For Jed, Kate, Padraic and Iven

BEING DEAF:
THE EXPERIENCE OF DEAFNESS

Edited by
George Taylor and Juliet Bishop at
The Open University

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This Reader forms part of The Open University course Issues in Deafness (D251). For further information on the course, please write to the Student Enquiries Office, The Open University, PO Box 71, Milton Keynes MK7 5AG.

This reader is one part of an Open University integrated teaching system and the selection is therefore related to other material available to students. It is designed to evoke the critical understanding of students. Opinions expressed in it are not necessarily those of the course team or of the University.

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Preface

This book is about the experience of being deaf and becoming deaf. The aim is to enable deaf women, men and children to express and explore the social and personal implications of their own experience in, as far as possible, their own words. There is no intention of presenting a particular picture of the experience of deafness, or of following a particular line of argument. Such publications are already available. The approach we have adopted is one that we believe will expand the reader's understanding of what it means to be deaf by having access to the testimony of deaf people themselves.

We do not claim that this book represents the 'experience of deafness or that all possible experiences of deafness are contained herewithin. There are as many experiences as there are deaf people, and the contributors represent only themselves. Their accounts range from light-hearted and amusing to sad and angry. They are all moving, and all the more powerful for their difference.

The accounts have been collected in a variety of ways. Around one-third have already been published in one form or another and the remainder have been specially commissioned. Some of the contributors have written themselves whilst others have elected to be interviewed, and the language of the interviews has ranged from spoken English to Sign-Supported English, and British Sign Language. On some occasions Sign Language interpreters were used. The early accounts in the book about deaf children have been mostly written by their parents. However the accounts were collected, the guiding principle was to represent as faithfully as possible the ideas and feelings of the contributors.

This book will be of interest to a wide readership, both professional and non-professional. Deaf people, and those hearing people who have contact with the Deaf community, may find many of the themes in this book familiar. Those readers who do not know or mix with deaf people may be surprised by the complexity of the issues raised, and that being deaf is not a straightforward case of classification by hearing loss. Many of the accounts in this book deal with questions of identity and community, isolation and rejection, and overt discrimination.

Being Deaf is one of two Readers which form part of the Open University course D251 Issues in Deafness. This course as a whole aims to question and explain commonly held conceptions about deafness and deaf people — conceptions which define deaf people as 'victims' and deafness as a problem requiring intervention by social agencies. Thus, whilst this book is free-standing and independent of the course, the readings it contains also reflect its integration with other course materials. If you are interested in enquiring about the availability of any of the other course components, please write to: Open University Educational Enterprises Ltd, 12 Cofferidge Close, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes MK11 1BY, UK.

Some of the individuals in this book are part of the Deaf community, where they share with other Deaf people a culture and a language (British Sign Language) that is unique to that community. Others identify more with the hearing world where they employ a number of communication methods which may include Sign Language, speech and lip-reading. Some of the contributors were born deaf, others have become deaf after the acquisition of speech. What they all share is that they have had to learn to cope in a world that is all too ready to ridicule, ignore and oppress them. This is not, however, a collection of 'victim' stories. There are many successes amongst these pages, and much for deaf people to celebrate.

Acknowledgements

The preparation of this book has involved the collaborative effort of a number of people. In a few cases we have included material as it was originally published. In most cases the final version is the result of drafting and re-drafting, and we are grateful for the secretarial support of Yvonne Holmes for whom this has meant many hours in front of the word processor. Linda Janes and Rachel Coombs conducted interviews and prepared written material. The members and staff of Bradford Deaf Centre made the section on older deaf people possible by their warm welcome and generous cooperation. Above all, we would like to acknowledge those people who have contributed their stories, and with whose lives we are concerned in this book. Without them there really would be no book.

The Editors and Publishers wish to thank the following who have kindly granted permission for the use of copyright material: Jack Ashley for an extract from Journey into Silence published by The Bodley Head Ltd. (1973); Arthur Dimmock for his article 'Sport and leisure (Great Britain) from Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness published by McGraw-Hill Book Company (1986); Victor Gollancz Ltd for extracts from Children of Silence (1987) by Kathy Robinson; Riki Kittel for her article originally entitled 'Making the right choice for a deaf child at diagnosis' and later published as 'Total commitment to total communication' in Talk magazine, No 131, Spring 1989; Willard J Madse for his earlier article 'Total commitment to total communication' in Talk magazine, winter 1989; Nagasaki Prefecture Association for the Welfare of the Deaf and Dumb for an extract from Silent Thunder (1976); Scottish Workshop for the Deaf, (c/o Donaldson's School for the Deaf, Edinburgh) for a shortened version of an article by Paddy Ladd 'Making plans for Nigel: the erosion of identity by mainstreaming' from The Integration and Disintegration of the Deaf in Society edited by George Montgomery (1981); Souvenir Press Ltd. for extracts from Language for Ben by Lorraine Fletcher; Vickie Walters for an extract from her article 'A deaf survivor remembers the holocaust' first published in Gallaudet Today magazine, Vol. 18, No. 2, Winter 1987-88, and

George Taylor
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Issues in Deafness.

**The Open University 'Issues in Deafness' Course Team**

Loma Allsop, Juliet Bishop, Laraine Callow, Tim Dant, Anne Darby, Mary Fielder, Vic Finkelstein, Susan Gregory, Gerald Hales, Fiona Harris, Gillian Hartley, Lynne Hawcroft, Yvonne Holmes, Linda Janes, Mary John, Jim Kyle, Paddy Ladd, Carlo Laurenzi, Clive Mason, Rukhsana Meherali, Dorothy Miles, Bob Peckford, Christine Player, Sharon Ridgeway, Janice Silo, George Taylor.
You Have to be Deaf to Understand

Willard J. Madsen

What is it like to 'hear' a hand?
You have to be deaf to understand!

What is it like to be a small child
In a school, in a room void of sound.
With a teacher who talks and talks and talks;
And then when she does come around to you,
She expects you to know what she's said?
You have to be deaf to understand.

Or the teacher who thinks that to make you smart,
You must first learn how to talk with your voice:
So mumbo-jumbo with hands on your face
For hours and hours without patience or end,
Until out comes a faint resembling sound?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to be curious,
To thirst for knowledge you can call your own,
With an inner desire that's set on fire ...
And you ask a brother, sister, or friend
Who looks in answer and says, 'Never mind!'
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like in a corner to stand,
Though there’s nothing you’ve done really wrong,
Other than try to make use of your hands
To a silent peer to communicate
A thought that comes to your mind all at once?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to be shouted at
When one thinks that will help you to hear:
Or misunderstand the words of a friend
Who is trying to make a joke clear,
And you don't get the point because he’s failed?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to be laughed in the face
When you try to repeat what is said:
Just to make sure that you’ve understood,
And you find that the words were misread . ..
And what you want to cry out 'Please help me, friend!'
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to have to depend
Upon one who can hear to phone a friend:
Or place a call to a business firm
And be forced to share what’s personal, and
Then find that your message wasn’t made clear?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to be deaf and alone in the
company of those who can hear
And you only guess as you go along.
For no-one’s there with a helping hand, as you
try to keep up with words and song?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like on the road of life
To meet with a stranger who opens his mouth ...
And speaks out a line at a rapid pace:
And you can’t understand the look in his face
Because it is new and you’re lost in the race?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to comprehend
Some nimble fingers that paint the scene,
And make you smile and feel serene
With the ‘spoken word’ of the moving hand
That makes you part of the world at large?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to ‘hear’ a hand?
Yes, you have to be deaf to understand!

Willard J. Madsen, Associate Professor of English, Gallaudet University
253, April, 1974)
Introduction

In preparing this book we have been guided by a principle of minimum intervention in the material. We have done this because we are hearing people, not deaf people, and we do not wish to introduce anything into any of the articles which would otherwise not be there. Some of the articles have been written by hearing people, for two reasons. Firstly, there were some existing accounts by parents of deaf children describing their experiences of diagnosis and pre-school experiences. The way that parents respond to the reality of their child’s crucial for the child’s psychological and emotional development. It is for this reason we have included these accounts. Secondly, some of the contributors chose to be interviewed rather than submit a written article. Where this is the case, we have assigned joint authorship to the article, the deaf person’s name appearing first.

Editorial control has been exercised only to keep the articles to a manageable length, and help them fit in with the overall style of the book. Where changes have been made we have been careful to preserve the original meaning of the text.

The use of “Deaf” and “deaf” throughout this book requires some explanation. The general reader may assume that to be deaf is an audiological definition and simply means to be without hearing, but many of the contributors to this book use the term in a very different way. There is a growing awareness of Deaf people as a linguistic minority group, a discrete cultural group who use Sign Language and identify themselves as members of the Deaf community, and it is becoming increasingly common to use an upper case ‘D’ to indicate those Deaf people who identify themselves this way. (This usage was proposed by James Woodward in 1982, and is discussed in Padden and Humphries Deaf in America: voices from a culture, Harvard University Press, 1988.)

In practice this convention is not without its problems. To be considered ‘Deaf’ infers some individual choice, that someone who is deaf has elected to become a member of the Deaf community. But some deaf children born to hearing parents (the overwhelming majority are) might not have contact with Deaf people and may never become members of the Deaf community. If they do, at what stage they begin to share the culture of the Deaf community and become ‘Deaf’ themselves is not clear.

For the sake of clarity and consistency an upper case ‘D’ for Deaf is used in this book only when it fits with this definition. The use of a lower case ‘d’ for deaf indicates a broader definition, referring
INTRODUCTION

Section One: A Whole-Life Account

This section appropriately includes only one piece ‘Janet’s Diary’. *Janet Goodwill’s* diary is unique in that she takes us back to her childhood as she recalls in vivid detail what she saw and how she felt from starting school right up to her eventual appointment as a Sign Language demonstrator in a secure hospital. It is not difficult to recollect one’s own childhood again as Janet describes her walk ‘through the very big double iron gates and along the massive path’, into ‘the huge boarding school’ to meet the Very tall, big man’ with a ‘moustache and balding white hair’. The world is huge to all small children but to a deaf child like Janet it was also one without explanation and full of apparent injustices.

Section Two: Diagnosis

For the most part, unless deafness is acquired in adulthood, it is not possible for deaf people to recall in detail the diagnosis of their disability. We have learned most of what we know about the period of diagnosis of childhood deafness from the writings and reflections of parents of deaf children. In this section parents describe, in considerable detail, the diagnosis of their children’s deafness.

Kathy Robinson has two deaf children but it is of the diagnosis of her first child, Sarah, that she writes here.

The second piece in this section is by Lorraine Fletcher who writes, drawing material from her diaries, about when her son Ben was diagnosed as deaf at ten months old.

Section Three: The Pre-School Years

Diagnosis can be the beginning of a bewildering stream of professional contacts for parents of deaf children. Advice, in particular, on appropriate communication methods and available education provision is perhaps given with most authority and yet, is the most contentious.

Whilst Kathy Robinson and Heather MacDonald espouse oral/aural methods of communication with their deaf children, Riki Kittel and Lorraine Fletcher reject these in favour of Total Communication.

Section Four: School Days

Whilst starting school is now acknowledged as a potentially traumatic transition period in hearing children’s lives, how much more so it must be for deaf children who may enter schools outside their locality, at an earlier age and without the companionship of siblings and established pre-school friends. Frequently deaf children enter school lacking the communication skills to understand the efforts of those attempting to prepare them verbally for the experience and what is more lacking the ability to communicate their subsequent bewilderment.

Boarding school life is focused upon in both Christine Monery and Clive Mason’s accounts of school days, with their recollections of both good and bad experiences.

Some educationalists assume that placing deaf children in mainstream educational contexts solves the problems described above but in a revised extract from his 1981 article, Paddy Ladd’s account of his mainstream education and associated trauma does not confirm that supposition.

Elizabeth Craddock attended Mary Hare Grammar School for the Deaf. Here she recalls some of her school experiences and the impact upon her identity as a Deaf person.

Section Five: Continuing Education

In this section young deaf people have recorded their experiences in a variety of post-school contexts. Lucy Briggs attended Sheffield Polytechnic which has an organised team of specialists offering a tailored made support to deaf students and their tutors.

Christopher Reid moved from a Grammar School for the Deaf into a mainstream polytechnic and, whilst he felt well prepared academically for college life, he felt that his schooling did not prepare young deaf people, like himself, psychologically for post-school life among deaf and hearing people.

Sarah Elsey experienced a mainstream education for most of her schooling and whilst not all her school experiences were good ones, she was ultimately accepted into a four-year degree course in Education and hopes, eventually, to qualify as a primary school teacher.

Richard Shaw attended a traditional mainstream grammar school after spending his primary school years in a partially hearing unit. From the age of sixteen he pursued a career in Art and Design, moving from a college of further education to Loughborough College of Art and Design. With an HND in Graphic Design he made a number of applications for jobs and eventually accepted a position as a paste-up artist.

Paul Holehouse is a ‘beamer’ in the Nottingham lacemaking industry. Whilst he acknowledged that he was not a ‘high-flyer’
Section Six: Working Lives

Work has a number of meanings in our society. It provides us with money to buy what we need, and sometimes what we do not need. It can be a way of making social contacts, and a source of social status. The notion of work is so deeply embedded in the structure of our society that to be unemployed can signify major life changes. It has been said that deaf people do not feature so much in the ranks of the unemployed as those of the under-employed, that their deafness is often given as the reason for a lowly paid occupation, or limited promotional prospects. All of the deaf people in this section have jobs. And whilst their individual experiences of work differ, they have all had obstacles to overcome, and they routinely face challenges where this would not be the case for hearing people.

Christopher Jones wanted to be an educational psychologist, or a teacher of the deaf, and found his route blocked by the education system because of his deafness. Janice Silo achieved her aim of becoming a teacher, but along the way she had to endure the patronising and discriminatory attitudes of colleagues she had expected would be supportive.

Shalil Lad has had to become active in adapting his work environment to be more suitable to his needs as a deaf person. He teaches his hearing colleagues Sign Language, so they can communicate with him more effectively. Is it right that deaf people should have to take responsibility for providing something as basic as a means of communicating with work colleagues? Billy Lambert’s experience, reported by Linda Janes is that becoming more assertive about himself as a Deaf person and a Sign Language user, has enabled him to develop a career, and a personal commitment to encourage other deaf people to pursue leadership roles in the Deaf community.

Section Seven: Citizenship

Commentators from all political persuasions lay claim to some definition of citizenship. The traditional liberal view is based upon individual rights based in legislation, whilst the new Right locate individual ‘freedoms’ not in law but in the choice to operate more in the ‘informal’ or private spheres than in state institutions. A new development of the Left is a definition of citizenship based upon need. This is informed by an appreciation of ‘difference’, and underlined by an understanding of societal power and how certain groups such as Black people, people with a disability, and women, have been marginalised. This approach sets citizenship within an internationalist (as opposed to a nationalist) context, where all contributors to society would be valued, and all individuals encouraged and enabled to achieve social fulfilment.

The contributors in this section represent some of the many diverse elements of our society. From the age of fifteen Patrick Murphy had to adjust to a life without hearing or sight. His story does not reflect a society responding to his needs. It is instead a tribute to his own determination and courage in ensuring that he maintains an active participation in social affairs. David Nyman is gay and deaf. He writes about the reaction of his family and the deaf community to him as a gay man, and also of the gay community to him as a deaf person. He has developed the strength to enable him to mix with either deaf or hearing people, and is actively involved in the development of the deaf gay community.

One of the developments of the 1980s was the recognition that black children in care have different needs from those of white children. For the development of a healthy black identity it is argued that it is necessary for black children to have access to black adults, and preferably have black parents or carers. Andrew Charles is black and deaf. He was brought up in a white hearing foster family. In his account, reported by Rachel Coombs, he talks about some of the factors that have contributed to his confusion about his own identity. Even though he is now in his thirties he still has no more information about his parents or his family background than he did as a child.

The earliest recorded date of admission of a deaf patient to Rampston Special Hospital was in 1926. From that time one can only imagine that the few deaf patients who continued to be admitted must have experienced a crushing sense of isolation, and staff working there a sense of impotence as therapeutic aims were frustrated by an inability to communicate. Rae Than writes about the appointment to the staff group of Janet Goodwill, a deaf person, and the changes that are being implemented in an attempt to meet the needs of deaf patients.
Deaf people are a minority group in British society, and, as such, they are marginalised and their presence in society goes largely unnoticed. This is to the detriment of both deaf people and wider society as there is much to appreciate in the deaf community. Some deaf people spend much of their time as public performers, either as paid employment, or for personal enjoyment, or as their contribution to deaf culture. There have been many deaf people involved in a wide range of sporting activities, and Arthur Dimmock has collected information on them. In his article he outlines a heritage of deaf sporting achievements stretching back to the nineteenth century. Linda Janes reports on Colin Thompson, who, in his spare time, is developing the art of sign-singing. One of very few sign-singers in Britain he explains how he has developed from simple signed interpretation of songs, to a position where his performances reflect the deaf experience.

For a number of years now Clive Mason has been a face that people associate with See Hear on BBC each Sunday. But what is it like to be a deaf television presenter? Clive Mason gives some information about television for deaf people, some insights into his job, and his behind-the-scenes activities to raise the profile of the deaf community. Dorothy Miles has many admirers for her poetry and acting. In this account she writes about her family background and how she became stage-struck before she was five years old. She has suffered from manic-depression for a number of years, but maintains that her manic phases have provided her with the necessary creative energy to extend the range of her artistic talents. Having a deafened father, she thought she understood what it was like to be deafened. However, the sense of loss she experienced was traumatic, and it was only through contact with the Deaf community that she recovered her self-belief.

Older people are a valuable source of information about the past. Their accounts focus upon their own experiences. They deal with human events rather than world events, and they fill in the details so often missing from ‘official’ versions of history. In this section George Taylor explores two events in the past. One a world event, the Second World War, the other a personal experience of school for two deaf children just after the First World War.

The contrasting experiences of deaf people in Bradford, Warsaw, and Nagasaki during the Second World War serve to remind us of the resilience, and flexibility, of human beings. Adapting their lives in the face of adversity and making the most of what is available. The conversation between Jack Haythornthwaite and Tom Campbell is of a much more light-hearted nature. But, all of these accounts by older deaf people are remarkable for their clarity of recollection over more than sixty years, and their ability to tell a good story.

Jack Ashley is well known as a deaf Member of Parliament and an advocate for disabled people. Although he had a slight hearing loss from childhood he had to adjust to being profoundly deaf after he became an MP. A daunting prospect in the hurly-burly of the House of Commons, Maggie Woolley is the director of SHAPE, an arts organisation for disabled people, she became deaf at the age of eighteen, as a result of a form of hereditary deafness with a late onset.
Section One
A Whole-Life Account
In the following extracts from her diary, written retrospectively, Janet vividly recalls events from her childhood, adolescence, early adulthood and recent past. Her attempts to make sense of what often seemed a confusing world are movingly described. Her eventual success in finding fulfilling employment concludes the piece.

My mother came from Dewsbury and my father came from Saxonby, Lincolnshire. I was born near Dewsbury. I am one of twelve children. I have six brothers and live sisters; there were also twins who died at birth. I am the youngest. I was born deaf and so was my sister, Ann, but she didn’t become deaf till she was seven. She was sent to Doncaster School for the Deaf. My mother and father were concerned about my hearing. They knew that there was something wrong with me because I wasn’t speaking, just screaming, angry and going very wild. My mother couldn’t cope with me at all. My parents went to the doctors who suggested that I should go to Leeds School for the Deaf. My father refused to allow me to go to Leeds. My sister Ann was at Doncaster School. So why should I go to Leeds? The doctor finally agreed for me to go to Doncaster.

Going to school

The day I started school I was three and a half years old. I did not know what was going on for I could not speak. My family started to cry, especially my adored sister Eenee who had looked after me when my mother couldn’t cope. My mother, my sister Ann and I went to Wakefield railway station to catch a train to Doncaster. We all got to Doncaster. We went through very big, double, iron gates and along the massive path, it was a huge boarding school and on the notice board right at the front it said, ‘Residential School for the Deaf’. We went through a double, heavy, brown, wooden door and the headmaster was waiting for us. His name was Dr Eric Greenaway. He was a very tall, big man with a moustache and balding white hair. His hands were in his pockets.
We were shown to the nursery school. Ann had already gone to the secondary department, so it was only me and my mother. There was this very tall lady with round glasses and fair wavy hair, with a smile on her face. She said 'hello' to me and showed me the two wooden rocking horses. I had a ride on one not realising my mother had gone and never even said, 'bye-bye'. When I got off the rocking horse and began to look for my mother I started to scream and cry for I knew something was wrong. I wouldn't eat or drink. We children went to the bedrooms. There were about six bedrooms with six beds and six little cupboards. We had a few helpers from the secondary department. One of the girls helped me to get undressed but I kept putting the clothes back on. I refused to let her undress me. I was getting frustrated. It took her a long time to undress me. Finally they brought my sister Ann over. I was so pleased to see her I let her do everything for me. She washed me in the bath and put me to bed. It was 6.30 pm and Ann had to leave me and go back but I was unsettled. I got up and screamed, refusing to go to sleep. Ann was brought back again and had to lie with me until I went to sleep. This went on for a fortnight. In the last two weeks of term Ann was very worried because she was going on a school holiday for one week to the Isle of Man. When Ann did not turn up for me, I was a bit unsettled. I went to bed and slept but started to wet the bed which I never did before I came to school. I had been dry. Ann was relieved when she came back from her holiday to see that I was all right. It was three months before I saw my mother. I had my own home clothes on when Ann and my mother called for me. I didn't smile at my mother, it was as if I didn't know her. We went on the train and went to my home. I saw Renee, my sister! I went and hugged her but I never looked at my mother. I hated her for what she did to me: leaving me at school like that. It felt as if she had dumped me. All I wanted was Renee. Renee and Walter, her boyfriend, went everywhere with me. They really spoiled me very badly.

Growing up

When I was four I was a bridesmaid for my sister Renee and her fiance Walter. That day I felt that there was something wrong. I was very sulky. I kept going to Renee all the time and I wouldn't let go of her. Renee had to leave home to live in her new home with Walter and I wasn't very happy. Renee was very worried about me. I went to stay with her a few times.

When I was seven years old my big brother Brian came to see me at school; he always spoiled me very much. He was in his air-force uniform. I don't know why he came to see me. He took me out for the full day. He hugged me and bought me a lot of things. I didn't understand why. It was time for me to go. He was in tears and hugged me and kissed me as if he didn't want to let go of me. He was gone. That night I went to bed and in the middle of the night I had a very bad nightmare. I dreamed of three black aeroplanes chasing around. This went on for a fortnight. I have that same dream often. I can never forget the dream to this day.

At the age of eight I started to go to junior school. Ann had left school. She was sixteen years old. She had got a job as a typist. I never knew much about Ann at school. I never wanted to go to school. I never made real friends. I was always alone but I never wanted to go home either, as I had no friends at all at home. I still wet the bed. There were four dormitories. I went into the fourth dormitory, for eight year olds and nine year olds. We had forty beds plus two prefects to look after us. I hated it.

We had our own swimming pool. We started to have swimming lessons. My PE teacher had white hair and was very strict and cruel, I would say. We all went out of the building and went to the swimming baths. We all got changed which was very exciting because I loved swimming. I got undressed and I was the first to get in the water and went to the bottom of the water but the teacher was looking for me and saw me in the water and made me come out. I was a good swimmer.

One day my mother, sister Ann and I went to the Deaf club in Dewsbury which was a very big building like a hotel. It was the Christmas party for the children. I just sat on the chair very quiet, refusing to speak or play. I would not do anything in front of my mother. We never had a very close relationship. I went to the Deaf club a few times but I was not keen on it. I liked to be on my own.

As I got older I started to feel happier in myself, although I still hated being deaf. I always blamed my mother for everything. I was very difficult and always wanted my own way. My mother could not communicate with me. I always seemed to take it out on mother. I would break down and say 'I hate you! Nobody likes me! Why me? Why am I deaf? Why me?' Everybody would go quiet.

I was difficult with my sister Jillian too. One day Jillian went out playing with friends: there were a lot of girls playing with a skipping rope in the middle of the road. I was just sitting on the wall watching them. Jillian wouldn't let me join them. I always showed her up. I just spoiled everything. One day mother told Jillian she had to take me swimming. We all went and had a good time but on the way home we stopped at the sweet shop. Jillian showed me the sweets that I could get with my money but I wanted the sweet sugared almonds. Jillian said no I couldn't because I didn't have enough money. I wanted them and got very angry. Everybody was looking at me because of the way I wanted my own way. Finally I did get the sweets I wanted but only five in a bag. I was happy but Jillian was angry with me.

When I was ten years old one Saturday afternoon my father was sitting in his own armchair, in his usual place next to the fireplace, on the right side on the floor there was a brown leather belt, it was
always there: on the other side there was a wooden stand with an ashtray for his cigarettes. He was always very comfortable in his chair relaxing on Saturdays ready to watch 'Saturday Sports'. Wrestling was his favourite and mother's as well. Of course, I was sitting on my own because I had no friends. Jillian was with her friends. As soon as the sports came on television I switched it over to the other side: it was ballet. I was watching it. Father went to switch it back to sport, I went to switch it to ballet. Father was getting fed up, so I stood in front of the telly so he couldn't see it: he was furious because I was getting my own way. Father got the belt out, I went out and went upstairs and made a fool of myself. I started to scream and kept saying, 'Nobody likes me or wants me because I am deaf.' Everybody hated me, nobody talked to me. I was always alone. It was very confusing. I was always bursting into tears.

At the age of fifteen, I started to go to technical college on my own. I went with Mrs Harrison who was my interpreter and had been my school teacher. She was a lovely woman, very friendly and I liked her very much. Her husband was a vicar. He was very handsome: dark black hair and black glasses. I liked him very much. I started college on the first morning with Mrs Harrison. I was so embarrassed as I had to wear my school clothes. I wore school uniform: blue and white stripes and grey knitted socks with black shoes. It was horrible: I was scared because the people were hearing and cleverer than me.

It was very difficult for me to make friends with the hearing students. I did commercial work, typing, maths and book-keeping. I was doing English. The teacher (I never knew his name) said “Write about the "government".” I had never heard of it before. I never knew we had a prime minister. I had no idea how to write. Mrs Harrison wrote everything down for me and all I had to do was copy it and remember because I was doing this for exams. I thought myself stupid: I was very worried but I never told her. I kept everything to myself. I never told anybody about my feelings. I cried so easily and when I cried I blamed my mother for everything she did to me. 'Why me? Why am I deaf?’. At fifteen years old I was studying English for eight year olds. We were learning 'Jane is behind Peter, Peter is in front of Jane.' I was fed up with it. I liked the book-keeping but the Maths was too difficult for me and I couldn't follow it at all. I was only doing x, 4×, and ÷, but it was so difficult. I loved typing as it was easy to follow. I was there for one year.

Leaving school

At the age of sixteen I left school. I was so pleased that I had left. I never made a real friend at school. My only friend Susan had left early because she started art school. I never wanted to go back to school because I hated it.

Mother and I went to the Job Centre. First I went to Readicut to do typing. I did a test but failed. I didn't know why. We went for another job. It was a very big house with a small office inside. Maureen Divine had ginger hair, curly, quite pretty, freckles, and was always smoking. She showed me what I should do. Anyway I got the job. The business was Peter Divine Plant Hire. The first day of my job I was wearing a black tight skirt, white jumper and black high-heeled shoes. I really did look nice. Maureen was waiting for me at the door. She showed me what to do. I sorted all the papers out. That was all I did on the first day. I was learning every day. I learned to do the wages and filled the time sheets.

It wasn't a very big job. I was on my own all the time. I didn't do any typing at all. Maureen sent me to do shopping. I thought to myself that this was not what I wanted to do. I was alone again and I'd made no friends at all. I started to get upset and started to cry. I took it out on my mother. I hated everything. Why am I deaf? Nobody likes me because I am deaf. I just go on hating myself.

Night school

I started night school to learn shorthand typing. On the first night I was very excited but nervous. I can remember the teacher, but I didn't know his name. He was short, had a big belly, was balding and wore glasses. I tried to catch his words but he kept turning round to the blackboard. I didn't write a thing in my book. I thought this is stupid. When I went home my mother said, 'Did you manage?’ I said 'OK' but I never told her anything. I kept everything to myself. I tried again for a few weeks but eventually I gave up. I couldn't do it. I carried on working. I was getting fed up with myself. I never went shopping on my own. I stayed in most of the time, just baby-sitting for my sister Ann. I started to smoke. Maureen taught me how to smoke. All I did was smoke, baby-sit and watch too much telly. My feelings got worse and worse. I burst out and told Jillian I didn't like where I worked and that there was never anything to do: that I was always on my own. I had no real friends. I'd never had any.

Mother and I went for another job at Slazengers in Horbury. We went inside and had an interview with a woman: I have forgotten her name. She was rather old fashioned. She asked me if I would like to work in the office with all the girls. I said no, thinking that it would be the same as I had experienced before. I decided to work on the factory floor. She showed me round and I saw all the girls. They were all hearing. At the end of the day I went home and burst into tears. My mother said 'What is the matter?' Nobody likes me. Eric, the foreman, said that I couldn't go on the machines. He gave me the box of cottons to sort and he made me think that I was so thick. Nobody talked to me. I was still alone. I thought it would be different but it did not work. Maybe because I am deaf people can't talk to me. I hated everybody. I wished I was dead. Why am I deaf?’

Mother and I went to see the boss about what had happened. The boss called Eric in and he explained to the boss. The next day Eric called me into the office and we had a chat: he asked if I was interested in reading books. I said no, that I had never read, as it was too difficult. I never read newspapers. I didn't understand them. He tried to make me take three books home to read. I refused because I wanted to go on the machines. He
agreed for me to go on them and I was so pleased.

After a while there was no work. I was watching everybody and they were too busy talking to one another. I was there all alone with no one to talk to. I just burst into tears in front of everybody. The supervisor asked what was the matter. I replied that nobody was talking to me because I was deaf. It was very frustrating.

Moving on

One day, I got a letter from my old school friend Susan asking me to go to Doncaster School Sports Day; I agreed to go. I went and met her. I told her all about myself. Susan was all right. She made friends easily. I couldn’t. Susan said, ‘Why don’t you live with us?’ I said I would. Susan’s mother said that I could live with them. I told mother but my father disagreed. I was so upset again. I took it out on mother. I was very lonely. Nobody liked me because I was deaf. Why me? I wished I was dead. Father and Susan’s father had a talk and finally they agreed. Susan wanted a deaf friend. I was over the moon and got a job, pressing, where Susan and her mum worked. I left Slazengers and left home to live in Doncaster. I settled down.

I went with Susan to Sheffield Deaf club. It was my first visit. There were a lot of nice, deaf people. I had thought deaf people were so thick but they weren’t really. Susan said she liked one of the men there, his name was Peter. She really fancied him. She made me talk to him and introduce them and they started to go out. I was all alone again. Susan and Peter were going to get married. I went back home. All alone again, and hating myself.

I lived with my sister Renee after I returned home from living with Susan. I didn’t want to go home to mother. I could never settle in one place. I moved around trying to find happiness. Renee and Walter and their sons, David and Jonathon decided to emigrate to Australia and asked me if I would like to go with them. We all went to Leeds for interview. They could all go to Australia but not me: I couldn’t go because I was deaf. I would never get a job there they said. I was so upset. Why me? I would be better off dead. I cried and cried, hating myself. That night I took a lot of tablets but it made me feel sick. I was poorly over the next few days. I didn’t tell Renee about it. She thought I was very depressed. She was very concerned about me. She called in a social worker, who came to see me. I was very lonely. He said that there was a job for me in Harrogate at the Deaf School nursery. I said, ‘No’, because I didn’t want to sleep there! I was thinking I would be shut in and never come out. I was wrong but I refused to go. Renee did her best but couldn’t persuade me. I had to move out of Renee’s house. I went to live with Jillian. I still wouldn’t live with mother. The day Renee, Walter and their two boys left I cried and cried. I should have been with them.

A first marriage

I had my twenty-first birthday at the Horse and Jockey pub. I invited a few families and friends from work, no one the same age as me, they were all a lot older. I wore a white dress which was very short. It looked like a smock; it was a beautiful dress. I loved that dress. A man asked me what record I wanted on. I couldn’t think what to ask for. Then he sat next to me and had a chat with me. He asked me for a date the following Friday; I agreed. I waited for the week to pass but I wasn’t all that excited when I saw him. He was quite handsome; he had ginger hair and a lovely smile; his name was Philip. He was my first real love, I would say. He was so kind and gentle. We had been going out together for about four months, when we got married. Our marriage wasn’t a success. I don’t think we had known one another long enough, I now realise. He stayed out at the pub until all hours. I was all on my own. I was so upset that I was on my own and fed up, feeling that he didn’t care about me. I thought, I will have a baby then he will have to stay in.’ It didn’t work. I had a baby girl, her name was Nicola Jane. She had blond, curly hair, and was very much like me. We only lasted five years. Our marriage was on the rocks. I was getting depressed and tried to kill myself. My life wasn’t worth living. I gave my friend Dave, who lives a few doors away from us, a note and told him, ‘I’ll only last today.’ On the note I wrote ‘Please tell Philip to look after Nicola. I can’t cope any more. My life has ended.’ I took a lot of tablets, but I can’t remember what happened to me. All I can remember is that Philip had Nicola. The house went up for sale and I had to live with Jillian, my sister. I was very depressed. I knew nobody cared about me. I tried to improve my life but it did not work.
One night I was sitting and watching the TV and heard somebody knock at the door. I opened it. I did not know who he was, but he was a deaf man. I couldn't sign properly with him because I hadn't signed for about five years. I had shut everything off. I asked who he was and he said 'John Goodwill'. I remembered his name from school but I didn't know him. We were two years apart in age but I couldn't remember him. He told me all his friends' names. I knew them all but not him. I let him in. We had a talk. My life changed that night and he began to come and see me every week. John and I went out for one year. I went to live in Scunthorpe and I thought my life was improving. John had been married before to a hearing woman but it did not work out for him. He had no children. We bought a house in Scunthorpe and we got married a year after. Then I had a baby boy. His name was Timothy John. I cried a lot; I felt guilty because I had left my first child with Philip. It was very painful. It was a horrible feeling. I could never really tell John. I hadn't wanted more children but John did as he had never had a child. I understood that. A year after Timothy I got pregnant again; this time it was twins. I could not believe it. I just cried because Timothy was such a terror.

One afternoon I went to the hospital for a check-up. I said 'Don’t forget I’m deaf.' The nurse put down in her book that I was deaf and she said she would give me a shout. I said that was no good; shouting was all right for the hard of hearing but I was different: I was deaf from birth. 'You will have to come to me,' I said. The nurse said 'OK'. I sat and waited. There were a lot of women, I'd never seen so many. I was sitting for one and a half hours. I thought I'd make a move. I asked the nurse ‘What about me?’. She said, ‘What?’? They had forgotten that I was deaf. There had been a change of staff. They were sorry. I had been in hospital for two and three-quarter hours. I was getting angry. In the end I lost my temper. They forgot again. I just went home and never bothered to go back. I went to my doctor instead.

The twins were born - Victoria Rose and Rachel Elizabeth. I was so pleased that they were girls as I didn’t want another boy. The next day we had photos taken by the newspaper and a TV crew. I thought, ‘What is going on?’ Well, I was famous. I felt so proud. We were on TV and in the national papers. I was so tired that day.

I was in hospital for ten days. I brought Victoria home but left Rachel behind for another week. I finally brought her home. It was hard work. I did not have any help at all. I had a health visitor to see me who said that I should have nursery nurse or home help. I refused to have them. They thought I was stupid. I'd show them I could do it. I remember that it was very hard work and I was on the go all the time. I went thin and lost one stone. When the girls were three months old I had to go to see a specialist to see how they were getting on. I had a social worker with me. The specialist saw the babies, and asked me how I was coping. I said that I was coping well with them. I said, 'I can look after Timothy so I can look after my girls.' He was rather worried. I said, 'I am not stupid, I am no different from anybody else, only deaf.' I think he was concerned about me. I was getting angry because he asked me if I could hear and asked all sorts of questions about me I said, 'Look I have brought the babies for you to check not to talk about me.' I said 'I am going home.' He wasn’t very pleased.

When the twins were one year old the newspaper men came back again to see how we were getting on. We had photos taken again and again. We were in the paper.

We never went on holiday. I couldn’t do it. It was too much for me. It was too easy to stay at home.

**A new job**

Timothy started school at Easter, it should have been September but he went early so I could have a rest and more freedom. The twins started play-school and it was a lot easier for me. I started to have driving lessons and I passed the first time. I was pleased that I took driving lessons; I used to be scared of the road. I hated bikes. I never thought I’d drive. Then I started my first job as a cleaner at the children’s school. My hours were half past three to five o’clock. I worked to get some money for petrol for the car. The twins started school in September I was looking forward to them going. ‘What shall I do?’ I thought. It was no different for me as there was still work for me in the house.

One day I got a letter from the school saying that there was a problem with Victoria’s hearing. I would have to take her to the doctor’s. All I could think of was, ‘She is not deaf.’ I just went numb and I cried all day. I don’t want her to be like me, having to go away from home and not able to hear the hearing world. John came home from work. I did not tell him about my feelings. I went to work at 3.30 pm. The headmistress, came to see me in the nursery block where I worked and told me again that Victoria was having problems with her hearing. I just burst into tears. The headmistress said there was nothing to worry about. I burst into tears because it brought all my memories back to me of when I was little. The headmistress said there was nothing to worry about. I burst into tears because it brought all my memories back to me of when I was little. I don’t know why I did it. It just happened. On the Friday I went to the doctor’s. My doctor was a lovely man, very gentle and kind and he explained to me about the hearing chart. She was only a little low. I was still not very happy about it.

Mr Peter Whitehead came to my house. What a surprise. Peter Whitehead was my former teacher from Doncaster School. He came to tell me that Miss Hill, the headmistress had called him to say that I was very upset about Victoria’s hearing. Well it was true. I don’t know why I did it. I just burst into tears. I knew I was being silly. I knew she wouldn’t go away from me. I knew she would hear better than I did. It was just the word ‘deaf’ I did not like. It bothered me so much. He explained to me that she might have to have grommets to drain the fluid away in her ears but that she would then hear better. I felt much better but I was annoyed with the hearing test woman. She had not explained and I think I ought to have known about it. I got a letter saying that Victoria had to go to
hospital. I took her and saw the ENT specialist. He was very nice and very good. He explained to us what the operation was going to be like and what it all looked like. I just nodded a bit: I understood part but not all of what he said. I got the date for Victoria to go to hospital. She was admitted to hospital at 2 pm on 21st September 1988. She was very good. The next day she was allowed to go home. The sister gave her an ice lolly. Victoria had to have a week off as she couldn’t go to school. She was not allowed to go swimming. I was disappointed because she was a very good swimmer.

I was very busy with the house but we got nothing done. John and I decided to move house because the upstairs was so small. To tell you the truth I didn’t have any friends round there. I think it was because we were deaf. I never had anybody come to see me. We looked for houses. I got so fed up searching because John didn’t know what house he wanted. He wanted a big house but we couldn’t afford it. I burst into tears: I was very fed up. I told him ‘Right, I want this house!’ He had to accept it. I couldn’t take any more. We moved from Berkeley to Ashby, which was about two miles away. I liked the house, but don’t think John liked it. I said, ‘I must have this job. This is the job I want. I hope I get it.’ I kept thinking about it all the time.

In the August the children, John and I went to the Lake District for our holiday in our caravan. We had a super two weeks holiday and when we came back I had got a letter saying that I’d got an interview for the job at Rampton and also I got a letter from the organiser of the Deaf club at Rampton, asking me if I would be a volunteer visitor. I agreed. I was to go the next night. I went and found it very interesting. I just wanted to stay there and help them. When I got home I told John that my heart went out to them. I couldn’t help thinking about them.

My interview lasted from 9.30 am until 4 o’clock. It was a long day. They had six people for interview. We were shown round all the building. We had our dinner there and the interview started at 2 o’clock. Mine was quarter past three. I kept saying, ‘I must have that job.’ I had a feeling that I would get it. I went straight home after the interview. John asked me how I got on. I said, ‘All right, I wasn’t nervous.’ I just waited for the news of whether I’d got the job. I got a letter from Rampton Hospital. I opened it and read it. I had got the job and I was to start on Monday. I was sure I would get it. I told everybody that I got the job.

A new job opportunity

I changed jobs but got fed up with the new job as the other cleaner was very lazy. I wasn’t very happy about it because I was a good worker: I always have been. One day I got a letter from John Clark, a lay chaplain, from Lincoln. In the letter there was an application form for a job at Rampton Hospital. I didn’t know what Rampton Hospital was. I asked my friend Ken and he said, ‘It is a dangerous place.’ I thought to myself, ‘No, I won’t bother.’ I thought to myself again, ‘I will fill in the form.’ They wanted a sign demonstrator for the deaf patients. I got a reply and waited to hear from them when the interview would be. In the meantime I wrote a letter to ask if I could have a look round and find out what it was really like inside. I got a reply and they agreed that I should look round. When I went I met Rae Than from the education department. We went inside the building and it reminded me of my school. I went to see two deaf patients. It was very interesting. I stayed there nearly all day. When I went back home I told John my husband everything about
Section Two

Diagnosis
2 The Appointment

Kathy Robinson

This is an account of Kathy Robinson's daughter, Sarah's, diagnosis as profoundly deaf at the age of two and a half years. A year later Sarah's sister Joanne was also diagnosed as deaf and the family's experiences are recorded in Kathy's book Children of Silence from which this piece is taken.

AN APPOINTMENT HAS BEEN MADE FOR SARAH ROBINSON AT...

HOSPITAL ON 23RD SEPTEMBER AT 2.00 P.M. PLEASE CONFIRM.

'Sarah.'

I spoke my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter's name quietly in the waiting room. I called her name again, louder this time, and when she did not turn towards me, fear clutched my heart.

Conscious that all eyes were upon me, I said ‘Sarah’ once more and raised my hand to touch her shoulder, but she turned round with a quizzical smile on her face as if to say she knew I had been calling her all the time. The summer sun had lightened her hair and wispy curls were beginning to form. Her skin had a translucent sheen, one or two freckles dotted her nose, and there was an intent look in her luminous blue eyes as though she knew today was especially important.

Before long two small children began to run round the room and Sarah waited for them to indicate that she could join in. After a while her laughter, higher in pitch than the children's, began to resound disturbingly in my head.

Outwardly I appeared calm. If the months of waiting for this appointment had taught me anything, it was control. Unable to translate my anxiety into words, I suppressed my fear. But something bad was going to happen soon. I knew it. Something really bad.

Sarah's white lacy tights were wrinkled at the knee and I smoothed them out with my hand. She was wearing a new red dress with a navy collar to match the navy band down the front. Sometimes I wondered if it was wrong to love someone as much as I loved her. She touched something deep within me yet I didn't seem
able to reach her in the same way. There was an elusive quality about her. An hour passed and the numbers in the waiting room dwindled until only a man and his young son remained in the row in front of us. The man turned around and smiled and I said, 'Why are you here?'

'My son’s having his six-monthly check-up,' he replied. 'My wife’s in there with him now.' Then he added by way of explanation: 'My other son is deaf.'

His words were unexpected. I wanted to say I was sorry but didn’t know if that was the right thing to do. He was about thirty and everything about him suggested he was a professional man. I couldn’t believe he could have a deaf son.

'I hope you’ve had help with him,' I said, unable to envisage the kind of help a deaf child might need.

The man turned in his chair to face me more fully, and I sensed he was pleased by my interest. 'Well, until recently we lived in America but we came home to have my son educated in England. We didn’t want him to use sign language as they do in the schools over there. We wanted him to learn to speak.'

I nodded, encouraging him to continue.

'The school’s been very good,' he went on, 'and we’re pleased with his progress. We used to work with him at home but now we do less than we ever did.' He looked towards Sarah. 'Why are you here?' For a moment we sat and watched Sarah engrossed in the task of interlocking some plastic shapes together. The effort had caused a pink flush to come to her cheeks.

The man waited for my answer unaware of the panic ballooning inside me. 'Sarah’s not talking yet and we think she has fluid in her ears which is blocking the sound,' I said. 'A friend of mine had the same problem with her daughter.'

At first I had thought Sarah wasn’t talking because I was anticipating her every need, but, when I tried pretending I didn’t understand what she wanted, she had screamed and banged her head on the floor with frustration. Then I thought perhaps it was because I had been a late talker. And my neighbour told me her little boy was three before he said a word.

Finally I took her to the doctor at the baby clinic who said he would refer her to an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist. Day after day I had tested when she was a baby, since he had her medical records. Material will contain a range of high and low sounds found in speech.

Sarah sat stiffly on my knee, every sense alert. She had the same serious look she always had in new situations. It was almost as though she must absorb every single detail to store in her memory, and sometimes when I looked at her, I imagined a secret life sheltering behind her eyes, a life which I could never penetrate.

We came to a room where several people were standing beneath a bright fluorescent light. They were talking to each other, oblivious of our presence. I reached for Sarah’s hand and held it tightly. Why were all these people here? I had expected a specialist and a nurse perhaps. Suddenly I was out of my depth. There were no signposts now.

The group divided and a man moved forward to welcome us. 'Hello, Mrs Robinson.' Sarah swung round to look at the nurse and without a word. 'Is your husband with you? He’s welcome to come in as well.'

'No, he’s looking after our other daughter. Joanne’s only a baby,' I explained.

'I’m Mr Chapman and this is ...' He introduced me to the occupants of the room, a courtesy unknown in my experience of hospitals.

'If you would sit here, Mrs Robinson,' Mr Chapman indicated a chair in the centre of the room. 'Will you put Sarah on your knee and try not to move or touch her. If you would put your arms down by your side,' he suggested.

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'We’re going to test Sarah’s hearing,' Mr Chapman informed me. 'The test material will contain a range of high and low sounds found in speech.'

I resisted the impulse to tell him Sarah had already had her hearing tested when she was a baby, since he had her medical records.

A smartly dressed woman came into the room closely followed by a boy of about Iseven. He had dark hair like his father and small delicate features. I couldn’t equate deafness with him — not until his mother bent to straighten his tie and I caught a glimpse of an ugly black hearing-aid beneath his school blazer.

'YOU WERE A VERY GOOD BOY. MUMMY’S VERY PLEASED WITH YOU,' the woman said loudly, stressing every syllable. She opened her handbag and gave the boy a packet of sweets without so much as a glance in the direction of her husband and other son.

The boy began to speak. His voice was flat and gutteral, his words unintelligible.

As the family were leaving I heard a voice behind me say, ‘Mrs Robinson?’ Sarah swung round to look at the nurse and without a moment’s hesitation climbed down from my knee and took the hand that was outstretched to her. I was aware of the tapping of Sarah’s red shoes as we went down the corridor, and the clash of my high heels: ordinary comforting sounds.

We came to a room where several people were standing beneath a bright fluorescent light. They were talking to each other, oblivious of our presence. I reached for Sarah’s hand and held it tightly. Why were all these people here? I had expected a specialist and a nurse perhaps. Suddenly I was out of my depth. There were no signposts now.

The group divided and a man moved forward to welcome us. ‘Hello, Mrs Robinson. Hello, Sarah.’ I smiled and shook his hand wondering why he was dressed in a suit instead of a white coat.

‘Is your husband with you? He’s welcome to come in as well.’

‘No, he’s looking after our other daughter. Joanne’s only a baby,’ I explained.

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chair. She waved a toy and when Sarah looked towards her, she hid the toy with her hand. Just then Mr Chapman rustled some paper behind us very quietly.

I waited for Sarah to react but she made no attempt to turn. I longed to move my leg to tell her what she was supposed to do.

‘That was the low frequency sound. Now try the high frequency one.’

The testing continued. Each time Sarah turned to a sound Mr Chapman patted her on the shoulder. He even patted her when she turned at a different time to the sound. When he began stroking the inside of a cup with a spoon, Sarah must have felt me willing her to turn because she spun round immediately. I breathed a sigh of relief.

But Mr Chapman laughed. ‘We’ve a bright one here,’ he said. ‘Sarah saw my assistant look at me when I scraped the spoon against the cup and she followed the look to me.’

The significance of his remark escaped me.

Twenty minutes passed and still we had not finished. Sarah was led to a small desk and chair. On the desk was a wooden boat with eight little men standing beside it.

‘This will determine the level at which Sarah hears low frequency sound,’ Mr Chapman crouched before her and smiled. To show her what he wanted her to do he put one of the men in her hand, said ‘Go,’ then guided it towards the boat.

Sarah placed the man inside it.

‘Very good girl,’ Mr Chapman spoke slowly and clearly. Sarah wriggled in her seat at his praise.

Why didn’t he let her play with the toys now? She had done so well. The atmosphere was beginning to frighten me.

Mr Chapman went behind Sarah and said ‘Go’ near her right ear.

Sarah waited, her body still poised for the signal.

Mr Chapman tried again. He shouted ‘Go!’ at the top of his voice and the word reverberated around the room.

Sarah leaned forward and put the man in the boat.

I wanted to hug her. She had done what he wanted her to do.

‘Go!’ Mr Chapman lowered his voice to a more normal level.

Sarah waited.

‘Go!’ Mr Chapman shouted as loudly as he had done before.

I caught the flicker of a smile as Sarah placed the man firmly in the boat. Then she sat back pleased with herself.

‘That’s the threshold of her hearing,’ Mr Chapman said to a woman in a white coat. He crossed the room and shouted the same loud ‘Go!’ into a sound-level meter standing on a table. Turning to me he explained, ‘That’s where Sarah begins to hear low-frequency sound.’

We had been here for three-quarters of an hour now and Sarah was still cooperating. Mr Chapman had a way with children and he injected enthusiasm into every move he made.

The assistant took over the testing for Sarah’s left ear. She shouted ‘Go!’ but no matter how hard she tried she couldn’t shout the word loudly enough. ‘I can’t get any louder,’ she said to Mr Chapman with a note of disappointment. I wondered if Sarah was being purposely contrary.
Sarah's crying when she was a baby because she wanted to be left alone. Afterwards, her frustration and tantrums were telling me something was wrong, but the invisibility of her deafness had meant I failed to recognise what that 'something' was. Now I knew why she seemed so unfeeling. Deafness had been an ever-present barrier between us.

I had thought that Sarah was being disobedient when she wouldn't do as she was told. Once I called her name as she ran down the road and she 'refused' to stop, I smacked her leg. I hadn't understood it when she turned towards me with a surprised and hurt expression. Deafness had been the reason for her independence. She'd had to rely on herself because she couldn't rely on other people. She had become a fighter because she'd had to fight to survive.

Could I ever make up for what I had done to her?

'Why did it happen?' I held back my tears afraid that Mr Chapman would become impatient with me.

'Did you have any problems with pregnancy?'

It all came flooding back to me. 'I had a threatened miscarriage, and I was in contact with German measles before I knew I was pregnant. Rubella.' Mr Chapman nodded at the woman in the white coat as if he found this significant.

'I had a blood test though. My doctor said anti-bodies were present and I had no need to worry.'

Mr Chapman had moved from my side and I felt abandoned. Everyone was getting ready to go home.

'Sarah passed her hearing test,' I said. As far as I was concerned the test stated that Sarah's hearing was normal. I had thought it was infallible.

Mr Chapman frowned. 'I'm afraid we have a long way to go in perfecting our methods of screening for hearing.'

'Why didn't I know?'

'Well, for a start, you wouldn't have been expecting Sarah to have a hearing loss and she is a first child. Besides she would have responded to stimuli other than sound: a vibration, a reflection in a mirror, a draught as a door opens. . . .' He hesitated. 'I don't know whether you are aware of it but you sign to Sarah.'

Yesterday I had asked Sarah to fetch a cloth from the kitchen and she had run to get it for me. I thought she had heard me but she must have seen the milk spilt, my 'rubbing' gesture and pointed finger.

'I thought the tonsillitis Sarah gets had caused a temporary loss of hearing,' I said. 'My doctor told me she would grow out of it.'

'Sarah has a sensori-neural loss of hearing or nerve deafness,' Mr Chapman explained.

'Is there anything that can be done? An operation?'

'There isn't a cure for nerve deafness?'

'Somehow I knew the answer before I had asked the question. What can I do? How can I help her? I needed to think I could do something. An idea came to me. 'Could I train to be a teacher of the deaf?'

'Don't worry about that for now,' Mr Chapman replied. 'What we're going to do Mrs Robinson is to give Sarah a hearing-aid. That's the first thing. Then you will begin seeing a teacher of the deaf who will help you. You're lucky. We're starting a clinic in your area next month.'

Next month! What would I do for a whole month?

There was one more question I had to ask and it couldn't be withheld any longer.

'Will Sarah learn to talk?'

There was no reply.

The assistant had been waiting for me by the door and, taking Sarah's hand, I followed her into the corridor and on to the next stage. Sarah's shoes tapped lightly on the tiled floor again as she skipped by my side. She couldn't hear the sound they made. I ached all over. One long ache of despair.

We were led into a room where a young girl in a white coat said, 'We'll take an impression of Sarah's ear so that we can make her an ear mould.' I held Sarah's hand to reassure her as a soft pink substance was pressed into her ear.

'It's better if you can cry,' the assistant said. 'Would you like me to ring your husband?'

'No, I'll be all right. Thank you though.'

'Here's Sarah's hearing-aid,' she said, placing it in my hand. I looked down at the black box. It was identical to the one the boy in the waiting-room had worn.

At last we were free to go, and Sarah and I walked to the car park. The sun was shining and the sky an unending blue. Once upon a time I had thought nothing bad could happen on a sunny day.

Sarah ran ahead of me to the car, a trim little figure without a
I had arranged to meet Mick at his sister's house but, as I turned the corner near where she lived, he was walking towards us. I stopped the car and he opened the door.

As I unlocked the door of the car to let her in, a bird sang in the tree above me. Lorries rumbled past the exit of the hospital. All around me were sounds I had paid scant attention to before: now they had the power to overwhelm me with sadness. I thought of everything Sarah would miss as if she had become deaf today and not before she was born: the sound of running water, singing, the lap of waves on the shore, a clock ticking... What about the television and the radio?

And oh - she would never hear my voice.

There were only two stages in my life now: before knowing about Sarah's deafness and after. Did Mr Chapman realise what his words had done? They had changed our lives for ever.

Before, we were an ordinary family. Now, deafness had come to set us apart and make us different. We were on our own. Alone.

But the effects deafness would have on Mick and myself were minor considerations when compared to the consequences for Sarah. Would it mean a life of deprivation, not only of sound but everything else as well? Would it mean she would never play tennis, go to a dance, attend university? What about having a boyfriend, getting married, and rearing children?

Had Sarah been robbed of her life, the life she would have had had she not been deaf? And had we been robbed of it too?

in her eye. She looked so pretty that somehow my sense of despair was heightened.

'Is there an operation?'

'No*.'

'There must be.'

'There isn't. There's nothing they can do medically,'

'What caused it?'

'They can't be certain.'

One at a time Mick's mother and sister came into the lounge to look at Sarah and ask questions. They kept saying it wasn't possible, and not to worry, as if someone had made a big mistake. I didn't want to be here answering their questions. I wanted to be miles and miles from anywhere. Not for one moment did I take their feelings into account, for they loved Sarah too. They were the best kind of family to have, but I couldn't share this with them. This terrible thing had happened to me. Sarah was sitting on the floor smothered in chocolate. It hadn't taken her long to realise the atmosphere was in her favour - and to take advantage of it.

'It'll get better,' Grandma said. 'You'll see. She'll grow out of it.'
3 Discovery and Diagnosis

Lorraine Fletcher

Ben Fletcher was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at the age of ten months. His mother, Lorraine, recalls below, illustrated with extracts from her diaries kept at the time, the family's experiences. This piece is taken from Lorraine's book, A Language for Ben, which was adapted into a television documentary.

It is perhaps thanks to the skill of the hospital staff in dealing so swiftly with what could have been a disaster that we do not worry after the birth. Ben is slow to regain a normal colour but apart from that seems fine. He has ten tiny fingers, ten tiny toes (the paediatrician counts them!), his limbs are strong, he has no blemishes, he looks around with interest when he is awake, and after a few hours he begins to feed well. His features are a bit squashed, but that simply makes him look oriental: he reminds Ray and me of a little Tibetan. Ray never mentions the shock and trauma he must have experienced being at the 'bottom end' during the birth: maybe he would rather forget. Perhaps it is true that fathers forget their fears just as mothers forget the pain of childbirth.

Once home, there is no time for either of us to think much at all. Sarah is not quite two and life is hectic, to say the least. When I brought the newborn Sarah home from hospital I would agonise over every breath, every little spot, the contents of each and every nappy: I almost lived inside this tiny being whose needs and whose actions were so new to me and so desperately important. I fit Ben in when I can and he rewards this more casual care with a placidity and a tranquillity I never thought possible in a child of mine. Yet he is not unresponsive, and at first we have no reason to suspect that he is any different from Sarah: he chortles when you tickle him, wriggles and kicks when you talk to him, appreciates having new and different things to look at, cries when he is hungry or upset, says 'A-goo!' to his grandfather, just as she did, and 'talks' to the toys hung over his cot.

As soon as Ben is past the newborn stage, we begin to establish a routine for caring for the two children. In the evenings, Ray and I bath them together, then Ray plays with Sarah in the bath while I get Ben ready for bed downstairs. Because I want to be sensitive to Sarah's feelings when both children are around, this time alone with Ben is precious. The kitchen is bright (we have decorated it in red and yellow)
makes him cry.) Ben’s legs are strong; he bounces happily and sturdily on anyone’s knee, stands upright holding onto people’s hands · but it is as if his head is attached by a loose spring; like Zebedee’s, it wobbles constantly. Ka and I are confident that as Ben matures the problem will diminish: how can there be anything wrong with a child who appears so sturdy from the neck down? So we stay calm, but the grandparents are not so sure: they worry much more than we do, but quietly, so as not to upset us.

Unbeknown to them, though, and at the same time, another suspicion is forming in our minds. For a while now, I have known that, when I go in to vacuum Ben’s room, he is unlikely to notice unless he can actually see me. Sitting on cushions in his room, feeding him, I have wondered idly why some people distract him when they come in and others don’t: Ray can come and go unnoticed, but Ben always turns and looks when Sarah bounces in. One June morning · Ben is about seven months old · I am on my way next door to visit my neighbour. Ben is riding on my hip, wide awake and alert, when we meet Louise coming the other way, similarly perched on her father’s hip, similarly alert.

‘Hello, Louise!’ I say, and she turns and looks at me, immediately, and smiles.

‘Hello, Ben!’ says Max, but Ben doesn’t respond. He is looking at some washing, waving on the line in the wind. ‘Ben!’ Max calls, louder. Again no response. ‘Look, Ben!’ I say. ‘Look, there’s Max and Louise.’ I turn him to face them and he smiles and bounces, thrilled to see them. Cogs spring into action in my mind and click away as, slowly, I piece these incidents together. He must be a little deaf. Maybe he’s deaf in one ear, which would explain why he responds at some times and not at others ...

Now, Ray and I subject this baby of ours to close scrutiny, aiming to make some sort of sense of his responses to sound. But his responses are very erratic: we look for a pattern but it is impossible to predict what he will respond to and where. His routine hearing test is due: we decide to wait for that and see what the health visitors say.

When they arrive to do the test, I do not mention my suspicions to them: I want to see if they notice any problem without influencing them by my own observations.

20.6.81
Ben’s hearing card came. I’m becoming more worried that he might be deaf in his left ear · and I’m sure he won’t respond to the tests.

24.6.81
Ben’s hearing test. They couldn’t get him to respond either, but said as he’s still very young they’ll try again in a few weeks. So no worry as yet · and after much persistence today I got him to turn to his left a couple of times in response to things.

I think that left ear does function OK. Perhaps it was just immaturity causing the problems with the test.

These little extracts from the five-year diary only hint at what is going on at this time. Even Sarah puts herself in ‘testing’ mode as the whole family sets about trying to ascertain whether Ben is deaf, and if so how deaf. We slam doors, we drop pans behind him, we call him, we squeak toys behind him, we rattle things, we bang lids together, we shout, we whistle, we whisper. Sometimes he turns, sometimes he doesn’t. Just as I knew that I could vacuum his room without him realising, but didn’t allow the implications of that knowledge to register in my mind, so now I close my mind to what might be.

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There is lots to think about at the moment, lots going on. Ray starts a new job in September, up in the North. We are excited about moving ‘back to our roots’, for both of us were born there, closer to our parents, and into a part of the country whose hills and moorland we love. We are also in the process of selling our house · and it is not a straightforward matter: we live on a modern estate, there are dozens of houses exactly like ours and about one in ten of them is for sale. Worry thrives on spare time, and I have little of that: simply coping from one day to the next is a full-time job with a two-year-old and a baby to look after. If I worry at all, it is about whether we shall be able to sell our house in time for the family to be able to move when Ray starts his new job. I do feel a little uneasy from time to time about Ben’s hearing problem, and we carry on spasmodic impromptu testing, and we watch Ben’s reactions carefully: but thinking, actual hard cogitation, is rather a forgotten art: I just take each day as it comes and am thankful if by the end of it there are enough clean nappies for the morning, there are still two Weetabix in the packet and the pedal bin hasn’t overflowed yet.

17.7.81
Ben’s hearing test. They couldn’t get him to respond again on the left side and are trying to get him referred to a hearing specialist before we leave. If he is deaf on that side he’ll have to be fitted with a hearing aid or he won’t learn to speak. We’re still hopeful that as he becomes more alert he’ll respond on that side, but meanwhile are doing a lot of face-to-face talking to him so that at least he sees the sounds being made · since his ‘speech’ at the moment has no consonants at all ...

18.7.81
Noticed two blue spots wide apart on his upper gums · hope he’s not going to have black teeth as well · he’s such a beautiful baby now.

‘… black teeth as well …’ I may not consciously be thinking about it overmuch, but this little phrase, written quickly and without deliberation the day after the health visitors’ comments about treatment, gives an indication of how my subconscious is working. By the deafness · or by having to wear a hearing aid? · my beautiful child would be scarred, spoiled, marked. Again, the defence system springs into action. We don’t exactly deny the deafness · in fact in our day-to-day behaviour we are already accommodating it by dealing with Ben in a slightly different way, relying increasingly on visual rather than auditory stimuli, finding him new things to look at and touch, taking note of the kind of games he likes and repeating them · but we do postpone the deafness: having been told that Ben will need to see a specialist we reserve judgement till then. For now, we live for the moment, as usual.

***
In July 1981 we move house. Due to a hiccup at the buying end we expect to spend some time living with Ray’s parents. Rather than waiting, we continue ‘investigations’ there, but without mentioning the deafness to the grandparents: we see no sense in upsetting them. For they will be upset, that is certain — until we ourselves are sure about it, until we have it confirmed.

6.8.81

Ben saw the doctor at clinic. She’s not sure about his ears, says they’re a bit catarrhy, has given some Actifed syrup to clear it up, will do a hearing test with the health visitor in about a fortnight. She says that the hearing problem might simply be due to his always having blocked ears because of sniffles. Let’s hope it is.

18.8.81

The health visitor and I checked Ben’s hearing: she also tested the other aspects of his development — he’s just a little slow with sitting, but hearing’s the main problem. Saw the doctor straight away and she referred Ben to a specialist. They were both very nice. Parents all shocked but Mum F. had suspected it. Just have to find out now how much affected he is. Feel very tender towards him and trying very hard to help.

25.8.81

Ben’s proper deafness tests — no conclusions drawn because of his inability to concentrate (to be expected in such extensive tests — rattling and banging all kinds of things behind him and at each side). So a different kind of test arranged Friday at children’s hospital — hope it’s not nasty for him.

28.8.81

It looks as if Ben may be totally deaf. Today’s tests got no response — electrodes stuck to his ears and neck to monitor muscle reaction to really loud noises registered no response, and he didn’t react to any of the things they sounded behind him, even a very loud drum. They said his reactions at home may be due to very good, quick eye perception and sensitivity to vibration, e.g. of floor if someone approached. Said to watch him and note down any instances of responses unaided by sight/vibration and today there have been none. Feel fiercely protective and very loving towards him, as does everyone we’ve told. More tests with boss specialist 9th Sept.

9.9.81

Ben’s appointment. Specialist thinks definitely some hearing loss: recommends op. to clear fluid (if any) which may be affecting his hearing, then electronic tests while he’s still under anaesthetic.

The operation over, we have official confirmation that Ben is deaf. Sitting at the foot of his hospital cot, looking through its white bars at my sleeping baby, I think back. Could we have known before?

Incidents spring to mind, insignificant singly but when viewed together and in retrospect giving powerful indications that the differences we observed in Ben might have been attributable to a particular cause. There were the obvious ones, of course, the ones which originally gave rise to suspicions — but there were others, too. That wobbly head .. . Might that have been Caused by a problem with balance rather than with muscle control? And Ben is by no means reliable now: all babies fall often when they are first learning to stand upright — but Ben’s falls are spectacular, more like fainting than tumbling, with no intermediate stage. One second he’s upright, holding on to a chair arm or other support, the next his head hits the floor. It’s frightening, and at the moment we’re grateful for Ray’s parents’ thick carpets and wooden floorboards. He obviously has very poor balance. Is this connected with deafness?

My mind wanders back to the very early days, days when we were still getting to know Ben, working out the best way to look after him, discovering differences and similarities between him and his sister .. . days before we even suspected that he might be deaf .. .

Travelling .. . On our way home, after Christmas. Ben is six weeks old. Having had a horrific outward journey with him, we’ve waited till bedtime for the return trip, so that both children can sleep. Sarah, in a safety harness between Ray and me, chatters away. I know that the noise and vibration of our ancient Volkswagen bus will soon send her to sleep, as it has done since she was a baby. We have found that the opposite is true for Ben: even the shortest of journeys has always seemed intolerable to him. On the way up North, in his carrycot in the rear of the van, on the floor, he fretted and cried for much of the trip. Because of fears for his safety, I was unwilling to pick him up and hold him, but eventually his cries became so piteous that I climbed over and cuddled him, sitting on a rear-facing seat in the back of the van. Even then he was not happy until he could see out of the window. I am resigned to doing the same on the return journey, but I intend to feed him, in the hope that he will settle down to sleep. As soon as we start to move, he cries: I feed him as planned. But, even though it is dark, he does not go to sleep. It is as if he is forcing himself to stay awake — behaviour quite common in his sister but unprecedented in this placid baby, who throughout his time with the grandparents has gained a reputation as the most contented child ever. He takes a little milk, breaks off, looks around, whimperes, starts again, obviously disturbed, resolutely refusing even to close his eyes. I talk to him reassuringly, try singing .. . nothing works. The journey seems never-ending. He falls asleep just as we
arrive home, exhausted by his own crying. I take him up to his room: he wakes again as I turn on the light, but this time he is his ‘normal’ self, relaxed, calm as ever.

Another night, in his room... Ben, at three months old, tormented by wind - or whatever else it is that wakes babies up again soon after they have been put down for the night. In a similar situation, Sarah used to enjoy being rocked, in the dark, and sung to sleep. It appears that in this respect, too, Ben is different. I pick him up, check his nappy, which is still clean and dry, try feeding him - no, that’s not the problem: I wrap him up in a soft, warm blanket, turn off the light, hold him upright against me in the rocking chair. He carries on fretting, wriggling about in my arms. Sarah used to do this for a couple of minutes, until I got into a proper rhythm and relaxed, so, undeterred, I rock, and I sing, one in time with the other, slowly, quietly. This is one of the pure joys of parenthood: the warm room, the smell of baby shampoo and the feel of that little downy head against my cheek, the prospect of cradling a sleeping baby in my arms while I rest myself, in the darkness, away from the bustle of life downstairs, in peace... But I can’t relax, because Ben can’t. The sweetest of singing and the most rhythmic of rocking have no effect.

Reluctantly, I get up, turn up the light a little and put Ben back in his cot, face down. He lifts up his head and cries. I try turning him on to his back: he catches sight of the rows of toys strung across his cot and he is quiet. A dreamy expression replaces the look of anguish on his face and his eyes flicker backwards and forwards along the row, as if he is greeting each little creature in turn. I tiptoe out of the room: he does not notice me go. A little later, I creep in again. Ben is asleep.

That Christmas, the weather icy cold and with the prospect of a walk over the fields to an aunt’s house. Impossible to use the pram - I’ll just have to take Ben in the baby sling. I know that he doesn’t like it, having made several attempts to carry him around the house in it, but I have promised this visit, and it will only mean ten minutes in the sling, so I decide to try again. I feed him so that he is full, and carry him around the house in it, but I have promised this visit, and it will only mean ten minutes in the sling, so I decide to try again. I feed him so that he is full, and carry him around the house in it, but I have promised this visit, and it will only mean ten minutes in the sling, so I decide to try again. I feed him so that he is full, and carry him around the house in it, but I have promised this visit, and it will only

Almost immediately he is quiet, sociable, content. He looks around, calm, interested, accepts the baby sling. Ray helps me to strap it on: the grizzlies of protest begin, I resolve to carry on: maybe brisk walking will pacify him as it used to pacify Sarah. I fasten my coat around the baby, and everything else I can think of as I walk, fast and easily, down the road. The crying persists, getting louder all the time. It’s pitiful. Two old ladies tut-tut in sympathy as they make their way slowly towards us up the hill.

‘Poor little mite I’ one comments as we pass. I feel so cruel and guilty I could weep, but I plod on, still talking, but to no avail, I begin to sweat, my heavy coat feels sticky, my chest. Wet against the little hot body. ‘How true it is that kids differ,’ I console myself, thinking of Sarah as a baby, riding untroubled in the sling, as much calmed by it as Ben is agitated. At my aunt’s house I throw off the coat, struggle to release Ben quickly from his prison, I put him down on his back, on the floor, to extricate his legs. The crying subsides. Almost immediately he is quiet, sociable, content.

‘That’s better,’ says my mother, also visiting. ‘You just wanted to Mawe a look round, didn’t you?’

.. And what of the cause? Maybe we could have been more aware even before Ben was born, more careful, perhaps? Yet, during this pregnancy, I was even more careful than during the last one: no alcohol, no drugs - not even an aspirin - and before even trying for Sarah I had an immune test for German measles... but, yes, I was ill. I struggle to remember. We had visitors. Their little girl went down with a tummy bug. After they left, suffering as I was from the kind of permanent nausea I took drugs to relieve whilst pregnant with Sarah, it was a while before I realised that I had caught the bug - but then it took hold: the vomiting became more frequent and was accompanied by debilitating stomach cramps. I was really ill for about a week, couldn’t keep down any food, lost weight and, for a while, worried about losing the baby. I must have been about eight or nine weeks pregnant. Just when organs like the eyes and ears are starting to form - just when a virus like German measles is at its most dangerous.

And the birth. Should we have suspected then that something was wrong? Could we have known then? I was certainly well-prepared for the birth: my classes had familiarised me with every detail of what would happen to my body and how I should deal with each stage of the labour. I read every book I could find, and I had memories of Sarah’s birth - hospital controlled and quite frightening for Ray and me - to help me through this one... but I resolutely avoided reading the sections on ‘birth trauma’... I could anticipate my own body’s suffering without fear, but I found the thought that my baby might suffer birth injuries too awful to contemplate. Like every mother, I was tormented from time to time by the thought that I might give birth to a handicapped child.

I remember a motorway journey when, pregnant with Sarah, I was sharing some of the fears I had then with Ray. His response came instantly, almost without thinking.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you know, even if it is... different in some way, it’ll still be ours, and we’ll still love it.’ I remember that now, as, in the quiet of the children’s hospital, I remember that other hospital where, just over a year ago, Ben was born, with the umbilical cord looped twice around his neck. He was a ‘blue baby’: he needed oxygen before he would regain consciousness. Afterwards, he appeared to be fine... Too little oxygen at birth? Too much? Both can cause damage. Was it then that Ben became deaf?

Now, I tiptoe around Ben’s cot and I conduct my own examination. Despite the insertion of the grommets, the operation has left no marks; there will be no scars. The operation has not changed Ben, and neither, I realise suddenly, has the diagnosis. ‘I’ll still be ours, and we’ll still love it.’ Ben is still the same child, the child that Ray and I brought into the world in shared labour and the child we love. Just as the world in shared labour and the child we love. Just as the
is it something ugly, a scar, a blemish. Faced with it, here and now, I see it as it has always been for Ben: a fact of life, and as it has to be for us: a difference.

Section Three

The Pre-School Years
In further extracts from her book Children of Silence, Kathy Robinson writes of her struggle to help her daughter, Sarah, to communicate: she writes of their mutual efforts and frustrations.

The month in which we waited for the appointment with the teacher of the deaf passed slowly. When the day finally arrived Sarah and I made our way to the clinic three miles from where we lived.

We entered a square hallway and through one of the doors leading off it, I saw a lady sitting opposite a small boy who was holding a feather between his teeth. Sarah would soon be doing that, I thought. Learning how to pronounce words properly.

Another door opened and as the teacher ushered a small girl from her room, my heart jumped when I saw her black hearing-aid. It was strapped to her chest, blatantly ruining the front of her dress.

The teacher greeted me and said ‘Hello’ to Sarah. She was well-groomed and self-assured, and this made me feel even worse than I had before. If Sarah needed a professional like this to help her, what could I possibly have to offer? She had a specialist knowledge of deaf children and I had none.

Sarah was asked to sit at a small table upon which stood a machine and a pair of earphones. The teacher placed the earphones over Sarah’s head and adjusted them to fit her ears tightly. She switched the machine on and spoke into a microphone which hung from a cord around her neck.

‘One, two, three. Hello, hello. Testing. Testing.’ When she was satisfied it was working she looked up at me. ‘This is an auditory training unit,’ she explained. ‘It amplifies sound. I can adjust it to suit Sarah’s hearing loss. This knob here boosts the high tones, and this the low tones. That dial there tells me how loud my voice is. I have to keep it on a level which makes the needle stay on the red line.’

I watched the needle as it wavered near the red line, and saw it fall when the teacher stopped speaking. Sarah was fascinated too. It surprised me she hadn’t made a fuss about wearing the earphones. They were far too large and cumbersome for a child.

‘If you watch everything I do,’ the teacher went on, ‘then you’ll be
able to copy the session at home with Sarah.' She held the microphone near her mouth. 'Hello Sarah.'

I moved forward in my chair to interrupt. I would have to explain that Sarah didn't know her name. I had been saying 'Sarah' for years. Surely she realised that Sarah couldn't hear.

On the floor by the teacher's side was a large cardboard box, and, as the lesson progressed, she pulled pieces of a toy merry-go-round from it and joined them together with gaily painted nuts and bolts. I concentrated on every move she made. I noticed she spoke clearly and that she held the pieces of the merry-go-round up near her mouth.

'Here's a stick,' she said. 'A long stick.' She traced her finger slowly across it, then added, 'I'll push the stick through the hole.' She pretended to find this difficult to do, but as Sarah reached out to help her, she drew the stick back up to her mouth. 'You push it through the hole,' she said.

She passed the stick to Sarah and when Sarah had pushed it through the hole, she took it away from her again.

Sarah looked deflated.

'You don't have to exaggerate your words though it will be a temptation to do so,' the teacher said. 'But you must speak clearly and in short sentences. When you get home try practising in the mirror. If you put a slight emphasis on the key words it will help Sarah, but you must keep them in the context of a sentence, otherwise Sarah won't learn words like "the, through, and, round, in," and these are important for the sense of the sentence. At the beginning you'll find it easier for Sarah to understand because she will see their movements. So try using words like "pushing, pulling, running," and "jumping".'

I stared at her, mesmerised by her glossy pink lips, and tried to make sense of it all. As far as I could tell Sarah wasn't understanding anything that was being said to her. As for me, it was like trying to learn a foreign language. Why wasn't Sarah being taught to say words? Why did the teacher put less emphasis on putting words to her? As for me, it was like trying to learn a foreign language.

'If you bring the toys up to your mouth it will encourage Sarah to watch your lips for information,' the teacher's voice interrupted my thoughts. 'Some people call it face hearing. Others call it mouth reading. Try to speak very clearly for Sarah to understand because she will see her movements.'

Information. What information? I tried to look as if I understood the whole magical process, a process which was so far removed from my experience that it was impossible for me to understand.

'Why can't Sarah play with the toys?' I asked.

'Because she would be looking at them and not at your face.'

I was pleased with Sarah. She looked calm but I knew that, inside, she was like a taut ball of wire, waiting to spring. It would happen. After we had left the teacher's presence Sarah's frustration would find release.

'Here's a horse. It's got some eyes.' The teacher pointed to the horse's eyes and then her own. 'The horse has a nose. You have a nose.' She touched Sarah on the tip of her nose. Sarah stiffened.

The lesson dragged on interminably until the merry-go-round was complete. At last Sarah could play and I could ask the questions I had stored for over a month.

'Will Sarah have to go to boarding school?' This had worried me so much I hadn't been able to sleep.

The teacher helped Sarah to undo the screw on the merry-go-round before she answered me. Some authorities do make boarding school placements but we think a child should be helped by the mother in the home. You see, if parents learn to help their children from the beginning, their support usually continues right through the child's education. When Sarah starts school she will go to the School for the Deaf.'

Then I asked the question which had tormented me even more. 'Will Sarah learn to talk?' That was all I wanted to know. In the last month I had alternated between thinking deafness was a handicap of immense proportion, or a sad, but nevertheless minor, inconvenience.

The teacher drew in her breath as if she was preparing herself for something unpleasant. 'I can't tell you whether Sarah will learn to talk,' she answered. 'No one can. A lot will depend on how much you are prepared to put in. We'll just have to wait and see how she develops. It will take a long time.

Hearing children listen for many months before they say their first word. If you do these sessions at home and talk as much as possible, then you will be giving her the best chance she will have for learning language.' She opened her handbag and took out a package containing an ear mould. 'Have you brought Sarah's hearing-aid with you?' she asked.

I handed Sarah's hearing-aid over together with the harness I had made the week before. It had a pocket at the front to hold the hearing-aid and straps to go over Sarah's shoulders and around her chest. To keep the aid in place I had sewn on a button and a small piece of elastic to loop round it.

'It may take Sarah a little time to get used to wearing an ear mould so if she objects don't force her,' the teacher said as she slipped the harness over Sarah's head. 'Let her wear it for a few minutes each day and build it up until she's wearing it all the time. It will become as routine for her to put on the aid in the morning as it is to put on her vest.'

I thought of the fight I had with Sarah each morning to put on a vest and marvelled at the way the teacher made it sound so easy.

'When you speak, your voice will go into the receiver here at the top of the aid and be amplified. Look I'll show you.' The teacher told Sarah to bend her head on one side while she pushed the ear mould gently into her ear, then she switched the aid on and turned the volume control to number three. At that point a whistle blasted from the earpiece.

'When this happens you'll have to turn the hearing-aid lower,' the teacher said, as she adjusted the control. 'Sound escapes from the ear mould if it doesn't fit tightly enough and then you'll get a whistle.'

Sarah started shaking her head from side to side, disliking the feel of a strange object in her ear.

The teacher quickly removed it. 'Don't make a big thing of the aid,' she advised. 'Get her used to it slowly.'

She stood up to indicate that the lesson was at an end, and I began to gather the kind of paraphernalia which would accompany us from now on. The ear mould and the lead, the hearing-aid and the batteries, the auditory training unit, and the box with the borrowed merry-go-round in, then I thanked her.

'As we walked from the building, I considered the job I had been given to do,
It was my responsibility to help Sarah to speak. To speak when she had never heard the sound of her own voice, had never heard my voice either. I was unprepared and felt totally incapable of carrying out such an undertaking. Yet Sarah depended upon me.

While we were at the clinic I had left Joanne with my friend Pauline and, after I had picked her up, I raced home to try the hearing-aid on Sarah. I had a desperate need to see if she could hear and couldn’t wait a moment longer.

At home I placed the harness over Sarah’s shoulders . . . and removed it when she began to scream. I was determined to do this thing properly even if it did require waiting. I wasn’t going to give Sarah the chance to think the hearing-aid was important to me, no matter what it cost to curb my impatience.

When lunch was over, I carried Joanne upstairs to her cot, then returned to the kitchen. I lifted Sarah on to a chair by the table and placed the merry-go-round on the floor before sitting opposite her to begin the lesson.

‘Sarah,’ I said clearly. ‘Here’s a horse.’ I raised the horse to my mouth. ‘It’s got a nose! I touched my nose and then Sarah’s. She spat at me, stood up on her chair, leaned over the table, and snatched the horse from me. When I moved to take it from her, she screamed and threw the horse across the room.

Disheartened, I pulled another piece of the merry-go-round from the box and held it to my mouth. Sarah began kicking and stamping her feet. And that was it. The lesson was over.

I picked the toy up and put it back in the box. Only then, when it was out of sight, did Sarah stop her awful screaming. Her actions seemed to say, ‘I’ll work with the teacher but I’m damned sure I’ll not do homework as well!’

And once Sarah had made up her mind about anything, nothing would change it.

I went upstairs to Joanne and lay my head against her warm cheek. She reached out her hand to stroke my hair. ‘Aaah,’ she said.

Her tiny face was framed by soft brown curls and she was smiling impishly. I loved the way she loved me.

When Mick returned from work, I strapped the aid to Sarah’s chest while she played with a new toy. Mick went behind her and called her name. When she didn’t turn he said, ‘Perhaps she’s busy concentrating on the toy. I’ll try again. Sarah . . . Sarah. Sarah. Sarah!’

The disappointment was intense. All our hopes had been pinned on this moment. The aid was useless. Its presence now seemed to take Sarah further away from us, erecting a barrier which had not been there before. With the aid strapped to her chest we could no longer pretend she wasn’t deaf.

Mick took off his jacket and sat down. T don’t see why she can’t wear it under her dress,’ he said.

‘The teacher told me not to put it under her clothing. She says we shouldn’t try to hide it.’

I had wanted to hide the aid. It was a symbol of deafness, and deafness carried a stigma. I didn’t want to feel this way but I couldn’t dismiss the attitude of society just like that, one which had passed through generations, and one I had been a party to myself. All the beliefs that society ever harboured about deafness were now turned against me: that deaf people were unintelligent and dumb, that they signed their own language, made noises instead of speech, had anti-social habits such as pulling, prodding, gesturing, that they were a sub-culture, lacked sensitivity, and had bad table manners. I had even read that in times past deafness was so feared that those afflicted with it were thrown into the river and drowned.

While Sarah was still wearing the hearing-aid, I took her to the kitchen to try and resume the lesson. It scared me to face her again. What if she wouldn’t co-operate?

I put the cardboard box on the floor by the chair and Sarah ran to the closed door. When I held out my hand for her to take, she shook her head and whined, so I picked her up and sat her firmly on the chair. Then, while she scowled at me, dreadful wordless thoughts revolving in her head, I undid my wrist-watch and laid it on the table. Ten minutes. The teacher said only ten minutes.

‘This is the swing Sarah,’ I said. ‘Put the man on the swing.’ I motioned for her to do it, but she grabbed the man from my hand and refused to put him on the swing. I resisted the urge to shout, ‘Do AS YOU’RE TOLD. PUT THE MAN ON THE SWING.’ Instead I reached into the box for the merry-go-round top, and spun it on the table.

Sarah held my eyes with her own as she swept the merry-go-round top, still spinning, to the floor.

Each morning I brought the aid to Sarah, and each morning she refused to put it on, until the day Joanne picked up the ear mould and made an uncoordinated attempt to put it in her own ear. Seeing this, Sarah grabbed the aid and banged herself on the chest with her fist.
‘Yes, it’s your hearing-aid,’ I said. ‘You put it on then.’ I motioned to her to put the harness over her head and, to my amazement, she nodded. I quickly put the aid on, fitted the ear mould in her ear, and sat her at the table. I poured cereal into a bowl and, with my heart beating furiously, I brought the merry-go-round out again.

By the time we left the table, I was walking on air. Sarah had eaten cereal and two slices of toast, she had jam on her face, and biscuit was floating in her tea - but she had put the man on the swing.

Even so when I saw the teacher again I was saying, ‘I can’t do it. Sarah won’t listen to me.’

I didn’t mention the violent feelings I was experiencing. One side of me was sympathetic towards Sarah, and the other, quite the most dominant, could literally have killed her.

‘Yes you can,’ the teacher replied. ‘It gets easier.’

‘But I’m lazy. I don’t want to do it.’ I was ashamed but it was true. I wanted to be free again as before, not chained to this dreadful ritual.

When we left the teacher gave us a new toy. Once we were home, I took the aeroplane out of the box while Sarah sneered at me from the other end of the table.

‘The aeroplane has wings.’ The teacher had said to use the word ‘aeroplane’ instead of ‘plane’ because longer words were easier to lipread. I had tried saying them both in front of the mirror and found them equally difficult to decipher. How Sarah was supposed to lipread when she didn’t know what words meant astounded me. Besides, many letters of the alphabet didn’t even appear on the lips so how could she lipread sounds which weren’t visible?

Sarah continued to eye me with disdain as her foot tapped rhythmically against the window seat.

‘Stop that Sarah. It has windows. There are the windows. Look, we’ve got some windows in our house.’

Sarah smacked her leg. One smack after the other.

‘Keep still!’ How could she see the fleeting movements of my lips if she kept fidgeting? ‘The man’s got a moustache.’

Sarah stared at me. Straight through me. Her look was one of defiance even though I knew that couldn’t be. Sarah could only defy words when she knew they existed. A word, as far as she was concerned, may have been the way my eyebrows moved, or the number of times that I blinked.

I left the table, and even though I knew the teacher would greatly disapprove, I began to blackmail Sarah. I gave her the biggest, chewiest lollipop I had been able to buy. She looked at it, pondered upon this unexpected move, and made her decision. She put the lollipop in her mouth and raised her eyes to mine. Silently, we reached a compromise. She would do it her ten minutes.

The next lesson was accompanied by another lollipop and, as I tripped over my tongue in an effort to get as many words into Sarah as I could before the lollipop disappeared, Sarah began: sucking at an equally fast rate until, triumphantly, she held the lollipop stick aloft and got down from the table. I looked at my watch in dismay. Five minutes. Only five minutes.

So it was a battle of wits between Sarah and me. The only thing was, she was winning!

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5 Total Commitment to Total Communication

Riki Kittel

In this piece Riki Kittel explains why she feels that Total Communication rather than purely oral/aural methods, is essential to the adjustment and successful development of severely and profoundly deaf children.

Riki makes a plea for more information to be made available to parents of deaf children from the earliest months, in order for them to make reasoned decisions about appropriate communication methods.

When our son, Piers, was eight and a half months old, we were told that he was profoundly deaf. There was a teacher of the deaf present at the diagnosis. She told us there was no need to worry: if we worked hard, using his hearing aids at all times, then he would develop quite normally but at a slower rate than his hearing peers - information which is cruelly wrong.

She later told us categorically that using sign language with him would mean he would never learn how to talk. Misinformation; for this need not be true. These two points should never be stated as facts, they are only hopes, more applicable to babies with mild to moderate hearing losses.

For babies with severe or profound deafness they are not only tragic and damaging, they are as outmoded as the alchemist’s dream of turning base metal into gold.

It is information which was, and still is, often given to parents at diagnosis. It not only leaves out most of the story but completely misleads parents who usually know little or nothing about deafness.

Their fears that something was wrong with their baby may have been multiplying for months. Parents of a deaf baby will almost certainly have been desperately searching for someone who will listen to their fears, and have at last found that person.

Confirmation will bring a curious relief. But they have learned that their beautiful baby is not just deaf but very deaf: they will be stunned and bewildered. The teacher of the deaf will sympathise, reassure and inform them.

This information must be full and unbiased, not misleading, for it is also information which is given at a critical time, to parents who are in shock and totally vulnerable. They will have complete confidence in the teacher of the deaf. They will trust them.

Thus, information they are given at diagnosis will not only be retained, but retained so tenaciously that it will be extremely difficult to convince the
parents that it is incomplete or even fallacious at a future date.

Usually parents do not know that there are choices to be made at diagnosis. They know nothing of the enormous advantages that are brought about by including the use of sign language in a deaf baby’s educational programme.

They frequently have no idea that they ought to be making far reaching decisions, not only for the benefit of the existing family situation but also for the future life of their child. They don’t ask for information on which to make a decision, simply because they have no idea they have not been given the full picture, and are unaware that there are decisions to be made.

Most teachers of the deaf actually take the decision for the parent, arguing either that the parents are too shocked to make a decision at this time or that they would be incapable of understanding and assessing the situation and taking reasoned decisions. Thus families default into oral/aural education, unaware of the controversy in the field.

Quite simply most parents are not fully informed of the facts. This is a breach of fundamental human rights. Everyone has the right to be given full information. Withholding or slanting it is not only wrong, it is totally immoral.

Typically, parents are told that a few very simple rules suffice:

Rule 1. Treat your deaf child as if they are hearing - although doing this denies both the deafness and deaf culture.

Rule 2. Never let your child use their hands to communicate - although this cuts the child off from their mother tongue.

Rule 3. Use their hearing aids at all times - even though this may be extremely painful.

Rule 4. Speak to them constantly - although this can be both intrusive and threatening.

Rule 5. Make sure they watch your face when you speak to them - even though this may need to be done almost by force.

To parents these five rules seem so easy. There need not be too much change to the family situation: extra work, but what of that, if the child will emerge normal at the end of it?

Parents are told that the success of the entire venture is totally dependent upon the amount of hard work which they and the child put into it. This in effect means that any lack of progress will be put down to the families’ lack of determination, with no blame attaching to the system!

Most parents take the word of professionals. They trust them and do as they are told. They do not question the seeming illogicality of the instructions.
When they are told their baby will almost certainly produce normal speech eventually, they hear exactly what they want to hear. They are not really helped to accept the reality of deafness.

Where they need counselling to accept and be proud of having a deaf child, what actually happens is that they are helped to maintain the myth that all parents hold, the myth that their progeny are perfect. To them the denial of the strange condition which has been diagnosed in their beautiful baby is exactly what they want. The answer seems so easy, just keep talking to the baby and everything will be all right. It is an enormous relief to them. Thus, regardless of the fact that the child simply may not be able to hear enough speech to ever make any sense of it, that they may also be isolated, bewildered, and frustrated, in pain from ill-fitting ear-moulds, given headaches from constantly amplified and meaningless noise, unable to play quietly alone without a parent taking their face and mouthing contortedly at them, that natural communication between child and parent has been fatally disrupted and replaced by desperation on the parent’s part, nonetheless, if the child can’t produce intelligible speech it is because the parents and child did not work hard enough!

The sad and simple truth is that very few profoundly deaf children will ever achieve a useful level of speech whatever educational method is pursued. The tragedy is that so often all a deaf child’s time at school is squandered in quest of a talisman to produce golden speech - a goal forever made to seem just around the next corner, until it is far too late. That goal is attractive - normal speech, normal life, normal relationships. How different the reality actually is.

A few profoundly deaf children do achieve good speech. Scientific studies produce differing results but, however they are dressed up, all show that very few severely or profoundly deaf school leavers speak intelligibly.

With education tied down to oral communication, language levels achieved permit very little real learning. Heroic efforts are made to pour in language but so little is heard that most children emerge virtually illiterate and uneducated. This is scandalous, when other forms of communication exist.

Adding sign language means communication becomes relaxed, fluent and fun, thus learning takes place. Such a method is hard work and not as good as spoken communication for those that can hear really well but it is like manna from heaven for those that cannot.

We had doubts about what we had been told at diagnosis. Soon the teacher came to our home and showed us how to talk to our baby so that he would begin to watch our lips: how to talk, talk, talk to him. He was still vocalising - a good sign she said.

Another sign of progress - he sometimes produced a ‘b’, although usually not, and never, it seemed to us, except by chance.

We met other parents. They all felt their children! were making terrific progress. We saw worrying little evidence. Tempting us all were promises that new hearing aids meant that all children could speak now - radio aids, infra red aids - high tech magic spells.

It was more hype than hope, more misinformation. There is no doubt in many cases that worthwhile improvements will result from their use but however good, however new, their use will not lead to the crock of gold.

We could not take what we heard as fact. We doubted the blandly smiling faces, patronising reassurances and ‘patently psychological approach’ to which we were being subjected.

Also, the rules they gave us ‘felt’ wrong for us. We had decided before he was born, that we would try not to impose our own needs over those of our child, that if important decisions had to be made, we would consider their effect on the future adult we would help shape.

So we read as much as we could. What we read, quite frankly, appalled us and we sought advice from a wide range of people, including deaf adults, believing them to be the best people to understand the full implications of the situation and advise us properly.

We met deaf people with and without speech. Some sounded terrible - they were ‘different’. We were afraid. They were also warm and friendly, they welcomed us, became our friends and, almost without exception, they told us to consider following a Total Communication (TC) approach with our son. The only people who said don’t distress yourselves with meeting deaf people or reading of alternative approaches were oralist teachers.

We decided to add signing to our programme. We continued to use our son’s hearing aids, to help him utilise his residual hearing. We continued to speak him whenever appropriate and to draw his attention to our faces for developing lipreading skills.

However, within three weeks of his diagnosis we used our first signs to him, having selected Sign Supporting English as the signing code we used.

His response was immediate and joyful. From being a good, quiet and unresponsive baby he blossomed into a lively and inquisitive little being to whom we could say ‘OK! OK! But watch my face!’ and it actually made sense to him. Until then he had not thought moving mouths of greater significance than blinking eyelids.

By the time Piers was 21 months old we could see that he was making better progress than the other deaf babies in his oral/aural group. His speech was no worse than theirs but the communication we were achieving was vastly superior and his English was just starting to blossom.

His comprehended vocabulary at that time was at least 84 signs and he was regularly using 46 signs, including a few verbs and adjectives. This level could never have been achieved orally.
THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

Why do other parents of severely or profoundly deaf babies not reach the same conclusions? How can they continue blindly accepting without question this huge gamble on the future of their child?

Initially they are unaware of the facts: wide open to gentle manipulation. They start off enthusiastically on the oral/aural route. They do exactly as they are told. It becomes an article of faith for them. Gradually they become aware of an alternative approach to the education of their child. This is presented to them by the committed oral/aural teacher as a method which produces a speechless child, only able to communicate with their hands.

This myth is perpetuated by contact with other parents similarly indoctrinated. Teachers present the alternative way as failure; parents start to seek success. They begin to see the acquisition of speech as the only route to language and hence to education - yet one more myth.

The alternative way, involving the use of sign language seems to many teachers to carry a stigma. Fear of that old phrase, so rarely spoken in polite middle class society - deaf and dumb - still seethes beneath the surface.

In more enlightened countries, Total Communication is used and deaf students are leaving schools and colleges with knowledge and communication skills, proud of their language and achievements.

Here, too, many deaf people are still left with nothing after years of barren work towards inappropriate ends because parents are not helped to access full and correct information at diagnosis and had their natural wish for a normal child manipulated by those who would bear no responsibility for the emergent adult.

How do parents allow the obviously poor progress of their children to continue? Why do they not intervene earlier?

Once a parent is committed to the oral/aural course it is extremely difficult to step off the treadmill. The most amazingly tiny advances by the child are greeted with extravagant applause from the teacher, lack of progress is countered by tales of others who did not show progress until much later.

The hearsay abounds with amazing tales of the child who did not utter a word until the age of seven (ten, thirteen) and then made astonishing progress, eventually gaining a first-class degree etc.

Pure tone audiograms are taken and parents encouraged to see from them that the child might have enough hearing to perceive speech. The facts are that speech does not consist of pure tones.

The only important thing to know about children's hearing is just how much speech they can hear and discriminate clearly. There is no test in current use for this. In such ways parents are encouraged to persevere against all odds until it is far, far too late.

I would like to stress the use of a sign system in achieving two-way communication. Early instructions to us were to pour spoken language into Piers. Little would come back initially, we were told, but encourage everything. It would all come right in the end.

This feels totally wrong. We believe that teaching depends fundamentally on good two-way communication. It is as important for adults to understand what a child wishes to communicate as it is for the child to understand the teacher. It is only by understanding a child that we can praise successes, correct errors and answer questions. The very point of having a live teacher is for the teacher to respond to each child.

If this response were unimportant, children might as well watch their lessons on TV. All schools would then disappear and we would learn solely from books and videos. This is not happening and it is not happening because of the need to act on a child's response. Without signs, learning would be much slower, because it would take place in isolation without adequate two-way communication.

There is a far wider handicap to poor early communication. The crippling effect of poor communication on the education of most deaf children is all too damaging. However not only is learning itself affected, so too are many skills associated with learning. Certain aspects of memory and the ability to think logically are crucial areas that become stultified.

However, nowhere is the lack of good two-way communication more evident than in the area of complex problem solving. If deaf children are not presented with complex, many faceted problems when young, it is impossible for them to learn, in later life, to handle complex problems, either numerical or logical.

We would not want to suggest that learning and using sign language for a hearing family is simple or perfect. We can say that our son, who is eight now, reads and writes well, his work still seems advanced in comparison with that of his hearing friends and his reading books are full of English colloquialisms.

We do not rely solely on speech for his education. However, he is integrating in a local junior school, with an interpreter for his English, reading and writing. He is the youngest in the class. He communicates happily, is alert, bright and inquisitive, with enough understanding to keep up with hearing friends of his own age. We know he couldn't have achieved the same level without the addition of sign.

We use sign to supplement our speech. We still talk a lot to him. We check his hearing aids. He has formal speech therapy at school and informal corrections from us.

His speech and lipreading ability are average for a very deaf little boy but his understanding is way above average and we are very pleased. Some of his speech is understood by his teachers, family and close friends. Some, particularly as his sentence construction is very advanced, would be impossible to understand without the clues that signing gives to us.

None of us suffers frustration because we are unable to understand each other, although we do find it tiring constantly having to explain what is happening on TV, at the theatre or in mixed deaf/ hearing gatherings.
We have no doubt at all that he will be able to fulfill his potential. His speech is constantly improving. Signing has never, ever stopped him using his voice when he communicates, as oralists would have had us believe. We have never regretted our decision.

Signed English and British Sign Language are developing as educational tools and we hope they will keep pace with his needs to help him unlock the mysteries of religion, art, politics, or science even alchemy if he is interested, but not until the time comes.

Early results from some Total Communication programmes abroad have shown less encouraging results than could have been expected. It must be remembered that they are still better than those achieved by oral/aural programmes which have been established for many years.

These disappointing results are largely due to the reluctant acceptance of TC by traditionally trained teachers, the dilution of results caused by the inclusion of oral children during the changeover period, and constant late introduction of children who have started orally. Tailed in the eyes of their teachers, and been moved out of the oral/aural programme.

Tragic but typical examples of this well known oral rejection phenomenon arrives too regularly at TC schools. They accept children, even up to the age of twelve, who have normal intelligence and no handicaps, other, of course, than those imposed by their previous education, those being no language, no speech and only the most basic communication.

They are seeking remedial education. It is always a case of too little and too late. To stop this happening, for deaf children to have the best chance, signs need to start soon after diagnosis. Parents must be apprised of the facts. It is little wonder that factors such as these have affected early statistics on TC programmes.

We believe it is the absolute, fundamental right of every parent of a deaf child to be fully apprised of all the facts and controversy surrounding deaf education as soon as possible after diagnosis, certainly before any firm decisions are taken.

We believe that deaf adults should be involved in this consultation and that where possible hearing families be befriended by deaf families living in their area. Certainly more deaf adults should be involved in the education process.

Achieving deaf adults are vital as the deaf child needs deaf adult role models to emulate. The scandal at the moment embraces the way deaf people, with their kind helpfulness, despite everything that hearing people have done to them in the past, are scorned by oral/aural educationalists who seem to believe that they are creating such failures that deaf adults have nothing of any significance to offer to them. Oralists try to ensure that oral deaf children and their families are kept well away from deaf adults.

Why can’t hearing parents understand that the deaf adults they are scorn are the very adults their children will grow up to be!

If they really wanted to lose their fear of deaf people, they could go to their local social worker with the deaf and discuss how to extend their circle of friends to include some deaf people.

They might like us, meet deaf people whose parents, unable to explain why, had put them, bewildered, into school on the advice of the teachers, at the age of two and a half.

There they had spent more than fifteen years, being so good and trying so hard to learn, as they watched uncomprehendingly, lips that flapped and tried with aching heads to hear speech through noise as vicious as static on the radio, with their hands sometimes sellotaped behind their backs to stop them signing, believing all the time that they were being punished, as hearing people casually threw away their birthright.

Those same deaf people welcomed us, hearing people, as friends, into their homes and helped us as much as they could to understand how it was; put up with our boring, faltering attempts at communication, and gave our son his mother tongue.

The awful reality of deaf education first becomes apparent to many parents of severely deaf children when the child reaches school leaving age. Many intelligent, able children who are only deaf, emerge from school innumerate, speech unintelligible, potentially unfulfilled.

They are a legacy of the ‘enlightened policy’ of educators who deny the undeniable difference of deaf children and attempt to mould them all to the ‘more socially acceptable’ pattern of the hearing child.

Thus, terrifyingly, many parents find that their school leaving child still has speech that is in fact totally incomprehensible to the outside world, despite waiting and working for years, always convinced that clear speech is just around the next corner.

Worse, that by allowing all those hours to be wasted on intensive speech training, they have in fact, denied the child their rightful education. Equally terrifying is the fact that parents are steered into ‘oral/aural’ education without being fully aware of these facts and that among those few severely deaf children achieving good speech, are many who do it at the expense of their education.

The parents and teachers of the few children who do ‘succeed’ are vociferous indeed about this ‘success’. Sadly but understandably, the many other unhappy families keep a very low profile. Few ever blame the system. They have been brainwashed and very quietly accept that they are the ones who have failed, they are the ones who did not work hard enough or whose child was conveniently labelled as aphasie. What else could they expect?

Finally I would like to discuss one of the false assumptions used in placing children in oral education. Language acquisition and rate of learning are crucially affected by the amount of useful hearing the child has.

Currently the audiogram seems to be the sole and complete measure of a child’s ability to perceive speech. Different educational methods are selected largely on the basis of an audiogram. However it does not tell the whole story.

In general it is true that the more profound the loss, the greater is the accompanying distortipn but work done by the ENID, University College Hospital and others has produced tests which give a better indication of speech discrimination than the audiogram alone.

They assess the ability to discriminate features such as pitch changes, gaps and formants, all important elements of speech reception. Researchers have found that subjects with similar audiograms show a wide variation in this ability.

Many parents and, we suspect, some professionals, are unaware of this
wide variation in the ability to discriminate speech. There is often an implication that if one child with, say, an 80 decibel loss can achieve a certain level of language and speech then any child with a similar loss can, given adequate dedication from parents, teachers and the child.

This is simply not true. This often leads to inappropriate educational placements being made with dismal results. Both parents and child are left feeling they have failed. In the absence of speech perception tests parents should be told frankly of the situation and not be encouraged to just keep talking and hope for the best.

We think with great sadness of parents and teachers still struggling without signing. For most of them their goal is as unattainable as a crock of gold. Worse still, they will see themselves and their children as failures, failures because they did not find the right formula or because they did not work hard enough . . .

Such parents and teachers were never offered a choice, never really presented with the facts. At Manchester University, where most teachers of the deaf are trained, competence in sign language is not considered to be a necessary requirement for a qualified teacher of the deaf. After qualifying, a few teachers learn to sign, a few schools use it, but far, far too few.

The future welfare of the family, and in particular the deaf baby, is totally dependent on parents making the right choice at diagnosis. They cannot make the right decision unless they have all the facts. Even if the baby has only a mild hearing loss, the parents should be given all the facts.

Choosing to use sign language with a baby who can develop speech is a good decision as it swiftly enables good communication to be set up between parents and a baby already suffering deprivation, and as long as a good oral/aural programme is followed in conjunction with signing, speech will develop and signing can be gradually phased out if found to be superfluous.

Choosing not to use sign language with such a child has only one advantage - it saves the parents the necessity of learning some sign language. Clearly it is advantageous to work in an oral/aural environment as that means that teachers need not learn to sign.

Choosing not to use sign language with a baby diagnosed as severely or profoundly deaf is a very serious matter. Any parent taking such a decision needs to be in command of many facts and statistics. They need to have read as widely as they can and to have been counselled by a variety of people including deaf adults. They need to understand that they are gambling on speech at the expense of education. The wrong decision taken at this time continues the deprivation the baby is suffering. Changing course later will be too late in this option.

We look forward to a future when deaf children no longer emerge from schools, still deaf but also illiterate, betrayed by the education system, treated as failures, to stand on the sidelines of a hearing world, trying to be second class hearing citizens. To a time when deaf teachers are allowed into schools, instilling deaf children with independence and pride at being equal with hearing people, first class, deaf people: when there is a much wider use of signing in schools, units, in public, in films, at the theatre and on TV.

We hope for signing to be offered in ordinary schools as an alternative option to French or German. When sign language is accepted by all and used more widely and hearing parents use it to their deaf children, as we do, with pride, then truly will it be a golden age for deaf people.
6 The Chance to Speak for Ourselves

Heather MacDonald

Mother of three deaf children, Heather MacDonald puts forward an argument for teaching deaf children to communicate, using oral/aural methods based on her own children’s experiences of being taught in this manner. She believes that given the right kind of assistance and teaching all deaf children can learn to speak for themselves.

My first daughter, Alison, was born in 1978 and was not diagnosed as profoundly hearing impaired until she was twelve months old. She had been a very unhappy baby but because she was so visually aware, I had never considered that her hearing may not be quite all it should. However, diagnosed she was and by thirteen months she was wearing hearing aids and I was now getting regular weekly help from a teacher of the deaf here in Leicestershire.

This lady was a tower of strength and in her calm efficient manner she showed me how to help Alison make full use of her hearing aids and so develop speech. Ignorance was bliss and to this day I am glad to say that in my ignorance I became a willing pupil and in turn teacher for my child. The only decision I had to make at that time was that my child needed help and help she must have to acquire speech.

By the time Alison was 5% years old there was another baby girl in the house, sister Susannah had arrived. Alison was making good progress with her language acquisition, trying out new words when she felt confident and of course the baby in the house gave plenty of opportunities to extend her vocabulary.

Susannah was a happy baby but then I usually cradled Susannah in my arms such that she could see my face a thing I’d learnt from Alison she liked to see my face it gave her clues about what I was talking.

By nine months Susannah had a few words to say to us but unfortunately she too was diagnosed as severely hearing impaired. Within two weeks Susannah was fitted with hearing aids and the visits from the teacher of the deaf continued on a weekly basis offering me encouragement and help towards furthering both girls’ language development.

Radio hearing aids were now becoming more widely available and here in Leicestershire the decision was taken to provide our hearing impaired youngsters with these superb pieces of equipment. Alison, on the day she wore hers first, was a joy to behold. The radio system allowed her to go out of the room and yet still be able to hear my voice she became far more aware of sounds thanks to this high quality equipment and so much more responsive. She had a new zest for words and her vocabulary increased. When funds became available, so in turn Susannah received her radio hearing aid.

By now Alison was almost five, Susannah just turned two and yes baby number three had arrived in the shape of a boy Ian! Had we broken the mould? Was he A1 perfect? Yes to look at not a thing wrong but within weeks it was obvious that once again I was going to have to accept the fact that I had a hearing-impaired child and again a profound hearing loss was diagnosed. The merry-go-round had started once again.

It all sounds very flippant. I don't dwell on the past. What’s happened has happened and life must go on. I am determined that my children will lead as normal a life as is possible.

All three children receive regular visits (three or four a week) from a peripatetic teacher of the deaf. All three have different rates of progress, make different demands on time and resources but all three have supportive friends with whom they communicate verbally, with whom they can share a laugh and an argument, with whom they can chat.

They do not receive any speech therapy, they do not use any signing codes, they do not need an interpreter in class (or out), they are not illiterate. What they do have are lovely, natural voices, speech which is understood by family, friends, teachers and which comes over clearly on radio programmes, an ability to communicate with whom they wish.

I hope I have shown that given the right kind of help both at school and at home and with good quality hearing aids, most deaf children can learn to speak for themselves. Most of them can learn to talk just as others do by learning to listen and so copying speech patterns and rhythms.

My message to other parents is in fact they are not a lot different to their peers better in some aspects in fact.

Alison began her school days in a unit attached to an ordinary school about fifteen minutes car ride from home. She was integrated into a classroom for a good half of her school day and spent the majority of her primary years being educated thus before joining her friends locally at the primary school just along the road.

Here she had the support of a peripatetic teacher of the deaf for several sessions a week. Before Alison moved to the local school, Susannah was already well established in it having started with the
local children aged four and again being provided with peripatetic support.

Thankfully the head teacher and his staff were forward-looking and readily accepted help offered by the Service for Hearing Impaired Children - because now they found themselves with three hearing impaired children in their school.

To come right up-to-date Alison is now 13 years old and in the third year at High School, Susannah now 11, is in the first year and eight-year-old Ian is in primary for one more school year.

If your child is deaf, what can you do? Play with him, talk to him, let him listen to different sounds, give him the chance to listen to your voice and when he in turn begins to make sounds, you listen to what he has to say to you. Enjoy your child as he learns to speak and build on that firm foundation.

Ben is sixteen months old. We feel as if we have lived in the village all our lives. Sarah has settled reasonably well into nursery school, and now I am able to spend some time with Ben, giving him the sort of attention which Sarah so loved at this age, the kind which it is easy to give to a first child, but which is so difficult to find time for with a second if the first is still at home.

Just as when he was a baby I used to look forward to those after-bath sessions when we were alone, and even enjoyed early-hour feeds for the same reasons, I love our afternoons. But we do have one problem.

Ben has hearing aids now, two little grey pocket ones which fit neatly into his dungarees . . . but they spend most of their time on top of the fridge. Sometimes I manage to get them into position when Ben is asleep, but if awake he sees them as pull-apart toys rather than equipment to help him to hear. There is no way he will actually leave the earmoulds in place and the aids in his pockets.

My feelings about the aids are ambiguous. Ben is a beautiful baby. Hearing aids are ugly things: what mother could honestly say she felt happy about seeing her child festooned in this way with electronic equipment, other than in a situation where it was necessary to save or preserve its life? Ben in pocket aids, wires sprouting out of his ears, makes me think of a baby in an incubator, tubes protruding from every orifice, and provokes in me the same kind of reaction: immense sadness and sympathy, an urge to see the child out of there, well and healthy, in its mother's arms. So, yes, I try the aids every so often, but half-heartedly, struggling all the while with that part of me which cannot bear ... to interfere with him in such a way.

On walks, Ray and I have carried the aids with us, waiting for
Ben to fall asleep: we have fixed them in place and inserted the earmoulds, and we have had to witness an immediate change in the reaction of passers-by. Everyone looks at a baby, especially one as pretty as Ben. Sarah bouncing alongside is the picture of health, all red cheeks and curls .. . People smile as they pass us, they talk to Sarah, they beam at Ben, who beams back. But once Ben is wearing his aids, it is as if people dare not look · or they look quickly, avert their eyes and walk on. If anyone talks to us it is to offer pity. It is as if all the health, all the vitality, all the attractiveness of this little family is eclipsed by the fact that the baby has wires coming out of its ears. Of course, I understand how they feel completely because my instinctive reaction is the same. But, unlike them, I can't ignore the aids. I have to handle them daily, test them, keep the earmoulds clean, check the wires for fraying, find ways of fitting them to Ben's clothes, and, worst of all, I have to attempt to get Ben to wear the damned things against his will. Yes, I understand their reaction: it's the same as mine, but I have to suppress mine: I am supposed to see these things not as the cause of a problem but as a solution to one: I am supposed to be grateful for them.

So at home I allow myself time to get used to the things. I don't force them on Ben and I don't force them on myself either. I use opportunities as they arise and the rest of the time I forget about them, in much the same way as I have allowed myself to forget about Learning to Hear. I was not ready three months ago and I am still not ready. The urge to help Ben is still there, of course it is, but I feel I am helping him now, in my own way, by playing the games he likes and by following his lead, just as I did with Sarah.

One afternoon, having delivered Sarah to nursery school, I arrive home to find a little note on the doormat:

Sorry I missed you.
Will be in touch.
Jan C.

Teacher of the Deaf

Teacher of the Deaf. The title is vaguely familiar. As I play around with the thoughts it provokes I recall the social worker's question, and passages from the Manchester book .. . I remember that there are special teachers for the deaf ... and Ben is to have one — now! I look at my baby, asleep in his buggy, mouth open, snoring gently, then I look again at the note. Do we need help teaching him? The idea of teaching this sixteen-month-old still seems, somehow, inappropriate. In fact, it is exactly what I have been avoiding.

I think of Sarah at sixteen months. Her environment itself seemed to result in her learning things, and the motivation came from within her: her own curiosity and determination to widen her experience of the world and increase her effect on it resulted in her learning, quite naturally and without pressure, all that she needed to know. At Ben's age she had no teacher . . . but she did have adults, she had parents and friends. What was our role in her natural learning process at that time? How did we help her? We provided a stimulating environment, we provided new play ideas or repeated old ones, as she liked. But did we teach her? Actually setting out to teach Sarah anything usually met with resistance. Whereas for us to follow her inclinations seemed to be great fun for her, the reverse situation soon became boring: her busy little mind was already somewhere else. She learned at her own pace · but it was fast . . . I remember that at Ben's age she understood practically everything we said to her.

And here, unavoidably, the difference is clarified. Possibly the most important aspect of our role in helping Sarah to learn surfaces: communication. We talk to her. We don't teach her, but we tell her about things and we answer her questions. And at an age when Sarah was starting to talk, Ben understands only a few gestures. As far as is possible with a second child, we have provided Ben with the same environment for learning as his sister had, but he gets no commentary about what he does and he has only the rudiments of language with which to manipulate his environment. We talk to him, but he doesn't hear us, and not even the most stimulating of environments can result in much learning if communication is limited.

Teacher of the Deaf. My idea of her role takes shape. If we need help with anything, we and Ben, it is with language. Some kind of language. Thinking about it, language is the one area in which we must be failing him. In struggling to decide what to do, I have ignored this fact for long enough. Really, something has to be done.

Ben wakes up, wet through. Changing his nappy these days is not a simple operation. Once free of nappy Ben crawls away at top speed: catching him and getting him to keep still for the clean one is not easy. I keep a stock of little-used toys in the hope that examining one of these will keep his attention for long enough. I think of Baby Sarah along the lane, younger than Ben but at the same stage, kept riveted by her mother’s constant patter, gazing up into Annette's face, babbling, hardly noticing the nappy change in her fascination with the latest silly rhyme or nursery song, infinitely distractable by voice and tone of voice alone. Not so Ben: if he is looking at something other than my face there is no contact at all; when I do get his attention I can't hold it for long: he would rather crawl off and find something to do than watch my lips move ... I crawl after him and carry him, struggling and protesting, back to the mat, hand him another toy from a rapidly diminishing pile. If my time and patience were infinite, I could manage without being physical like this, but Ben is only one out of a family of four. With the exception of weekday afternoons, this particular couple of hours in the day, there are always other demands on my time. It would help if I could temper my actions with words, as I do with Sarah. It would help if I could explain. Yes, the sooner we meet this teacher of the deaf and get some sort of communication established, the better.

When she arrives, I like her at once. She is the sort of person I would have chosen as a friend. She has a bouncy manner, a friendly smile and a reassuring way of talking. She gets down on the floor with Ben and me and she plays with him. He likes her. When she isn't talking to Ben she is asking me questions. Does he have a hearing aid? How is he responding to
sound? Do his earmoulds fit OK? I show her the pocket aids, embarrassed that they are on top of the fridge rather than attached to Ben, and I explain that he won't wear them. 'Well, they're not very good,' she says, 'I'll try to get him a Phonic Ear - but we might as well start by trying to get him used to these ones.' Energy and enthusiasm just shine out of her as she fits all the component bits together, hooks the aids onto Ben's dungarees and deftly slips in an earmould, talking cheerfully all the time. I watch, incredulous. So far, with us, Ben has only tolerated the earmoulds whilst asleep. Bay and I are so clumsy and nervous, so anxious not to hurt him, so very tentative in our attempts to fit the earmoulds into those tiny ears, that Ben reacts at once: the whole apparatus is wrenched off and discarded in one easy movement. It's like a game with us. We approach with the aids. Ben prepares himself. We give him something to hold or to eat; in the momentary distraction we make our move: Ben parries; the moment is lost. It soon transpires that, despite her expertise, Jan's only real advantage is surprise: as soon as Ben realises that this new person plays the same game, the earmould flies out as swiftly as it went in. Jan laughs, 'You'll have to be firm,' she says. 'I'll take a while but he'll get used to it.' She gently but firmly repeats the operation several times, matter-of-factly, showing no reaction, until Ben begins to show distress rather than annoyance.

'OK,' she says, 'well stop there. But you must keep trying so we can start training his hearing.'

Bay is home when we have our first training session. Jan does indeed want to help us in our efforts to get through to Ben, and we are both relieved when she says that the best way to do it is through play. She demonstrates. With Ben in his high chair, the tray empty in front of him, she sits opposite him, her face level with his, and produces a toy from behind her back. Ben's eyes follow the toy, a brightly coloured ball, as she raises it to her face, careful not to obscure her mouth.

'It's a ball, Ben,' she says. Suddenly she throws it up, catches it, brings it close again.

'Here's the ball, look!' Ben is watching all the time. She puts the ball behind her back. Ben knows it's there: he is waiting for it to come back out. He's enjoying this game.

'Where's the ball?' Jan asks, and, to us, 'Make sure he watches your face. Whenever he looks, say something.' Ben is craning his neck to see behind her, where the ball is. She moves so that her face is within his field of vision.

'Where's the ball, Ben? Do you want the ball?' Ben's gaze has shifted again, from her face, past it. He wants to see the ball. It doesn't emerge. He looks at Jan's face again.

'Do you want the ball?' Ben makes a sound. Jan's face lights up. 'YES!!! Good boy!' The ball appears, as if by magic. Ben holds out his arms but the ball stays where it is, next to Jan's face.

'Here's the ball, look. Here it is. Do you want the ball?' Ben is holding out his arms even further, straining over the empty tray towards the ball, looking alternately at it and at Jan's face. Whenever he looks at her, Jan asks if he wants the ball. At last, he vocalises. She beams at him.

'Oh, I see, you want the ball!' At last she gives it to him. He holds it for a few moments, then looks at her. He wants to continue the game.

'Give me the ball, then,' she says, and starts again. No opportunity is missed. Eye contact must result in communication. If he looks, talk. This is the social worker's advice extended into a teaching session.

'OK? Now you try,' says Jan. I take the ball. No problem, we've played similar games before, except that now I capitalise on the eye contact. Ben holds out his hands for the ball, I hold it by my face while I ask if he wants it, then I pass it to him.

'Hold on a minute,' says Jan. 'He didn't ask for it.'

'Yes he did,' I reply, 'he held his hands out.'

'Yes, but he didn't ask. You must wait till he vocalises, then give it to him, or he won't learn to talk. If you want him to talk, you'll have to get him used to the idea that talking gets results where not talking doesn't.' I try again. Ben shows in his whole demeanour that he wants the ball: his body speaks volumes but his lips make not a sound. I can't resist such an obvious demand. I give him the ball.

'Oh, you're going to have problems, you are,' says Jan. I explain that it feels cruel and unnatural to me, to hold something back that Ben so obviously wants.

'T do know how you feel,' says Jan, 'but if you want him to learn to use his voice you're going to have to be firm. You'll get used to it and so will he. He's a bright kid. It won't take him long to make the connection between using his voice and getting what he wants. Watch.' She demonstrates again. This time it takes longer. Ben is very nearly at distress point, but then he makes a sound and is rewarded by a beaming smile and the coveted ball. 'You can do the same with his food,' says Jan. 'Have you got a drink for him?' I fetch his beaker, am about to put it down on his tray.

'Wait a minute,' says Jan. 'Don't waste your opportunities! Ask if he wants a drink.' I learn quickly. Beaker at my cheek, I ask Ben if he wants a drink. I can't resist such an obvious demand. I give him the ball.

'Do you want this?' I ask sweetly. 'Do you want a drink?' I am
DEAFNESS; THE TREATMENT

extracting a few sounds from Ben. Ray’s view of language is much wider. Anyone can see that he is communicating with our son, that they both derive a lot of pleasure from exchanges which do not require either of them to speak or to hear. They are attached to each other by an invisible cord; they are on the same wavelength. Ray refuses to jeopardise this by making demands on Ben which he feels are inappropriate, unfair and educationally ineffective.

I start with the same set of ideals but my judgement is blurred: in this kind of situation the anxious schoolgirl aspect of my personality comes to the fore: this person in authority, this teacher, is asking me to perform and I have to do well. When I gave in to Ben she noticed, she commented, and I felt that I had failed. I could ignore advice from books, but I can’t ignore advice from a teacher. Even when my instincts are urging me to rebel, the voice of years of conditioning says that I must not, that teacher knows best and I must live up to her expectations of me.

Fear for Ben’s future also leads me to conform. All my experience so far has been with hearing children: maybe deaf children do need handling differently: maybe I can’t safely trust my own judgement – or Ray’s – on this. I cannot risk my child’s future: I must do my best for him, and Jan seems very sure of her methods. I don’t have the confidence to defend my instinctive preferences against her professional advice, so I decide to play it her way and see what happens. Ray and I agree to differ.

From that first visit onwards, life is very different, for us and for Ben. Ray does agree that the hearing aid is a priority, so we embark upon an ongoing battle getting Ben to wear it. We try it whenever he falls asleep, whenever he is in his high chair, whenever he is sitting still and concentrating on a play activity. We seem to be constantly interfering with him, deliberately disrupting his old routines in order to establish this new one. But Jan offers us encouragement, assuring us that it is in Ben’s best interests to wear the aid now, when he is small, to gain the best possible advantage from it. Thanks to her, Ben is able to borrow a Phonic Ear, a radio aid, with very high-powered amplification and excellent sound reproduction. I make up a harness for it so that it is impossible for Ben to dismantle or remove the aid once it is strapped to his chest. Eventually he accepts that it is put on every morning and kept on until

stretches towards me, arms out. I feel very anxious, torn between wanting to follow this teacher’s instructions and not wanting to make my baby cry. I repeat the words, but without conviction. He is obviously baffled and upset, and I can’t stand it. He whimpers. I’m so relieved I pass him the drink straight away. I know that the sound he made was the usual preliminary to a fully-fledged howl, but maybe it will pass as a vocalisation. It does. If Jan knows she’s not telling.

‘Well done!’ she says. ‘But you forgot to tell him what it was before you gave it to him.’

She tells us about the importance of being firm, of being in control of the situation and consistent in our responses: ignore any nonverbal requests or demands: respond only to vocalisation.

A persistent little voice inside my head is fighting to be heard. ‘If this is deaf education,’ it is saying, ‘it could use a few changes .. .’ But respect for Jan’s professional status and obvious experience keeps blocking it out. We want to help Ben. She is showing us how it can be done. How can I tell her that her way is wrong when I have no experience of it?

When she has left both Ray and I are quiet. I have avoided this way of helping Ben for months: I could have followed the instructions on auditory training in Learning to Hear, but I haven’t. And now I know why. It hasn’t just been laziness or an unwillingness to face up to things. What Jan has just demonstrated is simply not our way of doing things. As well as trying to cultivate a relaxed attitude to parenting, help the children towards self-discipline rather than overtly disciplining them, we have our own ideas about teaching and learning. We have both trained as teachers, and together we have read and discussed theories about how children learn. The ones which most appeal to us are those which have as their basis a firm respect for the rights of children as originators and decision-makers in their own learning, where the teacher’s role is seen as facilitating, not forcing, learning experiences. You can teach all you like, say those educators we have come to respect, but children will learn only what they want to learn, when they want to learn it. Effective learning is child-initiated. Our own experience so far with Sarah, and with the children in our classes, gives ample support to this view, and over the years it has become our own. It fits in with us as people, with our way of thinking and with the way we would like to relate to children, both our own and other people’s. What we are being asked to do now, with Ben, though not exactly contradicting this view, sits awkwardly alongside it, and we are both uneasy.

Ray has very little time for a method of teaching which pins children down and delivers formal training. He has a superb relationship with Ben: when Ray is around Ben has little time for anyone else: they kiss and cuddle a lot, Ray holds him close, carries him about, shows him things, talks to him. They have special games which are theirs alone: they rough and tumble: they make each other laugh. Ray values their relationship as it is: he’s reluctant to change the way he operates just for the sake of
THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

house and garden, acquiring unhygienic amounts of dirt in the process.

In our battle to 'persuade' Ben to tolerate the earmoulds, gradually we begin to tolerate in ourselves behaviour which a year or even six months ago we would have found totally unacceptable and abhorrent.

Ben and I are both still very attached to his bedtime breast-feed. It is communication without words: it is my way of letting Ben know that I love him and that I like to be close to him, that I'm his mother and that I'll take care of him, and it's his way of telling me that he needs me. In a busy and noisy household, it is one of the few chances we get to be quiet and alone. That changes.

Beside us on the cushion is the hearing aid. As soon as Ben begins to fall asleep I insert an earmould. The theory is that, once the earmould is in place, one must make sure that the child has something to listen to or for. So as soon as it is in position I begin to sing Ben lullabies, loudly, through the radio transmitter worn at my neck. What used to be a natural and peaceful event assumes the characteristics of science fiction, both of us cluttered up with gadgetry, clanking clumsily against each other like a pair of robots, every so often the roar of the lullabies interrupted by the high-pitched squeal of acoustic feedback as the earmould works loose. For weeks, Ben jerks wide awake as he feels the earmould against his ear, and he resists. Stoically, patiently, I feed him half asleep again and I repeat my attempt, sometimes three or four times, struggling with my own feelings of revulsion as well as with Ben's resistance. The bedtime feed becomes lengthy and tedious, all pleasure gone · but Ben does, eventually, accept the earmoulds and the first stage of the battle is won.

In the day, I persist in what is called 'conditioning', but really it is bribery and blackmail. If Ben accepts the earmoulds, he can have a biscuit, or a Smartie, or a drink. No earmoulds equals no attention. Earmoulds equals undivided attention, plus rewards, for as long as he keeps them in. The day is punctuated by the squeal of feedback as, for tens of dozens of times, Ben pulls out the moulds and the process is begun again. Three or four months of this and there is no more resistance from Ben: the battle is over. For me, too, in a sense, the battle is over. The fact that Ben is now able to accept the aid as a part of his clothing seems to help me to accept it in that way also. It is a nuisance at nappy change and mealtimes, when it has to be removed for its own protection, and the attention it needs during the day is time-consuming, but it is no longer repulsive. It might be a scar, but it's an old one now, and I'm used to it.

During and beyond the hearing aid battle, however, we have the training sessions for speech. We want desperately to establish some kind of formal language, so I attempt the sort of training which Jan demonstrated at least twice a day, and Jan does a session each time she comes. Ben is strapped into his high chair: playthings are lined up on the table and used to try and elicit speech. Once the hearing aid is established, sound-making toys are added: we operate them close to the radio transmitter and look for a response, beating drums, rattling shakers, squeaking rubber animals. I take my job seriously despite the lack of reaction in Ben and despite lack of support from Ray. I know that

DEAFNESS: THE TREATMENT

Ben is very deaf and that it will be a long process. I persevere, and Jan keeps me going. She sees responses where I do not: she delights in reactions which I would have dismissed as coincidental: she convinces me that we really are getting somewhere. We continue these sessions in a formal, planned way, and in our everyday interaction I try to insist on vocalisation whenever Ben makes a request. Of course, this makes every interaction between us much more lengthy than it would otherwise be. Conscious of Sarah's feelings, I try to include her in the process as much as possible, but it happens so frequently that she soon loses interest: sometimes, she hovers in the background waiting for her turn; sometimes she demands my attention constantly until she gets it, for herself, not as part of Ben's game.

The speech and auditory training sessions, the hearing aid battle and the daily 'workload' with Ben take up a lot of my time and energy physically, but the mental strain involved is by far the most draining aspect: all the time, there is conflict with my own feelings about how a baby should be treated: surely this amount of pressure must be damaging, especially when it was imposed suddenly and is in such contrast to the way I dealt with Ben before the onset of training. Surely he must feel hurt and rejected when his obvious but non-vocal demands are ignored, or when I refuse to play with him because his earmoulds are not in place, or when the precious bedtime breast-feed becomes a battle of wills . . . Ray agrees: he can see my relationship with Ben becoming distorted by the demands I am making of him, and I feel very much alone in what I am attempting to do. Ray feels no need to please teacher · he never sees her. He just carries on doing things in the way he feels is right. Feelings of resentment arise between us, ill-founded, perhaps, in that theoretically I have the power to change things, but very real nevertheless. I persist in the training, but all the while I long for the kind of easy relationship I can see blossoming between Ray and Ben, jealous of the fact that he can still enjoy what I have had to give up, and angry that by taking this 'natural' stance he is avoiding so much of the 'real' work and the unpleasantness, forgetting that I, too, avoided if for as long as I possibly could.

Ray is highly sceptical when I try to report progress in 'my' work with Ben: I am increasingly defensive and discussions rapidly become heated and hurtful. There are too many conflicts, on too many levels, and eventually we just stop talking about it. In general, Ray and I talk less and less. My job with Ben is the dominant thought in my mind, almost an obsession. I never ease off: I have to do the job well, I have to succeed. Whatever else I appear

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to being, the pressure is still there in my mind, predominating, taking over. Ben is the motivating force in my life and time for Kay becomes harder and harder to find. But I do need his support: I lean on him constantly, giving less and less in return. We used to be so close: now, it is as if we are losing touch, being pulled apart by our feelings rather than drawn together. We are very polite to each other on the surface, but the underlying tension is severe.

Then there is Sarah. Her little figure, hovering in the background waiting for my attention, or her little voice, repeating over and over again what she wants until at last I take notice . . . Only just three herself, in the course of a year Sarah has had to cope with a catalogue of disruption: the birth of a new baby, selling our house, the five months with Kay's parents, discovering that Ben was deaf, moving up North, starting nursery school . . . She needs my time, too, desperately, yet the demands on it, instead of diminishing as Ben grows older, increase with each new task I take on in his education. Every extra minute given to Ben is a minute lost to Sarah. No sooner has she got over the invasion of her world by this new little person than the attention given to him by everyone around her is redoubled because he is deaf.

People are not as considerate of her feelings as they were when he was a new baby, either. At least when he was born she got presents, too, and people made a point of asking about her first. Now, it seems that everyone's first question is about Ben. 'How's Ben getting on . . . ? What's happening about Ben . . . ?' Is he hearing his hearing aid yet? Is his teacher coming today? When's his next hospital visit? Is he starting to talk yet? We make visits, or people come to see us: usually, it's something to do with Ben, and the conversation reflects this, even when people are tactful. Play sessions with Ben are a priority; play sessions with Sarah are fitted in around them. Each of Ben's demands is an opportunity to 'work on' him: Sarah's are all too often met with delaying tactics: 'Just a minute, Sarah . . . Can you wait till I've . . .' The ease of communication there is between us works against Sarah at these times: because it is easy to ask her to wait, she is often kept waiting. Despite resolutions to the contrary, she is given second place far more often than I would have wished. I am hypersensitive about this, doubly aware of the injustice, the imbalance, in my treatment of my two children. Always a difficult area for me, it is ten times worse now because of the added pressure. I watch Sarah anxiously, full of guilt, waiting for her to crack: the thought that she might suffer preys on my mind and fights with my determination to do my best for Ben. I am constantly weighing up, which one first, what for whom, and when. My conscience pricks me remorselessly, about all my family. I cannot relax, I cannot ease off.

For the first time in my life, I have to evolve a priority system for people. There is no other way I can cope.

Undoubtedly, Ben comes first in this order of priorities, with Sarah a close second. Kay follows, a very poor last. Jan sees improvements, though, and that keeps me going. V am one of her 'best mums', I attempt to follow her instructions, and the slower Ben's progress,
me that I should be doing more for everyone; my tired body tells me that I can't. There has to be an easier way. We can't go on like this.

As the pressure intensifies, the idea of using sign language does seem more and more attractive. It does not surprise me that Jan does not mention the possibility; like most of the professionals we have consulted so far she appears to have complete faith in the effectiveness of the methods she uses. This of course adds weight to my suspicion that sign language must be somehow inappropriate - or even harmful - and best avoided.

But it becomes more and more obvious that the natural gestures we are using are effective in getting over the very basic messages essential to everyday functioning in a way that talking is not. It is, quite simply, far easier to gesture once than to repeat an oral message five or six times, especially when both children are involved and it is necessary to get through quickly for the sake of peace.

Ben points a lot, and so do we: just by pointing we are able to exchange quite complex information, particularly when the pointing is combined with an appropriate facial expression. Ben seems instinctively to understand and to react to expressions; by watching our faces he can tell if something is likely to hurt him, or if we find something amusing, or if we are not amused and are likely to disapprove. He 'reads' anger, of course, and affection. It seems silly not to build on this mutual understanding and consciously develop these skills. Since we are all actually using home-made gestures and are comfortable with them, it would seem sensible to use 'proper' signs rather than to continue to invent our own as the need arises. Life would surely be far easier for Ben if he could tell us things in an unambiguous way, rather than in the hit-and-miss manner in which he operates at the moment. If we are frustrated at the amount of time and effort it takes us to get an oral message across, how must he feel, this child who has no oral language at all?

As I watch Ben struggle, as I watch Ray enjoying a pleasant, easy, uncomplicated relationship with his son while I wear myself out trying to make him speak, I feel that something has to be done, that we must at least consider the possibility of using sign language.

At last, I find the courage to broach the subject with Jan, confidently expecting to be advised against it. After all, if she agreed with it, she would have suggested it, wouldn't she?

In view of what I have learned so far about other professionals, and surmised in Jan's attitude, her response is completely unexpected. She reveals that she can sign. Not very well, she says, she's been on a couple of courses and sometimes works with further education students who sign. But yes, she will sign with Ben, if we are sure that that's what we want. I am completely taken aback and, now that she has agreed so easily, full of 'huts'. I want to know why the books don't mention sign language, why the professionals are so cagey, why, if Jan knew about signing, she hasn't mentioned it to us before. What's the catch?

Jan qualifies her argument. She will sign, she says, and she will teach us what she knows, but we must all be sure always to try voice first, and

sign only if Ben doesn't understand, because too much signing will make him lazy and prevent him from learning to speak.

At last, I understand. Here, in plain terms, is the root of the professionals' objection to sign language. Signing is obviously the easier option for a deaf child (this, after all, is why we are considering using it), and the professionals believe that giving a deaf child a choice of means of communication early on will obviate (in the child's mind at least) the necessity of vocalising. In other words, using sign, offering an easier option, might destroy a child's motivation to learn to speak. All is now clear. For a hierarchy of professionals dedicated to the training of hearing and the production of speech in children who are not naturally inclined that way, sign language constitutes a threat, a serious barrier to the success of their methods. Their approach relies on fostering in a child a determination - a desperation - to learn to speak. As Jan had said, 'If you want him to speak you'll have to get him used to the idea that talking gets results where not talking doesn't.' Add sign and you take away the intensity of that motivation, thus making the professionals' job that much harder. Hence their resistance. So now we know.

Jan advises me to think very carefully before making a decision, and when Ray comes home we talk about it. It is now obvious even to me that Ben's oral progress is going to be painfully slow anyway, and the 'talk if you want something' approach is causing all of us considerable distress.

The pressures imposed by adhering to it have taken their toll on family life and on the relationship between Ray and me. Now, the prospect of a way out seems attractive to both of us. The situations where we really need to get through to Ben are multiplying as he grows in mobility and in maturity. An approach which consciously includes some signing and which is endorsed - however cautiously - by Ben's teacher, will allow me to relax a little. It is, after all, what I instinctively wanted to do when the idea first occurred to me, and Ray was thinking about it as early as the post-diagnosis meeting. Apart from being 'the easy option' for a deaf child, it could also be the easy option for that child's parents. We now know why there is resistance to the use of sign language, but for us, now that the mystery has been removed, the benefits of using it far outweigh the disadvantages. At last, we are sure that our grasp of the basic facts is adequate enough for us to make up our own minds.

I am rather nervous about the possibility that by using sign we might ruin Ben's chances of talking but, all things considered, I would rather take that chance than continue the way I am doing, trying to walk a tightrope between Jan's approval and Ray's
disapproval, and pushing aside my own ideas about child care and education in pursuing methods which are so far removed from those I would freely choose.

The 'easy option' is far more suited to our personalities and to our way of life. We need to relax: we need to agree, both with our instincts and with each other. We choose to sign.
As a profoundly deaf child Christine Monery attended a residential school for the deaf. In a moving account she describes years of confusion and unhappiness before she was able to find any enjoyment in school.

I have a very vivid memory of my first day at school. It was in the early 1950s, I was five years old. My parents took me on a bus and then on a train. I had no idea where we were going or what was happening. I knew we had a suitcase. It seemed like a long journey to me, although it was only from Chesterfield where we lived, to Derby.

In particular, I remember that everything seemed big and I felt little. We went to a big old building, which was Derby School for the Deaf, but I didn’t know what it was, of course. It was just an enormous, imposing building. We went into a big entrance hall and after a while we were taken into a big room with a high ceiling and long windows. There were big pictures all round the walls and we stood round a big table. This was the headmaster’s study, but I didn’t understand this - I was just confused and frightened.

The headmaster and his wife stood on one side of the table and I stood on the other side with my parents. The adults were talking and my mother seemed upset. The headmaster’s wife came round the table and started to talk to me with a serious expression. I started to cry because everything seemed very threatening and I just wanted to go home. She held my hands behind my back, so I started to struggle. Then she shook me so I struggled harder. Eventually she turned me upside down. I was terrified and I cried and screamed and kicked and struggled. My parents got very upset, my mother was crying too, and they were ushered away by the head. So I was left there, on my own for the first time. It was like a nightmare. I couldn’t believe that my parents wouldn’t come to rescue me and take me home when it got dark and everything would be back to normal again.

I was kept at school then for an entire month before being allowed home, or visited by my family. I learned later that this was standard.
initiation practice for new pupils. It was supposed to make them settle in by keeping them isolated from parental interference, so that by the time they were reunited with their families they had come to terms with being at school, established relationships there and found their feet. It didn’t work with me. I think it was very cruel; I was terribly frightened and unhappy. I couldn’t understand why my parents had deserted me. I cried all of the time.

On that first day, I remember that soon after my parents had left I was put to bed, still screaming. The dormitory had three beds at each end and three down the middle. I was too panic-struck to notice any of the other children. The matron tried to take my vest off before putting on my nightdress, but at home I kept my vest on. I wouldn’t let her take it off, it seemed very important so I fought and screamed because I desperately wanted to keep it. I can still remember all these details very clearly, even now, and recall exactly how I felt.

After that first dreadful month my mother came to collect me. This day also started off traumatically, for my mother this time, because she didn’t understand the school procedures. She waited in the school hallway for me but I didn’t arrive and she began to worry that I had run away. Eventually, a deaf woman who was also waiting managed to explain that she had to write my name on a large piece of paper and hold it up so that a monitor would go and fetch me. There were many tears then when we were reunited and again when we reached home, with my aunt and the rest of the family. I loved my mother, and my father, very much and even when I was grown up and married with a home of my own, I was always sad when it was time to leave them. But because we couldn’t communicate properly when I was a child it caused a lot of stress. My mother had a still-born child before I was born. Afterwards, my father wanted another child but my mother refused. She had a breakdown when I was eleven. Apparently his uncle was living in Derby and he just happened to walk past the school one day and read the sign ‘Derby School for the Deaf’ so he sent for his nephew from India so that he could join the school because there was no educational service for deaf people in India.

There was a sports-day once a week when we played hockey and went swimming. I loved hockey and I was in the school team. We travelled to play against other deaf schools, Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham, and also against some hearing teams. This was my favourite part of school life.

In the end I became head girl, very different from the terrified five-year-old, screaming to go home. Although I was so unhappy in the beginning, when I look back now I’m glad I went to a deaf school, I think it’s a much better place to grow up. The school community builds strength and confidence, especially through the shared communication of sign language. If I was a social worker now, I would advise parents to send their deaf children to a deaf school. Once they get over the initial problem of separation from their parents, it’s definitely worth it.

9 School Experiences

Clive Mason

Clive Mason’s first contact with other deaf children was when he was sent as a boarder to a school for the deaf. His education as a deaf person, however, really began with his first contact with deaf adults.

From the age of six years I attended a school in Glasgow called Mary hill
School for the Deaf (the school sign Maryhill is the same as the sign for protestant). It was all very strange to me, and all the children were signing. Before then I had never seen anyone signing and I looked at them all in amazement. My parents left me at the school and I looked around in awe at this very different world. At first I couldn't understand the other children but I soon picked up their communication until eventually I was signing fluently. So from the age of five I was using my natural language BSL.

At the end of term when I went home, my parents told me off for signing. They told me I was not allowed to sign as doctors, and teachers had told them that signing was inferior and that if I learned Sign Language then I would not develop speech and lip-reading skills. My parents had accepted this so did not allow me to sign and told me to use speech instead. At school, likewise, the teachers didn't allow signing in class, but outside at play-time, when the teachers were not around we were allowed to sign and I started to learn how to construct the things I wanted to say, such as describing what happened to me at the weekend and I could give a full account of what I had been doing - such as, T got up, had my breakfast, went out to play with some hearing friends, ‘I found that I could put ideas together. Before I had Sign Language I could only do so in a limited way. When I went home I was disappointed and wanted to get back to school. Contrary to what one might imagine, that is wanting to get home from residential school - it was the other way around as at the school I had full access to communication and I developed a lot of friends as well as developing my Sign Language.

The teachers didn't sign to me in the classroom and I didn't absorb much in the teaching situation but I had good relationships with other children.

In school, whilst we were sitting in the classroom - we often had visitors to the school, such as doctors, psychiatrists,^ perhaps student teachers who wished to teach deaf children in the future.

The visitors would come into the classroom - often whilst I was doing my work along with the other deaf children. The door would open and in they would come. One day the teacher tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to turn round so that I could not see her. She then said, 'What is your name?' very deliberately and I picked this up with the help of my hearing aid because I had heard the question so many times. So I said 'Clive Mason' and everyone said, 'How marvellous': I was a deaf child that could understand without looking. Then I turned round again and the teacher said 'Where do you live?' in the same slow, measured tone - which I didn't catch straight away so she repeated 'Where do you live?' and then I'd understood and answered 'Dunoon', which was my home area. The teacher then looked to the visitors for their reaction and again they said how marvellous I was. So once more I looked away whilst the teacher said something, although this time I didn't understand despite it being repeated two or three times. However, one of my deaf friends caught my eye and signed to me 'How old are you?' which is what the teacher was asking and I replied 'I'm eight.' The visitors were very pleased and gave me some applause before leaving the classroom.

This happened often and it was usually me that was picked to 'perform for the visitors, perhaps because it was thought that I had better speech than some of the others, although I was profoundly deaf like them.

It took me a long time to realise that I was receiving an 'Oral Education' and that the teacher wanted the visitors to come in and witness the proof that an oral education could work with a profoundly deaf child. This was, however, untrue as they had to pick the child they considered the best to prove their methods. The visitors, be they doctors, ENT consultants or whatever, went away with the idea that oral education was successful based on their experience of one or two deaf children being exploited in this way. They may wrongly conclude that all deaf children were the same as the one or two used as examples like myself.

In school we were split into two groups. One, of deaf children who, whilst being taught orally, did not make any headway. These children were moved to a separate classroom and were taught using the Paget Gorman sign system.

The other group was deaf children who made sufficient improvement through oral methods, although the improvements were limited like answering questions such as 'What is your name?' This went on for some time. The Paget Gorman group spent most of the time concentrating on Paget Gorman and not on other subjects such as Maths, History, Geography. The group I was in was really the same, because often I'd be sitting getting on with my work when there would be a tap on the shoulder to tell me that it was my turn to go for speech therapy and I would have to leave what I was doing to have a frustrating and upsetting time.

Speech therapy meant I would try to make the right sounds only to be told to do them again and again. I felt a lot of pressure during these sessions and would long to get back to my Maths or whatever I was doing — when I finally did return, however, I would find that I'd lost concentration. It's hardly surprising I lagged behind hearing children of a similar age.

I made quite good progress at school and was usually top for Maths and History. At ten or eleven years old I remember having a good relationship with one particular teacher who himself had deaf parents. Despite being a BSL user he taught by oral methods. I could understand a lot of his teaching because of his facial expression and use of gesture. Although I didn't understand everything I did manage to do quite well and at eleven years old I was moved to the top class. Imagine that! At that age I was in the top class without anywhere else to go - no higher class. The boy who sat next to me was also eleven years old, one other was ten years old, but most of the class were more than thirteen years old.

The teacher in the class had never met or mixed with deaf people. He had no knowledge of the Deaf community and no understanding of BSL - I didn't understand him at all well and I rapidly went downhill. When I left school my English was terrible (Maths was OK as I had a different teacher for that subject). I couldn't read very well and I made many mistakes in written English, especially grammar.

In my school English was taught through stories, such as The Three Little Pigs, We wore head-phones and the teacher had the microphone (I was perhaps seven years old at the time). The teacher held the book up to her face so that we couldn't lip-read and we had to guess what she was saying. She broke the text up, such as 'three little pigs' or 'a house of straw' and asked us 'Did anyone get that?'. We would usually answer incorrectly. Using this method each page of the book would take ages. I imagine in a hearing school they would be taught in their own language and would complete the
whole book in the time it took us to do one or two pages! If we had used our language (BSL), we would have finished the story and quickly moved on. Also, we could have asked lots of questions in Sign Language, but we had no time for questions as we were too busy guessing what the teacher was saying. What a waste!

I remember feeling completely cut off from whatever was going on around me at school. My eyes were not being used to their potential, and information was forced on to my ears. It was only through developing skill in BSL that I learned about the lives of the other children. But we were all at the same level! Contact and conversation with adults to prepare me to face the world was totally lacking!

My friend at school was Clark Denmark, and as my home was far away from school (Dunoon, on the west coast of Scotland), I stayed at Clark's home often during term time. Clark's mother and father were both deaf. This really made an impact on me as I usually had a complete language barrier between myself and the adult world, including my own parents. But at Clark's house his parents would chat and ask me how I liked school and what did I like to eat, etc. It was marvellous to talk to deaf adults like that - it gave me a lump in my throat. I remember one time at Clark's house whilst we were having a meal (we were perhaps nine or ten years old at the time) we were all signing and I suddenly became aware that for the first time I had access to adult conversation. I was eating my meal and watching them and I was fascinated. They were talking about work. They explained that they went to work for money - wages - to pay for clothes, rent, electricity and gas, etc. All of this was news to me but Clark already knew all about it - it was nothing new to him. They talked about the foreman at work and the factory, the manager, and the shop floor workers. I was hungry for knowledge, and they took care to explain to me in great detail.

After the weekend I went back to school and told the teacher what I had learned, I used the sign 'Foreman' but the teacher didn't understand. I explained that I had learned so much from Clark's parents. I had expected her to be as excited as I was, but she looked rather put-out that I had learned such information from deaf adults rather than through school.

I often went to Clark's house after that and through conversation with Clark's mother and father my confidence soared. It was as though my education about the world was beginning at last, something that school was never able to achieve. It was a marvellous experience for me, and I am convinced that contact with deaf adults for deaf children at school is absolutely essential if they are to develop a healthy sense of identity as a Deaf person.
10 Making Plans for Nigel: The Erosion of Identity by Mainstreaming

Paddy Ladd

Paddy Ladd writes below about his own educational experiences, from which he has developed particular concerns about the effects of oralist teaching methods and mainstreaming on the psychological development of deaf children.

I have often written about the education of deaf children and the way in which oralism distorts relationships between children and parents, teachers and deaf adults. My experience of mainstreaming in England, however, leads me to believe that it is the most dangerous move yet against the early development of a deaf person’s character, self-confidence and basic sense of identity. Forceful, clumsy attempts to mainstream not only deny the facts about being deaf but destroy much that deaf people and their friends have worked so hard to create, and may in the last resort be seen as genocidal (Hay et al., 1979). In this article, I have tried to re-enact the deaf child’s experience, to attempt to evoke an understanding in you of what it felt like at the sharp end of the mainstream knife, I do not think I have allowed the personalised approach to distort any of the factual evidence but I do not pretend to be unbiased any more than the ordinary reporter is when recording the destruction of his life and his friends’ lives by a foreign invader who has no respect for the culture and traditions of his native land.

Making Plans for Nigel

We’re only making plans for Nigel We only want what’s best for him We’re only making plans for Nigel Nigel just needs this helping hand And if young Nigel says he’s happy He must be happy He must be happy!

(X.T.C., 1980)

In this section I am going to do two things at once. I will take you through the years of childhood and how it relates to integration, and I will also deal with my feelings about being deaf and about my identity as it changed during that time. Let me cushion myself against the trauma of memory by assuming the third person.

The story starts with Nigel being diagnosed as partial/severely deaf at the age of three. He was born with this hearing loss, but was able to use his vocal cords quite well because he had enough hearing to use. He started to attend the Nuffield clinic in London where he and his parents were told: ‘Your son is not really deaf. He is a normal person who cannot hear very well. If he is to be normal, he must use his hearing aid well, or else you will lose your son to deafness.’ He was paraded in front of parents at the clinic: ‘Now Nigel, show the parents how well you speak. Thank you. Now, if you work hard, your children will be able to speak like Nigel.’ (Implied, if your child doesn’t, then you are to blame for not working hard enough.) This was grossly deceitful for two reasons. One, that many of the parents had profoundly deaf children, who had little hope of being able to speak like Nigel. And it also was calculated to make Nigel feel better than those other deaf children, so that he would make the springboard into the hearing world, and leave those nasty traces of deafness behind. Thus, little Nigel began life with a carefully instilled pattern of self-deceit. The parallels between this approach and the capitalist Great Lie are remarkable - both say ‘You can make it to the top if you work hard. Anyone can.’ In reality, of course, only those with the resources can do it, apart from a determined few who trample everybody before them. For the majority of people who have neither resources nor killer instinct, there is nothing but the branding mark of failure. The fact that this is not the only approach to life or to deafness is kept well hidden. These points will re-echo throughout our story.

Age 3–6

Little children play around each other, rather than with each other. Nigel joins in with this: few problems show up so far. He is taken into a hearing infant school by a head who relishes a challenge.

Age 6–9

Communication on a one-to-one basis starts. Nigel tries to cope but is too young to realise that he is missing a lot of what is happening. There is group playing where the action is fairly physical and therefore easier to follow and much game playing, so that if he can learn the rules by watching and copying, he can pass the time happily. In the classroom, which is small and cozy, he gets by by copying the
SCHOOL-DAYS

others. Outside school he knows one or two deaf children, but he cannot lip-read them, or they him, so he doesn’t want to see them again. And anyway he is better than them, isn’t he?

As the age moves upwards, verbal action plays a more and more important role in finding his true status in the school, including that most painful status for all children, whether in or out of favour. He feels very confused, but this is alleviated when he is adopted by the girls out of pity, or if he is good at sport, some of the boys will defend him.

Age 9-11

Junior school gets tougher, and the process above intensifies. Unless in an inner city area, the very nature of a junior school protects the deaf child from too much aggression. He has to choose between being loud and trying to dominate a group so that he then knows what the subject is, and finds word-guessing easier, or by being silent all the time and just watching from the outside, as if all that’s happening is like a TV play. His feelings of confusion grow, and he wonders who really understands him. This is brought out clearly when he is ordered to wear a second hearing aid. He protests strongly: the sound quality in his right ear is so bad that it hurts his ears and gives him a headache after five minutes. ‘Keep wearing it, work hard at it and it will help you be more normal,’ he is sternly urged. He says nothing, but goes home and drops it in a drawer and refuses to wear it again. This gives him proof that nobody understands his needs; he withdraws into himself. If they ask him, he says he is ‘very happy, thank you’, because it is polite, and if you want to be normal you must learn to be polite.

Yet at the same time there is a pressure from the opposite end. Having a ‘specialist’ teacher makes him feel like a pampered mummy’s boy. And he has to sit at the front of the class where the other ‘goody-goodies’ sit, not at the back with the ‘big’ boys. At home, nice kind people try to get him to join the cub’s, or the church choir even. ‘Doesn’t matter if he can’t sing – we just want to help him.’ Aagh! Those places are for softies; he doesn’t want any part of it. Yet, shielded by such care and concern, he is still more of a Walter Mitty. It is a fantasy world, pretend in the fringe of things. After a while, the initial *goodwill extended to him by his school mates dries up. The truce is over, and he flings himself desperately, spending all his time kicking a ball around. This makes life bearable for a few years. When his school has contact with the local deaf school, he feels a tremendous threat. He doesn’t want to be seen to be like them, because ‘they’ are regarded as stupid by his schoolmates, and so he shrinks from this contact like the plague. After all, he is different from them really, isn’t he? That’s what the doctors and teachers told him, didn’t they?

Meanwhile he misses the crux of just about everything: jokes, quick remarks, frantically flipping his head from one face to another like a Wimbledon umpire, trying to catch the last bit of whoever was talking and trying to piece together what so and so did, what so and so meant

‘B’s mum said … to him after the . . . “Ha, ha, ha, so that’s why . . . did . . .”’

He can’t pick up whispers and nudges and, worse still, he can’t use them. He tries to pick topics, and drop them into conversation, but they all turn out by definition to be ‘serious’ ones because these are easier paced. Humorous chat is too fast for him, and so he is seen as overearnest, and boring.

He begins to build up an image of himself as a stumbling, blundering retart, breaking off his sentences half way through because he is sure no one wants to hear what he wants to say, lumbering jing retard, good will extended to him by his schoolmates dries up. The truce is over, and battle begins; he becomes one of the butts of all the digs and jokes. And the years creep upwards to the age when *everything* that is said is vital because it carries under-messages of power, control, wit, put-downs. ‘And what does lickel Nigel really think then?’ He don’t say much do he? ‘Ah, he’s a poof, that’s it. Ain’t yer, Nigel?’ (What’s that? What’s that mean?)

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‘B’s mum said … to him after the . . .
repeatedly that this is what growing to be a man is all about. You still
hate it, but because of this it rules out suicide as an option.

Age 13–18

Nigel and his female equivalent Janie (they've never met) have a slight
problem. They like girls/boys, but they cannot work out what is going on
between all the others. The boys mutter in groups about 'wanking' and the
best way to do it, whatever 'it' is. Janie watches the girls giggling to each
other about boys and what they try to do I / (What do they try to do,
please?). Nigel feels he is not normal jj because he can't impress the girls
and make them laugh: it is all too n fast for him. They frighten him because
they talk too quietly, and you always meet them in places that are dark, or
noisy, or both. Janie wants a hearing boyfriend, not one of those deaf boys
she has heard about, feitelhe can't work out what they are saying so she just
goes along with them and smiles, and lets them do what they do (But not
that . . . And what should she do about that because she cannot follow what
the other girls say about it'). Nigel's label of 'queer' haunts him but he can't
talk about it because if he asked anybody, they would laugh at him.
Whenever he attempts to join in with conversations, he meets with no
response, as if he had never spoken, or *Ah shut up, Ladd', or 'Ladd, why are
you so boring, eh?' or, worst of all and most common, 'You what? What you
think we're talking about? 'Ere everybody, old Ladd thinks we're talking
about X, how haw how.

j \ As he progresses up the school it gets worse. The younger kids ■ | catch
on and start to taunt him. When he becomes prefect they take I no notice of
him - the final humiliation. Now in sixth form, even | sport is ruled out.
Time to go to pubs and dances. Even worse for understanding people. But
what does he do? Stay at home all weekend licking his wounds? So he has to
have something to do with his hands. He learns to smoke and drink and
stand on the fringe. When forced to dance with girls, he has to find excuses
to /withdraw every other number, which is for smooching, because he j can't
pick up the rhythm if it is slow. He has to go to great lengths I to avoid
getting stuck with a girl at the end, because it means dark places where he
is lost, like picture houses. Convinced of his thickness, he can find nothing
to talk about except football, and what girls like football? Yet all the time he is
running away he desperately wants to stay and get a girlfriend. Torn in two,
he consoles himself by getting drunk, but that is even worse, because he
can't /lip-read at all now.

His search for an identity becomes more intense. 'I'm an introvert, that's
it. I can't follow things. But that's not because I'm deaf. They told me I
wasn't deaf, just that I can't hear very well. So if I can't follow, it must be
because I'm thick. That must be true. I can never think of anything to talk
about to others except football. So that's what I am.' Now he is truly split in
half. His rational mind says that he can't be thick, because he is where he is
academically. Whilst his emotional mind sees no other alternative identity.

Oh Ewing, Oh Van Uden, what a marvellous choice you gave us deaf
children! To see ourselves as stupid rather than to be able to see ourselves as
deaf and accept it, andTo '.wpkrf from there. I hope it gave you a sense of
real achievement!

Age 18–21

The only thing that saved little Nigel was going to college. If he had gone out
to work at eighteen who knows what would have happened to him? Utterly
unprepared for life, with his range of interests almost nil, and his knowledge
of the basic facts in life also minimal, he might have become the proverbial
good citizen on the outside, but on the inside he would have been more like a
robot, a true dummy. Perhaps robots are what oralists want to produce. But
this time they did not succeed. College in the late 1960s and early 1970s was
the hippy era - a lifebelt. People accepted you for what you were. If you chose
your groups carefully, building up a network of friends, you could find the
encouragement to develop as a person. With this newfound confidence, Nigel
became interested in literally scores of subjects, most of which have
continued to the present day. But no matter how good the friends were, they
could not understand why he could not follow them when there were more
than two people present, or if there was background noise (which was 90 per
cent of the time). As at school, the sheer intensity of the pressure of leading
a 'normal' life had negative physical effects, and there was nowhere to turn
for relaxation. TV — lip-reading strain. Talking — ditto. Lectures and
seminars — ditto. Music — ditto. Radio — ditto. Sports? The game is fine,
but what do you do when all the lads head for the pavilion afterwards? Be a
bore or cissy, and drop out? Or sit there pretending to laugh and smile,
trying to drink yourself out of the dull ache of
boredom with no place to relax on a Saturday night, when everyone else is relaxing? So ditto. Theatre ditto. Telephone ditto. Politics ditto. Concerts ditto. Sex and romance ditto.

How then do you relax, Nigel? On your own, that’s how, walking and wandering alone. Sitting on your bed, reading and thinking, alone. Sometimes very happy and contented, sometimes lonely and depressed. But alone whatever way. Alone. Is that so bad, Nigel? Not if you want to be that way, and sometimes it is great. But if you wish to be elsewhere, among any of the dittos that other people are gaily undertaking, then, ah then, it hurts. How can you think of it best? You’re not deaf: you’re just a normal person who can’t hear. But if I am normal, then why can’t I act normally with others, or do their things? I know I’m not stupid now, but I still feel like a bull in a china shop when I try to join in. So what am I, then? If I am normal I can do normal things. If I can’t, I can’t be normal. So what am I? God, tell me! I can’t hear very well, but I’m not deaf. That’s just a word. It doesn’t explain anything or solve anything. So it doesn’t mean anything. So it doesn’t help. So I am a loner. That is what I am, an outsider. Beyond anybody’s reach. Love doesn’t reach that far. Friendship: that’s the only part of me they can understand or want to see. The real me is imprisoned in ice. And no tears on earth can melt it.

Search for an Identity

So college has helped little Nigel immensely in many areas of his life. But the dilemma isn’t solved. Part of his identity derives from the tolerant accepting hippie philosophy, but the rest of the iceberg is left intact. Onwards he goes to work. Job application-rejection-deaf-application-rejection-deaf-application-rejection-deaf. What is this word ‘deaf’ that only means negative things? Things you ‘can’t’ do and none that you can. He starts to worry and in his dilemma sees the parent of a deaf child he’s known vaguely for a few years. That person talks about what his adult deaf friends have told him about the things they find in being deaf. That one happened to you! So did that! Little things. Big things. And what’s that word you used ‘lip-reading’? Well, I wish I’d thought of that. Is that what I’ve been doing all these years without realising? Things start to come together. Must meet some of these deaf people. Frightening they are very strange: their faces adopt peculiar expressions and their hands fidget violently in their laps. One or two use the sign language a bit. But that’s OK really: a new feeling. I need time to let it all sink in.

Meanwhile time goes by. Work with deaf children? Yes, why not give it a try? He gets letters from teacher training colleges in London, Oxford, Manchester, saying no - he cannot teach deaf children because he is deaf! The ultimate blow. Tears of rage, tears of grief. Not much has ever hurt like this. He says to himself, ‘How can they reject me without meeting me? I can juggle for normal amongst hearing people, so I could even fool them at an interview.’ (As if there should be any need to fool them!) But what you can pass for counts for nothing in the end. You are deaf. The same people j who told you that you were hearing and normal when you were small now tell you that you are really deaf. The full impact of the oralist lie and his rejection of deafness now comes home to roost, and a new phase starts.

He hears about social work and sets off on this path. At last he is accepted by a boss with a hearing loss who can see some potential in him that he doesn’t know he has. He has to learn sign language for work. He is reluctant to start: it threatens him in some way deep down. But once he mixes a lot with deaf clients, then acquaintances, then friends, the threat simply melts away as he understands them more easily and can sign to make himself understood more easily. In some strange way, for some mysterious reason, it comes more easily to him. As if he understood it from the inside somewhere. As if something was waiting all these years to be peeled back and revealed.

He goes to meetings and watches the speaker’s mouth and eyes. As usual he falters because of the strain, and surreptitiously switches across to the interpreter to pick up a couple of new signs. Then suddenly he realises that he can follow the interpreter a little easier than the speaker. Well, a lot easier ... Maybe I should join the other deaf social workers at the front where I can see all of the interpreter, not just half of him. But they’ll see me as deaf! But I am deaf! So why worry? That’s it... I am deaf! What does it mean now? It means something good at last. It means that I can follow this meeting. The first meeting I have ever followed in my life! Why? Because I am watching this sign language interpreter who is making it easy for me. I can even relax a little in my chair for the first time and watch with ease. So this is what it means to be deaf! It means to have a language you can relax and communicate easily in. Just as others speak and listen and relax so I can sign and watch and relax. And I can learn things far more easily too! My father always used to go on at me to relax. Now I have relaxed I know what it means, and now I know why I couldn’t relax before. Yes, that’s it, I am a deaf person. I am an ordinary person. But I am a deaf person too. Deaf people are normal people. They just have a language of their own like any group of people, black, white or yellow, French, Chinese or Spanish. And you can have interpreters between these groups too. You can teach and learn these languages so that nation can communicate with nation, people with people. That must be what it is to be deaf. I’m not handicapped. I just live abroad. Permanently. Except now I’ve got a country. A small country, like Antigua, or Sri Lanka, or Monaco. But a country. I’m not alone any more on an island that hasn’t been discovered. Just part
SCHOOL-DAYS

of a country that's been driven underground. Almost to extinction. But we will see what we can do about that later. Eight now I can work towards getting a passport so I can travel freely between countries. Get the best from both. Give whatever it is I have to give to both. For Fve got something to give now I know who I am!

How sickening, I thought. I had always been taught that lip-reading and hearing aids were adequate, yet only now could I realise that they were, at best, crutches. They were not legs. It became clear that my legs were in fact sign language. It seemed as if I had spent all of my time on crutches, when I could have had legs.

From then on my confidence grew, and over the last five years I have really come out as a person and been able to do things I would never have dreamt of doing before. I had always seen myself as an introvert. Now I realised that I was really an extrovert who had been repressed by having a false identity forced on to me which offered me no support. That doesn't mean you stop talking with hearing people. On the contrary, the confidence you have gained gives you more chance to meet and mix with hearing people, because once you accept who you are you can accept the fact that you cannot hope to get all that is said and you adjust your behaviour accordingly.

References


11 Life at Secondary School

Elizabeth Craddock

Elizabeth Craddock was born deaf into a Deaf family. She reflects here on the time she spent as a pupil at Mary Hare Grammar School, how this effected her relationship with the Deaf community, and her own growing sense of identity as a Deaf person.

I went as a boarder to Mary Hare Grammar School in August 1970. I remember that on my first day in school I was fine. And then the next day more children arrived and they were homesick, and that made me feel homesick too. I remember someone saying that if I worked hard and got good results during the first three months I would be staying, but if not, I would be returning to my old school. It did worry me at first, but then I discovered that I could do the work without too much effort.

We had assembly every morning, except weekends, we were placed according to heights. As I was very small for my age I was in the front row but eventually moved back as I grew. The further back I went pleased me as it meant I was with the older children but I found it difficult because it meant that I had to lip-read at a distance, which was a strain. I kept asking the person next to me what the headmaster was saying, they would get fed up and said I needed glasses, so I had my eyes tested and was issued with glasses, which helped. But then we had a new headmaster in the middle of my third year, it was difficult as I was not used to him and it became difficult to lip-read.

Every Wednesday a pupil from each class would read out a passage from the Bible during assembly. I could never understand, mostly because I couldn't lip-read them, and didn't know to which passage they referred. I read one passage and recall a teacher telling me that at first it went well, but faltered later, and she gave me a speech mark for my efforts.

There were four houses in the school: Beverley, Braidwood, Arnold and Mary Hare. I was in Mary Hare. My house usually did well in the 'Education Cup' and badly in the 'Speech Cup'. Marks were given for working hard, but they could also be taken away if, for example, we were caught signing. Some of the people who were pre-
lingually profoundly deaf with deaf parents, used Sign Language most of the

time, they were usually caught by the staff who gave them bad marks for
signing. We had a summer ball and a Christmas party every year; these
people had to miss these because they had too many bad marks. It was a sort
of punishment. As I look back I consider it oppressive that the staff tried to
stop us from signing. Some of us were even punished, but it did not stop us. I
feel that I compromised myself because I would try and make sure I was not
caught, whereas if I had been aware of the importance of BSL I would have
demanded my rights as a Deaf person to be able to use my language.

I remember Speech Day 1970, my mother came with my grandmother.
During tea my grandmother approached my form teacher and asked how I
was getting on and she became angry when she found out I had no speech
lessons. I was born with a cleft palate and the consultant said I would need
regular speech therapy. It didn't make any difference. I did have some
speech lessons but not regularly, only when a teacher did not understand
me, he/she would arrange it with me during break-times, etc.

Going to boarding school didn't at first bother me as I just seemed to
accept it as part of life. I now think that it was because both my parents are
deaf and went to boarding schools. My brother went to Burwood Park two
years after I went to Mary Hare. At first I was not aware that Mary Hare
was a grammar school, but I remember my mother telling me that it was a
'good' school.

We had to wear headphones in classrooms. I simply hated it, partly becasue it was extremely uncomfortable. I used to try to avoid wearing these
by saying they were not working! The teacher, obviously, would test them
and pronounce them working. Headphones don't help me in any way at all,
they simply magnify the sounds which I cannot identify.

We had French classes and the teacher used to give us new words and we
had to demonstrate the meaning in English. Most of us in B form could not
lipread him, partly because in French lip-patterns are different. We used to
look at one girl in particular and follow what she was doing. The teacher
realised that and eventually she was moved to the 'A' class.

We were not allowed to sign at all, but we did during break-times and
leisure times when the staff were not around. I usually stopped when I saw
any of them coming. If I was caught I was given a bad mark. At bedtimes, we
would draw the curtains back and open the door a little so we could see each
other. We stopped when it was too dark to continue. Someone had the idea
of bringing a torch and we used to talk to each other. In one dormitory a rug
covered a glass panel in the floor which overlooked a corridor downstairs,
which was usually lit up. We moved the rug and carried on with our
conversation!

I wore my body hearing aid all the time, it was such a nuisance as we girls
had to put it in our bras or skirt waistband. Whenever we ran somewhere
the body aid usually came off and fell on the ground or we would catch it as
the cord dragged on our ear moulds. Although I wore my hearing aid all the
time at school, I never wore it at home and my parents have never forced
them on me or my brother.

At bedtime, of course, I didn't wear it. One evening I was in my dressing
gown, I was late for the lights out so I ran down the stairs. The matron
stopped me and said something to me, but unfortunately the light was very
postal strike for about six weeks, which meant I couldn’t get any mail. Some of the pupils who were hard of hearing could phone home for news whilst I couldn’t because my family are deaf. Minicom wasn’t known at that time. When we had the Open Day in February 1970 we could see our parents coming along the corridor, one by one we all started to cry because we had been completely out of contact with our families. In the end even the teacher had to wipe her eyes.

We used to sit in a half-circle with the teacher situated in the middle with the chalkboard behind her. I usually sat near the end of the half-circle. It was frustrating when the sun was shining as I couldn’t see the writing on the chalkboard because of the reflection from the sun. We drew the blinds but on occasions still needed the light on. It was not easy trying to lip-read someone from the side. I remember one time I moved my desk to be opposite the teacher’s desk so I could lip-read and see the chalkboard better.

Occasionally, when we had visitors, the headmaster would show them round the school. Every time he would come into my classroom and give a short talk about each girl in the room. When he reached my friend he lengthened his talk because she had three generations of deafness in her family. When he came to me it increased and I could lip-read him some words, he was talking about my family and also that my brother went to Burwood Park. We were a kind of status symbol, ‘proof’ that oralism really was best. The visitors usually looked suitably impressed.

In my fourth year we were split into three groups - A, B and C for Maths, French and English, according to intelligence levels. I was placed in the A group for Maths with two others. I could do Maths easily as it was one of my best subjects and more challenging as we were all of the same level. I found that there was a problem because the teacher talked faster than I was used to, and my friend and I had to stop her and remind her. We both found it a bit of a struggle to follow other pupils because most of them had more hearing than us.

I remember that when I had biology classes I used to ask questions about various things. The teacher could never understand what I was asking so my friend had to interpret for me by means of voicing my questions again. He was embarrassed because he couldn’t understand me, he tried but in the end my friend had to do it. Afterwards he decided to have some speech lessons with me during my break time. My French teacher did the same also. They really tried to help. If they had used Sign Language they would have known what I was asking, and saved me some embarrassment. Looking back I have to wonder - who had the problem?

During biology lessons in my last year we had a new teacher, whom I found difficult to understand partly because he was new to deaf pupils. I spent most of my time chatting to my friends, as I had lost interest in biology. Eventually I was allowed to drop it as a subject.

We went to Church service every other Sunday. I Used to loathe going because I could never understand the sermon, which could be long. One time we made ourselves as inconspicuous as possible and played cards! Nowadays I attend the local Deaf church which I enjoy tremendously because the Vicar uses Sign Language and I even take part in the choir. But I really couldn’t say my interest was kindled by school.

I do not agree with ‘integration’ for deaf children. I believe that all deaf
Section Five

Continuing Education
A Polytechnic with a Difference

Lucy Briggs

Lucy Briggs writes authoritively about the variety of educational contexts she has experienced but offers pertinent commendation to provision made for her and other deaf students at Sheffield City Polytechnic offering, as it does, specialist support services to deaf students and academic staff working with them.

As a twenty-year-old profoundly deaf woman, I will review my education from early childhood into adulthood. I have been to schools for the deaf (both day and residential), partially hearing units and normal hearing educational institutions. I have, therefore, experienced different teaching methods and social situations together with a variety of attitudes and feelings on the part of teachers, pupils and myself.

My formal education began at the age of two and a half when I went to the Ewing School for the Deaf, I can recall my first days there as my mother used to accompany me at first and then left me alone for longer periods. I do not remember feeling lonely or sad, in fact my mother said that I was the only one who did not cry in the nursery! Life seemed an adventure as I remember the long journeys to and from Nottingham, the games that we played and how learning was made fun. I do not remember feeling different as everyone wore hearing aids. Communication was easy as we had our own forms of language, consisting of garbled speech, signs and gestures. The school used oral teaching methods and thus I learned how to speak, read and write. I was able to recognise and write simple nouns such as 'mummy' and 'dog' long before I left the Ewing at five years old.

At five years old, I was the first deaf pupil along with another girl at a partially hearing unit within an infant school. The first day at this school was traumatic as I remember being put into a taxi (not a minibus as we used for the Ewing) and my parents followed in the car. When I arrived at this strange building with seemingly cold people, I did not understand what was happening, even though the previous summer was spent going past the school with my parents telling me that it was my 'new school'. Within a few minutes of our
arrival, my parents were led away into an office with what I believed were promises of their return. I was also led away but when I returned I discovered that my parents had gone, I was upset as I thought they had left me alone to fend for myself in this strange place with adults whom I did not trust. However, after this first day, I settled down and enjoyed school life. With just two deaf pupils to teach, the teacher for the deaf, whom I remember with fond memories, was able to give us individual attention. Part of my timetable involved integration - joining the 'big classroom' with hearing peers. I was for the most part left alone to work on my own and did not feel neglected as I enjoyed the solitary absorption in work. However, when I moved into the primary school after two years, I spent most of my time in the mainstream class and I felt neglected as I received little attention from the teachers. I appreciate the difficulties they had in controlling a large class but I did not learn anything and often spent time reading. I could not understand the teachers at all and I blame this on lack of insight as they were probably not prepared for teaching deaf children and had no knowledge of deafness. The teachers' attitude was to 'feed' me English work-cards whilst everyone else did exciting subjects such as history, science and geography. I spent little time with the PHU teacher for the deaf and other deaf pupils, mainly because of the varying range of ages, abilities and needs and also because we were encouraged to cope alone in the mainstream classes.

Socially, I was busy as I made friends with my hearing peers. I do not remember feeling left out, probably due to my lack of interest in conversation and because we played games most of the time. There were some children who made fun of my deafness and thus I was made to feel different. There have been occasions when I had to stick up for myself, leading to playground tussles.

As my academic progress was poor and it was time for me to begin my secondary education, my parents looked into the possibility of sending me to a small private school or a school for the deaf. I remember entering the Mary Hare entry examinations but I did not accept their offer of a place. I recall visiting some private schools which were either poorly equipped or too old fashioned (one had no TVs to my horror!). An old headmaster from the Ewing School recommended St John's School for the Deaf. When I visited the school, I was struck by the warmth and the politeness of the pupils and became excited about joining the school. St John's was a residential school but this pleased me as I had read so many schoolgirl's stories of the midnight feasts, tricks on poor unsuspecting teachers and close friendships.

The realities, however, were different as it was a convent school with strict rules but I did make close friendships. My first day was happy as X was shown my dormitory and then introduced to the girls there, making friends quickly and even 'dismissing' my accompanying parents. Over the years I made close friendships and am still in touch with old school friends now as there is a bond between us, derived from having lived together in a community and from sharing common experiences and memories.

The teaching methods suited me as there were small classes of around eight pupils assembled according to our academic needs. The teachers were able to concentrate on our various needs which meant I made rapid progress. It was an oral school and sign language was forbidden. I remember how the headmistress gave a talk on how lucky we were to be given a voice by God and that we must appreciate this gift by using it! It was perhaps rather extreme but at least the school did not make the mistake of devoting hours to speech instead of teaching English as some oral schools have been known to do. It was at this school that I first encountered sign language as the school took in different pupils, some with poor speech and a good command of sign language. I quickly learned how to sign but it was not a proper form of language as it was based on our inventions. We used it to ease understanding of speech but this was illicit so we were careful not to get caught.

I enjoyed the lessons as, after years of seldom speaking up in the PHU, I was able to participate in class discussions. This is another aspect of the school's teaching methods and thus speaking was encouraged to improve speech. As it was a small residential school, social life revolved around the pupils and everyone knew each other. Weekends, evenings and breaks were spent in each other's company (mainly females as mixing sexes was limited and under tight control). Being surrounded by other children made it hard for me to cope with solitude and loneliness at home. As I was away, friendships with other children at home faltered and this is I believe a common experience with children who are sent to boarding schools. My feelings of boredom and frustration were accentuated by my deafness which, I felt was a barrier and home life was difficult. As I was growing older, my interest in conversations increased and my family were suddenly made to feel obliged to 'interpret' for me at meal times and family get-togethers. I often felt that their interpretations were inadequate and thus felt even more left out. At the end of my visits home, I would be eagerly ready to return to school.

After achieving eight O-levels, I was ready to leave the confined and restricted environment of the school. The strict rules made me feel like a distrusted delinquent and I did not relish the prospects of spending my last teenage years doing my A-levels there. Also, since I was expected to enter higher education, I felt that being in a hearing institution would improve my communication skills and increase my confidence. The school had made me an independent person as I had to stand on my own feet. For example I travelled without adults on trains on weekends home and survived difficult times, such as when I was in serious trouble for unjustified reasons, with no protective parental shields. I felt able to cope with changing educational environments. My parents supported the idea of joining a sixth-form college and arranged for me to go to St Mary's High School which was a local authority grant-aided Catholic school which had the advantages of having had my brother and cousins among its pupils.

I was the first deaf pupil there and a special tutor for the deaf arranged meetings with my prospective teachers to prepare them for me. Extra tutorials were arranged as back-up to lessons. It was due to the support of the teaching staff and the special tutor that I achieved two A-levels with
good grades. My hearing peers were helpful in that they were willing to lend me notes, for example. As my O-level English Literature course was completed on my own without other pupils, I relished the competitive A-level literature course. My essay writing improved immensely and excellent progress was made due to competing with other pupils of high ability. I remember how I was once upset as I could not follow group discussions but after intervention by the sixth-form mistress things improved as I was encouraged to stop a discussion and ask someone to repeat.

My confidence increased and along with academic progress, my social life changed as I went to nightclubs and parties most weekends with my sixth-form friends. However, I felt that those friendships were superficial compared to my relationships at St John's. I hate to say it but I think my deafness was a barrier to friendships. Not only did I feel unable to contribute in conversation, as I could not follow every word, but also they did not share the bond of being deaf which explains the strong Deaf community based on Deaf clubs and organisations. Hearing people must have found it difficult to understand fully the isolating aspects of deafness in a world full of technology such as telephones, radio and television and of people babbling away and of strange sounds. Lack of understanding leads hearing people to misunderstand seemingly strange behaviour in deaf people like their glazed expressions and lack of reaction towards noises. Also, the feelings of being deaf are complex and thus difficult to convey

Also, the feelings of being deaf are complex and thus difficult to convey and usually the only hearing people who possess some understanding are close family who have lived with them for years.

Armed with my experiences from the sixth form, I was ready to embark upon a degree course in Business Studies at Sheffield City Polytechnic. It is interesting to note how my applications to various polytechnics were rejected on the grounds of disability, A certain polytechnic even went as far as rudely advising me to try another place! But it was the prestigious polytechnic which, although is widespread, is small. I am used to meeting people who happen to share mutual friends (my father calls this the 'deaf mafia') which can be explained by the fact that a high proportion of deaf children attend residential schools for the deaf which children from all over the country attend; these contacts are maintained at deaf clubs after leaving school. I keep in touch with old school friends through writing letters (we must have kept the post office in business and destroyed half the Brazilian rain forest!!) and travelling to meeting them at parties, deaf clubs or in our homes. Most of my friends are, admittedly, deaf as I spent several years with deaf children and also because making friends...
with them is very easy, compared to hearing people. My only regret for not attending a hearing secondary school is that I did not have better opportunities to establish friendships with hearing peers, but I would miss the warm community of the deaf world. I did have friends in the sixth form but we no longer keep in touch and although I do have hearing friends in Sheffield, it is my deaf friends to whom I turn for company.

In conclusion, I do not have any real regrets about my educational path and now as a second-year student at Sheffield I feel that my academic and emotional needs are being met. I believe that my success in escaping being a failure in the deaf educational system is a credit to my parents who were constantly convinced that oralism is the best method of teaching me and were also prepared to devote hours of teaching me through illustrations, books, demonstrations and outings. Indeed, I am lucky in that the schools I attended turned out to be the right ones, even the PHU primary school taught me how to communicate with hearing people who, after all, are part of my surroundings - at work, in the street, in shops, in offices and so on.

Christopher Reid, who has a significant hearing loss, describes his experiences in an oral grammar school for the Deaf, his subsequent move to a mainstream polytechnic and finally his plans to become a postgraduate student. He describes his growing realisation of the importance for deaf young people of feeling comfortable with their Deaf identity rather than feeling a compulsion to identify with hearing people.

At 22 years old, looking back at my life experiences, I find a point at which my attitudes changed towards deafness and Sign Language. This was also the point when I began to realise the importance of preparing a deaf child psychologically and socially for future contact with hearing people. I now feel that teaching deaf children to speak should not be achieved at the expense of neglecting this preparation. Before I go on to explain this in detail I would like to describe my life history as I think it is significant for understanding the changes in my attitudes towards deafness and Sign Language.

I went to Mary Hare Grammar School and I enjoyed the life there very much. The school was a boarding school for deaf children and being in the presence of friends all day and night gave me strong friendships. However being in a closed environment gave me certain beliefs that became incompatible with new knowledge I gained when I left school, as I will explain shortly.

The education I received was an oralist one and, as such, there was a strong emphasis on speech and lip-reading. Sign Language at the same time was strongly discouraged and we were sometimes punished if we were caught signing, but I believe that this practice has been stopped now at the school. The oral method presented me very few problems and in the end I left school with ten O-levels and two A-levels. My oralist education, however, gave me rather negative beliefs about Sign Language mainly that it was inferior and that it would discourage development of speech. I was lucky that I could speak and lip-read well and I tended to see issues about Sign Language as irrelevant thus not paying much attention to
them. I never really thought about the possibility of Sign Language being beneficial for deaf education, especially for those who were totally deaf and poor lip-readers. Anyway I was discouraged by teachers from using gestures and signs in communicating with my friends and encouraged to 'act like a hearing person'.

Their views towards Sign Language and speech (characteristics of an oralist system of education, I now argue) led me to believe that it was very important to be able to mix with hearing people and at the same time to minimise my disability when with them. But I must also say that this belief in one way gave me a greater sense of confidence and independence in myself, in that I believed that I could achieve things academically as well as hearing people could. I thus did not think that my deafness would be a great handicap in my future career. Because of my ability to speak and lip-read well, I thought I would not experience problems of communication nor hearing people's negative reactions towards my deafness. But when I left school I found these expectations to be false.

I went to polytechnic to study a degree course in Applied Social Science for three years. The move from eight years in a boarding school environment, into an unknown hearing environment was sudden and uncomfortable. I found it difficult to make a contribution to group conversations as the pace was usually too fast for me to follow. Some people found it uncomfortable having to repeat what they said when I asked them to. The consequence of the difficulties I had with hearing people was to make me feel more self-conscious of my deafness.

To be fair, a lot of the people I met did not know much about deafness and therefore did not know how to deal with me properly. I suppose many of them were rather puzzled or confused when they saw that my speech was good yet I wore hearing aids, and had problems in communicating with them. I sometimes wonder whether, if my speech had been less intelligible or if I had made it more obvious that I was deaf, they would have treated me differently?

Making friends with hearing people was the hardest part about polytechnic life. I tried at first to make the first move when approaching people but often found that my deafness tended to be a barrier. Although people did make efforts to speak to me this was usually limited to superficial conversation. There was one person who I regarded as a good friend and who I went around with a lot. On the whole it was a very tiring experience for me as I had to make extra efforts showing them that my deafness was not necessarily a barrier to developing friendships. I would make great efforts to speak correctly and would concentrate intensely on people's lip-patterns in trying to understand what they were saying. Group conversations were often difficult to follow, especially in pubs and nightclubs where the lighting was usually poor. It was difficult for me to try and put a word in, as one had to be fully aware of what was being said first, before joining in.

From my own choice I received very little help during the lectures and seminars, although support was offered to me from the Hearing Impaired Services in Coventry by way of radio aids and note-taking. The reason for refusing help was to show that I did not need it despite my deafness; I wanted to be like my hearing counterparts. This may seem stupid but at the time I believed that being given extra support for my studies would further emphasise my differences from hearing people and make me seem less approachable to them. Much of my concern was geared to what I wanted hearing people to think of me, rather than what I wanted for myself first.

During lectures I would sit in the front row, usually sitting next to a friend, from whom I would make notes afterwards. It was a matter of luck whether I was able to follow the lecturers or not. Some were very easy to follow and some were hell, especially those who had beards and moustaches! When the course started I made it known to lecturers that I needed them to speak more slowly in order for me to understand more easily. But this was often forgotten and some lecturers would speak too quickly. Often I would skip lectures and go to the library and do some reading there. I was lucky that my course involved a lot of reading and that the library could be used as a way round the problems with my lectures.

Seminars presented the most difficulties as these involved group discussions, which made it very difficult for me to follow what was being said. I would often skip a lot of seminars and do some reading in the library. My many requests for the pace of conversation to slow down were often forgotten and the pace would quicken again. It is not easy for hearing people to speak more slowly than usual for an hour without forgetting and speaking quickly at times.

My efforts in mixing with hearing people were quite a contrast to my efforts in mixing with Deaf people at the local Deaf club, to which a deaf friend, whom I had met at a party, had introduced me. I made friends rather quickly with several Deaf club members and this, much to my relief, dispelled my belief that my unsuccessful attempts with hearing people were because of my personality! I was amazed at how comfortable and relaxed I was in the presence of Deaf people, and that the problems I had with hearing people could be temporarily forgotten. The experiences were repeated when I went to Birmingham Deaf club. Some of the members were ex-pupils of Mary Hare School and some were people I had met elsewhere, so there was no initial difficulty there. I soon became a member of Coventry and Birmingham Deaf clubs which I attended frequently playing squash and chess.

I think it was at this point of my re-entry into the Deaf world that I began to experience a change in attitudes. Mixing with hearing people, to me, was not the best way of feeling good about myself. Mixing with deaf people, on the other hand, was. I began to feel that I should be myself more and try less to identify and belong with hearing people; I found, anyway, that this did not work very well in practice. I beg i to feel that I should be accepting my deafness more and being positive about it.

After three years at polytechnic I got my degree in Applied Social Science and began to look for work. After considering several different career areas I decided to work with the Nottingham Deaf Institute as a trainee researcher. The research I undertook involved studying people's attitudes towards deaf people and Sign Language. As well as research I...
became the society’s representative on Nottingham Council Working Party on Disabilities and undertook training to become an advocate for deaf people with the RNID advocacy scheme. In order to be able to communicate with those who use Sign Language as their first language, I went on a Sign Language course.

Through these various areas of work I became more positive about my deafness and began to accept more that Sign Language is a language in its own right. I began to identify more closely with deaf people and less with hearing people because I found this a better way of giving me feelings of self-worth.

I will soon be studying an MA course in Environmental Planning at Nottingham University. This time I am trying to get support that would put me on an equal basis of learning with other, hearing, students, something I would never have thought of trying to do before! I am hoping to get support in the form of note-taking, a radio aid, and an interpreter.

I feel then, that in their education deaf children should be prepared psychologically and socially for future contacts with hearing people once they leave school. They should fully understand the meaning of deafness, people’s attitudes towards it and how these attitudes can be dealt with in a positive way. They should be aware of Sign Language and deaf culture. I think understanding all these issues would go a long way in preparing the deaf individual for coming into contact with hearing people confidently. As J. Weinstock puts it very well, ‘Deaf students need to know who they really are and where they belong before, and not after, they graduate. They don’t need to prove themselves worthy to please the majority,’

14 Training to Teach

Sarah Elsey

Sarah Elsey describes her good and bad educational experiences in mainstream schools. Eventual acceptance at a teacher-training college, she feels, was in part due to her own attitudes and perseverance but also in no small way attributable to the encouragement and support given by her parents.

When I was diagnosed as being partially hearing, much was done to give me the support I required to help my special educational needs. David Harrison, Head of the Service for Hearing Impaired Children in Leicestershire, presented my family with toys and other materials provided by the Leicestershire Education Authority. These were changed regularly and selected according to my language and developmental needs. Mr Harrison was a tremendous support at home to both my parents in guiding them in ways to help me develop language, despite my hearing loss.

My mother was given lessons on how to help my speech, using apparatus with large headphones. Every afternoon, from when I was eighteen months old, she would spend time working with me in order to develop my speech, mainly through lip-reading.

At the age of two, until I was three, I attended play-school every Friday morning at the Mission for the Deaf. This was a session to help mothers learn from each other how best to teach and improve their children’s speech and learning.

I remember these sessions being the ‘crisp’ school where I would buy a packet of crisps every Friday morning. At the age of three I spent two days in an ‘ordinary’ play-school in the village close to my home. The remaining three days of the school week was spent in a unit for partially hearing children at Sandhurst Street in Oadby. This was a long day for me, leaving home at eight by taxi in the morning and returning at five in the evening. There was little integration with the other children in the mainstream part of the school.

When I reached five years old, I attended Danemill School, a neighbourhood school, where I integrated with hearing children. The unit at Sandhurst had taught me how to read, basic number work...
and copywriting. So there were no major educational problems when I got to Danemill.

I lived on a modern housing estate, where I had plenty of friends with whom I played with all the time and who also attended the same school. My best friend was Sally Bowers who remained with me throughout infant school up until the first year in the juniors - when she emigrated to Canada. I was absolutely devastated. Sally was my play-mate who understood me, even at times when my language was not all that clear. This must have had a significant positive effect on my communication skills, as I could mix with children both in and out of school and I do not remember experiencing any negative feelings at infant school.

I have many happy memories of the junior school. My time there seemed troublefree. This may have had some connection with my mother being a teacher at the school but I think overall it was because it was not brought to my attention that I had hearing problems.

At this age I felt confident and self-assured with continuing support and praise, especially from my parents and teachers, resulting in my participation in school productions. I started to play the flute, a musical instrument which opened up opportunities for me to be integrated into the school orchestra and do solo performances. I continued with the flute, despite one misunderstanding with a flute teacher who did not recognise my hearing loss. I did, however, meet up with him at a later date when I played for the Leicestershire School of Music in a band. I also played the melody for a folk group of a Catholic Church in Leicestershire. As a result of my determination I was able to prove that having a hearing loss does not mean that you are unable to play or thoroughly enjoy a musical instrument.

I progressed throughout my junior school with the support and help of a peripatetic teacher, Mr Ward, who visited me at least once a month. I enjoyed his company but at times I was not too keen on the work and tests I had to do with him. He provided me with a variety of activities; one consisted of showing cards with corresponding descriptive words, these were difficult at times but I was glad I was good at guessing! Mr Ward also used a machine to test my level of hearing using a bone conductor. I had to answer ‘yes’ if I heard a sound or note which was fed through the headphones at regular intervals. At first I used to watch his finger move up and down but then Mr Ward recognised this strategy and covered up his fingers. Unfortunately I was not defeated and cheated at times when the notes were getting fainter by watching the bones in his wrist move!

Mr Ward continued to pay visits to me throughout my secondary school, which turned out to be a great release from the French lessons I was having at the time! Mr Ward then retired and was replaced by Mr Dyson. These visits, I felt, were more of a social meeting and to solve any problems I had with my hearing aids themselves. I did not feel I had any educational problems associated with my hearing that Mr Dyson could help me with.

In the fourth year in the junior school I was presented with an old-fashioned form of ‘phonic ear’. A large heavy leather-bound box called a ‘radio aid’ which had to be near to pick up what the teachers were saying through a clumsy microphone which hung around their necks or laid on the desk. This picked up all sounds that the teachers were making, including breathing or scrunching up pieces of paper. In order for me to have it a suitable distance from my ear I had it on the back of my chair, which left me with little room to sit.

After a fund-raising event, I was honoured to receive a ‘phonic ear’, which was smaller and neater in design. Like the other hearing aid it ran on battery. I kept this in a Rowntree’s toffee tin with extra padding which I had to carry around everywhere with me. At the beginning I started to use it at home watching the television. After a while, it became more of a hindrance than a help and caused clashes in the relationship between the academic staff and the social side of school. I had to ensure that the teacher knew how to operate the ‘phonic ear’ before the lesson could start, and whilst the other children were collecting up their books and moving on to get a good seat in the next lesson, I had to wait patiently until the teacher had finished talking to other students or members of staff in order to collect the microphone they were wearing. The radio aid did, however, provide a bit of entertainment sometimes because if the teacher was asked to go outside the classroom by another member of staff, he or she would sometimes forget to turn the microphone off! The class would charge to where I was sitting and listen in if my aid was on full-blast!

With reference to the phonic ear, my parents remarked on how quickly my vocabulary had increased and how much better I seemed to be coping. Obviously I did not notice the educational benefits from the equipment only the social disadvantages I was coming across, in what it was picking up about 80 per cent of the teacher and only 20 per cent of the class, unless the pupil speaking was sitting near the teacher. The problems it was causing and the feelings I was experiencing of embarrassment and frustration were added to the list of social problems with which I was already having to cope. I had progressed a long way in my speech since my early childhood, thanks to my parents’ continuous correction! At times, I did have a tendency to mumble and mispronounce some particular phonic sounds. Unfortunately, some of the children in my class picked upon this and exaggerated the sounds I made even more. This resulted in my confidence, built up over the years, to be knocked down each day, and whilst school used to be a place that I really enjoyed, it soon became one that seemed to be filled with problems of a personal kind that I had to face everyday. I was given a nickname
which stayed with me throughout most of my secondary school but with the support of my parents I became stronger and even more determined to overcome this. I have no doubt, however, that these social problems hindered my academic work during this time.

I was placed in the top band throughout the City of Leicester School but must admit at times that I found the work a struggle. The need to prove myself kept me determined to keep up a standard of work that was acceptable. In subjects such as History and Geography a lot of the information that was taught to us was backed up by the use of textbooks: this caused me embarrassment when I was asked to read out aloud and hearing a background of giggling: this made me realise how important it was to improve my speech and become as articulate as I could.

The subject of English Language was a weak area of mine, particularly with comprehension and forming sentences that made sense, but I battled with this problem and was entered for O-level English Language and passed it after a re-take in November.

With the change of teacher from band teaching to selected O-level subjects, some of the teachers, my parents found out at parents’ evening, did not even realise I was partially hearing. This made me think that maybe the previous teachers did not see my hearing causing me any problems. At this stage of my education I decided to get on with my work and ignore some of my peers, and achieve what was expected of me. I got through my O-levels with a positive and determined frame of mind and received six O-levels with average grades. I had failed my English Language and Mathematics, so I took these up again in my first year of the sixth form. My chosen subjects for A-level were Geography and Art/Graphics: the choice was because of the enjoyment and satisfaction I received from these lessons. I had at this time no career in mind and no thoughts as to further education.

I found life in the sixth form to be much happier and more bearable, much better than I originally expected. My social life was better with a more relaxed and confident attitude. I had made different friends and the problems I had had seemed trivial. The standard of work expected of me in the sixth form was of a different kind and it was at this time that I noticed an increase in my personal skills. I realised that I had to improve my skill of notetaking as looking at the teacher’s face and trying to look at my lines on my paper simultaneously was proving difficult! I no longer relied on lip-reading as much, and working in smaller, quieter groups meant I could use my ‘hearing’ to a greater advantage. This provided an eye-opener as I found communication a lot easier and less frustrating. I had learnt to answer people calling my name promptly and this change of finding a balance between listening and lip-reading improved my confidence as an individual. I felt that I could approach new opportunities with confidence and I was prepared to overcome any difficulties that I encountered. I left the sixth form and found that other students with whom I had contact outside lessons did not even suspect that I had a hearing difficulty unless they had been informed by a colleague. This left me with a more confident approach towards my hearing loss and communicating with people for the first time. I would only mention that I wore hearing aids when I felt it was necessary. Later I learnt that I could fool a majority of people a lot of the time.

The choice of career to become a primary teacher came by chance suggestion rather than being a career that I have always wanted to do. With both my parents in this profession I had always said when I was younger that I would never become a teacher and follow in my parents’ footsteps. During the sixth form we had a careers adviser who visited us one morning to explain CASCAID, a computer programme which prints out possible careers for each student. Each student had to fill in this questionnaire which asked them to answer each question in order of preference. The print-out which resulted from my questionnaire answers suggested a career in education or anything associated with helping people of all ages. At this time of the academic year applications were being sent off so I applied to three colleges of higher education to do a BEd (Hons) with Art as my main subject.

I was accepted at all three colleges, and after the interviews, having carefully studied the various course details I finally chose Bishop Grosseteste College in Lincoln.

My awareness of my hearing loss had made me develop quite an unusual defensive attitude towards the way I applied to the colleges of higher education. I did not want to be treated as an applicant who had a hearing loss, but wanted the chance to be chosen at an interview on the same grounds as other hearing students. At my interview I had the confidence to tell that I had a chance of succeeding despite being partially hearing. After a lengthy talk with one of the tutors at Bishop Grosseteste College I brought up the subject of my deafness by saying something like, ‘Oh, before I leave’ I forgot to mention that I am partially hearing.’ The tutor looked surprised and mentioned how well I spoke and went on to tell me about a matron who was ‘hard of hearing’ who used to be at the college. I reassured him that my level of hearing would not cause me any problems either in school or with my education generally. I had reached a point in my education when I felt I had to prove to people that wearing hearing aids does not make any difference and that on no account did I need any special arrangements made in any situation, unless I asked for assistance.

A testing point of my capabilities would be in a classroom situation, where I might have to communicate with a child who was quiet and whispering against the normal level of background noise of classroom activities. I actually made a point with my personal tutor that I did not want to be treated any differently from other students as otherwise my true capabilities would not be apparent. This was a challenge to convince someone who was just learning about my capabilities and had not been with me throughout earlier years of my education.

The transition from sixth form to a new situation with tutors who were trying to find out what I was capable of achieving had some tense moments. I felt in the spotlight and became even more defensive. I was determined to make sure that my tutor knew exactly how far I had come and to try to help him understand about myself and my hearing as much as I could. I needed to see for myself if I could cope in a busy classroom where I would have to home in on a child on a one-to-one basis. I felt
satisfied and did not encounter any major problems; any child that I did not understand or could not hear I encouraged gently to speak a little louder or to speak more slowly. This strategy not only helped me but was also beneficial to the individual child’s own communication skills.

I found, through my own experience, that talking to a person who has hearing difficulties and relies on lip-reading, does require the speaker to face the person, where the lips can be clearly seen. I found that I can distinguish from those people who know I have a hearing difficulty and those who do not. On both sides there are some amusing events that happen and I have to correct those who are unnecessarily over-emphasising their lip patterns and often making communication even harder. Sometimes I completely mistake what people are saying or I use a word in the wrong context completely. Now I realise that people are laughing with me and not at me. I do realise that in each individual case it requires a particular way of communication suited to that person and there is not a right or wrong way to talk to a person with a hearing difficulty.

I feel that I am lucky in being able to adapt my needs to the situation when communicating depends on the level of background noise. In social places such as a busy pub or a disco, I feel both isolated at times as well as at home. I know success depends on me concentrating 100 per cent of the time which is hard work, but I am not alone in having communication problems in these situations. I can also be at an advantage being able to lip-read other people’s conversations from one side of the room to the other and this can be amusing!

When someone who does not realise I am partially hearing talks to me in a noisy situation they tend to come close to my ear. All I can feel is a mouthful of hot breath and hear certain sounds, this leads to an amusing situation with me pushing the speaker away so I can see their face and them looking puzzled and continuing to try to talk to me in my ear. Afterwards, I can see in their faces that a quick explanation is required before offence is taken! To combat this new found problem the speaker then talks to me using a ‘goldfish impression’ of exaggerated mouth patterns. . . . After all they are only trying to tell me something and trying to help me understand!!

Now I am in my third year of my four-year primary teaching degree. Looking back on my education as a whole, I have come to realise that I could not have come as far without the support of my parents. Both my parents were very influential in guiding me through my education with confidence in order to achieve the goals I had set for myself. They have always said that they let me go ahead to find things out for myself but they were always just one step behind. They have helped me to believe in myself and my capabilities. I try now to treat my hearing loss as a minor handicap, recognising that many people have difficulties that they have to overcome which are not always as obvious as mine.
Richard Shaw, who is partially hearing, writes about his successful progression from school through art college into a career in design.

I attended the partial hearing unit attached to Dogsthorpe Primary School, Peterborough. But I do know that I always had ‘a keen interest in Art, the one subject I was exceptional in. Thorpe Junior School next, and dreading Thursday’s spelling and Maths tests every week. If being partially deaf presented me with any problems or difficulties or made a difference to people’s attitude towards me, I wasn’t aware of it. But perhaps I am also the sort of person who doesn’t want it to be a problem.

Secondary school now, at The King’s School, Peterborough. I still didn’t like Maths, but my Drawing was always improving, so a career somewhere in Art and Design was foreseeable.

During games, where we played rugby, I always seemed to be in imminent danger of being crushed by the opposition, so taking out my hearing aids (although a disadvantage) was a wise precaution. What was worse, though, was my eyesight, and without my glasses I was pretty useless. Needless to say I much preferred cross country and hockey, where at least I could see and hear what was going on.

I was, in fact, all ready to enter the sixth form at King’s to do A-level Art, History and Geography but a Project Trident Work Experience at a local Graphics workshop over the summer, arranged through the school, changed my mind. I realised that specialising in a Design course was the best option: so with only a week before the autumn term my parents and I changed my mind. I realised that specialising in a Design course was the best option; so with only a week before the autumn term my parents and I changed my mind. I realised that specialising in a Design course was the best option; so with only a week before the autumn term my parents and I changed my mind.

I was provisionally accepted on to a B.Tec. National Diploma in Graphic Design, provided that a sample of my work was considered satisfactory when brought for inspection on the first day of the term. It was.

After Wisbech I was accepted on to, and successfully completed, a Higher Diploma in Graphic Design at Loughborough College of Art and Design.

People I’ve met never seem to notice or comment that I may be deaf when they first meet me. I always fill in application forms and medical forms that I have, ‘Partial hearing only · wear hearing aids’. Not one lecturer at Wisbech or Loughborough mentioned or asked me about this, or noticed that I wore hearing aids. Consequently, neither did I! I never found any problem with hearing or understanding lecturers and both courses were heavily ‘practical’ biased so there was little academic involvement other than a good understanding of English for various essays and reports.

On the first day of a two-week work experience arranged through the college, I did discover I had great difficulty in hearing one member of the staff I was to work closely with, as he spoke very quietly indeed. This is one difference between college and the real world where lecturers are involved in teaching and communicating effectively. At work, some people aren’t like this and speak softly or quietly or mumble. In this case I had to say straight away ‘I’m ever so sorry, I can’t hear you very clearly. I’m slightly deaf and wear hearing aids . . . would you mind speaking up a little please?’ After this there was no problem at all, and in fact the staff there asked me to stay on an extra week if I wanted to · which I did as I thoroughly enjoyed working there.

I never make a big deal out of it if people ask about my deafness. I explain that I have partial hearing and wear hearing aids to compensate and that’s it and continue with my conversation as before. Many are surprised when I explain that I was born deaf! a lot assume that I ‘had an accident’ or ‘became deaf’ recently. But some people still take a long time to appreciate this. I remember being told in the second year of college that ‘it took me ages to suss out that you were deaf’ . . . not that it makes any difference,’ he added seriously. ‘You’re still weird!’, and then he laughed.

I’d known a friend for quite a few months and once while walking back home together, my hearing aid battery was running low so I needed to replace it for a new one. My colleague was ‘astounded’, I think is the only word, to discover that I wore hearing aids.

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When I first attended Loughborough I did find the Student Union building terribly noisy and found it very difficult to hold a conversation during the evenings there. At the beginning of term, though, all of the new students regularly went there as it was the ‘focal point’ of entertainment and, of course, you knew the other ‘freshers’ would be there as well. Once I settled down though with an immediate group of friends, we tended to go elsewhere. I don’t think I ever went to the Union building during the whole of the second year.

No-one ever had a cruel thing to say about my deafness. I was never teased throughout school or college, although when I developed a particular musical taste for an artist called Brian Eno, it did provoke some comments along the lines of ‘Are you sure your hearing aids are working OK, Rich?!’ His music is a bit uncommercial!
Knowing that I couldn't hear at all well over loud music, one person I knew who had rigged up his stereo to play through his guitar amp 'to make music even louder' would always turn it down when I visited him. With anyone else, both were happy to shout at each other above the noise!

I left Loughborough with an HND and it has taken me quite a while to find a job. During the summer months of 1989 I wrote off to fifty-five job advertisements for junior graphic designer. Nearly all wanted 'a year's experience', but I managed to attend seventeen interviews, mainly in London, but also in Leicester, Norwich, Harlow, even Bath.

In November I finally began looking around my hometown and the first interview I attended for the position of 'paste-up artist' I received an offer of employment.

Paul Holehouse, a profoundly deaf young man, writes about his life at school, progression through an integrated education, course and Youth Training Scheme to his present position as a 'beamer' in the famous Nottingham lace making industry.

My name is Paul Holehouse and I was twenty-two years of age on 9th March 1990. I am profoundly deaf (from 250 Hz my hearing is below 90 db). I communicate by speech using lip-reading, but I can also sign when required.

Before starting school at three years of age I am told I received peripatetic help at home and my mother also did a correspondence course with me from the John Tracey Clinic in America. I am told the emphasis was very much to use speech for communication. I do not remember very much about my time in the nursery at the Ewing School, except I still have all the home/school books my teachers and my parents used to fill in each day about what I had been doing, where we had been at the weekends and about my family and friends. I still like to read and talk about them now!

I then moved to the partial hearing units at Aldercar Infants and Langley Mill Junior Schools in Derbyshire. At that time we were living in Nottingham, but there were no PHUs in the area.

When I was nine years old I was transferred to the Royal School for the Deaf, Derby as a day pupil. Because of my profound deafness and I was a slow learner it was difficult to integrate me into the classes with hearing children. It was recommended that I should have more individual teaching. This is when we moved to live in Derbyshire. It was at this school where I learned to sign. It was difficult at first because I had always used speech to communicate. This was a residential school and I thought it would be nice to sleep at school so there would be more time for sports activities in the evenings. I was pleased not to have to travel the long journey to and from school to home each day. My parents agreed that this would be good for me to help me become more independent and when I was twelve years old they applied for me to go to St John's School for the Deaf at Boston Spa, West Yorkshire, as this school was highly recommended.
I was happy there from the first day, although it was strange sleeping at school and sometimes not going home for three weeks. We had to do homework every night and then after our meal was when we did sports activities. (It was all academic subjects during the daytime at school.) All the other time I spent playing snooker. We had a full-size table in our sitting room and I soon learned to play very well. In 1983 I was the runner up in the school's snooker contest. My time at St John's School was very useful to my working life as we learned well the meanings of obedience, unselfishness, faithfulness, kindness, courtesy and forgiveness. As an adult I wish more people understood the meanings of these words! I had learning difficulties at school and got three CSE grade 4s in Woodwork, Home Management and Art. I didn't go for work experience, but went to college each week for Bricklaying, Metalwork, Science, Electrical Engineering. One lesson to prepare us for work explained about paying board, getting plenty of sleep, and showering and changing when coming home from a dirty job (easier said than done after working from 6 am! - but it was all good advice).

It was agreed that I should apply to work at Dad's factory on a YTS, as we were going to move to live at Worksop, as Dad's factory in Stapleford was being closed down and all the work moved to the factory at Worksop.

The tutor then responsible for careers and further education for the deaf in Derbyshire came to my school to speak to my teachers. After that visit he took me to Worksop to meet the staff there and look around the factory and it was agreed I could go on a YTS scheme there when I left school. This tutor was more than helpful to me and took many photographs. One Saturday I went to his home in Bakewell and he worked on making a card with me and explained about all the different jobs at the factory and illustrated this with the photographs. Soon after this the firm made all the young apprentices redundant and we agreed it was not advisable for me to work there and my parents decided not to move house as the job prospects were not very good in Worksop at that time and there would be more opportunities if I stayed in Sandiacre.

We went to the job centre in Long Eaton and also to see the disablement resettlement officer at the DHSS office. I was given a green card, which is a special card for the disabled to show their prospective employers. The man at the job centre said it was unlikely I would ever get a job because I was deaf! So no help was forthcoming there!

At the end of August the same helpful tutor phoned and offered me an Integrated Education Course at Buxton College (High Peak College in Derbyshire) and arranged this and the lodgings in a few days and I was glad to go there rather than be out of work. I was a little nervous, but I was looking forward to meeting everybody at college. My own teacher helped me a lot and the different subject teachers were very helpful. When the teachers spoke to the hearing students the teacher then came to me and explained clearly what I needed to do. Because of this I felt very happy at college.

At my first lodgings I was not happy, because the boys were not very friendly and, together with the landlord and landlady, made fun of me all the time. I got fed up and very unhappy about it. I was then moved to new lodgings and the students there were more friendly and good fun and I was much happier. One student baked and decorated a cake for my eighteenth birthday. I enjoyed my work experience doing farming at Chatsworth and child care in a nursery and infant school. I also enjoyed working at an old people's home.

Before I left college the tutor responsible for careers and further education in Derbyshire was again very helpful and came to my home to talk with Mum and I about getting a job. I said I would like to work with animals, but because I get hay fever it was not advisable to work on a farm, and to be a vet I would need high qualifications. This tutor then arranged for me to see an officer at Matlock Careers Office. I had previously met him when I had attended a careers weekend arranged by Derbyshire Education Authority. He had received an offer for a deaf person to work in a Nottingham lace factory and asked if I would be interested? He then contacted the firm and I received a letter to go for interview and a long application form to complete. I went for interview in Nottingham on my own and felt very nervous. The personnel manageress was very clear and I could understand her questions. She showed me round the factory and I saw all the different jobs. I didn't hear any more and I went camping with the group at college to Cumbria. When I was met from the coach I was told I had another interview for the same firm at a factory in Long Eaton in thirty minutes. I was very excited but it was a quick shower and a rush to get there. I was interviewed again by the personnel manageress and the works manager at Long Eaton. It was some time later that I was offered a job, to start on the YTS scheme. There was great excitement at home and I was really looking forward to starting work and earning some money!

All the adults at work were very friendly and helpful, but the other YTS lads teased and used to bully me including cutting my clothes! Although I told my parents about this I didn't want them to do anything, but even when I tried to ignore them they still carried on. Unknown to me some of the adult employees saw the manager and the boys were called in and given three days' suspension and a warning and told to write a letter to apologise to me. The YTS lads and I had to go to a college in Long Eaton Community Centre every Thursday. This was a waste of time as everybody played about.

At Christmas I was taken off the YTS and made an employee trainee and given a rise to £50 per week; also I did not have to go to college again. I asked to go on a job called 'beaming'. The supervisor has always been very helpful and friendly to me as well as being patient in showing and telling me about the different jobs involved. I am still in the same job three years later and my supervisor is now my good friend. During this time we have moved to another factory in Sandiacre and people come and go and often come back and we have some good laughs together as well as working hard when it is needed.

When I was twenty-one years old all my workmates arranged a surprise birthday lunch and gave me £40 which they had collected together. Some of my workmates came to my party at the weekend. One special friend at work has asked me to be best man at his wedding next year.

I would really like to be able to do another job, get very dirty at work...
with the black lead and the eczema on my hands is a nuisance. I would like a clean job, but I do not know what I would be able to do as I am not really clever, and would be worried not to be working with people as helpful and friendly as the ones I work with now. Though I hope to do something different in the future.

I am proud to say I passed my driving test first time, thanks to a superb instructor. I have bought my own car and I love driving, so perhaps in the future I may get a job which involves driving. I keep looking, but meanwhile I am happy with life.

I like to be able to speak and most times I can understand my workmates and they can understand me - but only in a one-to-one situation. When I am in a group situation it is impossible for me to understand as I cannot follow everyone. Sometimes other people do not understand this and young people have made fun and ridiculed me because of this. I am glad I can sign also because I enjoy the company of all deaf people. I would like a hearing or deaf girlfriend, but deaf girlfriends are usually more understanding.

The Derby HIYA Club (for Hearing Impaired Young Adults) has added so much to my life. The Club is very active and we meet each Monday either at the Rycote Centre to talk, or tenpin bowling, badminton, cinema, out for a meal, theatre, swimming, meet at a pub. We have also been away for several activity weekends last year and have more planned. I enjoy the company of the members of this Club very much and wish we had more members.

My parents and grandad have always been helpful and caring and also my sister. She is now married but she has always been my best friend; since I have known her husband he has been the same, I know I can always go to them for help and advice and they always make me welcome. We go out together often and their friends are also my friends. We go swimming, five-a-side football (with the lads) and sometimes to a pub or nightclub or disco. With other hearing and deaf friends I go to snooker, bowls (I belong to a club), the pub and evenings at my or their homes to play cards, or other games, e.g. pictionary, darts, ‘Give us a Clue’ (I do not like ‘Trivial Pursuits’).

For the future I just want to be with family and friends who are friendly, helpful and have a good sense of humour. ! My motto is 'Don't Worry, Be Happy'.
17" School and Beyond

Juliet Bishop, Susan Gregory and Lesley Sheldon

The material for this article is drawn exclusively from an interview study carried out in 1988-9 involving eighty-two hearing families of young deaf people. This study was a follow-up to one carried out in the early 1970s where the same families were interviewed when their deaf children were of preschool age (Gregory, 1976). The interviews, with both the parents (carried out by Juliet Bishop) and young people (carried out by Lesley Sheldon), some of which lasted up to five hours, covered a vast array of topics and this paper will cover only a few of these in detail. It is not intended that this paper should, simply be a research report, it is also an opportunity for deaf young people and their families to 'speak for themselves' about the areas under examination.

This paper explores, through the comments of parents and young deaf people, experiences in the latter part of secondary education and the period after leaving school. The material is reported in three sections as follows:

- **Secondary education** In which family views of the nature and quality of the secondary education received by the young people are discussed.
- **Vocational guidance** Where the extent to which the young people were involved in planning their future working lives is addressed. Additionally, the issues of how far and for what reasons the young people's vocational choices were constrained and the satisfaction felt by them and their families with the quality of vocational guidance given are examined.
- **Details of the current situation** of the young people conclude the report with some exploration of their satisfaction with their present situation and aspirations for the future.

The young people - background

It is appropriate, first of all, to give some background details of the young people and families involved in the study from which this paper draws material, if only to make it clear that they do not form a special or exceptional group but rather a reasonably representative group of young deaf people growing up.

Of the eighty-two families interviewed seventy-two came from five counties in or around the Midlands; the remaining ten families having moved away from their Midland county of origin. As Midland families they had all been involved in earlier research carried out by Susan Gregory (1976) who interviewed one hundred and twenty-two families of recently diagnosed pre-school deaf children in a study where the only criterion for inclusion, other than deafness, was county of birth and current age. It was not possible or appropriate to re-establish contact and interview all of Gregory's families and so, for a variety of reasons, only eighty-two of the families were visited (see Bishop, Gregory and Sheldon, in preparation).

There were forty-eight men and thirty-four women in the study, ranging in age from eighteen to twenty-four years and having a range of hearing loss.

Secondary education

The types of secondary school contexts catering for deaf children and the nature of the preparation for life after school offered by them was one focus of interviews with both the young people and their parents.

When asked about their satisfaction with the secondary education provided for their children, about one half expressed either dissatisfaction or mixed feelings.

One parent noted about a Partially Hearing Unit attended by her daughter:

No, not at all satisfied. I was concerned. I know they say they ought to mix with normal hearing children and I think that's right in a social environment, but I felt that in a school environment their needs were so specialised that really they were better to be together in a more closed environment when it came to that.

A father commented on his concerns about the mode of communication used in his daughter's school.

We think there has been a disadvantage in her education. I think if she'd gone to a special school, it's difficult to know in hindsight, but it would have perhaps been better for her if they'd concentrated less on getting her speaking than on her education. If she'd had some of her education in sign, perhaps she may have got a better education.

Another parent commented:

He went to Edgehill after he went to Sanderson Street, which is a secondary. Now there they mixed with the school completely although they were in just a separate room but there it was a Partially Hearing Unit and obviously they have got mikes and goodness knows what, but most of their lessons were taken in the ordinary school. You know, a teacher can turn away, and how much have they missed! And, as good as they are, anybody who hasn't dealt with deafness they don't know do they? They can miss so much. Oraly they are miles behind. Anything written on a board they can miss so much. Anything written on a board he was OK but you are talking, as you are teaching, all the time, and the amount that he missed. And they haven't got the time, if you think of the size of the classrooms and I think a lot of them are not prepared. It is not their job is it, a lot of them? I mean, you get some of them, even if it is not their job, they will spend extra time. A lot of them won't, they get - they are just ordinary teachers, they are not supposed to specialise are they? You know. So he dropped back an awful lot at
Edgehill because he is bright, yes. So I think he would say now - well, I know he has said to me - he wishes he had gone to a school for the deaf when he was older. Then he would have got all his exams.

According to parents, however, over a half of the young people were ‘happy’ in secondary school.

He was very happy there. When he very first started going, he was so young you can imagine we used to have to put him on the bus crying but as he’d been there and settled down he got where he’d run off and he’d want to catch the bus.

He quite liked the school. They could work on their own in the Unit but they could still mix with other kids.

Interestingly, of all the stages of schooling the secondary stage was the one where parents were most likely to have expressed and have been granted a particular preference.

Young people and their parents were specifically asked about their attitudes to the integration of deaf children within mainstream schools: this currently being a source of considerable concern among educators.

Only a few parents gave their unqualified approval for mainstream streaming:

Yes (integration) is a much better idea because if you see children in deaf schools they don’t attempt to speak, they use Sign Language all the time. If you teach them Sign Language and put them all together that’s how they speak to each other. If you want them to speak, they’ve got to be amongst people who they’ve got to speak to. He doesn’t use Sign Language at all. He’s never been taught it. He doesn’t need it. It was a deliberate policy not to teach Jamie Sign Language so he had to speak.

About one third completely disapproved:

I think, for Susie, if she’d gone to a normal school, it would have been totally disastrous and speaking as a teacher I have seen far too many children with special needs that have been deprived in main school education and I have had to teach some of them and I think it is a con that is put on to parents. If someone had come along to me and said ‘Yes, deaf children can manage perfectly well in normal school’ I would not have been aware, and it would have taken years to become aware, of the problems that was going to mean for them in future. All sorts of things!

The vast majority, however, had mixed feelings.

I’ve a lot of sympathy for integrating because I think it has social values but if you are going to integrate children then the cost of integration is going to be extremely high and if they must integrate then they must pay for it. And that means providing specialist teachers. It means providing support for teachers who teach the hearing children, so that they know what the problem is and it needs special equipment, special arrangements and it needs a specialist who knows what sort of arrangements need to be made for children with different disabilities because the arrangements for a child who can’t see very well must be different from a child who can’t hear very well. To make it simplistic and say either to integrate or not integrate really it appears to me there is a problem there.

When young people themselves were asked about mainstreaming they too had both positive and negative feelings. One young person noted, in favour of integration:

Well, in some ways it could be good to be one deaf and all hearing because the deaf person with another deaf person might pair off and when there is only one you have no choice but to go out and mix. You might benefit most from it but, on the other hand, you might feel ‘I am different’. I was always aware that I was different but I never worried about it, I just thought I was a bit different. It is there, always there, but after Mary Hare (Grammar School for the Deaf) I know there are people like me.

And another, in a carefully considered opinion, said:

I think definitely integrated into the mainstream – I have always said this. And not be treated like ... as though they can’t do anything. Every child should have an opportunity and every child is capable. I think what it is is that if they see other people have not got as much confidence in them they don’t have much confidence in themselves. If you react in life other people respond to you. If people don’t like you you tend to be withdrawn yourself. If people see you are confident you seem to impress.

In favour of segregation however, deaf young people made the following comments:

Deaf children should be together: separate from hearing children.

At deaf schools (deaf children) learn to help each other. I feel that it is better to be with deaf people: it is better for talking. Before, when hearing people were talking, I just didn’t understand.

Finally, this young person had mixed feelings:

Deaf schools are good but mine was bad. There needs to be more interaction in integrated schools: learning from each other and not a lecture style of teaching. There shouldn’t be one deaf person on their own in a class of hearing, I know the feeling of being on my own: my tension and frustration. If you are with other deaf people there is a ‘natural bond’.

...
The young people were also asked about communication modes used in their schools and again there was a range of responses:

I went to a very strict oral school where we were told that to use Sign Language was bad and that we wouldn’t get anywhere with it and wouldn’t get a good job or communicate with the right people.

We were not allowed to (sign) at school, but I could not understand hearing people talk. We had to try and speak properly – it was hard work.

I feel that they (deaf children) should communicate with speech – deaf children should have experience of hearing people so they learn how to communicate. Also they should sign with deaf people so they can learn about themselves.

Vocational guidance

When asked about the ideas which their children had expressed about possible careers on leaving school, over one-third of parents noted that they had had ‘no ideas at all’ about a possible future vocation.

She didn’t have a clue. One of her teachers was, of course, earmarked as a careers officer and they had a sort of careers room. They talked to them about various jobs and that sort of thing but I don’t know that Faye even understood what was involved.

One fifth had had, in their parents’ opinions, ‘unrealistic ideas’.

Oh yes, he wanted to go in the airforce and he wanted to be a policeman. He volunteered to go as a special constable and he even went as far as the interview and they had to turn him down because he was deaf. He got a lovely letter and they even took him around the police station. I am ex-RAF and he wanted to be in the RAF. Of course, I am a pilot and he wanted to fly. He has always wanted a uniform – something to identify himself with, that he is not just a deaf person, he is somebody. He couldn’t be an electrician, we did explain that to him because wiring a house is involved.

She has always said ‘That is what I would like to be – I would like to be a teacher’: but we said ‘Isobel, we don’t see how you can do teaching.’ And then, of course she didn’t get the A-level anyway to get into college.

Almost a third of parents believed that their children had not had any formal vocational guidance of any sort:

No. 1 felt that that (careers guidance) was more or less left. I can appreciate the school’s stand here though, because as they were all those miles away from here they couldn’t do a great deal, I suppose, other than write a few letters to the authorities.

No, not really, because Edward didn’t know what he wanted and what anything was about anyway. I think they could have helped a bit more.

Others had guidance either at school, after leaving or occasionally both.

We went up there on a sort of Speech Day and we saw the careers officer, didn’t we, but there was no sort of... Eventually before she left school we went and saw the careers officer for the disabled here. He was very helpful and he got her the job at Bedford's.

Looking at the parents’ opinions of the quality and usefulness of the guidance received by the young people, irrespective of the stage at which it had been given, a large proportion of parents felt ‘dissatisfied’ with the extent and quality of guidance and only a very few said they felt ‘very satisfied’.

He was no help! I mean, he just kept saying ‘what do you want to do?’ and Frank said ‘Bookkeeping,’ and he said ‘Right, make sure that is what you do do!’

She was very disappointed in the careers service. Louise had always wanted to work with children. She related very well with children and she had done ‘Mother and Childcare’ at school. Her careers teacher thought she should go and be a chiropodist.

Louise still laughs about it.

One father felt that giving guidance was a complicated issue anyway, he commented:

What could a school have done for Faye in the way of equipping her to go out to work and careers and what have you? Would the teachers be able to put over to the children just what they have to put up with in going... they could say, ‘How would you like to work in an office? You fill in forms and you copy information and may have to do a little bit of typing and filing and you have to put things together in date order’. Would they then realise that they have got to look at all sorts of other things?

One young deaf woman, herself in the study commented:

When I look back on to school, the careers officer was not so good at all. The literature is there but the careers weren’t very good with me because I didn’t know what I wanted to do.

However, others were satisfied with the help and guidance they received.

Young person:

We had a lesson called general studies when we discussed things outside the education – not so much work and people but talking about people in general - interviews and things like that. What you did when you went to interviews and the best ways to communicate with people. When you are talking to someone how do you explain things, look at them, and how to be a good listener. Had man come in to do like a workshop part of the sixth form – that was good fun. So I think I learnt how to get on with people, how to be a good listener and things.

Interviewer:

Before you left school did you get any information about careers?
Young person:
Yes. They had a careers officer come in once a week and a cascade computer with a questionnaire. On it it had what do you like, what personality, what do you like. The choices were categorised in Tike, strong dislike - just circled each one and she went away and she programmed this information into the computer and that gave you an outlook - the jobs that you as a personality would be suitable. Things like, do you like art? Would you prefer something more creative? Things like would you like to work in a shop?

Interviewer:
And was this the careers officer?

Young person:
Yes. She came from Leicestershire and she came in. We had an individual interview with her. She had to discuss what you would like to do and what steps you should take to get in that direction. Grades you might need so we knew how hard to work.

Interviewer:
Was it helpful?

Young person:
Yes, very.

When asked who had done most to prepare the young people for their lives after school, many parents felt that they themselves had played the most significant role. The next most frequently named group of individuals involved in the young people’s preparation for life after school was teachers from schools or colleges.

One of the young deaf people in the study commented on careers guidance:

The hearing pupils had a lot of information but it was most difficult for me - there wasn’t enough information. Most of the information I got from my family.

For the young people who were in, or had been in, some form of employment, job-scheme or sheltered work, questions were asked about who had helped in finding and obtaining their position. Once again, parents or family members were most likely to be mentioned in this respect.

I think it was her dad and I that really ... I mean I sat down with her one afternoon, when she was on holiday, and said T think we should write some letters now to the banks and what have you/ and I said to her ‘Write to the Post Office/ and she said T have written to the Post Office once/ and I said ‘Come on, let’s write again’! So she did it again.

Yes, I took it on my own back. I took him to the Simkins firm, you know, just before he got his community scheme a year ago, because he fancied working in the soap works and doing nights - he wanted to do a night shift for some reason, you know.

Current situation

In the final section of this paper it will be possible only to look in detail at the experiences of the fifty-three young people in jobs and job-schemes (for details of the other groups see Bishop, Gregory and Sheldon, in preparation).

A disturbingly high proportion of parents of young people in jobs, job-schemes and sheltered work felt that they were intellectually ‘under-stretched’ in their jobs. Parents’ comments:

Well he wasn’t allowed to use proper machinery for a year. He was a general runabout really. You know, he used to do a bit of sanding and that was his limit you see. It was wiping round sort of thing and they didn’t give him any real responsibility.

I don’t think Karen’s talents have been fully tapped but I think that is the deafness again though, you know.

She is using some of the skills that she learnt. But she was actually trained for more than she is doing.

Deafness, not unexpectedly, was felt by both the young people and their parents to have had considerable influence on job chances, usually in a negative way. Over one-third of parents said that, directly or indirectly, being deaf had prevented one or more job opportunities for the young person.

If he had his normal hearing what he wanted to do, he wanted to be a courier with several languages, you see, travelling around.

He lost two jobs because he couldn’t use the telephone before we found out about this (telephone amplifier).

This (interpreter) woman went with Abigail to the interview and Abigail came back and told me that the man who was interviewing them was frightened of her. You know, he said, ‘I have never had a deaf person come before/ and she reckoned that that spoilt her chances. She said he looked frightened. He didn’t want to really talk to her.

One of the young women herself noted:

I wanted to be a teacher but the careers officer asked me how I thought I’d cope: how I’d use the telephone in an emergency. It made me very uncomfortable. I stopped answering the questions and gave up the idea of being a teacher.

However, just occasionally, deafness had influenced job chances in a positive way. One of the young men noted that, coming from a mining community, he would normally have been expected by family and friends to join them ‘down the mine’, but he was offered opportunities by a specialist careers adviser which opened up different job prospects. He commented of himself:

I think that I’ve achieved more - sometimes I feel that was why I was born deaf. I’ve had to work that bit harder.

Over a third of parents said that, in their opinion, deafness would be the key obstacle to job prospects and progression for their children.

Oh yes! You see, where she is now in the Post Office, they are very reluctant to give her different jobs because they are wondering all the time ‘Can she cope with it?’ and ‘How are we going to cope with her if she can’t?’ and this is it - it is communication.

It is purely her deafness that will hold her back. Because you see there are certain things that she can’t do. It is an impossibility. She can’t use the telephone.

We want her to get a job where it is a job that more or less matches her ability. The problem about this is that the impairment might detract from that and she might get a job which doesn’t and so she won’t get the responsibility and satisfaction from the job.

As far as job satisfaction was concerned, over half of the young people in jobs, job-schemes and sheltered work were described as ‘happy’ or settled in their work whilst just under half were described as ‘frustrated’.
He's active and what he's doing now, he's in different places all the time, you know, building sites, renovation, that sort of thing. He loves it.

Yes. But she is not very happy on it, she says it is boring doing the same thing.

No. She thinks it is totally boring - what she is doing - but she realises that the money is good. She knows the money is good. And it is a job and she realises that an awful lot of people are out of work. Plus the fact that she feels that she is lucky to have a job because she is disabled. This is not the way I feel but this is how she feels - she hears so many friends of hers who are out of work because nobody really wants to know them. So she sticks it because she feels that she knows all these things.

One young deaf person himself, a stone-mason, commented:
It's a very interesting job really. You get lots of design come-back. You have to think the job out yourself. OK so you may get help from the foreman or someone else who knows a bit more than you would, but on the whole it is interesting. ... It is quite fascinating.

But another noted:
They pick on me and make me sweep up - I only get a poor wage. I looked for another job for two months but now I'm not bothered. I will stay at the same firm although there is no training. I'd like to work abroad like in Auf Wiedersehen Pet

**Conclusion**

So to conclude briefly it appears that, in spite of minimal or no vocational guidance, the majority of the young deaf people in our study but I don't think that will happen because I'm deaf. were in paid employment. What is disturbing, however, is that sometimes the jobs they occupied neither used the training they had acquired nor offered training 'on the job'. The young people and their parents felt that being deaf carried long-term implications for job prospects in general and promotion specifically. It appeared, at least in the early years of their working lives, that the majority of the young people were in a limited range of manual jobs in which they felt frustrated and from which they did not think they could or should attempt to move.

**References**


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Section Six

Working Lives
Christopher Jones worked as a Social Worker for Deaf People and a laboratory technician before achieving his ambition of becoming a psychologist. Along the way he encountered many obstacles, and even now finds that he cannot truly rely upon being treated as an equal.

During an interview for a job as a laboratory technician, the professor said, 'Why are you applying for this job, how about a place as a student on a microbiology course?' I turned this down flat since I knew that there would be no communication support for me and that I did not have the confidence and courage to pursue such a course. So I chose to become a laboratory technician and worked myself up the career ladder moved to the University of Hull as a senior laboratory technician in the Department of Plant Biology. In my early thirties, married with two growing children, I thought that I would be stuck as a senior since promotion became almost impossible as the next post, a chief, required the ability to communicate with members of the public and the use of the telephone. I became frustrated of not being able to exploit my unknown academic capacity. At this point, I became underemployed.

By accident, I was introduced to a lecturer in the Department of Psychology to discuss his new research using a computer to help hearing people sing. We discussed the potential of using computers to help deaf people with speech and this led to a weekly discussion on problems of deafness ranging from the importance of early communication to social problems. One day, he said to me that I should enrol as a student. I refused because I knew that it was impossible to pursue a university course without communication support and that I was happily settled with my growing family. This was the beginning of eighteen months of unsettlement whether or not I should take the plunge and become a psychologist. Another thing he said to me was that I could not help my deaf fellows without a piece of paper called a degree. This was the final carrot for which I decided to risk everything. So I became a mature student at the grand age of 32!

Was my university life wonderful? First, the university tried to get
me some communication support both locally through the social services which refused to provide me with any, and nationally through various deaf organisations such as the British Deaf Association and the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, with no luck. Although they were sympathetic to my needs and the fact that there was no nationally established service apart from the limited support offered at the University of Durham, they were unable to help due to financial constraints. I ended up entering the university without communication support, no interpreting and no note-taking services. I was excused officially from joining in tutorials thus missing out the two communications between my thoughts, my fellow students and the tutor himself. Except for one particular tutorial that I had to complete as a requirement of my course, a social worker was able to communicate for me throughout that tutorial. On completing my essay based on that tutorial, I received poor marks due to the interpreter missing out five vital points. This had some detrimental effect towards the marks, towards my Upper Second degree in the end. The difference between an Upper Second and a First is very small, I often wonder if I could have made a First if I had the right communication support from the beginning.

Since I was very interested in education of the deaf, and I thought that perhaps I should become a teacher of the deaf. However, I was very aware of the clause in the entry requirements for teachers of the deaf training course, which is perhaps the greatest barrier to any deaf person, that requires the candidates to hear a conversation within twenty feet. Nevertheless, I applied to become a teacher of the deaf at the University of Manchester but in spite of my credentials, I was turned down due to this clause. This University had closed off two career paths to me: one as a teacher of the deaf, and the other as an educational psychologist since one needs to be a teacher first! The final interview I had with the head of department was farcical because he could not find anything wrong with me except for this clause. I remember exactly, he was looking for the entry requirements under piles of papers on his desk and on finding it, was more than apologetic saying that he had nothing to do with these requirements but could I read the appropriate clause. I knew exactly what was going on. He did not have the guts to say it to me. I was simply disgusted.

Being married with a family, I looked for the first job I could find, I became a Social Worker with Deaf People in London and I worked there for a year. There I was offered a place to do a MA in Social Administration at the University of Surrey with full communication support. Unfortunately, I was offered a post as a research psychologist at the Research Unit of Donaldson’s School for the Deaf, Edinburgh on a plate. This was the most difficult time to decide which path I should take. I chose to become a research psychologist and I worked at the school for seven years before moving on as a project development officer for the deaf at the Scottish Interactive Technology Centre, Moray House College, Edinburgh.

On becoming a research psychologist, suddenly professionals were seeing me in a different way. Some, particularly professionals with the deaf were astounded by the fact that here was a profoundly deaf psychologist. Something that they thought was not possible. This, of course, reflects their negative attitudes about what is possible for deaf people. Not only this, there were some suspicions among some professionals, probably due to fear, that a deaf person had managed to work his way up to their own level.

It was a shock to me to find myself still being the only fully accredited profoundly deaf professional working in Scotland and at one particular time, I believe, the only profoundly deaf professional working in the field of deafness throughout Western Europe. This, of course, reflects how professionals treat me. Personally, I find that professionals who have no connections with the deaf field, treat me far more equally than the ones in the deaf field. Why? It is interesting to note that many of the professionals working with the deaf have no idea how to communicate with me or to understand my communication needs. With my extensive travels to the United States, I am astonished to find that professionals there working in the field of deafness know exactly how to treat deaf adults whether they are professionals or not. For instance, it is considered in the States to be inappropriate for professionals not to sign in front of a deaf adult whether or not this deaf person is following their conversation. Here in the UK, with the emerging number of deaf people becoming professionals, it is high time that the hearing professionals working with the deaf should start and treat them exactly equal. This means also ensuring that there is proper two-way communication.

Very often, professionals not in the field of deafness, would seek my professional advice together with my experiences as a deaf person. This, of course, put me in a somewhat unique position with the reasonability of becoming an elected representative for the deaf. Not only that, they would admit themselves that they are talking to a deaf professional. This is very interesting, perhaps they are double checking what other professionals have been saying or perhaps they are simply curious.

As a deaf professional, I am required to attend several committees, seminars, conferences and meeting people face to face, I do have problems in following what is going on. It is essential that to enable me to be on par with my hearing peers, I must be able to follow everything. Therefore I need an interpreter or a communicator to enable me to function effectively. The problem is who pays? I have approached the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) whose remit is to help disabled people to achieve equality at work. Their special equipment scheme goes some way towards that equality. Each one of us is able to claim up to £6000 worth of equipment such as the provision of two Minicomms. One to be left at the office and the other to carry with me. This enables me to communicate with the secretary. I also have a Z88 to enable me to type in my notes while following an interpreter or communicator, a task that I am practising.

Seven years ago, I appealed to DAS for the services of an interpreter, this request had been carried up through the hierarchy of the MSC to the Treasury doors, only to be told that the Treasury need to know the exact number of people like myself needing this service before they can release any money. One large organisation of the deaf was asked for this number and nothing happened. Another deaf organisation attempted to rectify this by asking several of its members to submit their interpreting
requirements for use in employment to indicate the level of demand. The blockage appears to be at the government end since it is necessary for the Treasury to know the exact number of deaf people needing these services. As there is no official register of deaf people in the UK, this does cause problems.

Last year, I requested a full-time personal assistant with communication skills for a project, and for that year I was blessed by the services of such an assistant. She was able to do the following: telephone interpreting; taking and making telephone calls on my behalf; help with communication problems if a visitor happened to be a difficult person to lipread: ‘interpret’ at committees, seminars or conferences if the organisers cannot themselves find the funding for an interpreter.

For that year, I was able to function fully as a professional in my own right. Since my move to my new post, funding is not available for me to have the services of a full-time personal assistant. Instead, I will be having a part-time assistant. I will simply have to cope for the rest of the time. I have since requested once again that DAS help with interpreting costs. This went to Head Office of the MSC and was informed that a consultative document is being issued looking into various gaps in the provision for people and that they will be consulting organisations of the deaf like the RNID. This letter had been copied and sent to the RNID together with my letter to them. A few months ago, the RNID at their Glasgow office established the Telephone Exchange for the Deaf, so I will be able to have a little more independence. But why should my employer be paying the extra costs? Should this not be the responsibility of central government?

For the future, it is imperative that deaf people are given equal access to information in their employment and that this should be provided by highly efficient interpreting services funded by the MSC. There should also be established a National Relay Service which would enable deaf people with text telephones to communicate with hearing people who have none or vice versa. Will this happen? Yes, but only by positive campaigning. Nothing is impossible, it only takes a little longer!

19 A Deaf Teacher: A Personal Odyssey

Janice Silo

Janice Silo is a profoundly deaf woman who wanted to become a teacher. Her success is due to her determination and her refusal to concede defeat. Here she describes some of the difficulties she faced,
to read some official versions of deaf education to see what the heroes of deaf education actually thought of their pupils. Perhaps it is time to de-mythise the teaching profession?

Why did I choose teaching? Because it was an option with promises of a professional status and a salary? If so it wasn’t an easy path. But I also chose teaching because I wanted to teach: I knew I could teach and I felt I had something to offer.

All of it at one point created a sense of horror which only deaf education can sometimes create ... a sense of unreality, dislocation, disembodiment. Why? Because I was fighting to teach and some of my opponents were using the very weapons against me which were the reason for my existence ... deafness and ‘imperfect’ speech. I believed with Dilip Hiro that ‘the point about being proud of what one is is so fundamental to normal human existence that it allows no compromise’.

I was then an oralist - someone who believed that as hearing was the norm therefore hearing people were the norm and everything less than that was not. I also believed in the supremacy of speech. I believed signing was for those who could not cope in the ‘normal world’. Gradually I became disturbed by some implications of the oral philosophy which eventually led me to discard these beliefs. I knew that my own personal beliefs were a valid tool for evaluating issues provided I was always aware they were subjective. I believed the criteria for what is a human being had nothing to do with gender, race, oral skills nor the presence or absence of hearing. I could not accept people being rejected for a job or a position (for example) because they were a member of a minority group. I saw and faced my own racism and sexism and naively perhaps expected other people to face their’s too. I rejected this particular brand of oralism of my youth and much of my adulthood (some of this brand of philosophy still exists) because to me it rejected my existence with its implication that hearing able-bodied models are superior to deaf ones or to those with other disabilities. And that qualified deaf teachers are inferior merely because they did not have ‘perfect’ hearing.

The first picture in my mind regarding my struggles to teach was a loss of innocence. For despite my Calvinist background and my growing scepticism, I still believed in people’s innate goodness if not sinlessness. I remember welcoming a colleague into my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to pass on the first picture in my mind regarding my struggles to teach was a loss of innocence. For despite my Calvinist background and my growing scepticism, I still believed in people’s innate goodness if not sinlessness. I remember welcoming a colleague into my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to pass on the first picture in my mind regarding my struggles to teach was a loss of innocence. For despite my Calvinist background and my growing scepticism, I still believed in people’s innate goodness if not sinlessness. I remember welcoming a colleague into my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to see me in my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to see me in my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to see me in my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to see me in my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to see me in my house who looked suitably embarrassed. She had come to see me...
understand social problems, etc. Working lives. I was studying going to a deaf school and a couple of adults were talking amongst themselves. Suddenly their old headmaster rebuked them in public for being ‘hard’ about it first! I was almost restored my faith in human nature. The battle had begun. Someone in their wisdom decided to test me. In the end my new tutor carefully chose the host school and thus class.

Whatever the reasons were behind my tutor’s choices and actions I have been most grateful to her. She believed in me and how ruthless she was! I was dumped into a classroom situation and was expected to teach the children on the spot. I remember looking at this group (I taught the whole class in groups during my TP there) trying to gather my wits and the children looking expectantly at me. I taught off the cuff. I was angry with my tutor. Yet I learned that I could do it and furthermore enjoyed it. I had no sympathy from her over my lack of knowledge of the subject matter. So what? I can learn alongside the children, besides what have I got a degree for?

It was an exhilarating experience. The staff’s attitude was marvellous. ‘Miss Jones, can you do dinner duty whilst we have a staff meeting?’ There I was with about a hundred hearing children. I was hungry to do anything a student teacher was supposed to do. One of the biggest arguments which was then thrown at me by ToD was that we were not exactly trusted the gist of it) to look after deaf children during play-time because you see, we can’t hear, thus locate quickly any accidents. Yet here I was posed at strategic points, moving about keeping all hearing children under my eye. I realised many of the arguments against employing deaf teachers were nonsense, patronising, based on a few hearing peoples’ own perceptions of what is a human being which had been basically unchallenged despite heroic attempts. It was like drinking cold fresh water working in a hearing school.

It was wonderful to be trusted and regarded as a responsible human being.

That TP produced more exhaustion and tears than any other teaching assignment I had - yet it was the most rewarding ‘job’ I had undertaken. I was accepted for what I was, warts and all. A trainee deaf teacher, university qualified, with speech which reflected her hearing loss. No one asked me patronising questions like which school did I go to. ‘Oh, my goodness you never went to Mary Hare?’ (The only grammar school for deaf and partially hearing students.) ‘But you are so clever, you managed to get into university!’ ‘How deaf are you?’ ‘Don’t you wear a hearing aid, why not?’ (I explained at the beginning I had no residual hearing which meant...
hearing aids were useless. That was the end of it.) I did not have to endure unsolicited speech correction, I wasn’t stereotyped. If I shared something it was accepted as my own personal experience not as something every deaf person was supposed to go through. I know that sometimes these questions reflect a genuine desire to be friends with deaf people. But we are children no longer. ‘Probing’ should be confined to professional experience and the sharing of personal experiences is up to us, in our own time and place (not during interviews for a teaching post or in the middle of a meeting!).

I must acknowledge the help I received from other ToD. I had tremendous support from another friend, who allowed me to take over her house, litter everywhere and put up with my selfishness and determination to be the best student teacher the host school had ever had.

Going back to a deaf school as a teacher was a shock but I was surrounded by friends (from top to bottom). Friends whose integrity was matched by a life-style they were committed to. What I am still learning is that we cannot stereotype people - deaf or hearing. People can be basically kind. People want to be treated as people, even if you feel they treat you as an ‘animal’. I remember wanting to change teachers of the deaf I knew - not from being an oralist but from an intolerant, inflexible one. For example, it is a good thing we are different. An oral deaf and a signing deaf person are no different. Each has a place and their own contribution to make. People are not superior if able bodied. It is good that there is a variety of human experiences. Somehow the teaching of oral skills has evolved into a philosophy of life, oralism, which in turn had become a weapon in the hands of the educators against such differences.

Deafness is not an object for horror or pity. It may bring pain but it also brings joy and love. Often it is not the actual disability itself which mars a person’s quality of life but the attitudes towards it. I wanted them to see deafness is the ‘norm’ for deaf people like me. Oh, the list is endless. A colleague said to me something like this ‘if you want to change people’s attitudes, treat them the way you would want to be treated yourself’. Hardly radical but the most important advice I have ever had and it struck a chord in me because of my own Christian beliefs. It reminded me of my faith and it gradually transformed my own attitudes. Some of my optimism started to return.

During teaching in this school I had to consider how to now train as a teacher for the deaf. It meant further training. I was advised not to go for in-service training by various professionals; they felt, rightly or wrongly, there was in-built bias against deaf people like me, whose speech reflected the type of deafness they had. It is most probably that I would fail. So the search was on for a college to take me. Prior to this, two colleges turned me down because I was too ‘deaf’ for them. Eventually a third college accepted me. Their attitude was I had a degree, a PGCE so on what possible grounds could they reject me?

I enjoyed the year very much even though I always: felt I was on shaky grounds. It was interesting visiting various schools, noting their reaction to my presence. Slowly I was becoming an acceptable face of what many perceived to be a deaf teacher. This always leaves a nasty taste in my mouth because it meant people saw deaf teachers in terms of personalities and oral skills rather than on professional grounds and equal opportunities. It meant too that we were at the mercy of their whims and moods. The support of my tutors was constructive and they were breaking new ground themselves, fighting prejudice and in-built bias in the educational system. This showed me the other side of ToD.

I was not to know that one board of governors questioned my inclusion on the grounds that if I requested an interpreter for some meetings (actually, as usual, there were no interpreters, I merely told my tutors that deaf students should have the right to equal access) then she would question my right to be on the course at all. This person, incidentally, was a ToD. In my letter to the principal of the college I wrote (from photocopied letter which I have condensed)

Dear Sir,

Regarding the first paragraph in the CM A A Report (on the proposed changes in the Certificate in Education of the Deaf and Partially Hearing based at . . .

It has come to my notice that the first paragraph made a specific reference to myself . . .

Deaf people cannot be classified under one label. We have varying degrees of hearing losses leading to varying experiences thus expectations and outlooks. We are human beings with our own idiosyncrasies. Each deaf person is an individual with his/her own preferences. If hearing impaired academically qualified students are to be treated as equals, there should be no restrictions placed on them. The request for an interpreter is a matter of individual preference and it is not a request for simplified or condensed information. It is not a reflection on the student’s academic/professional capabilities any more than a visually impaired person’s request for, and in many cases, dependence on tape recordings of lectures are ...

I have no record of the principal’s reply. But I have kept this letter to guard me against complacency. It reminds me, too, that the word ‘deaf’ with interpreter associated with it gives stereotyped images ‘dumb, poor speech thus language acquisition, need simplified information. It is not a reflection on the student’s academic/professional capabilities any more than a visually impaired person’s request for, and in many cases, dependence on tape recordings of lectures are ...

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Now I am in mainstream - and enjoying it very much despite the feeling of stress and loneliness as there are no other deaf teachers. I decided to try mainstreaming because it is becoming more widespread and I believe deaf people can contribute in a positive way (as we should in deaf schools too). It is an opportunity to touch, challenge and shape one of the foundations of society. One cannot challenge assumptions in formal education of the majority if one is apart from it. Hearing children are tomorrow’s adults. They can see deaf people in positions of authority and their authority is being accepted by hearing colleagues. They see signing being accepted as a language thus the still low status of Sign Language will be higher in the years of the next generation of hearing people.

Again, the same feelings of ‘must be better’ are there: I need to have more information - have I got sufficient information and more importantly, am I always given the right information - produce better ‘quality’ pupils. Every time I am asked to give a lecture or a talk it must be perfect. I feel also that I must behave ‘perfectly’ and spend sleepless nights if I lose my temper, or feel I have behaved in a way which could cast ‘dishonour’ on the
small group of profoundly deaf teachers. However, I have come to realise that while society is still unjust I am now responsible for my own choices. One cannot throw away so lightly a life-time of prejudice and discrimination but one can stop stereotyping hearing people because many of us have suffered from such attitudes too long.

Mainstreaming is bringing its own problems for the deaf teacher. Where is her support and role model? But then I had the same problem in special schools. What is her role in a hearing school? What contribution can she make? From my own experience there is a lot of leeway. With a good head (which I have in my present job) she can evolve her own role and contribute in a positive way. She can be a role model for teachers and pupils alike. Not only can she learn from them, but they can learn from her. But this is another story!

How does one finish an essay on one’s own on-going life experience? I will try. There were a few things that helped me during my attempts to become a teacher. But probably the main thing which helped me during the toughest time, I was a practising Christian. I found strength from my deaf community, which was my deaf church and, from the belief that God is just. This prevented me from becoming bitter for many of our leaders, to begin with, were hearing and some were even ToD! At the most stormy times, a still small voice would bring back some beautiful biblical thoughts such as ‘I love you ... I will lift up your head ... you are the apple of my eye ... I will help you.’ And my sense of proportion would return. Merely singing hymns such as ‘O love, that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee . . . restored my equilibrium.

Another was the sheer joy and love of friends. One friend said to me something like this . . . if I failed, my name will be on the roll of honour of deaf teachers who also ‘failed’. It was moving to look at it that way. Another thing was the fact that love (any way you define it) is essential to one’s life not paper qualifications. I knew that ‘live hearts must love as life must breathe’. If I experience this love, it did not matter. It was hard to acknowledge this truth because I was human, I wanted to teach, come wind, come weather!

But also wanted love more than any qualifications. This helped me . . . and is still helping me . . . to keep things in perspective.

Notes

1 Medical: this is the most difficult interview prospective deaf teachers have to pass. It depends very much on the doctor’s interpretation of the rules. One rule says that hearing impairment itself should not be a bar to teaching but then goes on to say that the student should be able to hear from so many feet. Some doctors choose to interpret it as being able to communicate. Others take it as printed. But the institution to which the student has applied for a place has the final say. Now how the doctor perceives ‘normality’ is a deciding factor, I remember helping out in another LEA and was summoned for a medical. The look of dismay on the doctor’s face implied I would fail my medical. I argued most strongly that I was doing his LEA a favour: that I did not ask them for work, that they approached me and I was damned if I was going to fail a medical because of this. I passed my medical but I still remember the looks on the faces of the doctor and his assistant.
I got a real sense of achievement from doing it. So when I found out that I couldn’t continue the course at Derby for a further year, but that I could do the BTEC certificate at Leicester I was really tempted to go although it meant leaving all my friends in Derby and the supportive environment for deaf people. On the other hand, I had been offered a job in the National Westminster Bank in Derby where I had done my work experience, so really I didn’t know what to do.

Then I spoke to a deaf friend called Lisa who had been on the YTS scheme at County Hall in Leicester. She was very positive about it and told me that the person employed by the YTS to support deaf people, Gerry, was very helpful and was learning to sign. So in the end I decided to apply to the YTS in Leicester and I was accepted.

At first I found it very difficult. The supervisors wrote down instructions for me but they didn’t talk to me. There were lots of things I didn’t understand and I couldn’t ask questions. I know it’s difficult with deaf people, I know about that, but no one took time to communicate with me. I felt like giving up. I told the YTS staff and they suggested that I should change departments. I could go to the Social Services department on the third floor. So they took me to meet the boss, Mr Sperry and he was surprised I was deaf but right from the start he tried to be helpful. So I started the following Monday. The boss introduced me to the other people in the section and wrote down instructions for what I had to do. But there was so much reading and writing. It took so long and I thought it was a waste of time, it would be better to sign. I suggested this to Mr Sperry and he spoke to the others in the section and they agreed to try. So we stopped work at 4.30 pm and for half an hour I showed them the alphabet in sign. The next day the boss had remembered and he tried to sign with me using finger spelling, but it took ages. I thought it would be better to try real signs, just simple ones, so we stopped again at 4.30 pm and I showed them some proper signs. It seemed to work well and some people really liked it. After that, it was agreed that I should teach Sign Language to anyone who was interested, in our section and outside as well, during Thursday lunch times.

So I book the meeting room every week. I plan what I am going to do the night before, I write a rough draft and I use a big sheet of paper to describe signs. About ten people learn, and three or four are really good. I think one of the women, Debbie, could be an interpreter. Some people start and then give up, but then new people join in. People learn at different rates, usually the younger people are quicker. Not everyone in our section has learned. One man and two or three of the older women didn’t want to learn. I think they are frightened of it. I say ‘it’s not going to hurt you’. But I think they
are uncomfortable because I am young and because it seems a strange foreign language. Maybe they are embarrassed in case they make mistakes. I always try to make it funny so that people feel more comfortable.

Communication at work is much easier now. Particularly with the group of colleagues who sit nearest to me, actually facing me. They are the ones who have learned the most because they get most practice. At first we talked about work but now we talk about everything - what we did at the weekend, what was on television, about our families - all the usual things. If three of us are talking together, say Debbie and Rachael and me, and then they will both sign to me but they talk to each other, so I sometimes have to remind them to sign to each other so that I can follow. Hearing people forget about that. If there is a difficulty over understanding something complicated, say with one of the people who doesn't sign so well, then we get Debbie or Rachael to interpret. It works well. I think the section feels proud that it can welcome a deaf person, perhaps another one in the future. I've heard it said that the department has a good reputation now because of this achievement. Of course, there are always some difficulties for deaf people in communicating with hearing people. Even now I sometimes feel reluctant to join in a conversation when the others are talking together. I think that the conversation might be private and that they might think I am rude if I interrupt. We have section meetings every two months and I get frustrated because I can't understand or make my contribution unless they stop to interpret for me. It would be good to have an interpreter for those meetings. Sometimes the section organises social events. They went to play skittles and I went too but I found it difficult to join in. Lots of people brought their partners and I didn't know any of them. But the boss suggested that the next time I should bring a friend, so I did that, I brought a deaf friend and that was much better. I think people made the effort to talk to us because we were together.

Last year I won a competition organised by the YTS and it was reported in the newspaper and on the television. I was a celebrity, it was really weird! You had to write 200 words saying what you thought about the YTS. I wrote 197. Jerry helped me to get the English right. And I won! The YTS phoned the boss to tell him and to say I was invited to the regional final in Nottingham. I was very excited and nervous. There were ten finalists and I was the only deaf person. So I went to Nottingham on the train with the YTS boss and Jerry to support me. There were five judges and they asked each finalist questions for fifteen minutes. They asked things like, 'Why did you join?' 'What's it been like?' 'What have you done at college?' 'What are your hobbies?' 'What are your hopes for the future?' They made me feel relaxed and I could answer all the questions through an interpreter. Then they announced my name as the winner. I was really surprised, I couldn't believe it. I was the only deaf person and they picked me as the best. There was a big audience and everyone was applauding. The newspapers were there and they asked me lots of questions and took my picture. The Leicester Mercury headline said 'CLEVER SHALEL' (I didn't like that!).

Then I went to the National Final in London, at Twickenham. I was really happy and nervous. I love going to London. We had to get the train at 5 am to be in London by 8 am. There were ten finalists again and I was the only deaf person. But it was really bad, much more difficult than the regional final, I couldn't answer the questions and I didn't win. The prize was four days and nights in Spain! I would have liked that. But never mind, I enjoyed going to London and I still have the regional final to remember.

Also, the BBC from Birmingham came to film me at work so that there could be a feature on Midlands news, about the competition and the signing at work. They filmed Brenda (the deputy section head) and me signing to each other. We got it wrong about three times, making mistakes! It was difficult with all the equipment and the lights. They also interviewed Mr Sperry and Jerry. It was shown on television the day we went to London, so I had to get my brother to tape it. I didn't like it. I thought I looked awful but everybody here likes it. I think the boss thought it was good publicity.

Mr Sperry offered me a full-time job, rather than staying on the YTS a second year, so I was pleased and I accepted. I work on Social Services accounts dealing with the running of old people's homes: maintenance, food, care workers' wages, etc. I like it, I feel at home here and it seems worthwhile. There were some parts of the job on the original description that required telephone contact but the boss told me to leave those. He's trying to get a Fax machine but he hasn't succeeded yet. He always tries to help make things easier for me and sort out problems, to do with work and college too. He has tried to help me with a problem over interpreting at college, but with no luck as yet. When I first came here on the YTS and I was doing the BTEC certificate at college Jerry helped me with my homework, the YTS paid for her to help, and it was a big benefit. I passed the first year. In the second year I began the National Public Administration Diploma but after a month I gave it up because it was just too difficult even with Jerry to help me. She had no experience of the course content and we both got more and more confused. So I changed course to the BTEC Diploma and I passed with a merit and I was very pleased. So I decided I wanted more qualifications and I chose the BTEC Business Finance course which is what I am studying now. It's very interesting about business law and people in organisations, but a big problem is that Jerry can't help me now that I'm not on the YTS anymore because she works for them. The interpreter I have now is from New Parks, the Leicester Education Service for Deaf People, but they have a non-signing policy and it's really useless for deaf people, they just lip-read and write notes. I
gel frustrated and worried that I might fail the course. I told the interpreter that it’s not good enough, they don’t realise what it’s like for deaf people the Deaf way - we need signing. Deaf people can’t take everything in without signing. Sometimes they say they understand when they don’t because they are embarrassed or confused. I said she should learn to sign if she is working with Deaf people: I think she knows really, but she can’t say anything because it’s the county policy.

Anyway I hope I pass the course. I would like to get promotion. If I moved job maybe I would try to start signing classes in a new place, if it seemed appropriate. I would have to see what it was like.

Billy Lambert has been actively involved in the Deaf community for most of his life. After thirty years working in the same factory, he suddenly decided he would embark upon a professional career working with deaf people.

Twice my parents were told that I had died when I was a small child. When I was born the doctor told my mother I was dead, covered the cot, broke the sad news to my father and disappeared. My father came to comfort my mother and then the vicar came to offer sympathy and support to the family. He had a look at the baby, and questioned the fact that I was dead. My father got his bike out, and went to fetch the doctor back again. The doctor apologised and declared that I was indeed alive! So they kept me warm in front of the fire in a tall-boy drawer for three months and I began to flourish. Then again, when I was five I contracted meningitis, along with my younger brother, although his illness was less serious. The hospital phoned to tell my parents that, sadly, their eldest son had died. I think my father said it was hours later when the undertaker came to take me away that the boy who was helping him noticed signs of life. So they asked the nurse, checked the death certificate, called the doctor to confirm the death. There was so much fuss that the doctor got out his stethoscope and detected a faint heartbeat. So I survived although I became deaf. It has always seemed a small sacrifice in the circumstances. But imagine how traumatic that was for my parents, I had been pronounced dead twice - so I have always felt grateful to be alive, it doesn’t matter about being deaf, it’s better than being in a coffin!

Because I could hear until I was five I had a little bit of speech which helped me later but I found that during my school years I was struggling because it was an oral school and I couldn’t hear anything. I felt that I was above average in the class so I was quite confident up to the time I left school, but within a week of leaving school my confidence was completely destroyed. I found that people couldn’t understand me and this came as a complete surprise. I became shy and nervous. I stopped speaking and wrote things down.
in order to communicate with hearing people.

When I was about eighteen, during the AGM at Lancaster Deaf Club, I was appointed sports secretary. I was good at expressing myself in Sign Language by this time, and people supposed I was bright and intelligent because of this ability. On that occasion I was asked to read the minutes of the previous meeting so I read them through to myself and then translated them into sign for the members, and this was fine. Then they pointed out to me that I had to write the minutes of the current meeting. I thought, ‘Good grief! How am I going to cope?’ I was really terrified. For the first discussion item I just wrote down ‘Scarb’, that was all, and the second thing was something about water. I just wrote very, very, brief notes. I was in a real state of panic!

I could always communicate with my parents because I could communicate in speech until I was five and I never lost that, although it was difficult to lip-read sometimes. So I went home and explained to my father what had happened. I told him that the Club was organising a coach trip to Scarborough, and that those people that paid subs would have a free meal and that pensioners would have a free meal etc etc. I explained all the details of this meeting while it was still in my memory and my father wrote it into long-hand and then I copied it into the minutes book. At the next meeting when I interpreted the minutes from the book into sign, they were absolutely amazed but I kept it to myself, of course, that this was how I had come by the minutes. But gradually I began to write up my own minutes in detail and my father would correct them for me and so this progress continued.

Eventually I got married and left home and then I had to cope on my own. I was elected secretary of the North-West Deaf Sports Council, a position I held for fifteen years, which gave me a great deal of experience, dealing with correspondence, committee work, administration, and organising events. I became frustrated and bored with my job, working in the same factory for thirty years. I spent all my spare time involved with organisations which helped deaf people. As well as being secretary of the North-West Deaf Sports Council, I was secretary of Lancaster Deaf Club, and chair of Preston Deaf School. I have two sons who are profoundly deaf who went to the same school that I had attended and during their last years at school I was chair of the PTA. I was the only deaf person on that committee. During this time I was also treasurer of North Lancs Branch of NDCS for a period. I was on the British Deaf Association (BDA) sub-committee, and a member of the North-West Deaf Regional Council and so on, and so on. The quality of these activities just didn’t match with my experience of factory life.

I could see hearing people doing all kinds of things, things for deaf people which I felt I could do myself. Blackpool was advertising for a social worker with deaf people and they were having difficulty appointing in that area, so I applied - I filled in the application form and sent it off. It was actually a social worker who was sympathetic to ray point of view (not a common experience at the time) who encouraged me to do it. She said ‘There’s no one who could do it as well as you, no one whose experience is so appropriate.’ So she planted that first seed of hope and ambition, and
So I left school with no qualifications, as most deaf young people did. The main emphasis was on manual skills. There were workshops for shoe-repairing, gardening, woodwork, that sort of thing. A few of the very bright children were selected to take exams and then placed in Mary Hare Grammar School perhaps, but just a very few. The rest of us had to make our own way into the world of work, and there was absolutely no guidance or support.

I was born and brought up on a farm. My father rented a farm until I was twelve and even after that I used to spend all my holiday time on my grandfather's farm. I really enjoyed being outside, working in the open air. So my first thought was maybe to concentrate on something like that, horticulture or gardening. I approached a garden centre but they refused to employ me because I was deaf. Then my mother came with me to a shoe factory but again they refused to employ me. They gave me a test, I had to do some maths and I didn't have any problem with that, I answered every question. I remember that the employer was puzzled and gave me some more difficult questions, but I managed to figure them out too. But he still wouldn't give me the job. So I gave up.

But later I went back with the Social Worker for Deaf People from Carlisle who was working for the BDA at the time. The firm said it was because they had sacked another deaf person recently and had therefore decided never to employ another deaf person. The social worker was furious. He said 'You can't prejudge people like that. All deaf people aren't the same. You don't sack every hearing person because they might be the same as one who does something wrong. You should base your judgement on the test that Billy did.' So in the end, they agreed to give me a six months trial, and X stayed there for thirty years. But the story illustrates how deaf people have to struggle against prejudice just to get a manual job in a factory. This is why their expectations are so low. During the time I was there I was involved in training workshops on Saturday mornings, training new staff. When I left, I had actually trained one of the managers and two of the foremen but I had never had any opportunity for promotion even though they relied on my skills to train others. Also they brought in quite a lot of deaf people after I joined. They were productive and docile workers! The social worker who helped me get the job told me that the company contacted him and asked him to encourage more deaf people to apply.

Looking back now I wonder how I fitted it all in - I never went to bed before 2 am I was at the factory every day, often on Saturday mornings too. Then I was at the deaf club most evenings sorting out the social events. After that I had all my committee work: writing up minutes, planning events, dealing with correspondence. Something had to go - I thought it should be the factory, it was the least interesting! My son is now interested in sports committee work and I can see him going down the same avenue, I think I should say 'Take care, you must be mad, taking on all that work.' But I enjoyed it, and also it was a challenge to succeed as a deaf person. I wanted to help other deaf people and to show hearing people: that we are not illiterate. We can run and organise our own lives. I think my son Robert feels the same way.
with a support group is an important factor in building strength and professional confidence.

For the future, I would cite better educational provision as the single most important factor in improving career prospects for deaf people. I feel very depressed and angry about the current direction of educational policy. More and more special schools are closing down and deaf children are being integrated into mainstream education, that's a terrible mistake. Deaf people must have specialised schools for development based on Sign Language. Secondly, prospects for further academic education should be improved, rather than the current focus on training and work experience. Interpreters should be provided through all stages of education so that deaf people's access is equal to that of hearing people. Deaf clubs should all have centre organisers who are themselves deaf. We don’t want social workers, welfare officers and other hearing people mediating our lives, we won’t accept that now. We need full-time deaf organisers. There should be careers advisers who are deaf. Deaf people need role models in professional jobs and communication in their own language to give advice on further education and training and career development. Then deaf people won’t feel subservient to the hearing world. Video is a useful medium to use with deaf people, for educational purposes and to keep records of meetings and events. This is a development which should be expanded for use with deaf people because it is visual and relates to their own culture and doesn’t impose the conventions of literacy which operate in the hearing world.

I don’t know what my own priorities should be now - whether to continue pursuing my own career, or to concentrate on encouraging others coming through. For myself, I think this is where my main interest lies. It’s difficult to decide, there are so many changes, and the pressure for change has to be maintained.

Section Seven

Citizenship
Patrick Murphy is a consultant on deaf blindness to the National Deaf-Blind League. He spends much of his time working to raise the level of awareness of both professional groups and the general public of the needs of deaf blind people.

1 became deaf-blind, as a result of meningitis, at the age of fifteen. At first I hoped that I would wake up one morning and be able to see and hear again. Soon, however, I accepted that this would not happen. I realised that life would be different in the future, that I would be limited in some directions, but that how circumscribed my life became was largely up to me. (I probably did not put my thoughts in those words at fifteen, but I am sure that I had some such thoughts in my head.) At school, when I was about twelve, someone came to talk to us about braille. I never thought, of course, that one day quite soon I too would be blind, and also deaf. I am sure that my deaf-blindness must have been a shock to my parents, but I cannot remember that we ever had a conversation about it. In fact, I can only remember that they communicated facts to me: a meal was ready; braille books or a parcel had arrived for me; or that I had a visitor (a rare occurrence at first). No one in my family used the manual—they all communicated by means of block letters on my hand. We were not a close-knit family, but this may partly have been because before my illness I spent several years, except for holidays, at a school near Oxford.

The first thing to do was to learn how to communicate with other people, which I did at first by asking them to print block letters on my hand, using one of their fingers as if it was a pen. I still read block letters on my hand from time to time, and it is a help to be able to use this method of communication. But the deaf-blind manual alphabet (manual, or 'finger-spelling') is faster for long periods of communication, and perhaps less tiring for the person communicating. In the manual a person who wishes to communicate makes various shapes with his/her fingers and places the shape on the deaf-blind person's palm. Each shape represents a letter of the alphabet so, by recognising the shapes and putting them together,
one strings words and sentences. Some deaf-blind people like a pause or some special sign (a little squeeze of the wrist, perhaps) to indicate the end of a word. Then, since I cannot see print, I learnt braille. Braille is formed by ‘punching’ rather thick paper so that the place which has been punched stands up in a ‘dot’. There are six dots in a braille ‘cell’, in two columns of three dots. By embossing various combinations of these six dots (there are 64 possible combinations), one forms letters of the alphabet, and other combinations which stand for a word, a prefix or suffix (e.g., con, com, ity), or some common combination of letters such as ‘tion’. If for example I write all six dots, then I have written the word ‘for’. These two means of acquiring information keep me in touch fairly well with what is happening in the world around me. It was important to keep my mind active, though I only later appreciated how important. Without such stimuli, small though they are in comparison to what is available to the sighted-hearing world, they helped to keep my mind reasonably active, and to prevent me withdrawing from life, from ‘opting out’. Then I decided - before, I think, the phrase came into such popular use - that it was better to think positively, to concentrate on those things which I could do. Remembering the things that I could no longer do could only lead to depression, or worse.

My hands are very important to me, for they have to serve both as my eyes and as my ears. By touching an object I form a picture of its shape in my head; or touching an object tells me if it is working - a piece of equipment that vibrates when it is operating, or feeling the bubbling of a saucepan or kettle. I manage quite well to clean my flat, do the laundry and cook meals. Of course, I sometimes drop things. That is not a spelling test, and I only need to understand what they mean. I am quite a good guesser sometimes!

Communication is easy, though of course slower than speech, and I suppose some people are put off by the strange method of ‘talking’ to someone else. When I have had to go up steps, a person who is helping me has lifted my foot from one step to the next - some people have almost carried me - as if being deaf-blind means one is also incapable of moving without assistance!

People have wondered how, being deaf-blind, I manage with personal relationships: how does a deaf-blind person choose someone they wish to marry? I guess I would choose in much the same way as a sighted-hearing person, only I would not be misled by a pretty face and other superficial attractions! I would decide how I feel about a girl and what interests we have in common. That would be a good start. A totally deaf-blind person does not often marry another totally deaf-blind person: though it has happened. One of the two usually has some useful sight and/or hearing.

It is almost impossible to write about myself objectively, to see problems and difficulties of the dual handicap as a sighted-hearing person would see them. People say, for example, that I am very clever because I can make a cup of tea! There is nothing clever about it: I have simply learnt to use my other senses to compensate for the lack of sight and hearing. This dual handicap does impose limitations, of course. My mobility outside my flat is limited to the immediate environs, of which I have made a ‘map’ in my head - noting landmarks which serve the double purpose of assuring me that I am going in the right direction, and also tell me at what point I need to change direction. Noting what my feet are ‘seeing’, noting the direction of the wind, the position of the sun - all these and other little indications can help to compensate for the absence of sight and hearing. A moderately good memory, of course, is needed to remember various routes and landmarks. In fact, I do not think I am exaggerating (not very much, anyway!), when I say that I can do almost anything except see and hear! Those who are deaf-blind can, in fact, do more than able-bodied people realise. But I appreciate being able to borrow my friends’ eyes and ears from time to time.

Sometimes I would like to be able to see or hear. It would be nice to do some of those things which sighted-hearing people take for granted: pop out to post a letter or buy something needed urgently at a local shop; put on clothes and be sure that they match (until I fastened pairs of socks together with safety-pins, I occasionally put on odd socks); listen to music, look at flowers, trees, etc. But dwelling on what is not possible can only be depressing. I have quite an interesting life, and I am less isolated than many other deaf-blind people.

My work is travelling around the country (and abroad) to talk
about the problems and needs of deaf-blind people, and helping individual deaf-blind people. At a meeting I am sometimes asked by hearing people who have heard me give a talk, 'Where can I find a deaf-blind person to befriend?' We are able sometimes to put such enquirers in touch with someone who is deaf-blind, but do not often hear whether the information has been followed up. One could say, then, that I deal in unfinished stories, but I often wonder whether somewhere another deaf-blind person has been enabled to lead a more interesting life.

23 A Deaf-Gay Man

David Nyman

David Nyman was born deaf. Since 'coming out' as a gay man he has been actively involved in a range of issues working for the deaf-gay community.

I came out in October, 1978, after several years struggling with my own sexuality. I had considered myself as a bi-sexual for a while having had relationships with girls, but I had always wanted a relationship with a man. I suppose that the fear of being ostracised from the Deaf community prevented me from doing that.

An old friend who is involved in the deaf theatre world recommended that I should visit a deaf gay club in London where I could meet people like me - how she knew about me, I will never know. I will always be thankful to her for pointing me in the right direction.

It is very difficult to be gay in the world of deaf people, as we do not conform to their standards; we tend to hide our real selves thus presenting artificial identities. The Deaf community is very small and many know each other: the deaf grapevine is a very powerful tool, and so we have to be very careful what we do.

I consider myself as one of the lucky deaf people who have confidence in mixing with hearing people as I can communicate fairly well with them. I live in a hearing world most of the time, therefore I have to mix with hearing people and at the same time maintain my contacts in the deaf world. At that time it was difficult to seek other deaf-gay people with the same outlook as mine.

On that providential visit to the Brothers and Sisters Club in London I was so nervous, not knowing the outcome, as it meant that I had to come out, and establish my identity in the deaf-gay world. Fortunately for me, I met several old friends that evening, whom I never realised were gay. They had the same ideas about me too. Since then the club has figured large in my life. To my surprise, I have met so many deaf-gays from all over the country. I would reckon that there are approximately five hundred deaf-gays scattered around the United Kingdom.

As a result of my visits to London, I have discovered more deaf-gay
people living in my local area, and have managed to establish a similar deaf-gay group locally to cater for their needs. We have approximately forty members in our area, most of them feeling very uncomfortable in their own deaf clubs due to the attitudes/narrow-mindedness of other deaf members. It was a difficult job for me to make contacts with them as I had to be very discreet, knowing what the reaction of the deaf world would be, if anyone found out. Fortunately, I managed to overcome that and we formed a group which meets once a month in a gay pub in the town centre. The landlord of this pub makes us very welcome, and we are now part of the local gay scene. The barmen know how to lip-read, which is an added bonus because the music is so loud. Now, whenever a deaf-gay stranger comes into the pub, the bar staff will tell him or her to join us or they give them information where to contact us for future meetings. It shows that we have built a rapport with the local hearing gay community.

Whilst in London I met several deaf-gays from the North of England who wished to set up the same sort of local deaf-gay group as I did. I gave them advice and support and now there is an established group which caters for the northern part of England. It is run on the same lines as the other groups.

Recently at a deaf congress in Wales, I spoke to several deaf-gays and they have decided to set up a group for the Welsh deaf-gays based in one of the large towns in South Wales in the new year. It is nice to know that we have encouraged others to form groups, as we already know that there are small groups in Brighton, Newcastle, Leicester, Nottingham, Derby and Glasgow.

I have also travelled abroad and via friends who regularly go abroad have made contacts with other deaf-gay groups. There are groups based in Amsterdam (Netherlands), West Berlin (West Germany), Copenhagen (Denmark), Stockholm (Sweden), Oslo (Norway), and many other groups too like the Rainbow Alliance Clubs in USA (especially in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington DC). The American groups have been established for a long time, and the support they give to their members is very good indeed. They also have conventions (congresses) which are held every two years in different states. The aim of these conventions is to foster understanding, support and focus on issues concerning deaf-gays in the USA. Naturally I am not surprised to see so many of us here and there, there is a special camaraderie among us. The parties the groups give are so relaxed, people are friendly and supportive to each other. Not surprisingly affairs have begun as the deaf-gays feel that having an affair or relationship with another deaf person helps them to achieve a better understanding than having an affair with a hearing person. It shows that the biggest problem we face in the hearing world is communication!

The American idea of having a congress has given us the opportunity to do the same. As I write this the BDA are celebrating their hundredth anniversary congress in Brighton in August 1990. We, the members of the three main deaf-gay groups are to set up a workshop for deaf-gay awareness. We are very aware that we will receive negative and positive responses from the deaf community. Perhaps our being in the open will encourage others to contact us. We have the backing of the BDA General Executive and BDA, as their policy is for equal opportunities. We will not be surprised if there is a backlash from the Deaf community itself, but we are prepared for that. For myself, I am looking forward to this, as part of a group, we can be proud of our identity and participation in the Deaf community. The Deaf community would be very surprised to know how many deaf-gays are involved in the deaf hierarchy. I know quite a few and they are ‘in the closet’ fearing to come out in their own Deaf community. I know the feeling as it happened to me when my local Deaf community found out about me from a person who resented my successful involvement with both worlds (gay and straight). He told many people in the club. I must admit that I thought of giving up attending the club, I think that I have gained respect from them, because I have always been very discreet about my private life: it never came into that sphere of the Deaf club. Telling the others about me certainly back-fired on that person who started all the business as he is now ostracised by the local Deaf community and also by the deaf-gay community. It seems that there is a kind of person like that in every deaf-gay group in this country, after all, we have given support and help and got it thrown back in our faces. Not prepared to tolerate it any longer, we have done the inevitable, and cut off before it does any more harm to our community. I know it is harsh, but it is necessary to protect ourselves from further ridicule from exposure. Now I can go to the Deaf clubs without any problems. You have to be strong and confident to face that sort of attitude.

The AIDS situation, has affected me in a very personal way. I have seen friends who have had it and are either still living, or have died from it in the past two or three years: and others who are HIV positive I do not shun them, as they do need support, love and understanding. The deaths of two very good friends, due to AIDS, has affected me greatly: it was so tragic to see them changed and dying in such a hurtful way.

As a result of these experiences, I decided to join an organisation, AIDS AHEAD, a consortium which was set up by deaf organisations concerned about the lack of accessible information for the deaf community on issues on AIDS/HIV. At the interview, the panel warned me that it could be necessary to develop a thick skin as I would receive abuse and insults. I told them that I was not bothered as I have had to develop this anyway. I was trained by the staff of the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) in London and in turn I trained twenty-five information officers. They went to their local Deaf communities to inform others about AIDS etc. as the government did not provide access of that information to the Deaf community in their own language* All the information officers were deaf. I also went on a course rim by a group specialising in counselling and befriending with ten others. It was the first time that this kind of project was organised for deaf people, and now it has paved the way for others to get involved in this kind of training*

In my role, as a befriender and adviser, I have had the opportunity to listen and give advice to many deaf people, gay and straight, to overcome their problems and identity crisis. I do enjoy this role as it gives me the satisfaction of helping people. I think I am in a good position to give advice and experience as I had several longstanding relationships with hearing gays. One such relationship lasted seven years and I shall always be
grateful to that particular friend for giving me the confidence to mix with hearing people.

Do I have any problems with the hearing world? Yes, I have had difficulties in communicating with some people, but perseverance usually pays off in the end. I have now been involved in the deaf-gay scene for twelve years and made a lot of friends: some became lovers; some became very close friends to whom I can talk freely at any time. How do I fare in the hearing gay world? Well, I go with a group of deaf-gay friends to pubs, clubs, discos and parties. We tend to stick together for company and at the same time we go off to meet others. I suppose we all support each other. We have been part of the local gay scene for the past seven years. Many hearing gay people have accepted us; sometimes we have requests from them to teach them sign language to enable them to communicate more effectively with us or others.

A surprising feature which has arisen in the last twelve years since I got involved with other deaf-gays, we have our own sign language and culture ‘GSL’, Gay Sign Language. It is more apparent now than ever and is becoming more widespread in this country and abroad. Interpreters are even interested and we have been asked to produce a video on ‘GSL’; we hope to do this in 1991 with the co-operation of the deaf-gay community.

I am a confident person in myself, not being ashamed of being deaf and gay, I get on well with men and women, (deaf or hearing). I do not bring my private life to work as I have always been told never to mix work with pleasure. It works to my advantage, and although I have my suspicions that my colleagues know about me, I am not bothered at all. My family are aware of my sexuality and out of respect for each other we do not talk about it at all, as I don’t want them to get involved or hurt.

What do I see for myself in the future? It is a difficult question to answer, I now that I will always be around the deaf-gay community because there I have very close friends on whom I can rely at any time and who can depend on me too when they need to.

24 Growing up in Care

Andrew Charles and Rachel Coombs

Andrew Charles is an Afro-Caribbean Deaf man. When he was a baby his mother placed him in a ‘children’s home’. Later he went to live with a white hearing foster family. In this account Andrew reflects on his early years and the particular experience of someone who is both Black and Deaf.
couple took me out for the day every Sunday for about a year. They fed me all the time when we went out, if I wanted an ice cream they would buy me one, they really spoilt me and I enjoyed it. I kept thinking that perhaps they would want to take me home with them but they never did. I kept wondering if they loved me but they suddenly stopped visiting so they can’t have really wanted me. I decided from then that nobody would ever want to take me home because I was Black and all the visiting families were white.

One day one of the Sisters came and told me that a woman had come and wanted to see me. I asked Sister why she wanted to see me. Sister said that she didn’t know but she thought that I might have to leave St Christopher’s. I couldn’t understand anything that the woman was saying. I just nodded and nodded. At the end the woman said ‘come with me’. I thought I was going out with her. I didn’t realise I was going to stay with her all the time. I was about four years old then. Then they started to pack my clothes so I thought maybe I was going to stay for the night or for the weekend as some of the other children did. The woman to be my foster mother and her family lived in P., they came over and took me back there, I was crying and crying. When I got there everybody was staring at me and I still kept crying. Then the woman started hugging me and comforting me and telling me that everything would be all right. I cried for a few days and then began to feel a little better. I still thought that I would be going back to the children’s home but then they told me that I wouldn’t be going back any more. The woman said, ‘I love you’. I said ‘Are you sure?’ She told me that she was sure. I started to think about my birth family and kept wondering why I couldn’t live with my black mother. I asked my new foster family. They told me that my black mummy couldn’t come and see me because she had moved and she couldn’t afford to look after me. I was very upset and cried and they told me not to worry about her as she was no good - she was worthless and I should forget about her and not cry for her any more now that I was with a family who loved me.

One day my foster mother told me that a deaf woman would be calling to see me. The deaf woman was called Mary and she lived round the corner, she came from a wealthy family. When I met her I said, ‘hello’ and she started signing. I was amazed, I had never seen signing before. I didn’t know that it existed. I was surprised and confused and I couldn’t really understand it but as I started to meet up with Mary and her friends more often I slowly started to pick up Sign Language myself. I also began to pick up a bit of Sign Language at school. Although it was an oral school, some of the children communicated by signing in the playground. At first I stayed in the background, not pushing myself forward, just watching until I was able to join in and express myself through signing.

I found that I was spending more and more time with Mary and her friends. We would walk and walk for miles and miles, just chatting and chatting. I was only five or six years old and I would often get into trouble with my foster mother for staying out too late! The thing that was I just so curious about deaf people and about signing and I couldn’t understand hearing people so well. But because Mary was Deaf she could think in the deaf way and I could talk with her and really understand her.

I still sometimes meet up with Mary and her friends. She still lives in the same house although most of the others have moved to different parts of the country.

When I was very young I remember people sometimes shouting at me and tapping me and looking at me in a particular way. I didn’t realise that I was deaf until later and that was because people kept shouting at me and I could feel their breath on my ear but I couldn’t hear anything. My foster brother told me that I had needed an operation on my ear when I was a baby but my birth parents had not taken me for the operation then and it was too late now. He told me that my foster mother had tried to get me an operation but it was too late and I would stay deaf as I grew up.

I had some happy times when I was young with my foster family in P. I can remember stealing apples, pears and plums from a neighbour’s garden. On one occasion we were spotted in the garden and my foster parents were told and we did get into trouble! Another summer-time memory I had was when I was about seven and I was playing outside. I saw a large insect on the window and I crept up on it and clapped my hands together on it. The pain in my hand was terrible and I called for my foster mother. By the time she came out of the house my hand had swollen up like a football. She called for an ambulance which took us to the hospital. I was given an injection which brought the swelling down straight away. My foster mother explained that it was a bumble bee that I had caught in my hands and that the bee had stung me. I hadn’t known what a bee was, nor had I realised that any insects could sting. I certainly never tried to catch a bee again!

I can remember being aware that I was Black when I was quite young, living with my foster family. The foster family were all white except for one foster sister who was not, she was mixed race. I remember that my birthday was only a few days from one of my foster brothers. His birthday was on the third and mine was on the eleventh and every year my foster mother made two cakes - one plain sponge cake for my brother and a chocolate one for me because of the different colour of our skins. There was no problem about being Black in a white family when I was younger. I did have trouble with my foster family when I was a teenager and I didn’t feel that I fitted in very well then because I was deaf and because I was Black and because they were not my real parents.

After a few years my family moved to another town so that my father could live nearer his work-place and not have to travel so far every day to get to and from work. At about this time it was decided that I needed a Catholic education. However the education department in the new area could not afford to pay for me to go to the Catholic boarding school for deaf children so the Children’s Society arranged for me to go to a children’s home back in P because if I continued to live in that area then the education department in that area would pay for me to go to school. From then on I spent part of my holidays with my foster family and part of my holidays at the children’s home.

I remember the first time I went to the boarding school. I hadn’t really known what to expect. I had thought that perhaps all the children I had known from my previous school would be there. I was particularly worried because I thought a boy who used to bully me would be there.
greatly relieved to find that he wasn’t, although initially I felt shy meeting so many new children.

Like my previous school, this school was an oral school and I got on well at first because I was a good oral student. I was quick at picking up lip-spoken words and writing them up on the board. The teacher would give us a sweet if we got the word right and I enjoyed having a lot of sweets to eat. However, even though we were not officially allowed to sign at the school I picked up a lot more Sign Language from other children whenever we had a few moments on our own without the teachers looking at us. Although I was still thought to be a good oral pupil, I began to change my way of communicating when I was not in the classroom. I felt that I got a fuller explanation with Sign Language and using Sign Language helped how I felt about myself. If the teachers ever saw us signing in the classroom they would throw chalk at us so we found a way of hiding the fact that we were signing - we would put our desk tops up and pretend to be looking for something but really we would be signing to each other! One day I got a big surprise. I had put my desk lid up and was signing to my friend when I was hit by a piece of chalk that the teacher had thrown. I couldn’t work out how the teacher had been able to see what I was doing. Then I realised that she could see through the gap where the hinge was when the desk was open. From then on my friends and I would put rulers in the gaps so that she couldn’t see through them. We thought it was great fun!

When I was first at the school the boys and the girls were kept separate. When I was older the school changed and the boys and girls were mixed for most school activities. I think that was better because when the sexes were segregated it led to a lot of homosexuality. I believe that is the reason why there are so many deaf gay people now - because they kept all the boys together for years and years with no opportunity to mix with girls in many deaf schools. By the time they left school their sexual preferences had been formed by their school experiences.

For many years my time was divided between three ‘homes’ - my foster family, my school and my children’s home. I enjoyed different things about each of them. I had a lot of fun as well as some difficult and disappointing times. However, I was not sure if I actually belonged to any of these ‘homes’. And always in my mind was the image of the parents that I could not remember, the family that I had never known, and I wondered where they were and whether or not I belonged to them.
25 Provision for Deaf Patients in Hampton Special Hospital

Janet Goodwill and Rae Than

In 1987 a project was proposed to research the needs of patients in Hampton Hospital with communication problems. A pilot project was initiated, run jointly by a Sign Language tutor and deaf patient, to teach the basics of Sign Language to staff and patients. Rae Than writes here, with Janet Goodwill, of developments since then.

A deaf Sign Language demonstrator was appointed as a co-teacher in September 1989 to work for twelve hours per week, this time to be shared between the Education Department and the areas where deaf patients live and work.

Her task:
• to be a role model - a deaf person who could be seen to be coping in a hearing world.
• to teach British Sign Language (BSL) to both deaf patients and hearing staff.
• to promote an awareness of the problems created by deafness and to help deaf and hearing people develop strategies to overcome communication barriers.

Some weeks after her arrival, she completed the usual induction course with the help of an interpreter. Despite some understandable initial apprehension, her intelligent approach to security issues convinced the establishment that she should be accorded the same status as all other staff.

The Disablement Advisory Service are now in the process of supplying minicom (text-type) telephones which will enable her to maintain contact with staff in all areas where deaf patients live and work. It is a system which helps her to work independently and maintain contact with deaf people outside the hospital, particularly the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (ENID), ensuring that she has easy access to appropriate support and advice.

Janet has now become a valued part, not just of the deaf class but of the Education Department as a whole and has taken her place as part of a multi-disciplinary team. What follows makes no attempt at a chronological account of a working day or even of the developments of the past five months. Janet and I have simply shared our thoughts on our work and experiences. For Janet, starting work in Rampton was clearly a powerful and emotional experience.

Janet I felt like a really important person. I never dreamt of having a professional job - it is something I have always wanted but thought I never could because of my deafness. I am used to being told I’m not good enough because I can’t use a telephone etc. In the past I had a cleaning job. Now it is different. My first meeting in the hospital was the first big meeting I had ever experienced. I felt like a really important person - like a Member of Parliament!

The school had only three deaf patients when I started - two others had stopped attending because they could not understand the teacher. The thing which stood out most was how many questions they wanted to ask. It was as if they had held them in for a long time and my arrival had broken down the barriers. I was able to make the lessons much easier for them and the other two patients soon asked to join the class again.

I was surprised to find how little they knew, not even the names of people they rubbed shoulders with every day or the names of ordinary things such as food.

It had become obvious from the questions put to Janet and from her alertness to every nuance of sign just how little our deaf patients understood of the mixture of Sign Supported English, gesture and mime used by hearing staff. They seemed to have developed a strategy of avoiding conflict or of appearing stupid by a nodding pretence of understanding. It is a strategy which inevitably creates problems and can lead to aggression, hostility and a reinforced mistrust of hearing people. An essential part of Janet’s task was therefore to encourage deaf patients to ask again if they didn’t understand, and if this does not resolve the problem, to ask for and if necessary insist on using an interpreter.

Janet I agree many deaf people nod when someone is trying to explain something but it isn’t always true that they understand. The person talking to them thinks they have got the message through but they haven’t. This leads to a lot of misunderstanding.

Basic educational skills continue to form the backbone of the curriculum, but we are now developing a bi-lingual approach which not only improves the level of understanding but gives access to written and spoken English. Standards of reading are poor at approximately 7-8 year old level, but most patients are very aware of their inability to cope with the demands of everyday written material such as forms, notices, subtitles, and letter writing and are anxious to improve. Motivation and effort have increased markedly now that they can identify with a deaf role model who is seen to be literate and numerate.

Shortly before Christmas we were able to arrange a visit to a sign interpreted pantomime followed by a meal in a restaurant. It was an important day in the calendar and was especially organised for the group at a time of year when they are likely to feel excluded from most seasonal activities. None of the patients had ever been to a theatre before. They were able to meet other deaf people, learn about the availability of facilities such as loop hearing systems in public buildings and relax and enjoy each others’ company. For our part, we were able to observe how they coped with the requisite social skills.

Janet has also been able to accompany one patient on a shopping trip and visit a local fire station which again stimulated a great deal of
interest and discussion and presented an opportunity to develop language skills.

The recent lobbying of Parliament by deaf organisations to gain access for deaf people by means of TV subtitling or interpreting has been of great interest and the group were able to see a video of an appeal made in sign language by Janet to her Member of Parliament.

Janet: Once a week I teach BSL and on the other days a mixture of reading and writing. We watch a TV programme for the deaf called See Hear and then discuss the issues raised. Sometimes I give the patients a choice. They always seem to end up doing the same thing - talking about current affairs and all sorts of other things they want to know about. Deaf people miss out on lots of aspects of life like childhood stories, recreational evening classes and the theatre.

Wards and workshops regularly make use of Janet's time usually giving her an opportunity to work with patients on their own. In one workshop, several patients were keen to learn some basic sign language and have a weekly class with Janet and their occupation officers.

Case conferences and meetings are a regular part of hospital life and Janet attends any which relate to deaf patients or which hearing teachers would normally attend. An interpreter, engaged on a sessional basis, enables her to participate as fully as possible. However, working as part of a multi-disciplinary team means that she has had to cope with a completely new range of vocabulary.

Janet: I would like to learn about mental illness and handicap. I have heard a lot of new words about mental illness and have to try and make signs for them. Deaf people do not have signs for these as we are not allowed to train as doctors or nurses.

Staff interested in learning to sign have, in the past, had to be prepared to travel, sometimes long distances to a college of further education, often at their own expense. Janet's arrival enabled the hospital to offer on site Stage I CACDP classes. An initial enquiry resulted in an astonishing sixty applications and it was possible to start two classes for staff who had regular contact with the deaf.

Janet: I am very happy teaching people to sign and because so many different people have joined including doctors, nurses, a librarian and a solicitor - it is so very important that the people who are in charge, like doctors, learn to understand their deaf patients.

Now the classes are learning a few signs and find they can communicate a little. A teacher came to me the other day so very proud and excited that she had managed to make herself understood in sign. I felt proud that I had taught her. It's nice to feel that the class is succeeding.

The Deaf Club continues to be an important focus for Deaf culture in Hampton. It is held fortnightly with a regular core of interested staff and deaf volunteer visitors.

The opportunity for relaxed social contact is clearly extremely important. Club time is invariably spent chatting and attempts to introduce videos or games have been consistently rejected.

Although we would like more deaf visitors it is difficult to persuade 'outsiders' to come - they often have other commitments, may have to travel long distances and are sometimes apprehensive of coming to Rampton.

Janet: Yes, we have five visitors all are Deaf. This gives deaf patients a chance to meet representatives of the Deaf community and to talk in a relaxed manner using their own language. They think the Club is great. They love having deaf visitors - they are the most important aspects of the Club. The time is never enough and at the end of the evening they are always reluctant to go back to their wards.

Lastly Janet describes the essence of her work in the Education Department.

Janet: Deaf patients have more confidence with a Deaf teacher who they can understand. It is less of an effort for them. They feel the same as me because of our shared problem. Their signing is very poor so I try to help them improve this and to explain to teachers how they can communicate more effectively.

I help teach English from sign, how to use the Minicom, news about the world outside and the ways in which the deaf community is changing. For example, now we have interpreters and communicators instead of social workers. I have to help prepare the patients for outside, showing them how they can contact the police or associations like the Samaritans or the RAC. They learn about the deaf associations like the RNID and the British Deaf Association (BDA). They need to know about all the aids available such as TV subtitles, alarm lights and pillows which can help them, but most importantly, I try to show them that we deaf people can be equal to hearing people.

Janet has already remarked that her arrival seemed to have inspired a surge of questions from the deaf patients. It also evoked memories of their past experiences in the hospital and highlighted current problems. The over-riding emotions described were fear, frustration, confusion, anger and suspicion. Signed communication used by staff has improved but is often in English grammatical order and therefore likely to be misunderstood by deaf patients. The patients' own signing skills are not yet adequate to explain their