

Chasing the Bean



**The Inspirational Life Story of
Pervez Hussain
Co-written by Sandy Sounds**

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Acknowledgements

For writing, editing and proofing this book, Sandy Sounds and Paul Smith from the Alliance of Mobile & Party DJs (AMPdj)
For final proofing Paul W J Smith

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-78280-406-2

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Pervez Hussain – Motivational Speaker
www.motivationalblindspeaker.co.uk

This is a true story of inspiration and determination. How do you deal with blindness, kidney failure, discrimination and a Guide Dog that tries to kill you?

These are just some of the stories Pervez relates about his eventful life with a combination of tear jerking moments and hilarious real life events.

Chasing the bean... ‘Having once had the benefit of sight, I can recall watching blind people trying to eat. There was always one baked bean left on the plate that proved elusive. Just like dreams and ambitions, you have to persevere to capture it!’

Despite his disability and illnesses, Pervez has had an eventful career which includes working for West Mercia Police Service, Unison and being a mobile DJ. As a motivational speaker, he also inspires others to chase their dreams.

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Chasing the Bean - Prologue

You often read courageous stories of people overcoming great hardships and disabilities to succeed in life. I've been told mine is one of them. I find this rather strange because for many years I wasn't aware I was any different from anyone else. I don't see myself as disabled; I just have to approach things differently to other people and find things that work for me.

Although I've been labelled as blind; what is blind? Just because my eyes don't see things that others see, I am still very aware of my surroundings. If put to the test, my sense of hearing is much more finely tuned than a sighted person and my memory is second to none. Rather than be called blind, I'd prefer to be regarded as 'exceptionally perceptive without sight!'

Being brought up as a strict Muslim in a second generation Asian family from Pakistan, my own community were less accepting of disability than most. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't persecuted, just pitied which for me was worse; or was it better because it probably gave me the determination to prove them wrong and lead an independent and rewarding life.

My stubbornness not to accept the easy way and become a slave to my eyesight is part of who I am. For as long as I can remember, if someone told me I wouldn't be able to do something or manage a certain task, I would endeavour to prove them wrong. As a child, if you do what you're not supposed to do you are a naughty boy; as an adult it's seen as dogged determination. I am doggedly determined!

With a loving and very protective family, gaining independence was always going to be a battle of wills. I'm lucky to have been born with a very strong will.

I wasn't born blind, but unbeknown to me, I was born with the potential of blindness. From an early age, I didn't have full sight. It didn't bother me at all as I was growing up; partly because I was blissfully unaware! In fact it doesn't even bother me now in later life. I've always felt that it affects other people more than me, especially in the way they have perceived or treated me. In fact my recent kidney failure is of greater concern, but no one can see an internal defect.

In portraying my eventful journey through life, I hope I give others inspiration. In addition, I hope to give an insight into what it is to be disabled and carry that label.

Chapter 1 - A Special School for Special People

It was Autumn. A big black taxi cab rolled up and parked on the street outside our house. The taxi driver gave me a friendly smile, uttered a cheery 'good morning' and opened the cab door for me to climb in. My mother ushered me forward to take a seat. The rest of my family congregated on the pavement accompanied by what seemed like the whole neighbourhood. As if on cue, they all waved a cheery farewell. I felt about two inches high, whereas in reality I was a strapping lad of thirteen.

I hadn't attended school for two years due to accidents and operations. I'd either been writhing in pain on a hospital bed or recovering in my bedroom at home, totally protected from the big wide world. My life for the past couple of years had been my family fussing round me plus many instances of solitude.

Suddenly, here I was trundling through the streets of Birmingham heading for Priestly Smith Special School in Erdington. All I was told was that I wouldn't be going back to my old comprehensive school. Instead, I would be attending a special school. Why? I had no idea.

The black cab took some twists and turns into numerous housing estates to pick up other passengers. A girl jumped in at one stop. She was hearing impaired and had very visual hearing aids that caused me to stare. The twenty five minute journey became even more frightening and confusing as we picked up other children. None seemed like the friends I had enjoyed playing with at my old school. None seemed like me. I couldn't help but feel someone had made an awful mistake.

At this point in time I had regained 90% vision in my right eye but a cataract, which was present since birth, had resulted in complete blindness in my left. To me, that was perfectly normal.

The staff at Priestly Smith School were very friendly and a kindly lady showed me around. The school was considerably smaller than my old comprehensive. It housed eighty to ninety children and was made up of three departments; hearing impaired, visually impaired and physical disabilities. All three shared the same campus and most of the lessons saw us fully integrated.

After that first day, I thought it was going to be hard getting on with the other children and adjusting to life in a very different school to what I was used to. I shouldn't have worried; we all had disabilities and were all in the same boat (and school!).

However, I did find it very different. It's always difficult starting at a new school and being with children I'd never met before. The process of making new friends seems so daunting on that first day and even more so for me as I'd spent such a long period of time isolated at home. Add into the mix that the lessons were designed specifically for children with disabilities and impairments and you can understand why it all felt so strange. I had to adapt to lessons being delivered in a way that was totally alien to me.

At the end of each school day I was picked up by the black taxi cab again for the journey home. This trek to and from school never stopped being a cause of embarrassment, but worse still, I had no independence at this time.

It didn't take me long to settle down, but that was due to the wonderful teachers. I became very fond of Priestly Smith School and have many good memories of both the caring staff and the many good friends I made along the way.

I remember my first art lesson very well. On entering the classroom, my attention was drawn to a boy in a wheelchair with severe physical disability. He had very little movement and his head was leaning to one side, dribbling from the corner of his mouth.

My first emotion was to be scared of him. Then I caught myself feeling pity. I was frightened because I'd never seen anyone as disabled as this little boy before. In our lesson we were encouraged to huddle together around a large painting. Gradually, I overcame my initial feelings. I began to see through what was wrong with this boy. It wasn't long before I could see beyond what he looked like and was making friends with the person inside the distorted body.

This was the first realisation I had that I was at this school because I too was disabled. It was quite a scary moment because it dawned on me that I was going to spend the rest of my five to six years of school at this special place.

Our PE teacher started at the school soon after me. At first, he seemed a bit shy of disability, especially visual impairment, but he soon got used to us and I remember him as a really good teacher. We met his girlfriend once which felt really odd.

One day he took us to the Aston Villa football club to play a five-a-side football tournament. It was a real highlight because I was a big fan. I'd been a huge Villa supporter since I was in the children's hospital at about the age of seven. For once, it wasn't about my eyes; more a useless appendix! In the bed opposite was a boy watching football. After studying him for some time, I went over and started talking to him; probably out of boredom more than curiosity. I watched the game

with him and he said I should be an Aston Villa supporter, especially as their home ground was just around the corner from where I lived. That stuck with me and I'm still a big fan to this day.

It was very exciting because the winners would be presented with the trophy by some of the Villa players. With my skinny legs and lack of football mastery, I must have looked quite a spectacle running round the pitch.

We were all fired up and eager when our first game kicked off (pardon the pun). It was against New River who were an all-black team. They were good! After them running rings round us, we finally lost to them 10-1. In fact, we lost every game. We did, however, have one good player; my mate Charlie. Unfortunately for Charlie, he was in a league of his own and without a team around him who could actually kick the ball, it was inevitable that we would always lose. When Charlie scored our one and only goal of the tournament, none of us could believe it!

Later on we had a school trip to see a proper match. It was Aston Villa vs Notts County and Villa won 3-1. It was when I could still see enough to enjoy the game so I treasure that experience.

Our headmaster looked just like a typical headmaster. He was short and chubby with intelligent thick rimmed glasses. I remember him as always being firm but fair and never aggressive. He was always very kind to me.

At this point, I feel I must come clean and admit I could be a little mischievous at times. I wouldn't call it naughty; more pushing the boundaries. I take full responsibility for my history teacher having to be assessed. I'd perfected the art of engaging him in conversation and getting him off track. Amazingly, it worked every time. The lesson would come to an end and he'd realise that he hadn't covered the work he was supposed to. When I look back, I still get a pang of guilt.

I remember one particular teacher who I always felt was quite hard on me. On one occasion I walked into the classroom and the chairs were all stacked at one end. I stood waiting by the door thinking he would get me a chair. He told me to go and fetch the chair myself. I placed it in the middle of the room and sat down. He looked thoughtfully at me then asked what I had learnt from that little exercise. Nothing, I thought, absolutely nothing. 'You have learnt something,' he replied. 'In life we don't spoon feed you. If you want something, you have to go and get it.' I had, in fact, learnt an important lesson that was to stay with me throughout my life and be something I would refer back to whenever life got tough.

We were all taught to touch type, which sounds like it should have been an absolute blast. It probably would have been except we had a very strict teacher in terms of how we typed. We learnt on the old fashioned touch typewriters and we

weren't allowed to look down at our hands. If we glanced down at any time, 'the dragon' would wrap us on the knuckles with a ruler. We learnt the proper way to type very quickly!

It seems ironic that at school I was hopeless in music lessons, and now I'm surrounded by music in my role as a mobile DJ. My musical ability was so poor that the teachers very rarely let me near the instruments. We were doing a Christmas play one year and I was really excited; I'd been given the important task of playing the sleigh bells on Greg Lake's 'I believe in Father Christmas'. Unfortunately, I never got to show off my musical prowess; constant mistakes during rehearsals resulted in me being relegated to stage hand! My stage debut came the following year when I was given the chance to tread the boards as a bus driver. With a large cardboard cut-out of a bus, I had to trundle onto the stage and exit on the other side. My moment of fame was very short lived.

Mrs T will always stick in my mind. When I was fifteen or sixteen years old, she taught us how to do an interview. We were either the interviewer or the candidate. On that day, we had to come dressed in a smart suit and tie. Somehow, I'd drawn the short straw and had been chosen to interview Mrs T. There were shocked gasps as she walked into the classroom dressed as a rocker in scruffy jeans and leather jacket. To add to the surprise, she was chewing gum rather loudly, if I remember correctly. She showed us that this is not the way to dress for an interview. It was a wakening point for me and I learnt a valuable lesson. If I wanted to get a job, I needed to look smart.

I was inventive and had initiative even when I was younger. My form of fifteen pupils went on a day trip to a large department store. We could choose any clothes we liked to parade them on a catwalk for a fashion show. I chose a pair of trousers and top. We didn't have a lot of time, so it was choose your items, put them on, then do the fashion show. Unfortunately, I'd forgotten to pick up a belt, and resembling a rake at the time, the trousers kept falling down. With my hands behind my back looking suave and stylish, I strutted and twirled on the catwalk. Little did they know I was actually holding my trousers up. I won the catwalk show because of my choice of clothes and the way I'd executed the walk. The prize was a voucher to be spent in the store which I was thrilled about.

Lunchtimes were quite a treat because the food was beautiful. I used to look forward to the fish on a Friday and the puddings were gastronomic delights every day of the week. We had a wonderful cook. It was the best food I've ever had in school. We could never complain that we weren't well looked after for both our education and our well-being.

Before each meal, we had the routine of saying grace, 'For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful. For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.' As a Pakistani boy brought up in a strict Muslim family, it didn't make much sense to me. I dutifully went along with the ritual although it had no meaning to me whatsoever. I look back now and can't help but have a wry smile about it.

I'd been at the school a few months when one of the teachers called me into the office. I was desperately trying to think which misdemeanour had been discovered. I needn't have worried. There, sitting on a chair looking very small and frightened was a lad called Sajad. He was the first to be accepted into the school with complete blindness. At that time, Sajad couldn't speak a word of English and my Punjabi skills were needed to translate for him. I used to guide him around the school. It didn't take him long to pick up English and settle into the school. One day the maths teacher asked him why his maths was so good, and with a strong Pakistani accented he answered, 'Because I like cricket.'

He only lived five minutes from my old school so I used to go to his house and got very friendly with his parents and three brothers. We became very firm friends and I'm still in touch with him to this day.

The second completely blind boy to join the school was Nadeem. He was a slim fella who had mastered the art of using a white cane. Like Sajad, he arrived from Pakistan with very little English so I used to help him with translations and guided him around the school too. I enjoyed the responsibility of helping other people coupled with the sense of purpose and being useful.

It may have been a very different school for special people but the same antics occurred as at any other establishment that housed a group of teenage children. We played and messed around; we got into trouble; we tested the boundaries and found our feet as individuals.

There was one occasion when a big fight was arranged between the hearing and the sighted pupils. For the life of me I can't imagine why. I suspect it was one of those territorial things that seem so important when you're a teenager. Somehow the teachers got wind of it and stopped it before it happened. There were about five of us from our part of the school and one by one we were summoned into the heads office for a grilling. The planned fight wasn't the poignant part of my recollections but the interview and dressing down by the head was quite significant. I just told the complete truth of how it came about and my involvement. My lesson that day was that the truth is a far better course to take. I started to develop my sense of justice.

Another incident soon afterwards helped to consolidate my stance. At the back of the school there was an area with football nets which was concealed and not overlooked by any windows. Charlie and I often played one on one football there.

On one occasion I was walking through the area when I spotted a girl I knew. The boy with her was well known as a Jack the lad and had a reputation as a troublemaker. He had forced himself on her and she was pinned up against the wall. She was screaming, 'Let me go, let me go.'

Like a knight on a trusty steed, I came dashing from behind him and grabbed at his clothing to pull him off. As I pushed him aside, I had my hand on the girl to protect her. If ever there was a wrong moment/wrong time, this was it. A dinner lady came into view and saw the girl upset and me standing close, put two and two together, came up with five and the totally wrong conclusion.

Needless to say I was summoned to the head's office straight away. I was made out to be the perpetrator. I told him what had happened. I'm not sure whether he believed me or not at first. He then spoke to the girl who verified the whole story, praising my gallant actions and rescuing her from the dastardly troublemaker. I was called back into the office and the whole tone and atmosphere had changed. I was now hailed a hero! The headmaster said I'd done a very good thing. My damsel in distress was blowing her knight kisses after that which I found just a little embarrassing, but I was proud I'd righted a wrong.

Towards the end of my time at Priestly Smith School, I remember an occasion when we all assembled in the hall for a special visit. A man dressed in a sharp suit walked in being guided by the headmaster. He was completely blind. You could hear the gasps ripple round the hall when it was announced that he was the managing director of a very large and successful local company. I listened to him attentively and was enthralled with his story and what he'd achieved in his life. He explained the obstacles he'd faced and how he looked for theoretical alternative routes. I was inspired.

It was a dawning moment for me and I vowed to myself that even if people around me underestimated my ability, I could make something of my life. I never thought of myself as having a disability although I realised at a very young age that I was different to my brothers.

Chapter 2 - Where It All Began

I was born in 1968 in Burton on Trent weighing just 5lb 7oz. After an eight day stay in hospital, I was taken home to our poor, and much too small, house in Queens Street.

At the age of three we moved to Birmingham. This new house was quite memorable but for all the wrong reasons. We had our very own over-active poltergeists that would have a ball in the dead of night. I would lay awake listening to creaks and bangs. In the morning, we would look round the house to see what had been moved during our absence. It's the only time I was very thankful that I shared a bedroom with my four brothers.

My family were so poor that my brothers and I used to wear each other's clothes. Little extras that most kids enjoyed were never on my mother's shopping list which was probably why we looked forward to the weekly visit on a Saturday from my uncle. He used to arrive laden with a full crate of Coke which was a rare luxury for us. His own two sons were still in Pakistan, so he would make quite a fuss of us. He's passed away now, but I look back fondly on his Saturday visits and those much appreciated gifts.

I had a terrible sense of fashion as a child. When we were ten, Dad took Nakhez (my fourth brother) and myself to the barbers because it was a special Muslim festival the following day (and school). We thought we were going to have a short back and sides. Imagine our surprise when my Dad told the barber to take it all off.

We stood staring in the mirror. Our hair was no more and we were completely bald. The next stop was a shop called Fosters to buy a smart suit... I use the word 'smart' lightly. They were cream, made of nylon with huge flares. When we got home Mum couldn't believe what Dad had done to us. Dad argued it would help our hair grow. You could imagine us walking down the street in our cream nylon suits, bald as badgers... and Doc Martens. My brother had a visit from a friend that night. I answered the door and he asked 'Where's Nak?' Nak suddenly appeared with a towel round his head saying he was washing his hair!

Although born in England, I was brought up in the Pakistani way speaking Punjabi. To all my close and extended family I would talk Punjabi, but as soon as I walked out of the front door I would talk English. I've been bilingual for as long as I can remember.

Our Pakistani culture is as important as our religion. For the most part, problems and incidents are kept within, and sorted out by, the family. Culture is centred round the family, not just parents and siblings but also the extended family

too such as aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces. If anything happens to anyone in the family, we would all be there straight away. When I had my kidney failure, every single relation was there, much to the amusement of other patients in the ward.

Muslims follow a very strict faith. Children are expected to attend Mosque after school every day. We had to read the Qur'an, learning both the religion and the culture. They are in fact very separate things. Religion is learning the five pillars of Islam. There is only one god, Allah. We are expected to pray five times a day, which I don't think I've ever managed. There are certain times when we are expected to fast and not eat any food during daylight hours - Ramadan. We are expected to give money to charity, which I do. You should also make at least one trip to Mecca in your lifetime which I haven't managed yet. My parents were very strict when it came to our faith. All my brothers were expected to attend Mosque daily.

I went to Pakistan when I was five or six but haven't been back since. My only recollection of that trip was setting fire to a field and being stupid enough to sit in the middle of it. I suppose that makes me an arsonist!

As a Pakistani, you are brought up with very different values to western society. Up to the age of eighteen and a half, I lived at home and abided by these cultural rules. When I look back now as a parent myself, I do think that sometimes my upbringing may have been just a little too strict.

On one occasion, my brother Nak and I had been naughty. Collecting stray cats in the neighbourhood and shutting them in the downstairs toilet wasn't our brightest idea. To punish us my mother stripped us and made us stand outside naked. It was only for a few seconds but it seemed like a lifetime. We were really embarrassed. As a father myself, I feel that was just a little harsh but it was quite normal for a Pakistani household to be strict with the children. When I look back, I have to admit that it didn't do me any harm in the long run and probably made me the strong character I am today.

We often got a whack with a slipper for our misdemeanours. It may be hard to believe after that story, but my Mum was actually a lot softer than my father. We all grew up in fear of him. Even today, I struggle to eat in front of him because of the ingrained fear.

Since he's been diagnosed with terminal cancer, he has softened although I'm still nervous in his presence.

As Pakistanis, we were brought up in the traditional way of eating without a knife and fork. Using cutlery was quite alien to us. We ate many different varieties

of curry using just a chapatti and our fingers. If we had ice cream we would use a spoon. Needless to say, eating at school with the other children caused some embarrassment. It was quite difficult, and even more so when you can't see the food.

Meat is an important issue to us. We are not allowed to eat pork at all. Any other meat we eat must be halal which means it is killed in a certain way. For example, chickens are allowed to bleed out when killed.

One of the traits of our culture is the gross lack of time keeping or any organisation whatsoever. It is the norm to react to situations there and then rather than think ahead. For example, if they need to be somewhere to catch a train at three o'clock, they'll start realising at about quarter to three that they'll have to get there. On numerous occasions, my nephews have left so late, they put their foot down, get stuck in traffic and end up running for the train. Planning ahead doesn't seem to be part of our make-up. For both my thirtieth and fortieth birthday parties, my brothers arrived nearly two hours later than planned.

On the night my Grandma was rushed to hospital with a brain haemorrhage, our disorganisation came to the fore. I'd just returned from doing a disco and was sat in my house in Hereford having a cup of tea at two o'clock in the morning when I received the sad news. It was customary for all family members to rush to the hospital as soon as possible and be at her bedside. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to catch a train until the morning. My five brothers, en masse, headed for the hospital straight away. They ran into the reception area shouting, 'Where is she?'

The poor receptionist just looked blankly at them and asked, 'Who?'

'Our Grandma,' they chorused.

'What's her name?'

'Grandma.'

That's the end of this preview.

You can purchase the full eBook from [Amazon Here](#)