the Ring' in a little Dutch village with not another tourist for miles around, nor travelling through the Greek mountains in local buses with the odd landslide thrown in for good measure. My son married a girl of Italian descent and we visit her family in the mountains of Italy. They speak no English so all conversation has to be in Italian. Without a knowledge of Italian and I would have been unable to share their life experiences. The lesson on their rare breed cows' genealogy was quite taxing for my Italian! These were just a few of many unforgettable experiences, none of which I could have done without a reasonable working knowledge of the language of the country I was visiting. This only served to fuel my conviction that proficiency in languages other than one's own was eminently desirable.

When I developed multiple sclerosis I had to stop teaching and decided that this was my chance to further my linguistic skills. Owing to my disability I was unable to be a full time student. I enrolled in a course for Business Spanish at the James Watt College and the following year I took my Higher Spanish. The next year I approached the University of Paisley to find out if they would accept me as a part time student and also to enquire if I could be credited with previous learning. I am delighted to say that the answer to both questions was yes. As a disabled student I must commend the university for their support and sympathetic approach to students with special needs. For this they should be commended. One of my problems was that a year's placement abroad would be difficult for me but I was able to come to an arrangement with my lecturers whereby I would attend a course in Spain in the winter break between semesters. Summer courses would not be suitable for students with MS as the condition usually causes heat intolerance.

I have found the French and Spanish courses to be well researched, challenging and thought provoking. This last element has been what I have found most stimulating. The subject content is interesting and varied. Students are challenged not only linguistically but also intellectually. These could never be described as dull courses.

I am very aware of the improvement in my language skills and my tutor remarked upon this when I returned for my course in Spain in this year. What surprised me most however was the development of other skills as a consequence of my studies in French and Spanish. My ability to undertake a critical analysis of a passage has improved enormously. I was also amazed to find myself become more and more interested in philosophy and I can only attribute this to the content of the study programmes delivered by my lecturers. Surely this is what university is all about, not just to be more proficient linguistically but also to become more intellectually mature.

To sum up I am very glad that I chose to do a degree in modern languages and that I enrolled in the University of Paisley. Many thanks to the University of Paisley and to the lecturers in the modern languages department for helping me on the road to achieving my most cherished ambition.