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Communicating With Hearing People

October 7, 2003

Mom always pushed me to speak up for myself - any way I could

I am the oldest of the three offspring in an entirely hearing family. Everybody in my family signs. Also, two of my relatives (both lived far away) did learn how to sign a bit. But, my family never considered themselves as my interpreters, especially because my mom refused to let anyone to be in that role...no matter where we went.

My mom took pains to make me write down what I wanted at a fast food restaurant at a very early age-maybe 4 or 5 years old. Her system was to fingerspell the letters one by one as I wrote them down on a piece of a paper. She then sent me alone to the ordering counter to hand the paper to the cashier. This became a routine thing for me, and when I was able to spell just enough to get my words across, I did it without any complaints or question. I may have written poorly, with lots of misspelled words and poor grammar, but I could at least communicate on my own as a kid. When I didn't have anything to write with, I used mime-skillfully. These ways of communicating with non-signers are still my primary ones.

One of my brothers, Kyle, used to feel a sense of responsibility for helping me communicate, even though he was three and half years younger than I. One day when I was 7, I was trying to tell some neighborhood teenage boys to stop killing ants. Kyle looked out from the living room window and said to mom, "I should go out there and interpret..." My mom stopped Kyle and told him, "Wait...let's watch." And there I was, showing them my sign already posted with "NOT KILL" and a picture of an ant. I then tried to kick them. Then I screamed at them. Seeing them still stomping the ants to death, I took off my shoes and threw the shoes at them. "Humm," my mom told Kyle, "I don't think she needs any help."

During my teenage years, my mom used to take me out shopping with her. Because she didn't want to be the interpreter, she would pretend she was deaf too, so everybody had to write things down for both of us.

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You can find this page online at:

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