

# Preface

Alexandrine is a beautiful name.

It was the name of my godmother, my father's mother. As was the custom then in Catholic Rhineland, I should have been named after her. But my parents, Wilhelm and Maria, who were born deaf, found it difficult to say and lipread *Alexandrine*, and so my father gave me the same name as my mother.

My parents subscribed to a daily paper. Every morning, my father put me on his knee, and in his incomprehensible, but to me so familiar, voice he taught me the letters of the alphabet from the paper. When I started school at the age of six, I was already able to read.

The exceptional situation of my parents, and of myself, caused me to ask early for the why and how. I wanted to know the story of their lives—where they had been before I was born, and who they had been without me. And, I wanted to write it all down.

I read about “deaf-mutes,” as deaf people were called in their time. People without speech and hearing have always been seen as strange and mysterious. In so called primitive as well as in advanced cultures they were regarded as condemned by the Gods, as creatures living under the curse of invisible, demonic forces. Sometimes they were killed, but in some cultures, they were revered as beings with magical powers.

In European antiquity, Greek philosophers discussed the phenomenon of deaf-and-dumbness and assumed that a person without hearing could not think. Plato granted deaf people a certain amount of intelligence because they were able to communicate with gestures, but Aristotle decided that people without hearing could not be educated. The Church Fathers of the Christian Middle Ages saw deaf people as monstrosities from Hell. To teach them speech, they thought, was impossible and, worse, presumptuous to divine intention. St. Augustine proclaimed that “the deaf-and-dumb

from birth can never receive the gift of Faith, as Faith arises from the spoken word, from sermons, from what is heard." When my parents went to school, attendance was not compulsory for deaf children; it did not become so until 1911. Despite this, there were several schools for them around the country. The first school was founded in 1778, in Leipzig, by Samuel Heinicke, who was a strong advocate of the oral method. The school in Aachen opened in the 1830s. Without the help of their teachers, my parents would have remained speechless all their lives. They talked to me in their laboriously acquired speech, which I had no problem understanding. They, in turn, read from my lips what I told them soundlessly, while also reading my signs and facial expressions. We always signed and "spoke" with each other. My parents could never do without these.

I grew up among deaf people because my parents had deaf siblings and many deaf friends. They were part of my family; I felt at home among them, but also lonely. I found release and happiness in reading and writing, in the great gift of language.

Again and again I pleaded with my mother. "Mama, please, you tell me about your life! I want to write down!" I placed paper and pencil in her reach, so that she could jot down bits of memories as they came to her. Initially, she was reluctant. "Why write down? For whom?" she would tell me. "I poor, deaf-and-dumb, Papa too. People not interested!" The notebooks and readers from her years at the Institute for the Deaf in the town of Aachen, which she had kept diligently over the years, now turned out to be of great help in my undertaking.

I also asked my father to tell me about his childhood and adolescent years. How had they lived without me, without the daughter who, from early on, had been their interpreter? My parents would be amazed today if they could see with how much interest my readers follow the story of their lives!

Over the years, they did tell me about their lives, and I have written their stories here, in the way that they told me. Direct quotes are transcribed in the language they used; in other words, the way they signed to me. For this reason, the translations may not appear to be grammatically correct, though they are if one saw them signed.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks, my respect, and admiration to all the teachers of the deaf for their demanding and invaluable work.

Maria Wallisfurth, Aachen 2017

# 1

Near the young Ahr River, near the source, in the village of Freilingen, Maria Giefer was born on the fourth day of August in 1897. Freilingen, near Blankenheim, belonged to the district of Schleiden, the “poorhouse of Prussia.” The village is situated on a rise with a view all around of the forests and peaceful valleys of the Eifel mountain range with its extinct volcanoes the Hohe Acht, the Nürburg, the Aremberg, and the Michelsberg. The house she was born in is made from solid stone taken from the Freilingen Castle just across the road. The castle, an impressive structure with two corner towers, had been torn down around 1830.

Maria’s parents kept a black trunk with iron fittings in their bedroom, on which was written in block letters,

HUBERT GIEFER FREILINGEN KR. SCHLEIDEN REG. AACHEN  
RHEINLAND PREUSSEN-STEINBÜCHEL & BRO. INSURANCE LAND  
LOAN STEAMSHIP LINE AGENTS WICHITA KANSAS

In 1893, when the best wine of the century was ripening on the banks of the Moselle River, the Eifel was suffering famine due to a drought and a bad harvest. Hubert Giefer, Maria’s father, decided to leave impoverished Freilingen for America to become a rich farmer. He worked as a farm laborer in the endless wheat fields of Kansas and Michigan. For three summers, he saw only yellow stalks reaching to all horizons. Hubert earned money and saved it so he could progress in the new land. He saw where his future lay. But he could not forget Elisabeth, his sweetheart back home in the Eifel. So he returned to take her with him back to America.

But Elisabeth’s parents would not allow their daughter to move to a strange land. So far away from the village—somewhere beyond a vast ocean! Hubert had to make a choice: Elisabeth or America, and he decided



Maria's parents—Hubert and Elisabeth (née Luppertz) Giefer.

to stay. He married Elisabeth and they lived on his mother's farm. Elisabeth soon bore two daughters, Maria and Gertrud. He never forgot his dream of a wheat farm of his own in America. It only slumbered.

Hubert found it hard to stay in Freilingen. It was a place where time stood still. For centuries, the people in Freilingen and in the higher lying village of Lommersdorf had lived as diggers, coal miners, charcoal burners, or carters. The high-grade iron ore from Lommersdorf was transported by horse-drawn carts to the small steel mills in Ahrhütte, Stahlhütte, and Antweiler, where it was processed into iron bars and then sent to the arms factories in Brabant in the Netherlands and Liège in Belgium. In the forests, the charcoal burners produced charcoal for the smelting furnaces. Their kilns were ever smoking.

The people in both villages did only a little farming on the side, but by 1880 the coal pit and steel mills closed down, and poverty and need settled in. Hubert Giefer saw the narrow fields, the small gardens, and all around the forests, marshland, and moor. If he had to stay in Freilingen, he at least wanted to get out of poverty! He calculated, he planned. He also acted. Soon people were saying, *By the time Hubert Giefer gets up, he has already made money.*

## 2

Hubert and Elisabeth Giefer work from early in the morning until late at night. They till the fields and care for the animals. How fortunate that Grandmother is there to care for the children. When little Maria has not seen her for a while, she goes on a search. Maria knows every corner of the house. It is divided down the middle; the part with the front door facing west belongs to Aunt Barbara, Hubert's sister who, together with her husband Ernst, does a little farming and runs the only grocery and post office in Freilingen. Hubert and Elisabeth's entrance faces east. A small passage leads past the living room door and then widens out to the large kitchen, with its range with a chimney hood, the baking oven in the wall, and the door to the vaulted cellar.

Maria climbs up the wooden stairs to the bedroom facing the village street. Her little sister Gertrud is lying asleep in their parents' bed. The room next door is unoccupied, filled with sacks of grain and flour standing between old bits of furniture and junk. Grandmother is not to be found in there, nor in the bedroom at the back looking out onto the meadow with its apple and plum trees. Maria goes to the stables and the feedstore, but Grandmother is not there either. Next, she goes in the dim henhouse, with its tiny window veiled by cobwebs. Nothing moves. The barn is joined to the house at a right angle. A smaller door is set into the huge barn door, and Maria has to step up high to climb through it. She still cannot find Grandmother.

Maria would rather sit on the stone steps in front of the open house door. She pulls up her straight frock that reaches down to her laced-up shoes and with her heels, taps on the wide strip of flagstones in front of the house. Then, she sits in the shade, protected from the blazing heat and glare of midsummer. The sheepdog is stretched out sleepily in front of the pigsty. Swallows swoop across the yard with a manure heap in the middle.

In the open shed, hens perch on the wagon shaft and the plow and harrow or scratch around on the hard-trodden ground. All is peaceful. The people from the village are out harvesting. Nobody passes by on the village street that curves around the Giefers' farm.

Finally, Grandmother comes. The dog wags its tail and blinks. The hens leisurely get out of the way. Maria stands up quickly and runs toward Grandmother, arms opened wide. Her hair hangs tousled around her happy face. Her eyes are bright. Her face and hands are dirty. As she thrusts her head into Grandmother's apron, heavy muffled sounds come out of her throat. Grandmother is here again! Grandmother is something soft, something warm, something good, like fresh, fragrant bread, like sweet milk straight from the bucket, like the soft fur of the big dog and the secureness of the stables when the animals are at home, like the delicious smell in the kitchen when you are hungry. Grandmother is comfort, the nest, the home.

At first, Grandmother, Hubert and Elisabeth, the neighbors, and the children who play with Maria were puzzled, surprised; then they became concerned. They worried, they watched the child. Now, the people of Freilingen have begun to talk—"What misfortune! Hubert Giefer's firstborn cannot hear or speak. She is deaf and dumb!" Terrible suspicions have been confirmed. The nearest doctor lives in Blankenheim. He costs money. Nobody has time to take Maria to the doctor, and she is not actually ill. One just has to accept things as they are.

Little Maria is quite unaware of her misfortune. In the mornings she lies in the big bed. Grandmother smiles at her, lifts her out, and gets her dressed. Downstairs in the living room there is bread, sometimes with cream, curd, or even butter, and a cup of milk. While Grandmother peels potatoes, Maria sits beside her on the bench in front of the house in the morning sun, handing her brown potatoes from the basket, dropping the peeled ones to soak in a bucket of water. When Grandmother moves her mouth, Maria looks around. She sees people who also move their lips. They often do it for a long time. Even when men or women pass by on the street, Grandmother moves her mouth.

It's nice when the other children take her by the hand and toddle off with her. Such fun to romp around with the others, and she only needs to watch and see what they do—climb; throw things; build little houses

out of stones, leaves, and twigs; pick up a stick when the two cows have to be led to pasture; and try to sweep dirt onto the manure heap with a brushwood broom.

In the evening, after milking time, Mother will bring a bucket of milk into the house. Maria only has to show her with tiny hands that she wants a drink. Then, Mother gives her the ladle of sweet milk—how good it tastes, so fresh and warm!

Maria learns she always has to watch! When Grandmother waves her hand and puts her finger to her open mouth, as if she wants to put something into it, Maria nods her head yes or no. Often, when Maria runs over to Grandmother and presses her hand on her throat, Grandmother looks at her. Maria does not know that she is making sounds. She points her finger at her mouth, and Grandmother cuts her a large slice of bread and gives it to her.

Maria watches everything around her. Her experiences form themselves into pictures and movements in her mind. She stores everything that happens repeatedly. She knows what is not allowed: getting under Father's feet, chasing the hens, following Mother all the time. Sometimes Mother picks her up and holds her little head to her face. That is what Maria really likes, and she would like to stay in Mother's arms. But Mother has to work.

# 3

Summer is a good time.

Mother takes Maria by the hand, and in the other hand she holds a knotted scarf filled with slices of bread, along with a jug of coffee and the sickle. Mother is wearing a long dress reaching to her ankles, a large apron, black woolen stockings, and stout lace-up shoes. Her dark hair is covered by a white cloth tied in a knot at the back. Father walks beside her, the scythe over his shoulder. A hollow cow's horn hangs from the leather strap around his waist. Within this sheath is the whetstone. He has clapped an old straw hat on top of his reddish blond hair. The wide rim casts a shadow on his face.

Men and women carrying scythes, sickles, and knotted scarf pouches walk along the village street and spread out onto their fields. Wagons are underway. The road leads down into the valley. At Grindel Creek, Father bends down and fills the horn with water. The three climb to the top of the hill called Am Zollstock, where the wayside cross stands and the view is open and wide. They walk along a rutted path that branches off from the main road and come to the field where Father wants to work that day. Mother sits down on the edge of the ditch with Maria next to her, and Father sharpens the scythe. It is just past noon. Big bushes of chamomile give off their scent. The heat crackles through the field. Father begins to reap the field with broad swings of the scythe.

Mother stands up and gestures to Maria with her hand to stay sitting. The child nods. Her eyes follow Mother who has taken the sickle and, with swift movements, gathers up and rolls out the cut stalks. She takes a handful of stalks out of the loose sheaves and winds them around each sheaf like a ribbon. Then, quick as a flash, she twists the two ends together and sticks them into the sheaf.



Maria already knows what will come next—Mother will build a shady little house. She takes six sheaves, props them up against each other and waves to the little girl. Pointing to the bundle with the bread, she makes the gesture for carrying. Maria nods. With both hands, she grasps the cloth, carries it in front of herself, and sets it down to go and fetch the jug of coffee. Mother stows the things inside the shock of sheaves. Inside the shock, in the shade, she puts two more sheaves. She lays her head on her folded hands. Maria understands: *sleep*.

Mother starts her work in the sun, her back bent deeply. Father is almost at the other end of the field. The freshly cut stubble stands up straight. Lots of little stones lie in-between. The sheaves lie across the field, all pointing in the same direction. Only in the evening, when the field has been reaped, will Father and Mother put up the shocks.

Maria feels good. Beetles scuttle around and grasshoppers leap with their long, angular legs. A flock of earth-colored partridges flies past her. Maria crawls into her little house of sheaves so that the wandering sun cannot find her. She pulls her frock right down to her high-topped shoes. That way the stubble and thistles can't scratch her legs. There is a smell of bread and coffee and straw.

Maria can't keep her eyes open. Her hands sink down her side and open. When she wakes up, there is no more to be seen of the waving field of grain. The sun is sitting low in the sky, casting long shadows. She eats the food her parents have left for her and waits until all of the sheaves have been set up. For that, the farmers put up one sheaf in the middle and four additional ones around it. That is a *Kasten* (a shock of sheaves), as the Freilingers say. In windy weather, they put up nine sheaves to form a *Kasten*, making it more stable.

On the way home, Maria sits on Father's shoulders and Mother carries the scythe. From all directions the people are coming home. Long clouds of dust rise up behind the swaying hay carts. Down below at Grindel Creek, children are watering the cows they have brought down from the pastures.

Maria senses a slight trembling in Father's throat around which her hands are clasped. Then she knows Father is moving his mouth now. Sometimes she can also feel him laughing. Then Father's back moves. Maria looks, and feels, and is happy.

# 4

Although Maria has grown quite a bit after a few years, all she can see when she looks through the living-room window is the snow on the barn roof. She would have to push a chair to one of the windows high up in the thick wall to see the snow-covered road. The sun is shining and the room is bright. Grandmother comes stamping through the door with snow still on her shoes, which quickly melts into little puddles. From her sturdy apron she tips oak and fir logs into the basket behind the big iron stove. Maria feels the floor, the bench, and the table shake. With a hook Grandmother opens the stove door and throws wood into the red glow. Maria sees the flames licking. Her sister Gertrud is playing with their little brother Willi, who is crawling on the floor and ruffling the dog's coat. In a wicker basket on the long bench lies her youngest brother. He tries again and again to raise his head. He is called Nikolaus, later nicknamed Klöss. Only Maria will call him Nikolaus later.

Maria picks up her doll from the windowsill. She has made it herself from a piece of cloth. She wrapped the cloth around her fist, tied a strip around her wrist, and then pulled her hand out. She stuffed another piece of cloth inside the pouch, pulled the strip tight, and made a doll's head. With needle and thread she sewed on eyes, a nose, and a mouth. The loose ends of the cloth are the arms and legs. She lays her doll in the wicker basket next to her baby brother.

Grandmother brings in potatoes, beans, and some bacon. Quickly Maria runs to the door to close it. The cold has to stay outside. Maria opens the largest of the small oven doors so that Grandmother can place the bowls in the small oven chamber to keep warm. All at once there is an appetizing smell in the room and Maria hurries to clear the table. Grandmother wipes it clean and Maria goes with her to the cupboard in the hallway.

Grandmother hands Maria the plates with the cutlery on top. Maria sets the table.

She is suddenly very hungry. She goes to look for her parents. In the yard a path to the barn has been shoveled clear; the manure heap has disappeared under the snow except for the dung from yesterday and this morning. The barn door is wide open and Father and Mother are standing opposite each other threshing. Rye sheaves lie spread out in two rows, the ears pointing inwards. Again and again her parents raise the smooth handle of the threshing flail and drop the swingle down on the ears rhythmically, two-strokes. Father has made the flail himself on the chopping bench. Hubert and Elisabeth's faces are red from exertion. When they glance toward Maria without interrupting their work, the child points her finger to her opened mouth: *Time to eat!* Mother nods her head. The parents turn the sheaves over and carry on threshing until the ears are empty. Then they shake the rye straw thoroughly so that all the grains fall out and gather it into a corner of the barn. Later they will use it to bind the shorter sheaves of wheat, barley, and oats.

Mother stretches herself. Her back aches. Father sweeps the grain and chaff into a pile. Dust swirls up. Hens run between his legs and peck greedily. Mother comes out into the snow, wearily takes off her headscarf and shakes it out. Father also shakes his jacket. They go into the house with Maria. They all sit down at the long table and make the sign of the cross. Willi, who is a toddler, sits on Mother's lap. Father, Mother, and Grandmother move their lips very quickly for a long time while Maria watches them attentively, then they cross themselves again and begin to eat. Father insists on order at table, as the children well know. They sit quietly without fidgeting or talking. Maria props her feet up on the dog, who is lying under the table with his head on his paws. After giving thanks, Maria helps Grandmother with the dishes and then she sees to Gertrud, who has pushed a chair up against the wall to look for her cap amongst the hanging trousers, jackets, scarves, aprons, and coats that all smell of the barn and stables. Mother swaddles little Nikolaus and feeds him. Maria likes watching her. Soon, Mother goes back to her work. Maria fetches the birch broom and sweeps the bits of straw, wood, and stable muck out of the room into the yard. She wraps herself in her woolen scarf and steps outside to lean against one of the half-round stones that protect the barn



The Giefer farm in Freilingen.

doors from being rammed by carts. Children from the neighborhood are also watching Father's new winnowing machine in the barn.

Father shovels the threshed grain into the uppermost of three sieves along with the debris, chaff, and ears. Mother, with a crank, turns an axle to which four blades are fixed. They make so much wind that everything lighter than the grain is blown away. At the same time the sieves shake and tilt forward, so the grains become cleaner and cleaner as they drop down through the sieves.

Maria runs over to Mother and wants to help, but Father sends her back with a stern look. Maria dashes back to her stone; she doesn't want to make Father cross. Maria's cousin takes her by the hand and together they run around the house to Aunt Barbara's big living room. The cat is sitting on the bench around the tiled stove, licking its coat. Maria always enjoys being at Aunt Barbara's. It's friendlier and cozier than at home. Her aunt always has a treat for Maria—raisins, dried fruit, sometimes even an egg or a slice of white bread with butter.

Aunt Barbara goes out into the passage where a barrel of sugar beet syrup stands for sale. In the barrel next to it there are salted herrings. The oozing juice has already corroded the colors of the stone floor. Maria sees that the postman has come. He comes to the village every other day and has a long walk up from Ahrhütte via Lommersdorf in the west. He lets Aunt Barbara know when goods for her shop have arrived in Blankenheim-Wald, a small, nearby village. Then Mr. Dreimüller, from Lommersdorf, picks up the goods with his horse and cart. Maria sees the postman take letters out of his shoulder bag and hand them to Aunt Barbara, who gives him other letters to take away with him. He smiles at Maria, moves his lips, and leaves. Aunt Barbara brings the mail into the shop and puts the letters on the mail table next to the rubberstamps. In the shop, shiny cow chains, ropes, and bridles hang from the walls. A sack full of salt sits on the floor. Copper kettles gleam, buckets are stacked one inside the other. Cans of petroleum stand in the corner. There are petroleum lamps with flashing mirrors, stable lanterns, striped apron cloth, thick underwear, and yellow linen. Boxes hold spools of yarn, cards of thread, needles, writing paper, and nails. Sugarloaves are piled on the windowsills. Eggs that have been brought by farmers' wives to exchange for goods they have bought, lie in willow baskets. Nobody pays with money. Once a week a carter comes from town to fetch the eggs. Aunt Barbara gets money in return.

Scales with two shiny brass trays sit on the counter. Whatever Aunt Barbara puts items she wants to weigh in the tray on one side of the scales, and on the other side she puts brass weights, large or small ones. The pointer in the middle of the ornate iron bow dances to and fro, and Aunt Barbara has to take away goods or add a bit until the pointer stands straight up. Grasping the sides of the table with both hands, Maria rests her chin on the table top and eagerly watches the wavering pointer. She is delighted when the trays balance. But Aunt Barbara hears only incomprehensible sounds. For a moment, the child sees her aunt's eyes turn sad, then Aunt Barbara puts her hand into a wooden box and passes Maria a handful of raisins. *How terrible!* thinks Aunt Barbara, *and little Gertrud can't hear either!*

# 5

Village life is set by the seasons and by the weather. The children build snowmen and get frosty hands. Snow melts, then spring comes with fresh green. Summer smells of hay, and harvesting is hard work. Then apples, blackberries, and hazelnuts will ripen. And finally, snow falls once more. Everything has its set order. Everyone has to work in order to eat, and the earth and the beasts are there for the people.

Life carries on around Maria in its customary rhythm. She has no idea that everything has a name. She does not know that her village is called Freilingen and that she goes to church in Lommersdorf. When the street is swept in the evening, and the shoes are cleaned, greased with oil and lined up in a row, Maria knows that the next morning Grandmother and Mother will wear a good dress and a dark, fringed headscarf. Father will put on a clean shirt, a proper pair of trousers, and a jacket. In groups and in rows the villagers of Freilingen make their way to Lommersdorf, to the white parish church there with its Romanesque steeple. They carry thick prayer books with them. In the afternoon, when they again make their way back home, they have rosaries wrapped around their hands.

Maria sees pictures and thinks in pictures. She observes all movements, sees colors, and has a nose with a sense of smell she can rely on. She trusts in everything in her small world. Everywhere is safety.

Maria's home is in the lower part of the village near the chapel, whose history dates back to the Middle Ages. Opposite the chapel is the splendid, ancient Gilles Farm, one of the largest farms in Freilingen. All along the rising village street are the little farmhouses, close to each other, separated only by the low, dark stables and open yards around manure heaps. Animal urine and sewage run down the street into the gutters. Some of the houses are so old that their doors and windows have become crooked in the half-timbered framework. Large patches of yellow loam and interlaced branches

are visible beneath the plaster. The mossy roofs have sagged. The windows of the houses built during the French occupation in the early 1800s are less than two feet square in order to avoid the window tax imposed at that time. The school is in the middle of the village. It is a stone building with large windows. The schoolmaster's wife has hung homemade curtains in the windows of their rooms above the one and only classroom. Maria gazes at them in wonder because no one else in Freilingen has curtains or shades in their windows. Maria rarely goes to the upper village, only when her parents take her along on a cart to the fields in the direction of Reetz, a village to the west, beyond the woods and heath.

Maria's deaf sister Gertrud lies buried among age-old stone crosses in the old churchyard in Lommersdorf. Maria can hardly remember her anymore. Weeds are growing on the small grave, as they are on most of the graves. *Who has the time to care for them?* she wonders.

The stone parish house stands behind the tall churchyard trees. One day, Hubert and Elisabeth Giefer go to see the priest to talk about their deaf and mute child Maria. She is now seven years old. How glad Elisabeth is that her husband wants to send Maria to a school! Without his consent in this paternalistic society, this would be impossible. His will alone counts. When "paternal authority" is officially laid down, a mother has no rights at all. Hubert is not required to send his deaf child to school; there is no law forcing him. He would even save money and have more help if he kept Maria at home. The priest promises to make inquiries.

Maria is a great help to her mother and grandmother around the house. She helps five-year-old Willi into his knee breeches and buttons the flap at the back. She pulls three-year-old Klöss's frock on, which he wears because he is not yet big enough to wear trousers. She feeds her baby sister Christina who will soon be two years old. Maria carries her in her arms and, if the neighbors come, she goes up to them, nudges them, and shows them her little sister. The neighbors laugh, nod their heads, pat the little girl or clap their hands together, and move their mouths. This delights Maria. Christina is a placid child with curly chestnut brown hair. Like Maria, she cannot hear. Their brothers, however, charge round like all the village boys, scrapping, shouting, running, chasing each other, and filling the house and yard with life.

Maria has learned to look at people's mouths. Grandmother always

makes the same movement with her mouth when she points to Father, as does Mother. They do it for a lot of people and things, for everything has a distinct movement of the mouth that is repeated again and again. Maria is observant, and gradually she grasps the meaning and takes exact notice of everything. Her visual mind begins to connect the persons and things with the shapes the grownups make with their lips. When she thinks of Father or Mother, she also will see in her mind the mouth movements the others make to refer to them.

When Grandmother looks at Maria and her mouth forms the word *mother*, Maria knows what she means, runs off quickly, looks for Mother, tugs at her dress and indicates with her finger that Mother is to come to Grandmother. Maria always tries to imitate the lip movements. Over time, she has learned to press in the back of her throat and breathe out at the same time. When she feels slight vibrations in her head, the people near her look at her face. Even those further away, so far that they are out of reach, notice her when she does this; one just has to push in the throat a bit harder.

More and more often, and more and more distinctly, she calls "Father" and "Mother." Strangers do not understand her when she does this, but her family does. She cannot pronounce "er" because she cannot read it on other people's mouths; instead she ends the words with "eh," because that is what she sees. Only her parents, brothers, Grandmother, and Aunt Barbara understand her two spoken words. Maria also can point with her hands, and with a nodding or shaking of her head she can tell them yes or no.