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## Mark

**October 21, 2003**

*Mark is a school counselor at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. He tells us what it was like to grow up with a progressive hearing loss. [Contact us](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/contact.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/contact.jsp>) if you want us to respond to Mark or ask him a question.*

**RaisingDeafKids.org:** When was it that you first realized that your hearing was getting worse?

**Mark:** I'm guessing this was around age 5 or 6. At first I noticed people around me reacting a bit differently - teachers and classmates looking at me funny, or seeming a bit frustrated with me for reasons I couldn't comprehend.

**RaisingDeafKids.org:** Did you tell anyone, like your mother or a teacher?

**Mark:** Nope, I didn't think of bringing it up at home. It didn't become an issue at home until my grandfather, obviously in response to a phone call from my teacher, gave me the old "can you understand me?" test. First he said something to my face, which I understood. Then he covered his mouth with his hand and said something else - which I could not understand. That's when he realized I was dependent on reading lips due to a hearing loss. Next thing I knew, I was visiting an audiologist.

**RaisingDeafKids.org:** Do you remember how you felt when you realized this?

**Mark:** Confused, maybe even horrified - at his reaction, not mine. Other relatives and teachers were also noticeably alarmed or overly concerned. That's when I realized, "Uh-oh, something's wrong with me. The way people are reacting to it, it must be really bad." I was ashamed of what was happening to me.

**RaisingDeafKids.org:** What did you do so you could still get along in a regular classroom?

**Mark:** Fake it! Remember, deafness in my eyes was something bad. Therefore I tried to look anything but deaf. Nodding along with what others were saying, smiling when others smiled, making superficial conversation...I was trying my best to create the illusion that I could hear. Academically, I would just bug someone to clarify what the homework was and do my best to catch up. Individual attention from a teacher's aide also helped immensely. But in a nutshell, I was pretty much living a lie.

**RaisingDeafKids.org:** Now that you look back on it, what do you think would have been a better way to help you cope with your hearing loss?

**Mark:** I wish I had a better understanding that deafness is not something horrible, just something different. Something that simply requires a different approach, say, like the use of ASL and sign language interpreters. It wasn't until the tenth grade when I fully understood this. I learned how to go with my strengths instead of trying to cover up or fix my weaknesses.

**RaisingDeafKids.org:** What would you say to a child who is starting to lose his hearing?

**Mark:** I'm not exactly sure what I would say - but I would be mindful of how I would react. I would be reassuring in such a manner as if to imply, "It's okay, so you're deaf (or hard of hearing). You may have to do things a bit differently, but you're going to be all right." From there I would answer any questions as tactfully as possible. I would also go about showing the child that he/she is not alone, through introducing him/her to role models (especially peers!). I'd probably get some of those wonderful children's books that so beautifully address the issue of deafness.

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<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/deaf/mark.jsp>