

Silent World

Mary V. Rivers

To all my loved ones:

My dear husband Bruce

Monty, Darrell, Clay, Patricia, and Bruce Jr.



Preface

I remember clearly sitting in the doctor's office and hearing her tell me that my little boy could not hear anything, that he was deaf. I also remember hearing her say that she could do nothing to help him. This was a great shock to me, and it made me very angry. How could she be so cruel, to interfere with the happy life my husband and three handsome little boys led? Monty was three, Darrell was two, and Clay was only fourteen months old. Clay was a healthy looking baby. He had a round face and very alert green eyes and a reddish curl of hair on the top of his head. He was an adorable baby. They were all very handsome little boys. Now this doctor was telling me that Clay was deaf. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I had read about it happening to other people, but not to me.

Clay's deafness was invisible, and I knew nothing about his silent world. I imagined it was like living in a large glass bubble, seeing everything and hearing nothing. I felt like he lived in one world and I lived in another.

From that point on, instead of being resentful, I realized that I must study his every movement in order to try and understand what each meant. I had to face reality, because Clay's deafness was mine to conquer with much strength and courage. I prayed to God to please show me the way. I knew nothing of this deaf world and it scared me.

Between Two Worlds

Dvora Shurman



Preface

I was part of my deaf parents, their ears, their voice to the hearing world, Mother and me sharing the task of being the mother.

This book is a double helix, around the core of deafness and society, and my own duality in the deaf and hearing worlds. Elements wind together:

- within the community of my deaf parents,
- in the society of people who can hear,
- and my split life inside and outside those worlds.

Daughter of Deaf Parents without Signing?

Language is not only spoken or written words, but incorporates the entire body, through the mind, beyond the limits of words.

More important than any physical handicap was societal perception of deaf people. Mother forbade me to use sign language, since her teachers at the school for the deaf told her that signing was only for people who were born deaf. But sign language, expressed with intelligence, wit, and thematic and cultural integrity, has the power to do what any art aspires to do: affect people's attitudes. Sign language is deep, and it's natural; it involves not only the left brain's logical mind but also the spatial perceptions of the intuitive right brain.

But Mother did not use sign language with me. Since she had no language before the age of five, her brain was not configured for "grammar," but it was open to signing, and to spatial perceptions.

My hands were locked. Yet, watching my parents, body language and deep connections developed.

In these stories I journey back into memories. Like the infant in King Solomon's dream, the struggle between Mother and her sister Ella pulled me in two parallel lives, with two mothers. I perceived my dichotomy, not being a self but rather a messenger. I found healing for myself, as someone with Memory.

Deafness as Social Handicap, and Shame

In journaling, using both storytelling and movement, stories came alive and revised themselves! I reentered memories, resolved conflicts, by giving voices—and “listening”—to other people. I pried stories out of memories, then reconsidered them with amazement and new understanding. I also recognized shame—I had been taught to be ashamed of my deaf parents.

Using dreamlike journaling, I unfolded the layers of myself. Unhappy episodes became more-than-personal facets of a broad human drama. I reconsidered Mother, her disappointments, frustrations, anger, and anxieties. In imagined dialogue my father “told me” he loved me. Out of depths of understanding my father's spirit informs my life, enthusiasm, and ability to rise as a phoenix from my mother's misery.

Then I discovered Father Antonio Provolo, the Italian priest responsible for taking away sign language from deaf children—from my parents and from me.

Telling these stories I drew understanding from them, coming to celebrate that I am my deaf parents' daughter. May this book inspire my readers toward a similar understanding.