The Cursive Ꝺ

Back in the early 70's, when I was identified with a severe to profound hearing loss, life was different. There was no such thing as the Internet, Facebook or YouTube. You knew only what you were exposed to in person, and if living in a rural area, as I did, you weren't exposed to a lot. As the only deaf individual in a hearing family, I did not meet another person with a hearing loss until I was in high school. Well, unless you count the old deaf peddler guy that used to go door-to-door selling handmade yarn dolls attached to an ABC card.

American Sign Language (ASL) just did not exist in my world. It wasn't avoided; it just did not exist. There was no one that used it and no one to suggest that I use it. I was the only kid with a hearing loss in my entire school district and, quite frankly, no one knew what to do with me. I was placed in the front row and teachers would write assignments on the board. The rest was up to me. When I became a freshman, someone finally suggested to my parents that perhaps I should attend the Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD). An hour and a half in the car and several hours of testing later, administrators told my parents and I that I did not belong at KSD because my English skills were "too good" and they were afraid that I would stop speaking once I learned ASL. I was heartbroken, because although I was able to "hold my own" academically and had a nice diverse group of friends, I had never had any true peers. No one that understood what it was like to keep a smile plastered on my face even though I had no idea what was going on around me, and no one who could understand what it was like to be at a gathering of family or friends and feel so totally alone. No one with whom I could let my guard down.

Due to the rubella epidemic, many children were identified with hearing loss in the late 60's and early 70's. Gallaudet College was expecting an influx of students in the early 80's and to avoid overcrowding they were offering preparatory coursework to some students. I was fortunate enough to be accepted into this preparatory program during my senior year of high school and I was absolutely thrilled. As a one-stoplight-town girl it was exciting to not only attend school in the big city but to be able to attend school with all deaf students. I was fully convinced that I would arrive and be greeted by my people! I arrived, only to find out that I didn't fit in there either. This was my first introduction to the concept of "Big D/Little d" and many years of asking myself who and what am I?! By hearing definition, I was deaf. By the Deaf community definition, I was hearing (sign: think like hearing).

Over time, I begin to resent the whole “Big D/Little d” idea. While I totally understand that it is an effort to distinguish between individuals who are a part of deaf culture and those who are not, it is a label that forces me to choose one or the other. I don’t want to. I do not want limitations placed on me based on my ability/inability to hear, speak, read/write English and use ASL or a combination of any or all of these. When in reality, my ability to do any of these things changes from situation to situation. On any given day, from one situation to the next, I can function as Big D, little d, hard of hearing, deafblind and even hearing. So, where does that put me?

Most importantly, where does this put deaf/hard of hearing kids who are currently being mainstreamed, who by hearing definition are deaf, and by deaf definition, are hearing (sign: think like hearing)?

I have always identified myself as deaf with no emphasis on which d. This tends to lead to questions from the person I am speaking to as they try to analyze which d to assign to me. It also leaves me feeling like a fraud as my life experiences have not allowed me to be 100 percent one or the other.

Therefore, when it comes to my ability/inability to hear, I have decided that I am “cursive d” deaf. I am all the above and whatever I choose to be or not to be. I refuse to allow limitations or expectations to be placed on me by others so that they can assign me a predefined label. Others will no longer define me, for that is something for which I alone am responsible. It is my hope that other deaf and hard of hearing individuals who feel the same will draw this line as well so we can put an end to deaf and hard of hearing children questioning their identity and feeling like they are not deaf enough or hearing enough because they are perfect just as they are!



2017

NOT ENOUGH…

Some will say I have to choose,

Because if I don't, I'm bound to lose.

"Choose to speak or choose to sign-

You can't do both, that's asinine!"

"Research says this way is best,

So be like us, don't trust the rest!"

"If you take that path, you're gonna fail,

Be like me and you'll do well!"

"Don't be like them, they're not enough,

The life they have, it's far too rough!"

"If you choose that, you won't fit in,

You're bound to lose, you cannot win!"

"I am the expert and I know it all;

If you question me you've got some gall!"

STOP!!!!

I'm sick to death of all your words,

Your petty war is for the birds!!

You don't know me, my tale, my life

My joys, my pain, my success, my strife!

How can you say what works for me

Discount my facts? Just let me be!

Your way…it works, for some- not all,

Still you force your choice, now who's got gall?!?

To speak AND sign, that is MY choice

My hands, my mouth are BOTH my voice!

Don't limit me with your short sighted views-

I don't want to be labeled, in fact, I refuse.

I refuse the old adage of it's either/or

For I am quite worthy and deserve so much more!!



Dowd '16