

Dear Mom

I've had many thoughts and experiences that I didn't have the chance to put down until now. It's difficult to whittle everything down so I can talk about my language development, speech training, communication at home, communication at school, educational placement, social development and academic skill development.

I know you were a wonderfully devoted because not many mothers would devote every night to making me do the math homework, do the history or English reading. I remember always not doing the math homework until you came home. You would afterwards scold me, and make me stay up at nights to finish the homework. Because I rarely understood math concepts explained at school, you would always read and explain them to me, until I could do the reading by myself. Then, you would check my math homework to make sure it was correct. If there was anything wrong, you would make me redo the problem until I figured it out.

I have wondered many times if it would have been better for me to go to a deaf school. I know that you think the school for the deaf is considered to be a school of last resort. But, would I have had more opportunities for socializing? Would I have made more close friends than I did in mainstreamed school? Thinking back on my life, I realize I had only "acquaintances," people I regular greet, but do not do anything with, such as hanging out, going to parties, or meeting outside of school. The only person I could be close to was you. You said this was me being "shy" because of deafness. After learning ASL, I realized that despite understanding everything while chatting, I still don't find myself chatting very much. Maybe the time for social development already passed, maybe I don't need to interact with people. I am not sure.

My language development did not suffer because you were always there to help me understand, especially the concept of before, after, when, since, and because. After a while, I became devoted to reading. It was through reading that I learned to improve my English. I started by reading computer books, then I began to develop an interest in writing. I began reading books on writing, hoping to find ways to improve my grammar, my sentence structure, and other parts of my English. I also started reading other things, including books about Shakespeare whom I was interested in. This reading was in addition to readings assigned by the school.

My speech training was not a negative experience that I've seen many people had. I will be honest and say that I enjoyed trying to learn to talk because I regarded talking and lipreading as a challenge. Moreover, most of the people I meet in school and outside of school were hearing. Talking seemed a natural requirement that I was prevented from merely by my hearing loss. I was still myself with or without it. Since I learned ASL, I have met many people who asked me, would I rather have gone to a deaf school or stayed in mainstream school. I dislike giving an answer to this because I know that to say "Yes, I would have rather gone to a deaf school" would be saying that you were wrong, but I know that you have tried to make the best choice you could for me. You simply believed that speech therapy would work despite of a lot of difficulties. You simply believed that teaching me to sign would mean that I never learn to talk and that talking was the top priority. Signing would lead to a limited lifestyle. And then, saying "yes" would also be saying that I wished for a different childhood, an experience that has

made me who I am. I would rather be proud of who I am, what I have accomplished, and what I hope to accomplish in the future than to dwell in the past or complain.

Dr. Holcomb, the professor of the Deaf Education class, told the class how different he was from his wife, who was born in a hearing family. He talked about how his wife did not want to deal with the hassle of asking her parents where they were going out for dinner. As he was telling the story, I realized how similar I was to her in being passive while growing up. I always knew that I did not have equal access to information, and so I could not feel as qualified to give an opinion that could be based on ignorance. Once in a while, I remembered that my step-dad, you and I would agree to go to Fry's, but we wind up going to Target before Fry's. This was not because the plan had changed, but because you never told me that we were also going to other places. I would get into a temper tantrum over not being informed. After so many years of this, I've learned to ask for information, but also to be passive and let things happen.

As for my academic skills, I know that I had succeeded in transferring to a prestigious university. I succeeded in oralism. I am one of the rare group of people who succeeds in understanding many subjects, like mathematics, English, science, and more. Yet, throughout my elementary, middle, and high school, I could never understand more than a quarter of what the teachers said. With the FM unit, where the teacher wore microphone, I could understand a bit more, but it was less than ideal, less than perfect. Concentrate on lipreading as I might, my mind wanders often, my eyes go back to reading books, more accessible than lip-reading. I was taught to go to the teacher if I did not understand what he or she said. It was through this personal explanation that enable me to catch up in class. Otherwise, I tried to understand what the class wants to do, to figure out things based not just on lipreading, but also on context and situation. I remembered one time I tried to join a Conflict Mediation group that would use peer students to try to resolve conflicts. One time, I was summoned to mediate a spat that had broken out, but found that I was unable to contribute because I could not understand what any of the parties were saying. One time, I joined a musical class hoping to learn to play the violin because of a cartoon show I watched, but I found that I was unable to hear music sufficiently to play.

You once got frustrated that I couldn't lipread some of the things you said and blamed it on learning ASL. I believed you were wrong, because ASL opened me to much more than lipreading had. I don't think my lipreading skill has declined or improved. The difference is that I am more aware of what I missed before. When I was in college, I realized how much more helpful that having either real-time captioning (RTC) or interpreting would be, compared to lipreading or using an amplification system. I felt ridiculous having to ask the professor to wear a microphone, just for me. In contrast, when I knew enough ASL to request an interpreter, I found myself much more comfortable with interpreters. I felt a certain sense of pride and freedom, compared to RTC or an amplification device. The cords I had to wear, or the laptop I had to carry, seemed to symbolize the entanglements that only interpreters could free me of.

This is a lot that I've had to think about. Contrary to what I said about wanting to free myself to focus on the future, I often find myself still thinking about the past, remembering things that I had forgotten, cherishing my memories, and comparing myself now to myself then. I am pretty sure that ten years later, I will do the same thing, but with much greater wisdom afforded me by the scars of time.

Love