



# SINEAD'S BULLYING DESPAIR

TV3 star struggled as **deaf** brother was targeted

## By Shilpa Ganatra

**I**RELAND AM presenter Sinead Desmond could not be closer to her deaf brother Conor but regretfully was helpless to stop the bullying he experienced from an early age.

Two years her junior, Conor has been unable to hear since birth. Despite his parents best efforts to integrate him into mainstream society — even to the extent of enrolling him into a class for profoundly deaf people in LA — he was still a target.

Sinead (35) says: "I had to put up with seeing Conor being bullied when he was young, especially because in those days he had to wear a body aid which was the size of two pieces of toast strapped to his chest.

"When you can't speak, people immediately assume you're intellectually below average. I saw him face all this prejudice and it really upset me because I saw how it upset him.

"Sometimes it wasn't just in a social context, it was institutional too.

"Like, he went to Uni in Bradford to study fashion where they provided an interpreter for lectures. But they suddenly lost their funding and told him he'd have to deal with it — in his final year!"

Though such discrimination is on the decrease, it's something we should all address, believes bubbly Sinead.

"We're getting better about all disabilities in Ireland, and that's down to people who don't have disabilities being more chilled about it.

"Sign language and deaf awareness should be taught in school," Sinead continues.

"It should be dealt with as a matter of course so that people aren't so afraid to talk to deaf people. Just to have that awareness would make someone much more inclusive.

"We go out of our way to learn French and Italian, but there are a whole lot of people on our doorstep we could be talking to if we'd just learn sign language."

Sinead's experience of observing her brother fight discrimination to become an in-demand hairdresser is only being made public now, because for the first time he asked her to get involved and help with Ireland's Signing Week, which runs from September 6-13.

"He's so shy," she grins proudly. "He's never asked me to use my role in the public eye to help the deaf community until now. I told him I'd be so proud to."

Indeed, their relationship has become even closer since Sinead almost died soon after filming her live telly show on TV3 in June.

The gorgeous star suffered a brain haemorrhage in the studio. Worried co-star Mark Cagney feared the worst when she took ill.



"She started to feel ill and nauseous and people thought 'blood sugar drop'. Some people thought it was meningitis because she was having a problem with light but quite honestly we didn't know," he said at the time.

Sinead was diagnosed as having had a minor haemorrhage, and took two months out to recover.

Now, thanks to not only her family but also her friends and hunky fiance David Ryan (32), she's back to work and back on the mend.

"I just went to the hospital recently for another check up, and they've told me to go forth and be happy," she beams.

"I'm still a little bit tired so I've cut down on social events, but otherwise I'm back to normal."

Sinead has not even thought of postponing her wedding to her partner of two years — they're still all set to get hitched in France next year.

"We're full steam ahead with the wedding plans, trying to make up for time," she says. "We're currently looking at all these beautiful chateaux in France.

"It's quite stressful," she admits. "We're thinking about getting a wedding planner but it's such a celebrity thing to do.

"If I read about me getting a wedding planner in the media I'd think 'who does your one think she is?'"

"But I want the wedding to be fun, and it's not going to be fun if I'm stressed about it.

"I have a busy life, planning weddings takes a lot of time, so something's got to give," she states, apparently having come to her decision in the last few seconds.

"I can't wait for it!"

For more information Ireland's Signing Week, log onto [www.signingweek.ie](http://www.signingweek.ie)



**BROTHERLY LOVE:** Only months after her health scare Sinead is back to her glam self and (inset) with Conor