

Ashleigh- Podcast Transcript.

Gough: Hello and welcome to the Beer Nuts Productions podcast. My name is Gough and we have a very special guest on the show today. She is a young lady who is a teacher, she's been in a Beer Nuts Productions film and I've known her for a very, very long time. It's Ashleigh Forsythe. Now, Ashleigh is Deaf, so she has a male interpreter with her today called Mikey. Say G'day Mikey.

Mikey: G'day, hello.

Gough: And uh so basically how it's going to work for you guys at home is obviously I will be asking the questions, uh Mikey will sign them, Ashleigh will sign her answers back and then Mikey will tell us what she says. So, there may be short periods of 15 seconds of silence or whatever while Ashleigh is doing her answer. So don't think your speakers have exploded, they haven't, uh (chuckle), Ashleigh is just answering the questions. So, all good. So welcome Ashleigh!

Ashleigh: Thank you very much for having me! It's pretty cool.

Gough: Absolutely, absolutely. So firstly, I want to learn a little bit more about uh sign language, because I think a lot of people don't know much about it. Now, one thing that I know is that Auslan which is the Australian version of sign language, is different to English. Can you maybe give a little bit of an example and tell us how there is a difference?

Ashleigh: So, let me just explain a little bit more uh about grammar and English and stuff like that. So Auslan is very, very different. We use English words, but our structure is almost aligned to a French way of speaking. So, people assume that Auslan is basically just English um being produced, ah it's all about gestures and signs and stuff. So, there is actually a grammatical way to use Auslan. There is a way to sign appropriately. So, an example I can give you; in English you would say 'I saw a beautiful red car'. In Auslan we see, car-BEAUTIFUL (emphasized word). So, we're talking about the car first, we put the car, we set it up in our space and then we comment about what it is. So, in English it's a very lineal way of speaking and the way we express ourselves. In Auslan, because it's a very dimensional language, we can unpack so much more. And that's why the Deaf people can be seen quite blunt, because we are very straight to the point! We see what we see.

Gough: That's not a bad thing.

Ashleigh: No, it is not. I love hearing that!

Gough: (chuckle) So another thing as well is that every country has their own sign language, so even if you go to a country like America for example, you can't communicate with another Deaf person because even though you're both English speaking people you both, you've got a different sign language. Is that a frustration at all when you go on holidays?

Ashleigh: That's exactly right. But I wouldn't say it's a frustration. You always find a way, we find a way to communicate. That Deaf identity there, that Deaf Hood is still there. We can still manage to work out our common language together. The funny thing is, I think Deaf people travel better overseas than what hearing people do, to be honest. As an example, my Dad and I went on holidays, we went to Thailand. Dad was trying to communicate all sorts of things to these Taiwanese people and they had no idea! I come in, did my thing and bada-bing, bada-boom! A lot smoother! So Deaf people, we're great. We can gesture, we can mime, we find different ways to communicate. Whether they're hearing or Deaf.

Gough: So, going back to the first point of it being different to English, that means when you were young you had to learn two languages essentially. Can you take us through how difficult that might have been for you?

Ashleigh: I wouldn't say it was difficult as such. You learn to love a language, you understand a language, you unpack a language. So, with English, English was, look, it's a hard language to learn because it's so lineal, it's interesting when you compare it to Auslan. So, I use my Auslan to polish my English, so my English actually got better because my Auslan was so sophisticated.

Gough: Cool, very cool, very cool. So, what are some common misconceptions about the Deaf community? I know I've talked to you about this before and one thing you said to me is people can think you're stupid because you're Deaf. Where the brain works fine it's the ears that are the problem. So, you are...

Ashleigh: You are spot on! You're exactly right! Because people think we are a part of the disabled group, they think we've got a disability meaning we can't do stuff. I'm like, no, no, no, physically I'm fine, I can walk, I can swim, I can drive a car, I can do anything you can do, I just can't hear. It's the ONLY (emphasized word) difference. So, we access our information through signing or through an interpreter. And as we have an interpreter you can see I am quite an intelligent human being. So, look we have barriers if there is no interpreters and that's where the 'disability' comes into play. If I'm meeting people and I say that I am deaf you can see they fumble and over accentuate their mouth and do all sorts of things and I'm like 'don't talk to me like I'm 2 years old'. My mouth, everything still works, my brain still works, you don't need to either over enunciate or shout at me! Just because my ears don't work.

Gough: Actually that's a very good point you make, because I remember back when I first met you and had my first interactions with Deaf people, uh, I would remember the one thing you guys would always tell me 'don't over talk, I can't understand you, I can't lip read you when you're talking big!'

Ashleigh: You are exactly right! I do remember that. Gah, we get fed up with it. People over accentuate, it's like talk normally and we can actually understand what you are saying, when you over accentuate it's like 'who? wha?' Because we are so used to doing that, we have to sort of assimilate in the general community we get used to lip reading, we find lip reading cues but when someone goes outside the norm it's like now what are you talking about are you speaking a different language? Are you still actually with us in English here? Uh, it's not the way we talk so it doesn't make sense to us. So we are used to having to try to lip read and say the common things like thank you, please and ok, everyone gets across that message ok.

Gough: I want to chat a little bit about bullying. Because obviously having a disability, it can put a bit of a target your head for bully's. Can you talk about some of the not nice things that have taken place and how that made you feel?

Ashleigh: Yeah bullying does happen. A lot of deaf people I think you will find have been bullied. We don't always live that perfect lifestyle unfortunately. Growing up I think I was ok. I had an older brother that was always with me, I had a great circle of friends that always understood my deafness and they would stand up for me. But then I also had to be more independent as well and say hang on I can also stand up for myself. So, that bullying teaches us life lessons I guess, become more resilient and to actually stand up and say hang on there's nothing wrong with the way we are. The process to actually get to that enlightenment is painful though. You have to ask, what do I do here? What happens if this happens next time? And stuff like that, it's not nice.

Gough: And so, one thing else I would like to chat about is you told me about your university experience and how they wouldn't let you graduate. Can you explain to everybody why they wouldn't you graduate university?

Ashleigh: I couldn't because they thought my disability, my deafness was an issue. I studied for 4 years, no issues, I could do everything, I did my prac, I worked with the hearing kids, everything was running swimmingly, 3 weeks to go before we graduate the university comes to a conclusion and say 'no, it's a risk, it's a liability, you won't be able to hear a fire alarm, you can't do this and you can't do that' I'm like going are you serious? This is out and out discrimination! Why would you let me study for 4 years to tell me I couldn't do it? They assumed, I think, that I was going to bail out because it was just too hard having a disability. Clearly it wasn't. And so the ultimate decision was, I was discriminated against and they said we will see you in court. I'm like this is unbelievable, so they couldn't even accommodate me they were trying to intimidate me. It wasn't nice, the perception of the university thinking that I had a disability and that I was going to be a liability in the work-place there. I mean I've looked after myself, all they see is the barrier I've got rather than the abilities I've got. Very frustrating.

Gough: So two things there, firstly; I should have said you were studying to be a teacher for deaf children and secondly; one of the things they said that you mentioned in your answer was you can't see the fire alarm. There are ways to get around that like a flashing light for example.

Ashleigh: Spot on. Exactly right. And you know what? I can see if there's smoke, I can see if there's fire in a room. I'm not going to stand there and keep teaching kids with flames going on around me, I'm not going to keep teaching because I can't hear an alarm. It's just utter nonsense! You know what? I can smell too; you wouldn't believe it. And if I saw someone running, I'd be interested to see what was going on.

Gough: And so how did that experience, how did that make you feel?

Ashleigh: I was angry. I was angry, I was very upset, I was depressed. My world had been swept out from underneath me! Growing up, I wanted to be a teacher, I wanted to be a teacher of the deaf, I wanted to have that passion working with deaf kids and I wanted to get their language up, I wanted them to be able to sign and have English. I'm not blaming educators, I'm not blaming teachers, I find teachers, in my experience have found it hard to communicate ideas and concepts to me, but when I had a deaf teacher come and teach me it was just so much easier. It was easier because we had that same language. And that inspired me, I wanted to be a teacher, I wanted to be that teacher. So I've worked as a teacher aide in the schools with deaf kids and I've seen some horrible, horrible teachers out there, horrible educators out there and I just want to say look step aside let me take care of this. But unfortunately, I'm not qualified! I wanted to do that. Its just that common language, that common shared lived experience and that's why I wanted to do that. I wanted to be a great role model for these kids and model life and language for them so that they can become successful adults.

Gough: You actually raise a really good point that I'd never thought of before and that is; if a deaf child has teacher that is also deaf, not only are they going to get a good education but the lesson will probably be communicated to them better. Would that be a fair statement?

Ashleigh: Yes, spot on, you've nailed it. Because hearing teachers, not to their own fault, but they just don't understand what its like being a deaf child. They don't understand that we have Deaf Hood, they don't understand its different cultures its a different way of living. Yes we live in the same place but its different. As a deaf person you've lived that experience, you can see what they

are understanding, what their background knowledge is and can adapt and make sure that the lesson is still being taught, you have to guide them on that right path to grasp the concept, so you are guiding them, making sure they are on the right trajectory there. A hearing teacher just goes oh no they don't get it, oh it must be their deafness they just don't get it, it's just that child. As a Deaf parent, or as a Deaf person or as Deaf teacher you can guide the child and you can understand it.

Gough: And I suppose also that goes into the Auslan and English being different. I mean a teacher might know that intellectually, but they might not understand for example as you gave us that example of car-BEAUTIFUL they might go no she gets an F for her English exam.

Ashleigh: And that's very true as well. I can remember this very one time with my teacher, I was in high school and the teacher said to me 'please put your book at the back' and in signed English and I'm looking at the teacher going what do you mean? So, I put my book on my teachers back, because she said back, she actually signed back rather than the right sign concept for back, she pointed at her back. If she had used Auslan she would have pointed to the back of the room rather than pointing to her back. Because I'm going what an idiot teacher, what is going on here. I couldn't understand what they were saying and that is the difference Auslan and Signed English representation.

Gough: Like I said at the start you have also been in a Beer Buts Productions film. What was that experience like for you?

Ashleigh: Oh, I loved it! It was a wonderful experience. A lot of people will hit me up about it saying it was amazing because there isn't many deaf actors out there so it was great exposure and creates more awareness so I was pretty excited to be a part of it all. And you see hearing people doing the Deaf role and I'm like hang on let's get a Deaf person in here playing the Deaf role. It was really exciting, loved it.

Gough: Actually, that's a very good point. I get frustrated too when I watch a movie for example and there's an actor in a wheelchair and I think theres lots of great wheelchair actors out there yet you have an able-bodied actor laying that role, why not get an appropriate wheelchair actor in and I think physically they'd be able to do it better and also their acting ability would be equal. So why use an able-bodied person when there are deaf actors or wheelchair actors or blind actors, people out there who can do it.

Ashleigh: Adding onto that as well; people with their own disabilities and stuff like that, have their own mannerisms, they know, they are living their own experience, so they don't have to act as such. So deaf people, we have a way of how we engage with people, well scan and we'll look, and we'll lip read and things like that. You can see in movies, where the hearing person doesn't have those mannerisms, they're just not doing those little nuances, those little subtle things that make it good. I remember I was watching one where there was fighting outside the window and a woman was washing up and I'm like a Deaf person would have been looking outside that window going what the devil is going on outside rather than being oblivious, I can't hear and that means I can't see anything. It's like that's not what Deaf people do. And that proliferates that deaf people are dumb sort of thing.

Gough: Now Ashleigh did you ever think in a million years you would be sitting in an audio recording studio recording an audio podcast for people to listen to all over the world? Is that something you ever thought you'd be doing?

Ashleigh: No, I would never have thought in a million years I would be doing something like this. So, I am so grateful that you hit me up and asked me to share my knowledge and talk about our world and what it's like being Deaf.

Gough: Absolutely. Now I should also mention uh because people might be wondering what does she do now, besides obviously starring in Beer Nuts Productions Films, what do you actually do now for a living Ashleigh?

Ashleigh: I now am an Auslan teacher. I am training students to become interpreters to work in the Deaf community out there. Some people want to learn a new language which is amazing so I'm happy to teach them that, um some people just want to do stuff and we teach baby sign now, it's all a out communication and I love my job, I love being an educator. I'm teaching adults now though, I'm teaching hearing adults, but the passion is definitely Deaf kids. So hopefully one day I can do both.

Gough: Hopefully yes, absolutely. And Mikey just a quick question for you; why did you want to become an Interpreter? What inspired you to do this for a living?

Mikey: Oh, I wasn't inspired as such, my parents are Deaf, and it was something I was also going to do (chuckle).

Gough: So, with Deaf parents, that's a really good question, with Deaf parents when were you taught signing?

Mikey: I'm sure Ash could answer that.

Ashleigh: I know Mike's parents are Deaf so they would have taught him to sign from day dot. So, it is the natural way to do it all. If Deaf parents have a hearing child of course they are going to sign to their hearing child and that's why Mikey is very proficient in both languages because he has had both languages from birth. His first language is Auslan, it's the receptive language that he's getting from his parents and he learns English just from being in the community and going to school and things like that. A lot of people would think that Mikey is Deaf because he has those nuances and they have to ask him they don't understand sometimes that he is hearing because he has those nuances because he grew up in that Deaf family.

Gough: Very interesting. I wasn't aware of that Mikey so that's very interesting because yeah, actually that's another good question I just thought of; when do you actually teach signing to a child. If your child was hearing impaired when would those lessons begin, at what age?

Ashleigh: From birth, from day dot, from day one. They re going to sign straight away. If they have Deaf parents, or if you have deaf child you want to sign to them from day one because it's all about language acquisition. If a Deaf person wants to communicate with their child of course they will want to sign. Later on, obviously a kid will go to school and they can learn those extra languages and stuff like that. Uh so a hearing aby to deaf parents will get that incidental learning, but a deaf baby will need to be explicitly taught to sign so they should be taught from day dot!

Gough: So, if they don't it's going to hinder their education going forward, because the longer they leave it to teach them the harder it will be, like anything in life.

Ashleigh: You're exactly right! My parents were hearing, and they didn't know, they didn't know what Auslan was. And that's not their fault, that's ok, that's just what it was at the time. The doctor misinformed my parents, the doctor said that signing bad and you have to learn to talk, you have to be oral. So, they tried to teach me to speak and lip read. I managed, I did manage, but I felt like a

parrot. I didn't feel like I was who I was, I felt like I wasn't expressing myself. I mean I could speak words, but I didn't know what they meant. They are saying 'great girl, you can this word and that word' and I'm going but I don't even know what it means, it doesn't make sense to me this English concept. So, it was hard at times and that's why I think the more sophisticated my Auslan became I could match that to my English, and it made sense. God, I'm parroting all these English words as a kid but now as adult when I'm learning more and now, I'm going oh that's what that meant. So yeah.

Gough: Well it's been really interesting to chat with you today Ashleigh. We're out of time and Mikey thank you so much for coming in and helping out today I do appreciate it.

Ashleigh: Thank you so much for having me and thank you Mikey for coming in as well

Gough: Absolutely, absolutely. Well that brings us to the end of today's episode of the Beer Nuts podcast and like I said earlier if you want to see Ashleigh in action you can check out How to Land That Dream Job on the Beer Nuts Productions website beernutsproductions.com is the place to go for all your entertainment needs and of course like and subscribe to this podcast. Make sure you leave a friendly comment in the comment section, that's always helpful. And until next time, we'll see you then!