

Dear Mom and Dad

I want to tell you that I appreciate what you have done for me all those years. I realize now that all the choices you've made for me were in my best interest. Back then, I didn't think that you were doing that for me. I always have thought that you were trying to mold me into something else that you wanted in your first child born. I thought that you were disappointed with the fact that your first child was less than perfect. I remembered resenting you for pushing me too hard. Now, as a parent I realize that I am no different from you. We expect so much more from our children. Like every parent, I overly get thrilled every time when my daughter signs a new word. How sad you must be when I couldn't hear you and understand your responses. Now I understand your decision for putting me into oral school because you wanted me to be able to communicate with you and the world. You believed that the ability to speak clearly can determine one's future in life, so you worked long hours together with me, working on my speech. I remembered refusing to go back to speech training. I remembered the worst moment when one of the speech therapists told me that my voice was the most horrible that he had ever heard. After that, I became very self-conscious about using my voice in public. The idea of using my voice in public still stares me to death. I didn't want to use my voice in fear that others would find out about my deafness.

It's very frustrating that we still can't communicate to each other very well. I just don't understand why you gave up so easily after taking ASL class. Everyday, it's hard for me to express my feelings to you because you would misunderstand me. I resented everybody in the family for leaving me out of the family conversations. I hated the short version of the conversations. I never felt that I was part of the family even though I know that you were trying your best to keep me in the family loop. Even though I can lipread you most of the time and I have gotten used to our own method of communication at home. But I always felt that something was amiss. At school, it was even worse. I felt most lonely at school. I had no friends that I could share with and I couldn't share my inner thoughts with anybody. Even though I was doing well in school, but inside of me, I was not doing so well. For a long time, I had conjured thoughts about killing myself. I even fantasized the different ways of killing myself but somehow I was never able to attempt those. Maybe deep down, I was hoping things would work out eventually.

Academically I breezed through high school but that period of time was the worst. I begged to take a class at the deaf school which you finally relented. When I took a class there, I felt even more isolated. I couldn't even keep up with other deaf kids who signed too fast. I didn't fit in their circle of friends who grew up together in school. I didn't fit their definition of who was Deaf. After a couple of months, I dropped out, thinking that the deaf world wasn't for me. I wish that someone told me that I should stick out at school a little longer and eventually I would make new friends with other deaf. For a long time, I felt that I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. The rock was that I considered myself as part of the hearing world because of my family and how I was raised but I didn't fit in the hearing world because of my inability to talk clearly and understand other people. The hard place was I don't fit in the deaf world because I wasn't fluent in ASL. For a long time, I felt like I was stuck between two worlds. Not until many years later now, I ended up working at the deaf school which is kinda ironic to me. I lost my job in the hearing world and fortunately, the deaf friend I knew reached out to me and suggested that I take a job at the deaf school. My first reaction was absolute horror. The

reason was that I didn't feel that I was good signer to be part of the deaf community and for many years, I have been trying to avoid the label of "deaf." But part of me wanted to be part of a group. For so many years, I felt alone and I was so tired of being loner. That decision to join the deaf school turned out to be the best choice for me. The first two years working there was very challenging. Being part of the deaf community, I had to learn about deaf culture and interact with other deaf. For first time in my life, I stopped feeling ashamed of myself. I feel the sense of pride after seeing so many successful and productive deaf people who are not pigeonholed. It was the hearing world who put limits on deaf. I realize that now.