

A person is walking away from the viewer on a path that leads into a vast, hazy, orange-toned landscape. The person is small and dark against the bright, misty background. The overall mood is one of solitude and journey.

*Journey
Beyond
Silence...*

Margarita Adams

JOURNEY BEYOND SILENCE

Translated by: Elisa Castañeda
Edited by: Marian Prokop

Title in Spanish:
VIAJE MAS ALLA DEL SILENCIO

JOURNEY BEYOND SILENCE
Copyright 2004 Margarita G. Adams - FSH

All rights have been reserved, including the right to copy
all or part of this book.

PRINTED IN MEXICO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	v
From the author	vii
Recognition.....	ix
Chapter 1 Controversy between the oral method and sign language.....	1
Chapter 2 My story	5
Chapter 3 Interviews.....	51
Chapter 4 Clients.....	93
Chapter 5 Experiences.....	111
Chapter 6 Words of wisdom when meeting a deaf person.....	125
Chapter 7 Where do we go from here?.....	127

PROLOGUE

Deaf Mexicans, especially, in Mexico, tend to be overlooked in the educational system. Without public support for the education of deaf children, the task is left to a few private institutions and teachers.

Yet we find success stories of deaf Hispanics in all walks of life. They have overcome obstacles to educate and better themselves.

Seeing these stories in writing will serve as an inspiration as well as draw attention to how crucial it is to create opportunities for the deaf to learn to communicate.

FROM THE AUTHOR

My name is Margarita Adams. I was born deaf to a big family in Mexico City. We are ten brothers and sisters, six hearing and four deaf. My parents are hearing, and they use home signs and gestures to communicate with their deaf children. I learned Mexican Sign language (MSL) from my deaf brothers and sister.

Sign language communication is not universal. Each country has its own sign language. When I moved to the United States, I learned American Sign Language (ASL). I am currently living in San Diego, California. I have many years of experience as an intermediary interpreter between Mexican and American Sign Language. I offer my services to institutions, courts, schools, hospitals and I give MSL workshops all over the United States.

Despite the enormous difficulties that we experience, much still remains to be done, and we need to realize the things that we gain. The road is wide and long but has open doors. This challenge will allow us to continue looking for dignity in the lives of deaf people.

With that in mind, let's allow this book to support the "Journey Beyond Silence."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

From the bottom of my heart and my deepest inner spirit, I want to express my true feelings of great appreciation, and with signs that are louder than words, I say, **“THANK YOU VERY MUCH.”**

I want to thank all the people who were involved in writing this book and generously gave their time and their wonderful spirit to benefit Fundación de Sordos Hispanos (FSH). I especially thank my beloved husband, Mike Adams, a very special person in my life. He has generously given from his heart and made the production of this book possible and I could not have done it without his support. He is also responsible for designing and building my office, including the furniture, which I find indispensable for working on my projects.

The following people with compassionate hearts also want to see a better life and successful future for deaf people.

May God bless Sharon R. Axe, Valentin Popov, and Elisa Castañeda, Marian Prokop and Dawn Sign Press Company.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE ORAL METHOD

As a way to enter the topic, I would like to start by sharing one of my experiences with people who were in favor of the oral method for teaching the deaf.

I remember a time when I visited a school for the deaf and hard-of-hearing with some friends of mine. We observed that all the students used different styles of communication. Some were able to read and write Spanish, others were very oral and knew only a few signs, and the rest knew Mexican Sign Language (MSL) and home signs. All the teachers were volunteers and knew MSL, but they had a strong philosophy of using an oral teaching approach referred to as Total Communication (TC) in which oral methods – speech-reading and voice training are used together with MSL.

After the class was over, we all went to a social place to chat with the teachers and students. One person brought up a hot topic of debate: whether MSL should follow Spanish word order. As the discussion became more intense, the teachers stopped signing and began talking as they continued to argue.

The other deaf and I started to fall behind. I asked some of the others if they could lipread what the teachers were saying. They told me that they could, but I was very skeptical. The teachers were talking so fast and furious that I could not imagine how they could keep up. Lipreading is a risky venture. In fact, even the most talented speech-readers are only able to recognize approximately 30% of

what is seen on the lips. The remaining 70% of the message is not visible because it is produced inside the throat.

I was soon totally lost as to what they were saying. That is when I recalled that forty years before, my deaf brothers and deaf sister warned me that something like this might happen if I were ever in a mixed group of deaf, oral deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing. I sat there in silence for a few hours without a clue as to what was going on.

This experience made a big impact on my view of the oral approach in teaching the deaf. The natural language for deaf people is sign language, whether it is MSL in Mexico, or American Sign Language (ASL) in the U.S. and parts of Canada.

In my opinion, the time that is spent in oral training could be much better spent in teaching sign language. Oral methods involve tedious hours of vocalization drills and lipreading training that have historically produced very poor success rates.

The end result of this form of education is that the deaf person does not have fluency in either the spoken or the signed language. For this reason, communication with people who are not fluent in MSL or ASL has always been a frustrating endeavor for me.

I have at times needed to communicate with hearing people. The only mode I had available to me was writing in Spanish or English, but this takes time, a longer time than just using a spoken language or a sign language. Writing back-and-forth is cumbersome and that makes for very limited content and often results in misunderstandings.

In my opinion, the oral method produces a communication barrier between deaf people and hearing people, because deaf people can never learn to speak as well as a hearing person and will never be able to truly master lipreading. There are some deaf people that can do it well, but they are the minority.

Another hinderance to the advancement of sign language, in my opinion, is that most parents with deaf children want to raise them as much as possible like hearing children.

The parents pretend that their child is “normal” and do not accept sign language as the natural language of deaf people because they are afraid that their child will look “different” than the other children. They hold onto the hope that their child will one day learn to speak. These children go through a very frustrating process that can never result in fluent speech.

My family was unique in that they were very supportive of sign language. They always encouraged me to socialize with other deaf people who used sign languages such as MSL and ASL. My parents wanted me to have the freedom to communicate and avoid the frustration of always struggling to understand what others were trying to tell me. They believed that in order for me to find success and happiness in life, I had to have a language that I could use naturally, a sign language: MSL.

It has been over 40 years since I first learned that there were different views about sign language than those I experienced with my family. I had hoped that by now, society would have changed its views about deafness. Our society still thinks we have the problem and should be more like them. But we have solved the problem of communication by developing sign language.

Unfortunately, the controversy still persists about which is better: teaching children in the oral method or teaching them sign language. For me there is only one choice, sign language, but I can’t forget that all children are not the same. My hope is that in the future it will be left up to each deaf child to decide whether they want to learn the oral method or sign language or both.

CHAPTER 2 MY STORY

My name is Margarita Adams. On March 21, 1955 I was born, profoundly deaf, to a large family in a small Mexican farming village called Santa Cruz, in the county of Ayotusco. During my childhood, I faced the same obstacles as all the other deaf Mexican children of my generation, except I was fortunate enough to have three older deaf siblings who knew and used Mexican Sign Language (MSL).



My parents were very proud of their big family with 10 children. I am in the middle with my hands on my brother Luis' shoulders.



My father's parents whom I never met. My father has a strong resemblance to my grandfather. They were born in Spain.

Both of my parents grew up in Santa Cruz, Mexico but their upbringing was quite different. My father, Espiridión Garcia Gutierrez Moreno, came from a very large and poor family, with a grand total of thirty-three children. He was a hearing person. Several of my aunts and uncles were deaf; they didn't have any education and only knew home signs and gestures.



I used to look like my grandmother (to my right). She had a vision problem. It was very difficult to communicate with her because she could not see well.

My mother, Margarita Muciño de García, was hearing, but she had one great-aunt who was deaf and had no education. Her family was just the opposite from my father's. She had two brothers and one sister and the family was quite wealthy.



My father was 22 years old and my mother was 16 years old. They had a civil not a church wedding. My mother wore part of her communion clothes and father used tuxedo to make it look like a real church wedding. I am very proud of them. They were married over 70 years. My father passed away in 2001.

In 1932, my father had fallen in love with my mother and wanted to marry her, but her parents did not approve, because she was too young, and most likely also because he was from a lower class. Another very interesting fact was that they were, in reality, second cousins.

So my father devised a plan; he asked one of his sisters to lure my mother away from her house. When they were far enough away, he galloped over to her and whisked her away on horseback. Since he was twenty-two and she was only sixteen, today it could have been called a kidnapping. But, no matter how it actually happened, my father's plan succeeded and the two of them eloped. Not long after my parents were married, they began to have children. The first one born was my brother Francisco. He was also the first one to be born profoundly deaf.

Four deaf children in the school

When Francisco was old enough to attend school, my uncle Baldemiro García began to encourage my parents to send him to the National School for Deafmutes, in Mexico City. At first my father refused, but my mother was very much in favor of the idea, despite the fact that he would have to stay in a government sponsored boarding house, during the week.

She secretly gave my uncle permission to take Francisco to Mexico City. When my father found out about the plan, he was furious. But my mother was stubborn and stood firm in her decision. At the end of his first week, my uncle picked Francisco up from the school and brought him home.

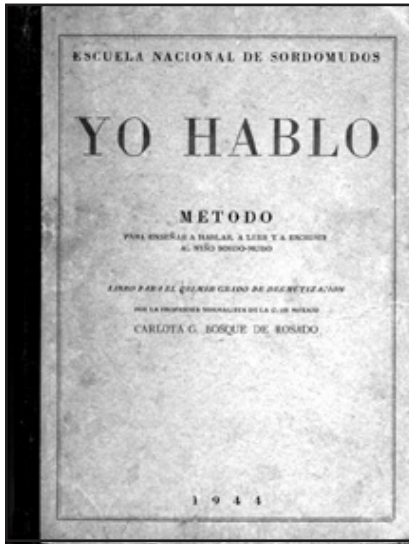
It was a magical moment when Francisco uttered his first words, “Mamá and Papá.” Both of my parents began to shed tears of joy. My father was especially happy because he had long ago given up any hope of ever hearing his deaf children speak. Since this was such a miraculous achievement to him, he decided to show off his son’s new ability to all his friends, neighbors, and other relatives. Because of the wonderful success with Francisco, my father changed his mind and allowed my brother, Juan, to join Francisco at the school. My sister Blanca would soon join.

The trip from our house in Santa Cruz to the National School for Deafmutes in Mexico City took about three hours. My brothers had to commute back and forth every weekend. So, eventually my parents decided to move the whole family to Mexico City. They wanted to be closer to the school and make the travel easier for my brothers. We moved into an apartment that was only about a half-hour car drive, or a one-and-a-half hour ride by bus and trolley from the school.



In 1961, when I was 6 years old, I was admitted to the National School for Deafmutes. I am standing in the second line, the seventh from the left.

During the time that we lived in Mexico City, while Francisco, Juan, and Blanca attended the National School for Deafmutes, the teachers and the educational curriculum was still quite good. Unfortunately, by the time I began attending the school in 1961, all three of them had already graduated and things had already begun to take a turn for the worst.



This was one of the very first books I ever owned. Although it is no longer used, I am fortunate to have held on to it for over 40 years.

When I was 6 years old, I saw a booklet with colorful drawings. Since then, I kept this book that belonged to my older brother, Francisco.



Since I was unable to read or write, looking at the beautiful pictures helped me to have a clearer understanding of the meaning. This book is very appropriate for oral speech therapy.

When I began attending classes at the National School for Deafmutes, there were very few good teachers still teaching, and the educational curriculum was in decline. Many of the teachers that were fluent in MSL were gone, as was the pro-MSL principle, Luis Gomez.

During my time at the National School, most of the teachers were very poor signers. Their ability to communicate with deaf students was minimal. As a result, they had trouble keeping order in their classrooms. They also tended to talk a lot among themselves and neglected the needs of their deaf students, including me.

My impression was that they thought that deaf children were incapable of learning. Without proper guidance, it was no wonder that my classmates were as unruly, undisciplined, and acted like “wild burros.” Without an effective means of communication, the teachers and the curriculum had little hope of making progress with the deaf students.

Since the teachers, in my opinion, did not have a good attitude about their jobs or our potential, they tended to give us the same lesson repeatedly. Also, there was a shortage of books and materials. The teachers would write the lesson on the board, and it would usually be something really basic like just the alphabet. They most likely did this to make their jobs easier, because they did not have to prepare anything in advance. But the problem for us was that it was so simple that we became bored very quickly. They tried to keep us busy, but we were all easily distracted from our lessons. This educational environment was not productive and of little benefit because there was nothing new to learn.

The classes were so boring that I finally decided to complain to the teachers. But they were less than sympathetic and got upset with me because I could speak out for myself. They labeled me as a troublemaker since I could use MSL (Mexican Sign Language) to communicate and express my feelings and thoughts.

The other students noticed my courage in speaking out against the teachers and began to see me as their leader.

Soon I had all the students on my side and I began to teach them MSL because they only knew home signs.

One day, during my early school years, I remember sharing a very special moment with my mother when I was about seven or eight years old. We were walking down a street holding hands. I glanced up at her and noticed that she was silently crying. I wondered why she was sobbing, so I asked her, “Mama. Why are you crying?” She told me that she was crying because she worried about my future. I reassured her by telling her, “Mama, please don’t cry for me. I’m happy to be deaf because I can communicate in MSL with my deaf brothers and sister.” My mama looked down at me, wiped her tears, and began to smile. I think she was pleased to hear that I was happy.

Another advantage I enjoyed, besides having two brothers and a sister that used MSL, was having an MSL-fluent hearing sister, Pilar. She was two years older than I, and would often interpret for me when we were in mixed company.

I learned a lot when I was with her, especially when she relayed to me what other people were saying. From Pilar’s interpreting, I learned what adults, friends and relatives were discussing. With her help, I was able to obtain a better understanding of the world around me.

Up until the time my brother Francisco got married, the two of us would ride the bus together everyday. He was still living at home, and his work was not very far from the National School for Deafmutes. We would take the bus everyday, and when we got off we would each walk to our separate destinations, he to his work, and me to my school. Then he would meet me after school, and we would ride together back home. This was a nice arrangement until the day he was married and he moved out of the house.

We would then no longer take the bus together. This worried my mother very much, because it meant that I, her eight-year-old daughter, would have to ride the bus alone. She recalled that when we were living in Santa Cruz, before we moved to Mexico City, Francisco, Juan and Blanca stayed in a boarding home during the week.

She decided to find a boarding home for me to stay during the week, so I wouldn't have to ride the bus alone. After getting a referral from my school she Blanca, and Francisco, and another brother, to take me to the place the school had suggested.

We arrived at the address and looked at the building. It was old and rickety, and looked like it was going to collapse. I was so scared that I held my sister's hand. We walked together into the building and up the dark stairs. There were no lights.

With my brother and sister standing beside me, we ran the doorbell and waited. I began to feel even more uncomfortable when the lady of the house opened the door, because she knew only very basic MSL. To make matters even worse, she didn't look Mexican. She was really tall and her skin was very white. That's when I realized that this woman was going to be the caretaker. She also had two maids working for her, which I thought was very odd because very few people in that area were wealthy enough to afford hired help. She showed me the tiny bedroom that I was to share with seven other girls.

My brother and sister left, and I started crying because I missed my family already. I kept thinking about how I loved them and wanted to be with them.

I had a hard time getting along with my new caretaker. A couple times a week she would have all of the kids take a shower. We had to get up early, eight girls between seven and eleven, and stand in line and wait our turn. The first time we did this, I received a big surprise. The water was ice cold. I was so mad that I told the caretaker, "I'll tell my parents that you're making us shower with cold water." She became so angry that she punished me by keeping me out of school for a day and not allowing me to eat all day.

The next time we had to shower, I refused again and told her I would tell my parents and all the teachers at the school, unless she turned on the heater so we could have warm water. I knew it was not right to make us children shower with cold water, and I was not afraid to tell her. The

other kids did not complain and remained silent because their language skills were very poor. I was different because I was fluent in MSL and had a family that was also fluent in MSL.

I kept complaining until she finally realized that I could create problems for her. She turned the gas on for the water heater, and from then on, we all had warm showers.

The food was another problem. On Fridays, we would have really good food, complete meals, like whole chicken pieces or beef with vegetables and rice, and even dessert, fruit, and milk. But during the week, it was a different story. We would usually have just plain oatmeal for breakfast. Dinners were often just a piece of bread, or plain cooked rice, sometimes with plain broth that had a chicken foot or head, in it.

When the parents came to pick up their kids, the caretaker served on Fridays a very nice dinner. During the week, when there were no parents, she served bad food.

It was so bad that I could not eat it. I hid it under the table and in the corner, and asked the other girls not to tell any one. My plan didn't work because the maids found the uneaten food when they were cleaning the house. I did not get punished only because they didn't know who to blame. The food never improved, and the cycle of good and bad lasted as long as I was there.

One day, after about three months at the boarding home, I saw the maid carrying some really wonderful smelling food down the hall. I was really excited because I thought that she was bringing it to us. But she turned left, instead of right, and then I knew she was going to the main dining room. I followed her so I could see for myself exactly what was going on.

Then I saw the three of them, the caretaker, her husband, and their son all sitting comfortably at their big dining room table and enjoying their nice dinner while watching TV. I stood in the doorway and stared at them in bewilderment.

I started screaming at the woman and complaining, “Why do you get all the good food, and us kids get lousy food? And you have a TV and we don’t?” The caretaker stood up in a fit of rage signed back, “Get back to your room, now!”

I signed back to her, “No. I won’t. It’s not fair!”

She began storming towards me, so I turned and fled down the hallway with her right at my heels. The other kids were watching all the action, and they waved their hands in the air, warning me, “Look out, she’s right behind you.”

Just as I turned back, she took a swing at me. Luckily, she missed and hit the wall. Then we both stopped dead in our tracks right there in the middle of the hallway and glared at each other, both of us in fits of seething rage.

I signed furiously at her, “Don’t you ever try and hit me again!” She angrily signed back to me, “I’m going to tell your parents about this!”

Then, to my relief, she turned around and stomped back to her meal of luxury with her family, while I was welcomed back to our tiny dining room, greeted to gleeful cheers from all the kids. Then, they watched me in total amazement as I described in detail what they were luxuriously eating down the hall in front of the TV.

Up to this point, I had been complaining constantly to my mother about how bad it was at the “home”, but she either didn’t completely understand me, or just didn’t believe me. Finally, she began to suspect that there really was something wrong. She began noticing during my weekend stays at home that I was acting strange and was unhappy.

One Sunday in particular when it was time for me to go back to the boarding home, I went into a furious rage and started crying uncontrollably at her, “Please don’t send me back there!” Then I added in anger, “You’re so mean to me and I don’t love you anymore!” She did not know what to do and sent me back there anyway.

I also complained to Francisco, and he decided to show up at the boarding home unannounced to see for himself. On a weekday, not a Friday, he showed up by surprise. He came by to check up on me, and see if I was right about all

the horrible things I had described to him. The caretaker seemed nervous when she was talking to him.

She made up some excuse, saying, “Margarita is very uncooperative and a bad influence on the others. She is a problem around here. It’s better that she leaves.”

Francisco was really happy about this and came to me and told me, “Pack your bags, we’re getting out of this lousy place.” I jumped up and down with joy, grabbed my stuff, smiled and signed to the poor kids still stuck there, “Good-bye. I hope you can get out of here too just like me.” That was the day I walked out of the boarding home for good and never returned.



I’m the second on the right side in the front row with my arms around a boy and a girl. The students were all deaf. I was about 8 years old.

I was happy to be back with my family again, but we still had to solve the problem of transportation. My mother asked me if I thought I could take the bus, by myself. I told her, “Sure I can! Just show me how.”

She then took me to the bus stop, and we waited for the right bus to come along. When it finally arrived, she pointed up to the sign that showed the name of the bus, Zocalco. We both got on and rode to the school. We did the same thing on the way back. She wanted to make sure I

also knew which bus I had to get on to come back. After we made the whole round trip, we did it again, but this time I had to show her which bus we had to take. Finally, she was satisfied that I knew how to ride the bus by myself.

My new independence had a few drawbacks. One was that I was too short to pull the cord that signaled the driver to make a stop and Francisco wasn't there to do it for me. So my mother showed me how to gesture to another person on the bus so they could pull it for me.

Another problem for me was that I had to get up early in the morning to catch my bus because it was a very long ride, about an hour each way. For me, a tired little girl only eight years old, that was too long. As a result, it wasn't unusual for me to be lulled into a short nap now and then - seduced into slumber by the smooth monotonous rhythm of the bus. Luckily, I would usually wake up (as if an angel were protecting and watching me) in time to ask someone to signal to make my stop.

One day, while riding the bus home, more tired than usual, I fell into a deep sleep. I went out like a light and didn't even notice my books falling to the floor. I was lulled to sleep by the afternoon heat and the rhythmical movement of the trolley. When I woke up, I remember looking out the window and seeing nothing familiar. I began to panic when I realized that I had missed my stop. I jumped up, grabbed my books off the floor, and frantically began gesturing to the passenger sitting next to me to pull the cord to make the trolley stop. When the bus finally stopped, I jumped off, looked around, and I realized that I was totally lost.

What really confused me was that I could see nothing recognizable, not even the street name on the sign. I was terrified. How was I going to tell someone where I lived? I didn't know how to write down my home address and there was no way for me to tell someone what it was. It would have been a good idea to have a piece of paper with my home address already written down, just for this type of a situation, but I didn't. I was not only lost; I had no way of asking others for help.

I was stuck with no other option but to walk around until I found my own way home, if that was possible. So I started crying because I thought that I was going to be lost forever. I paced, frantically, up and down streets I had never seen before, for what seemed to be hours. I kept walking, hoping, and praying until, by some stroke of luck or a guardian angel, I saw something that looked familiar. It was that an apartment building that I knew was near my part of town. Feeling relieved, and kicked up my heels as I turned the corners that finally led me home, safe and sound.

Playing Hooky

After school, I would often walk through town with my best girlfriend, Laura. We would look at all the shops that lined the busy streets of Mexico City. She would ride the bus with me part of my way home, and then we would get off and walk around. Sometimes we would stop at my favorite “fast food” stand and order sopas with salsa verde and queso (a thick corn tortilla topped with green salsa and cheese). They were cheap, and I could sometimes afford it by myself. Then we would walk to the next bus stop where I had to take my bus home.

One day, my friend and I skipped school early. She wanted me to go with her to her house, which was really far away. So we got on the bus and rode it to an area that was unfamiliar to me. When we got to her house, we played for a while and then her parents asked me to stay for dinner. It was getting late and I really needed to go home. Her parents then realized how late it was and began to worry about how I was going to get home. By then, it was quite late in the afternoon, about 4:00 pm, and it would take another two hours before I would make it back home.

I had no other choice; so I got on the bus alone. By the time the bus made it close to my neighborhood, it was really late, and I was lucky that I didn’t get lost because this was a different bus, and the trip was unfamiliar to me. Finally, I

got off the bus; as I got closer to home, I noticed my mother standing outside by the front door, waiting for me.

As soon as I walked up to the house, my mother who was always very gentle and loving with all of the kids, felt that she was pushed beyond her limits of patience, and it was necessary to punish me. There was no way I could avoid a spanking. I started to cry, and with tears running down my cheeks, I pleaded with her, “Mama! Why are you spanking me?” “I was so worried about you. I thought somebody kidnapped you. Don’t you ever do that again,” she demanded. In addition to the spanking, I wasn’t allowed to see my friends or go out of the house for several days.



This picture was taken when I was about 9 or 10 years old. It was taken on a special day to honor all the mothers at the school. My mother made the Mexican clothes I’m wearing. A few months later, I left the school for good!

I’ve always been really stubborn. I missed the excitement of exploring and causing mischief with my friends, so it wasn’t long before the boredom of school again was too much to bear, and the outside world was too tempting, that I was out playing hooky again.

I once again stayed out with my friends and took a late afternoon bus home. And, just as before, my mother punished me.

After this happened a few times, my mother began to realize that I had earned some level of trust because I could get around on my own without any problems. And she finally accepted my hard-won independence.

One day my mother asked me if I had any homework. When I told her that I didn't, she became very concerned. It seemed unusual to her that I had not been given any homework so she decided to go and talk to my teachers and find out why.

After visiting the school, my mother realized that their program was so poor that there was nothing of benefit to me. It was a hard decision but she decided to take me out. It wasn't worth the daily expense of the bus ride for me to keep attending. Her opinion was that I was wasting my time since I spent most of it on the playground. This worried her, even more than the poor curriculum, because she feared that I might get mixed up with the wrong kind of children. And so, my last day in school was sometime in the year 1965.

My mother wanted me to stay home and help her with the housework. Soon I learned how to do all the chores around the house, cleaning, laundry, and my favorite, cooking. She decided that it was safer for me to stay at home.

In 1967, my brother Juan – he was very intelligent and well educated - was concerned that I wasn't getting a proper education, so he tried to find another school for me to attend. By now, the National School for Deafmutes had closed for good. The school at the Secretaría de Salubridad (Secretary of Health) had its revolt, and their program changed to one that relied heavily on oralism and auditory skills. This school was too far away to attend and for me to travel.

Juan came up with an idea. He knew of someone who was running a private school out of his home. Juan thought that since he and the teacher were old friends, he could persuade him to allow me to attend his private classes for free.

Later we found out that the owner of the private school

was none other than the former principle of the Secretaría de Salubridad, Fidel Lopez de la Rosa. When Juan asked him if he would make a special allowance for me, he made it very clear that he wanted money. Sr. de la Rosa refused to admit me free and demanded that we pay tuition fees, which my family couldn't afford.

He didn't offer us any kind of help or compromise. All he wanted was money. He recruited students from parents who were rich and could afford to pay for his classes at his private home. Since my family was poor, Juan was stuck. He wasn't able to find a way to help me further my education. This was just one more unfortunate circumstance, and one that was not unfamiliar to me. I had no other choice but to stay at home and help my mother.

Future Plans

One day when I was about eleven, my mother, afraid that I would end up sitting at home and doing nothing, asked me if there was any job or career that I thought I would like. I told her that I wanted to work in a beauty shop.

She had some friends who were beauty salon owners in town, so she asked around to see if one of them would be willing to let me work as an apprentice.

She found a salon that was willing to hire me as a helper to sweep the floors and to clean the combs, brushes and hair rollers. I worked all day everyday during the week. The shop owner would usually give me a meager handout of one peso at the end of the day.

But my mother did not care about the pay; she just wanted me to keep busy hoping that maybe someday I would learn enough to pursue a career in the beauty industry or maybe open my own shop, which I eventually did. I worked at this one shop for about a year.

The Importance of Communication

I spent a lot of my time visiting deaf friends and they also came to visit me. During those years I had one of the most important realizations of my life. I remembered how easy it was for me to learn the visual language of MSL, but learning to read and write Spanish was very difficult. I made this discovery because by now my older deaf brother and sister, Blanca and Francisco, had married and moved out of the house. Juan, my other deaf brother, still lived at home, but was he was always busy and gone most of the time.



This is one of my favorite pictures where I was wearing special Mexican design clothes. I was probably 4 or 5 years old and my sister Pilar is holding my hand. She always protected me everywhere I went. We had a very close relationship.

I would often go and visit Blanca and Francisco and enjoy the ease of our conversations in MSL. I would follow my sister Pilar around because she could interpret for me. Inside the house with my family, I was comfortable and could communicate easily with everyone. But outside the house was a different story. It was very difficult to communicate with hearing people and I often relied on my sister Pilar. So I had no friends to play with in the neighborhood.



Looking at this drawing told me that he was telling a story to the boy and he probably was talking about God. I enjoyed this very much.

This drawing helped me see that there was something above this earth. I could actually imagine the angels worshipping and looking down at Earth.



When I was about 7 years old, a friend of my brother Francisco, gave me a Bible story book which I've kept for over 40 years. I couldn't read it but I enjoyed looked at the pictures of Jesus bearing the cross and admiring His shiny halo. From then on I began thinking a lot about God.

My problem was that I didn't know how to communicate with hearing people, unless they knew MSL. One day I heard my inner voice ask me if I could understand the hearing world? I responded "No. I can't." Then it asked me if I could communicate with the hearing world. And I replied, "No. I can't." Then I made a revelation about myself that would guide me through the rest of my life. I came to accept that my deafness was a part of me. I didn't resent the hearing world, nor did I feel sorry for myself. I just accepted that I was unique and different and I belonged in the deaf world.

Then I began to ask why God was putting me through all this. I kept thinking that God probably had a very good reason, and there was a purpose to my life on earth, so I didn't argue with Him. One thing I learned from my mother that helped me tremendously in my life was to accept the fact that I would never understand why God made me deaf. My mother was a very strong believer in God. She never blamed God for having four deaf children. She accepted it and many times say, "Only God knows, and we will never understand why."

After I accepted my deafness, I began to increasingly notice how there was a barrier between the hearing world and my deaf world. Up to now it was easy to communicate with my family, friends at school, and with my teachers that signed. But now I faced the hearing world outside of my nucleus of familiarity. I realized that there was a barrier. This barrier was not created by my deafness. The main obstacle was that I couldn't talk, I couldn't hear, and to top it off, my educational background was very limited.

When you put all these factors together, it is easy to understand that there was a really big communication problem that I had to overcome, especially if I had any hope of interacting with the hearing world. Communication was the barrier, and I wanted to cross that barrier.

The ability to communicate is a very basic human necessity. Without it, we cannot survive. For me to live in the hearing world I had to learn how to read and write. I've always wondered how simple it must be for hearing people

to learn to read and write. These skills are very important for functioning in a society that uses a spoken language. What would I do if I went to a job interview, or if I wanted to buy something at a store? What if I needed to go see a doctor? How would I take care of myself in these different situations?

It must be so easy for hearing children to learn Spanish. After all, they can hear the words. Imagine what it must be like to try to learn a language you can't hear. And that's exactly what I had to do.

This made me realize how important it was for deaf children to get a better education than what was available. That is why I have preferred to be involved in the deaf community and deaf clubs throughout most of my life.

During this time, when I was twelve, my family moved to a better section of town and into my sister Blanca's house. Blanca owned a small corner store that sold soda, beverages, tortas, and convenience items. Since she was now busy taking care of her small children and a new baby, she turned the store over to my mother. My sister Pilar and I helped make the tortas and also learned how to run the cash register. I would write down the prices on a piece of paper so the customers would know how much to pay me.



Every year in San Hipólito there was a Catholic Communion event for the deaf children. Here at the age of 12, I wore my communion clothes that my sister Tina bought.

The Big Shock

One day, I received one of the biggest shocks of my life. Up to that point, I pretty much had ignored my brother Juan's advice, who was very intelligent, educated, and became a leader in the deaf community. He understood how important it was to have an education. But nothing could have prepared me for what happened next.

One day, when I was about fourteen, my deaf girlfriend Maria whom I knew from the National School for Deaf-Mutes but was in my sister Bianca's class and was eight years older than me, brought her hearing brother over to my house. I was very happy to see him because I thought he was cute. I thought that since he had a deaf sister that it would be easy to communicate, Unfortunately, I was wrong!

When he asked my name and address, I wrote it down on a piece of paper and handed it to him. He tried to read it, and then he looked at me in disappointment. He was an honest straight-forward kind of a person, fifteen years older than I, and said, "Oh no! Margarita, you're a pretty girl, it's such a shame that you write like a little a little girl learning to write. I wish you would learn to write better." I was never so embarrassed in my entire life. My feelings were hurt and I got upset. This was a real turning point in my life.

I decided to practice reading and writing every day. I liked to read comic books and children's stories because they had lots of pictures that made it easier to understand the meaning. When I came across a word that I didn't know, I would ask my sister Pilar. She was fluent in both Spanish and MSL. My skills gradually improved after a lot of hard work. I eventually learned basic communication skills through reading and writing.

Before, it was easy for me to communicate using MSL. I didn't see any real value in reading and writing Spanish. Now I was convinced that in order to make life easier for myself, it was important for me to learn to read and write. I challenged myself to improve, because I wanted to prevent future problems. I learned that I would be more comfortable



What helped me to learn to read were drawings with words. This is a drawing with MSL pictures and words. This combination helped me a lot.

Mr. Serrano was deaf. He was a published novelist and comedy writer, and he drew beautiful pictures. I have carried these with me for over 34 years.



if I was able to communicate with hearing people. I also found out from personal experience that if a person lacks communication skills, he or she can very easily fall into frustration and depression.

Work with Maria

One day when I was about thirteen or fourteen, my friend Maria asked me to visit her at her work in a hair salon. I watched her do the customers' hair and was able to learn how to do it myself. After that, I volunteered at the beauty shop. For the next couple of years, I spent my days either working with my mother in the store or with Maria at the salon.

I was 15 years old and this was the first time my picture was taken in color during my birthday. It was a big birthday (Quinceañera).



One day when I was about sixteen, Blanca wanted her store back. Because I had no other skills other than fixing people's hair, I went looking for jobs in hair salons.

Challenge of finding a job in the hearing world

It was a big challenge for me to work in the hearing world, but I always had a positive attitude, and that helped me overcome the obstacles presented by my deafness. Sometimes the situations were very frustrating, but I was always able to handle them. I would never give up and always worked to find solutions to solve my problems. One very challenging situation happened one day.

One day I was riding the bus and looking for a job and I saw a "help wanted" sign in the window of a beauty salon. I decided to get off the bus and go into the shop. When I met the owner I wrote her a note that said, "My name is Margarita. I am deaf. Please hire me." As I handed it to her, I could see the expression on her face change. She began

to look resistant. Then she told me, “Sorry, but there is no job for you here.”

I could tell that she was afraid to hire me, but I wrote back to her anyway asking, “Then why did you put the sign in the window?” That’s when I realized that hearing people are afraid to hire anyone that is deaf. But I felt very confident, and brave. I felt that I was good enough and wanted to prove to her that I was a skilled beautician. So I wrote back to her again, asking her to please give me a chance. If she wasn’t happy with the way I fixed hair, then she didn’t have to hire me.

She begrudgingly asked one of her customers if she would be willing to have her hair done by me for free. At first, the customer was a bit scared because I was deaf, but she decided to try me. She sat in the chair and I gave her a magazine. She looked through it, found what she liked and pointed to the picture. Then I went to work. I worked quicker than the hearing stylists, because they talked all the time, and I go straight to work. When I was done, the customer loved it. The owner was so happy that she smiled and told me that I was hired.

I worked for her for a while and learned even more skills of the trade. During that time, I practiced and studied fixing, cutting and dyeing hair and eventually became a highly skilled beautician.

I changed salons several times because the owner favored the hearing stylists that earned more than I did. That wasn’t fair because I worked harder! I worked 10 or 11 hours a day, 6 days a week. I had very good skills but many times the employers didn’t care. I was very unhappy about that.

For example, the employers allowed the hearing beauticians to come late and paid them more. When I was late for work they would nag me. When this happened I would quit and not show up for a few days. Then the employer would realize how valuable I was and show up at my home begging me to come back to work for an increase in salary. Many times I would simply tell them, “Sorry, its too late, I’ve already found another job!”

It was easy for me to find employment and get hired because I was a good worker. The other hairdressers were always chatting with their clients. I was very professional, worked fast, and most of my customers were very happy with my work.

When I was seventeen, I fell victim to an abusive relationship that lasted about five years. Although most of my wounds have healed, I will carry the scars of that experience for the rest of my life.

Jose's (not his real name) family was rich in comparison to mine. They were upper class, and we were middle class. He worked at his father's shoe factory. His family didn't accept me because of my deafness since he was also deaf, but he was brought up with an oral education and could speak as well as use MSL. His mother wanted him to find a rich girl who could speak.

It was around this time that I was finally able to open my own business and have a shop of my own. The business was good, and it was a good experience for me to work with hearing people. I had a lot of customers but I had to close the business after a year and a half because of the problems I was having with José.

My trip to Europe

My sister Blanca, her husband Rafael, José, and I were part of a group of fourteen members of our local deaf club that went to Europe in 1973 to see the Deaf Olympic World Games. When we arrived in Sweden, we met a lot of other deaf people from different parts of the world. It was very interesting to meet other deaf people with different languages and from different races.



Deaf Mexicans formed this group. We were getting ready for a new adventure to Europe. This was a once-in-a-lifetime trip. My sister Blanca (middle) is beside her husband, Rafael. I am wearing a Mexican hat and holding my ex-boy friend's hand.

I was 18 years old in this newspaper picture taken in 1973. The deaf group demonstrated in the Deaf Olympics in Sweden. I'm holding the Mexican flag.



Because of a mix-up in communication, the officials did not know that our group was coming, so they cancelled all our sporting events/competition. However we were allowed to participate in all the other activities including the march.

My group chose me to march and represent Mexico. I proudly held Mexico's national flag. We went to 11 different countries using a rental van with the help of an excellent deaf guide. Later we boarded a huge train, where we experienced something very interesting. The train was docked on a boat. It was difficult to imagine that the heavy train was actually on a boat. It was amazing! We really enjoyed our trip and new adventures. We shared many laughs and good times. When we got home we were all very tired because of jet leg and crossing different time zones, but we made wonderful memories. Wow!

Before my trip to Europe, I thought that food was the same everywhere in the world, and everybody ate the same thing. I thought cuisine was universal. I will never forget how different the food is in Europe from what I had grown used to in Mexico. It was a big shock to me. In Europe when I asked for a "tortilla, limón, or salsa," the waiter would say, "Sorry we don't have them." Unfortunately that made me lose my appetite a few times.

When the trip was over, we returned to Mexico but unfortunately my relationship remained the same and the abuse continued. I did not tell my parents because I was afraid of José. He told me that if I ever told my parents or brothers, he would kill me. I was confused about my life. Later my parents found out about our domestic violence and that he raped me. I had some witnesses and thank goodness my parents were very supportive of me. They really cared and loved me.

Because of my wonderful experience in Europe, I was eager to explore more of the world and travel to other countries. I saved up enough money for a visit to the United States. My brother Francisco decided to join me, in December of 1976, we took a trip to the United States. We traveled through El Paso, Los Angeles, San Francisco,

and eventually ended up in San Diego. For the second time in my life, I saw different ethnic groups, different kinds of buildings, and again experienced different kinds of foods, even more different than in Europe. I was glad to have Francisco tra-veling with me, not only for his company, but also for secu-rity.

After visiting San Francisco, we went to visit one of Francisco’s friends in Chula Vista, a suburb of San Diego. Francisco stayed a few days and left for Mexico City, but I decided to stay longer. My main reason for staying was to avoid my ex-boyfriend back home. After he left I began to cry because it was the first time I had been separated from my family in Mexico City.



My brother Francisco and I went to San Francisco It was very cold in December of 1976. I love that funny Santa Claus waving his hands.

Francisco teased me for many years about the new fancy coat I bought and that I’m wearing in this picture. It was very warm and comfortable, and every time I see Francisco I always remember him teasing me about it.



I called my parents long distance to let them know that I was all right and asked if I could stay a few more days. They said it was fine as long as I was happy there and they felt comfortable because they knew where I was.

I stayed for a while because it was the end-of-year holiday season. My friend Louise (not her real name) and family introduced me to Jack, and we went bowling with some other deaf people. After that Jack and I saw each other frequently.

It wasn't easy to communicate with Jack but fortunately I bought a Spanish-English dictionary that helped us a lot. I began studying American Sign Language (ASL) and reading and writing English.

I was supposed to go back home but I called my parents and told them I wanted to stay a few more weeks. My parents were starting to get concerned about me so they sent my brother Juan and sister Blanca by plane visit me in San Diego.

We picked them up and then they realized something special was happening in my life with my new American boyfriend. They began to understand why I stayed so long in San Diego.



On March 5, 1997 I remember having a big smile and feeling full of happiness. Jack and I got engaged and then later I flew back to Mexico with Juan and Blanca.

My boyfriend Jack was an Engineer working for the Navy Government. He traveled often and he had to fly to Japan for 6 months. During that time we corresponded by letters.



I lived with my sister Blanca and my parents in a small village called Toluca. Here I'm writing a letter to Jack. My niece Sandra helped me with telephone conversations. We were very close. Gaston, my nephew, is also in the picture.

When I came back home, I decided to go back to work in salons. There was an American lady who used to come to the salon. We traded work. She tutored me in English and I did her hair. She helped me to translate my letters from Spanish to English.

One day I finished early at work and came home. My niece Sandra, told me there was a telephone call from Jack. It surprised me. Jack was coming to Mexico with two other married couples. We had planned to marry in Mexico but there was too much red tape, although my parents approved of my marriage.



Pyramid in Mexico. My heart always carries good memories of my beautiful country.



Figure 25: We got married in Las Vegas on August 9, 1977. My heart was sad to be separated from my family. They couldn't come and celebrate with us because it was too far away.

We got married in Las Vegas and lived in San Diego, California. It was a real struggle for me to learn ASL, my second sign language. I was exhausted, studying ASL and English every day.

It also wasn't easy to adjust to the different kinds of American foods. At first it was overwhelming to learn many new things, make new deaf friends, and get used to the new environments in this country.



We had a nice apartment and I loved to play the music very loud with my special equipment to feel the vibrations. The most difficult part was that I missed my family.



My sister Tina was hearing and knew MSL. When I was homesick she often would fly to San Diego to visit. When she left, I would cry a lot.

I soon became very homesick. I loved my family and my country so much, and now I had given it all up! I didn't have any family in the U.S. I went back to visit Mexico City once a year, and usually stayed about a month.



I flew to Mexico and stayed for a month. I loved spending time with my parents and family as well as eating authentic Mexican food.



I felt incredible joy every time I visited my family. I especially enjoy the animated chats and celebration time.



My parents were always happy to see me in Mexico.



All for us in this photograph are deaf. I'm the first one to the left, then my sister Bianca, followed by sisters-in-law Alicia and Dora. We always enjoy chatting and having fun together!

I decided to take some English and business classes in the adult education center. While I was studying, some people from Deaf Community Services (DCS) found me. I volunteered to help them out with a witness in a murder case. The detectives who did not know MSL or ASL wanted me to communicate with this Mexican deaf person who only used home signs. I was able to help, and that was a wonderful experience.

Employment in the United States

In 1980, I got my first job as a clerk in a clinic. It was a big struggle having to type letters. I made a lot of mistakes, and miscommunication was difficult. I was forced to quit.

Late in 1980, I started to work for Deaf Community Services which lasted for seven years. At first it was a challenge. I was frustrated with my English language skills. I couldn't write well in English and it was required for my job. When I typed the letters I made mistakes and they didn't have correction tape to help erase mistakes on papers. However,



My first job was working as a clerk in a clinic.

my good ASL ability helped me assist the clients and staff with no problem. I had good organizational and management skills as well. Soon my boss decided to give me fewer typing jobs and hired a new secretary to do those chores. She wanted me to concentrate on communicating with the deaf clients. She persuaded me to stay.



I was thrilled and proud to have a dog named Casper. He was a special hearing dog donated by the San Francisco Hearing Dogs for the Deaf. Casper was smart and I loved him so much. He was featured in a newspaper article.

In 1983 my marriage failed and ended in divorce. We didn't have any children. In 1985 I remarried. My second husband was a Mexican. He moved from Mexico City to U.S. and he was hard of hearing but he knew MSL. I continued working at DCS.



I lived in an apartment and still worked at DCS. It was hard work with no support or close family. I was surprised that I could handle all the problems even though a scary "black cloud" seemed to be following me.



When I was down, especially during holidays, my sister Tina would fly in to support me. Here we are cooking at Thanksgiving.



I used to always set up parties for the deaf community. I love to decorate, prepare food, and set up tables and drinks, etc. We had many successful events at DCS for the deaf community.

It was time to make a career change and I decided to quit DCS in 1987. I took computer and technical classes. Again, it was difficult to learn new things and English was always an obstacle. I was frustrated but pushed on until I received a computer proficiency certificate.

I found a job in the Navy Training Recruiting Center. It was a quiet job and I spend many working hours on the computer. The people were very nice and tried to communicate with me by writing notes. They were all very patient and I was very grateful for that. I worked for two years there but I was unhappy because the entire staff was hearing.



This was my big office at Navy Recreation Training Center.



My new boss was very nice and patient with me.

I moved to Texas for two years because my soon-to-be-second-ex-husband wanted me to live there. I agreed because it would be closer for me to visit my family in Mexico who lived just 12 hours away instead of 3 days driving from San Diego.

It was a difficult experience. I was alone most of the time. I got two jobs. I worked full time at the San Antonio Independence Living Services and part time as a secretary in a church. I was also teaching classes in MSL and on weekends, I held workshops about the history of the education of the deaf in Mexico.



I worked as a secretary for an Assistant Pastor in San Antonio, Texas, who worked for a deaf mission.

Soon later I bought a small older house with a large patio. I hired people to help me fix it up. The situation grew worst with no support from my husband. I decided to visit my family to help me decide what I already knew.



My brother Efren and I are all smiles because I moved closer to the family in Mexico by living in Texas but later I moved back to San Diego.

After I bought the house I realized in my heart that I shouldn't stay in Texas while I was still married. My husband had stayed in San Diego and I was not happy about that situation. I moved back to San Diego to try to work it out with my husband. Unfortunately we divorced later.



I worked as an intermediary between MSL-ASL in 1995 during a big deaf convention in Mexico.

I now conduct workshops as an intermediary between MSL and ASL.



Since 1980 I have been working mostly as an intermediary in Mexican Sign Language and American Sign Language and Home Sign/Gestures.

I have many years experience providing interpreting services for lawyers, judges, teachers, counselors, employers and social workers and their deaf clients. I try to bridge the communication gaps between hearing clients, deaf clients and the ASL interpreters by providing insight and clarification to all parties involved.

I help my deaf clients, because many of them cannot speak out or discuss their ideas publicly. I explain difficult legal concepts and try to bring the ideas down to a simple picture concept so that they can see and understand them clearly.

I also educate hearing people about our deaf culture and language. Therefore, I see my job as building a communication bridge to help deaf and hearing people.

With this vision and purpose in mind, in 1996 I started my new home office called, Fundación de Sordos Hispanos (FSH). It required a lot of time and was funded with my own investment money. This has been a dream come true to help deaf Hispanics as well as to be my own boss and to write books.

1997 began a wonderful and miraculous time in my life. One day my friends and I went to see a captioned movie and we saw Mike, someone I had known from Deaf Community Services and had lost track of for a long time. He thought I was still living married and living in Texas. After the movie we all went out to eat and talk.

A few weeks later we saw each other again and started to fall in love. This wonderful man was divorced and had no children, just like me. I explained to Mike that I loved my small business working with deaf Mexicans and was growing professionally. Mike was happy and proud of me.



We were very happy the day of our engagement.

In March 1998, we got married, but this time not in Las Vegas. We were married in San Diego. Mike wanted a wedding with his family and my family to be present. My family flew from Mexico City. Mike's family lives in San Diego. His father was the preacher at our wedding. What a beautiful wedding!



Our wedding day:
March 28, 1998



We've now been married almost 6 years.

Mike has also become my best friend. He is a construction worker in a Navy Base in San Diego. He has a very generous heart and has provided me with a home office.

I've completed my first book which was published in 2003, "History of the Education of the Deaf and Mexican Sign Language." It tells about the history of the education of the deaf in Mexico, and it gives hope for the future to generations of deaf children.

The objective of this book, "Journey Beyond Silence" is to share my personal story and the stories of other deaf Mexicans and how we have been able to become achievers in spite of our deafness and the communication barriers.

**The key to living a successful life
is education!**

CHAPTER 3 INTERVIEWS

The next section of this book is devoted to interviews with deaf Mexicans that I met in Mexico City during my visit in 1995. Of the numerous interviews that I conducted, I have chosen fifteen that I felt had the most positive messages and showed how deaf Hispanics can become well adjusted, happy, and proud people who enjoy their work and family life. What is sad is that these fifteen represent a very small portion of the deaf Mexicans in Mexico. The facts are that only a mere ten percent of them end up leading successful lives and an even fewer number, about one percent, receive a college degree or university diploma.

These fortunate few – the successful ones that I chose for this chapter of my book - preferred to stay in Mexico because they were living good lives there. What made their success possible was that they had a very supportive network of family, relatives, and friends. This created what I consider to be the most important ingredient to a deaf person's success: an environment with a positive attitude toward deafness. Strong positive attitudes during childhood helped them build up the self-esteem that they needed to overcome the obstacles to effective communication, and then that opened the door for them to become successful in their lives.

The deaf Mexicans in my interviews all had strong communication skills and most of them were proficient in Mexican Sign Language (MSL). Some were trained in what is referred to as the Oral Method, which consists of articulation and lipreading in Spanish. The majority of them were literate in Spanish, and some were also experts in communicating through mime and gestures. Acquiring skills in more than one mode of communication is typical of most successful deaf people. Many of them become expert communicators, relying

on several strategies that they use selectively depending on the skill level of the hearing person with whom they are trying to communicate.

The fifteen interviews that follow are samples that clearly illustrate the potential for a positive outcome in the face of adversity. They are stories of what we are capable of achieving on the road to our own wellness and wholeness. I hope you enjoy reading as you follow their intriguing journeys.

GENERATION OF DEAF FAMILIES

Luis Sanabria Duran comes from many generations of deaf family members. One of his great, great great grandfathers was Gaspar Sanabria. Gaspar was admitted to the Escuela Nacional de Sordos Mudos Mexicana (Mexican National Deafmute School) in 1870. There he met Mr. Eduardo Huet who was the teacher. At that time Benito Juarez was the President of Mexico.

Please note that **A.** in the below sections represents the author, Margarita Adams asking the questions.

A: Are there any deaf people in your family?

Luis: Yes, my grandfather and grandmother were deaf. I was the only deaf son but my parents always treated me very well.

A: Were you able to attend school?

Luis: Yes, my parents sent me to school and I was very happy there not only because of what I learned but because it allowed me to be close and communicate with other people. I met a beautiful woman and we were married. She was also

deaf. Our life was good because I watched my parents live a good life. While I was growing up, I never thought about problems. I was always signing and involved with my parents who signed. I felt like a normal person, but I would see many deaf people who had problems communicating with their families elsewhere. Their experiences were very different.

When we were married, my wife asked me how many children I wanted and I answered two or three. After five years, we still didn't have any children. I thought it was God's plan. That's okay. But after five years, we had our first-born daughter, a beautiful baby called Patty. My wife asked if she was deaf or hearing, and I didn't know. My wife decided it didn't matter, but Patty sounded like a hearing child. When my wife changed her clothes, she would babble with her voice. She would talk about shoes or buttons. It looked like she had normal hearing, which was good. One day a plate fell to the floor. It was loud and the baby continued to sleep and felt nothing. My wife thought she was deaf.

Anyway, as it happened, Patty got sick and my wife brought her to the doctor. My wife asked him if the baby was deaf. The doctor asked me if the baby could hear? I did not know. The doctor examined her and said that yes, the baby could hear. We thought maybe the doctor was wrong. As Patty grew up, she really was deaf. It was confirmed. My wife said that it was impossible. How did she know how to vocalize? I told her that Patty was lipreading.

The second child was also deaf. The third was hard of hearing, his name was Gaspar. The fourth was Marisa who was deaf. When Marisa was little she wouldn't accept that she was deaf. She acted as if she were hearing. She was stubborn.

When she was with deaf friends she would interact; but elsewhere, she would act as if she were hearing. We sent her to another state where there was a deaf school.

My friend Esther was one of her deaf teachers. I was asked if Marisa was hearing, and I said no. I got angry with

Marisa who then said she was fooling people. She was a bad girl, smart girl! We would all laugh.

Our fifth child was born hard of hearing. Our sixth child, Edi, was our last child. I thought we would have three children, but ended up with six. We are a very united family.

A: Do you still believe that deaf children do not have a support system?

Luis: Education is a very important issue especially the lack of good schools and needed resources. My wife worked hard to get all of our children to different schools. While I worked, she took the children to school.

We raised our children so that they could be independent and obtain jobs. They all were married and we have grandchildren. My first grandson is hearing, and it was about time. We were very moved. He finally broke the record in the family.

Many deaf children left the schools due to boredom and they were walking around doing nothing. The park near Benito Juarez's statue used to be a common place where many deaf persons would meet to chat and pass time.

Finally, one day someone asked me, "Why don't we start a deaf club?". I told him that it was a good idea since the hearing people made fun of the deaf when they were signing. The deaf were getting angry with them. They needed their own place. This club was established in 1933 and remained open until 1949 and it was called the Eduardo Huet Club.

A. Was the club discontinued?

Luis: Not altogether because a few years later a group of deaf people started another deaf club called Club Federación, parallel to the Eduardo Huet Club, that helped the deaf seek employment. Economic differences in the long run caused both clubs to close, as well as a third club. Years later we were invited to participate in the Deaf Olympics but in order to assist we first had to start a sports club. That

is how the Asociación de Sordomudos was established. In 1965, we were the first Mexican team to participate in the Deaf Olympics and it was a great inspiration to all of us. We occupied the 18th position, therefore our flag was the last flag to rise but it was the first time Mexico participated in this type of tournament. From that point on, every four years we participated in the Deaf Olympics.

A: How do you see the future?

Luis: Nowadays there are not enough people joining the club. There are very few schools for the deaf. The economy is poor and there is no work, which creates many problems for the deaf. We must educate and support ourselves.

The number of deaf children is increasing. They do not know if they will have happy futures. There are many intelligent deaf people but we also have to respect the fact that there are also mentally retarded deaf as well. We must help them use sign language so they can communicate better. Many parents insist that the government must help and pay more attention to deaf children. My experience tells me that most of the problems arise from the conflicts between the hearing teachers and doctors. It makes me ill that they are only interested in money! They do not care about deaf children.

We, the adult deaf persons, are sympathetic to our deaf children because we know that communicating with signs brings us freedom. The hearing people oppress the deaf. Their minds are closed and they want the deaf to talk and not sign. It is very difficult to communicate orally and to lipread.

THE TAILOR

Guillermo Carrera is deaf. He is one of the best tailors and finds his job challenging. One of the most difficult experiences he overcame was communicating with his customers. His customers are professional people like lawyers, doctors and actors. Mr. Carrera is dedicated and provides good customer service.

A: Can you tell me how you became a tailor?

Guillermo: I used to attend the National School for the Deaf (Huet). Later I went to another school for the deaf and blind. I went to school in morning and then I learned how to sew in the afternoon. Learning to use tools is very important. I would study hard and memorize everything. I cut out shirts and constantly practiced and practiced.

A long time ago, when I was 20 years old, I went to see Pastor Rosando Olleta at San Hipolitico Church and received a tremendous blessing.

I started a small business and slowly it began to grow. My father encouraged me in my business because he knew I made good clothes. Many people started to come to my business. Some years later my father suggested that I buy a building. I paid one and half million pesos at that time and now it is mine. I invested more money and bought several homes which I later sold. I have money in the bank and I live comfortably.

A: How many employees do you have?

Guillermo: I once had thirteen employees, but now that the economy is not as good, I have six employees. All are hearing and do not know signs but I taught a few of them some signs, and now they can communicate with me.

A: How do you communicate with your customers?

Guillermo: I know most of my customers and how to communicate with them. When I have a new customer who doesn't know signs, I will ask one of my employees, Eduardo Alvarez, to help me. He interprets the customer's needs. He really helps me a lot. He also answers the phone and relays messages for me. It is easy to communicate the cost of the services and to know exactly what the customer wants. Most of the things we need to talk about are simple and we can use gestures or write them on paper.

A: Do you know other deaf tailors?

Guillermo: A long time ago, I had a friend named Salvador. He was a master tailor and was about eighty-five years old when I met him. He was the first deaf tailor; I am the second. I know of no other deaf tailors. There are around three deaf people who cut patterns or try to copy a tailor, but they are not professionals like I am.

A: Do you have deaf relatives?

Guillermo: My brother, Roberto is hearing impaired. He owns a photo developing business. My other brother, Carlos, is deaf. He is a draftsman and works for the government. My parents are hearing. They were poor. My father worked as a milkman. I have made a good life for myself and I have a lot of money.

A: How long have you been working as a tailor?

Guillermo: Altogether I have worked here for forty-eight years. I retired in 1990 but I decided to go back to work again because I was bored. I love my work and I will work until the day I die.

Guillermo Carrera died in 1999.

THE TAXI DRIVER

Gustavo Ignacio Mayani-Verenros is a self-employed taxi driver. In Mexico City, deaf taxi drivers are not allowed. He was fortunate to have his parents help him get a driver's license. He will give us more details later.

A: Mr. Gustavo Ignacio Mayani Verenros, what can you tell us about your life?

Gustavo: I used to go to school at IMAL between the ages of twelve to fifteen. I completed sixth grade. I am deaf. At school the speech therapy class was held downstairs, then I would go upstairs to attend the rest of the classes. I know MSL.

In my family there are six children, I am the last one, the baby. We were three hearing and three deaf kids.

At one time I used to work as a draftsman in a private business. It was a simple job to copy from paper. The pay was not good but it was okay. Three years ago, while I was still a draftsman, I decided that I wanted to become a taxi driver. I bought a taxi. Taxi driving pays better than being a draftsman. Everyday I drive my taxi I make more money than drafting. Ricardo, I'm sorry I can't remember his last name, was the one who first told me that I could earn more money driving a taxi. He influenced my thinking. After I bought my taxi, one year later, my deaf brother also bought a taxi.

Driving a cab is very competitive and rough. We are always in a hurry trying to make more money. My customers direct me where to go. If I tell them I'm deaf, they write the instructions on a piece of paper.

One day a passenger gets into my taxi. I tell him I can't hear. The man put his hands on my shoulders and puts pressure on them when he wanted me to turn.

Most hearing people are surprised to find out that I am deaf. Sometimes hearing women, when they find out I'm deaf, become afraid and get out of the cab. This doesn't

bother me because there are still plenty of other people down the street that accept my services.

Once a man who was drunk got into my cab. I couldn't understand the instructions he scribbled on the paper so he decided to direct me. We arrived in a small town which wasn't the one he wanted. We had to go back. I told him to get out and I didn't charge him. I will never do that again because it is very difficult to understand a person who is drunk. If they are sober, that's ok, but if they are drunk, I leave them there.

A: How did you get your license?

Gustavo: I really don't remember exactly. My parents took me to the Department of Motor Vehicles and got me the necessary papers. We didn't tell them I was deaf. Sometimes when I'm driving I get stopped by the police and they ask me to show my driver's license that proves that I can drive.

THE DRAFTSMEN

Francisco and Juan Garcia Muciño are brothers who were both born deaf. They were members of a family of ten children, four of whom were deaf. They were born in a small village in Santa Cruz, Mexico. Their parents did not know MSL, but they used home signs. Francisco and Juan learned MSL at school and with friends. The brothers talked about their lives when they were younger, and that they enjoyed school because there was manual sign language communication. Good education and communication led them to good jobs and lives.

A: Tell me about some of your school experiences.

Francisco: My school for the deaf was inside of the National School for the Blind. Both the deaf and blind schools were in the same building. I was there from 1947 to 1955. That was the extent of my education. I finished the sixth grade.

Juan: I can say the same. He was older and I followed him.

Francisco: At school, everyone lived at the dorm. There was communication everyday at the dorm, at school and on the playground. When I was growing up, I was always learning at school and with my friends.

Juan: I was happy when I was at school and with my friends. Before I came to school, I lived with my parents on a farm. When I came to the school things were strange at first, but later I loved it. I was also happy, even when the food they gave us wasn't very good and it tasted like jail food. Today, school is no longer like that. It's very different. All of the teachers are hearing.

A: What else can you tell us about your teachers?

Francisco: My teacher's name was Jesús Salazar. He was a reasonable signer. Some signing is better than nothing. He didn't sign 100% but approximately 40%. He would write text very clearly on the blackboard and I would copy it. I'm very good at mathematics.

Juan: My teacher, Angelina, was a good teacher. At that time I was small and could not speak. She was a speech therapist. She taught me by using a piece of wood to push on my tongue and move it. I improved. The speech therapy stopped when I left school. If it had continued, I would have probably improved and had better speech, but it was stopped.

Francisco: Jesus Lopez was a teacher who used MSL fairly well. I remember director Luis Gomez would ask us questions and show us the answers with sign. He was impressive.

Francisco to Juan: Do you remember?

Juan: Luis Gomez was a director but he was also a substitute teacher. He paid attention to the students in class. He would check up on the teachers to make sure they were there. If they did not show up, he would teach the class. He would always write very clearly on the board any special issues about the school. The students understood him; his signing was very clear. He was a good, competent teacher. He started to set up another school (Secretaría de Salu-bridad), but in the middle of the process he died. Fidel Lopez was another teacher. He was hearing impaired. Hearing people oppressed him; he was almost always sad. Doctors believed that oralism was better and took over the school, which López thought was a failure.

Francisco: Around 1972, there was a near riot. The president of Mexico showed up hoping to solve the problem. The teachers, parents, students and public wanted the school to remain as it was. The doctors were fighting to change the school to have oral education including auditory training and speech therapy only. Mr. Serrano was involved in the meeting. His hearing daughter was his translator. He wanted to keep everything the same in the Secretaría de Salubridad, but there was a vote and the doctors won. The name of the new school was Instituto Nacional de la Comunicación Humana (INCH). Sign language was not used anymore.

Juan: I was happy at school. I had many friends and went out a lot. Every weekend I visited my parents. I didn't really want to go there because of the communication problems. Instead I wanted to return to Mexico City to be with my deaf friends. Weekly and on weekends we played soccer. I enjoyed school activities more than seeing my parents. Now that I have children, I see things differently. I look back at those times with fondness.

Francisco: In 1955, after leaving school, I printed and sold Christmas cards on commission. Later, I worked with jewelry. Then I moved and I started working for the federal government where I continued working for thirty years.

Juan: My story is similar to his. I worked thirty-eight years as a draftsman. I worked in different places. I would think a lot about my future. I saw older deaf people working as draftsmen. I thought I wanted to be like them. I tried to persuade Francisco to come work with me, but he said he wanted to wait. Therefore I started to work and gain experience. I had different jobs but became skilled and talented at drafting. In some ways I influenced my brother Francisco and other deaf to become draftsmen. It pays well and provides for a good life.

Francisco: I now work for a private business company. After thirty years for the government, I retired and had nothing to do. I wanted to keep busy so I started working mornings in the Castillo Architectural and Engineering Company. I've been working with this firm for over eleven years.

Juan: I have a parallel life. I moved to the city of Guadalajara and got a new drafting job. I moved to different jobs several with no problems. My experiences have been positive. I know how to do different kinds of drawings, which gives me great satisfaction. After living for eight years in Guadalajara, I moved back to Mexico City and my brother helped me find employment where he works. Francisco has known the engineer for a long time. I now work with Francisco and we hope to continue working together for a long time.

Francisco: I knew my boss back when I was younger and I barely knew how to draw. I taught him a few signs and he learned the deaf manual alphabet. He later became a successful engineer and we lost track of each other. Years later when the business where I was working closed down and I was out of work, we saw each other again and I learned he needed a draftsman. I began to work with him. He knew some signs, but he was only about 30% fluent in MSL.

A: Do you know the history of the deaf manual alphabet?

Juan: Yes, I do, and it is very interesting. Guillermo Velich, a deaf man, was born in Austria and emigrated to Mexico City in 1914. He was an active member of a deaf club called "Asociación de Sordomudos." He had forged immigration papers and managed to live as a resident in Mexico. Mr. Velich was a very smart, influential leader and participated actively in the deaf club in the 1920's. One of his inventions were the manual deaf alphabet cards. The cards were designed with pictures of hands forming

letters from A to Z. The ABC cards appealed to the hearing non-signers in hopes of teaching how to fingerspell using the guided pictures. To this day, some deaf Mexicans and Americans continue to carry out the practice of selling the ABC cards. Mr. Velich's club agreed to his ingenious idea of selling the cards to help run the deaf clubs. Deaf peddlers earned substantial income selling these cards. For five years, Mr. Velich and deaf peddlers earned together 30,000 pesos. However, the deaf community later discovered he had tricked them and embezzled all of their money. With the stolen funds, the con artist fled back to Europe, leaving behind only his alphabet sign cards.

A: Do you think it's hard for deaf people to get a job like yours?

Juan: Yes, it is difficult for deaf people to get jobs with private business companies. Deaf people require good reading and writing skills. Engineers want deaf workers to be fast and experienced. The deaf for the most part do not have the experience to get jobs other than those with the government. Those jobs are very simple. They are only required to make copies of designs. There is no special training or schools to help the deaf get jobs in the private sector.

There is a big problem. If the deaf don't have reading skills, how can they be hired? It is hard in the private sector. My brother works for the government in the morning and in the private sector in the afternoon because he is a fast learner. Other deaf people stay where they are until they retire. Now the government doesn't want to hire any more deaf people. It is getting harder for deaf people to find jobs. They have to start at low paying jobs and end up peddling to supplement their income. The more deaf people peddle, the more they pull others into peddling especially when you need additional money to survive.

Francisco: When I was younger, in school, I learned to sign. Nowadays, children aren't allowed to sign. Teachers

prefer to teach oralism. Signing has been minimized. There are twenty-nine school districts, and they all have different sign languages. There is no uniform sign language in Mexico.

Juan: The times were better when we were small. Over the years things have changed. The National Deaf School closed. The Blind Center is still there, but there is no longer the National School for Deafmute children. Now, the schools have different kinds of teachers who want to run them like a business. They are very possessive causing divisions between schools. It is no longer easy for deaf people to congregate. That's why today, life for the deaf people is different. Today, there are many more deaf people and the government cannot handle the problem.

A: Today, does Mexico have another school for the deaf?

Juan: No, there are none. Right now we are both draftsmen. But in the future, what will deaf people do? They have no skills. Schools don't prepare or train them for work. Then what will they do? We don't have a place where deaf people can be trained. Currently, the Asociación de Sordos Mexicanos (ASM) is working and trying to get help.

Narrator: Are there dorms for deaf people?

Francisco: No, no dorms.

Juan: Rich people can obtain an education more easily than poor people. Unfortunately, most deaf people are poor. It is rare that deaf individuals can finish elementary school. They need a lot of help in order to finish. There are no public schools where the students are deaf.

Juan García Muciño passed away in 2001.

THE HISTORY OF THE DEAF CULTURE IN MEXICO

Ignacio Serrano was deaf; his parents were hearing. He was very active and a good role model for all deaf or hearing people to emulate. He fought to preserve the deaf language and culture. He told us the following story.

Between 1965 and 1972, our school administrator hired new teachers. Regrettably, those teachers were not capable of teaching deaf children. They did not know any type of sign language and were not able to communicate with the students.

Fidel López, eighteen years old and hard of hearing, worked with great intensity to become a teacher. He aspired to be the director. The administrator told him that he could not give him the job because he could not hear enough to use the telephone. Fidel López continued working with the deaf community. He tried to introduce oralism to the educational process, but it was not well received by the deaf. The community wanted to use MSL and felt frustrated with López's efforts. This resulted in chaos in the community, because there wasn't an existing plan or organized process to educate the deaf. Later on the name of the school was changed to Instituto Nacional of Comunicación Humana (INCH).

Today, a few courses are provided at the San Hipólito Church. Over the years, several clergymen found it necessary to help their deaf parishioners. In the beginning, they taught the children to work with their hands. For example, they taught some carpentry, others how to draw. Then they understood that it was necessary to teach the students to read and write and therefore established a school in 1994.



The Instituto Rosendo Olleta is a private school. There is no existing public education for the deaf community. The parishioners are the ones that support the school with donations.

Father Francis has the dual role of parish priest of San Hipólito's Church and he is also the Instituto Rosendo Olleta's director. He has been working for two years at this school for the deaf.

It is very important for the children to attend school, but many parents keep them at home. When they grow up, they do not know how to live nor do they know what to do because they can't communicate. They don't know what steps to take to get a job. They have to learn all these things at the school in order to be able to improve their life. This institute is trying to train the deaf precisely to this end so that they may be able to face the world and live a better life.

I consider total communication to be very important. It includes manual and corporal signs, as well as the oral and written expression.

The Institute counts on hearing teachers, as well as two deaf assistants. They also have a speech therapist who works individually with the children. Sixteen people at the school work directly with 42 students whose ages range from 3-15 years of age. When they finish their sixth year of studies, they leave the Institute. I would love to see more children attend the school. However, this proves to be very difficult, because some families live far away. Few can count on transportation facilities and most of them are poor.

The children find themselves isolated and sad. If the parents could see other deaf children, they might feel the desire to send their children to the school.

It would be ideal if the children could live in this school with teachers who take care of them. When the children return home, they do not have means to communicate with their parents and relatives. When they go back to school, we have to once again teach them the signs. This proves to be difficult. The best thing would be that the children stay in the school, but in Mexico, dorms do not exist.

I would love to see students finish school and advance to the university level. I know that it is not easy and it takes a lot of work before a deaf student can go to a university. Many support services are needed including their parent's consent. The main problem is the fact that there are no programs for the deaf and no interpretation services. There were none here and none elsewhere. We need to prepare and to plan good schools for the deaf. We need money and teachers. It is even more expensive to empower teachers with corresponding teaching programs.

Ignacio Serrano not only provided information about the history of education for the deaf in Mexico, but he also enjoyed sharing about his life. He enhanced our understanding of deaf culture and told us some interesting stories.

A: Please, tell us about your life.

Ignacio: My family's ancestors date back to Spain in the 1700's. My grandfather was born in Spain and died when he was 50 years old. He was a banker and dressed very elegantly. His wife was a beautiful woman. My grand-father lived when Benito Juarez was President. My father was also from Spain and my mother was born in Mexico. Even though I was born in Mexico, I have Spanish blood.

My wife, who passed away, was very smart. If I didn't know what to do she would advise me. She was very smart and a good communicator. I regret that she couldn't write because they didn't teach her how to do so in school. So I tried to teach her and help her to write. My wife became tired and said it was too late in life and she did not want to learn anymore.

A: What kind of job did you find in the workforce?

Ignacio: I worked as a draftsman. I drew designs for planes. In the afternoons at home, I would draw cartoons that I called "Drake" and I sold them. Every Sunday I'd get

ideas from color magazines. I have a collection. For a long time I worked doing the cartoons and I would also write stories to go with the cartoons. People in small villages in other States would also buy them. The public knew me. When I meet people who grew up seeing my cartoons, they congratulate me and ask if I am still drawing. I tell them that I am not because nobody will print them.

A: It's obvious you have taken a path not traveled very often among the deaf.

Ignacio: Yes, that is probably true. I tried to find the best possible way of drawing. In one occasion I used a mirror to do my self-portrait. It was a long and tedious task. It was not done in one day. It was hard work because of my mustache. The next day I returned to the task. I then worked on the color of the face. When it was finished, I hung it up and people commented on it. I did a "Jesus" portrait and then a second self-portrait.

A: Do you remember the history of technological devices for deaf people?

Ignacio: One of the first inventions for the deaf in Mexico was also invented in U.S. The deaf can't hear the doorbell, so an air fan took the place of a doorbell. Later we learned how to wire a light to the doorbell. That was more com-fortable and satisfactory. I have a doorbell light.

Another invention made it possible for us to use the phone. It was a teletype called a TDD. I don't use it much, but it is used to talk to other people. First, you answer the phone and put the earpiece on the TDD. You then wait for the other person to do the same. You can hear some sounds and then comes the written messages. We have four friends that have TDDs. It is difficult to communicate on the phone because there are only about 40 TDDs in Mexico and most deaf Mexicans cannot read or write and therefore can't use the TDD.

A: Do you believe that deaf adolescents who finish school can have a promising future?

Ignacio: When deaf students finish school, they return home. One deaf student I know returned home, but, could not read or write. His father, an army captain was so concerned that he complained to the school director. The director answered, “Your son can’t read books because he is dumb.” The father believed him and his son was very saddened because deaf people are just as bright as hearing people. They simply can’t hear. Hearing people have the idea that deaf people are stupid and that is not true.

A: I guess this means we have to continue to fight for new special schools.

Ignacio: Yes, I believe that the deaf need special schools because the existing schools are not working. The teachers in many schools think that MSL is not necessary, just oralism. The deaf that are taught orally don’t understand everything. MSL combined with oralism is better. Schools in some states are really bad and that makes me feel sad.

Once when I was at church I saw many young deaf children. After church I took them home. I taught them history in sign language. For example, I asked them if they knew how matches were invented. They didn’t know, so I gave them a brief explanation on how to grind bones until the dust lights up in fire. The deaf children learned something new. Many years later, one of them told me he never forgot the story about the matches. I’m very happy when they say that. I continued to help the deaf when they asked how to write something. Frequently, friends would come to my house, and they asked me to help them write.

A: Despite the great difficulties, don’t you believe the efforts of most deaf people are admirable?

Ignacio: I have seen and experienced many things. Some deaf cannot read or write, others study until the sixth grade and receive their diplomas and they know enough to get a job. Some are proficient at drawing and different kinds of jobs. They buy a newspaper to see what jobs are available. They go to an employer, show their diplomas and get hired. Many of them get jobs as carpenters and skilled ornate woodworkers. When someone tries to talk to them, they write down, "I am a carpenter!" Then, would create woodwork according to what was on the paper.

Let me tell you something. Computers are new and the deaf are learning how to use them to earn a living. Do you know how to use a computer? Well, I'd really like to. Many people are using them now, some use them at a basic level, others at more complex levels. The deaf are learning about everything.

I'm eighty-eight years old and I have lived a lot. I cannot think as well or do as much work as I used to. I'm weary. When I was younger, I had energy and used to work very hard and did many things.

XOCHIMILCO'S GONDOLAS

Gilberto Gaspa-Solar is a very special person because he never attended school. He grew up in Xochimilco helping his uncle build gondolas or light boats. He didn't know how to read or write. He uses home signs and he has very minimal knowledge of Spanish.

A: Please tell us about your life.

Gilberto: I am single; I began to work when I was fourteen years and at present I'm 43. I feel old. I would have liked to have my own business, but I can't communicate very well with others.

I work too much, this is not easy. When I hold and push the gondola with a wooden stick, my arms grow stronger. It's my daily exercise. When there are a lot of people, I work long hours. I begin at 7 am. I come home around 10 am, eat something and then I'm back out again. I work until about 6-7 pm and sometimes if needed, I stay until nightfall. This is definitely a beautiful place and I love to be here. During the weekends, we see people from all nationalities: from all over the country, US and Europe.

A: It's obvious you love this place.

Gilberto: This entire region is beautiful, full of flowers. It's my home where I was raised. Let's take a ride in one of the gondolas. Look at the beautiful forest, everything is gorgeous.

(Gilberto takes us for a boat ride around Xochimilco giving us the opportunity to see his gondola.)

Gilberto: All of the boats are beautifully adorned with flowers. All this forms part of the Mexican culture. The tourists like to sightsee by gondola. The canals are natural. They belonged to the Indians many years ago. They planted

the flowers and the trees. The green color of the water is natural. Let's go for a ride in the gondola. It's a lot of fun. You will like the mariachi music. We can't hear it, but the hearing people enjoy it.



Gilberto uses signs. The hearing people in the gondola know each other. Gilberto sticks the rod deep into the canal's muddy bottom, pushes and the gondola begins to move. In some of the gondolas, there are Mexican men singing mariachi songs. In other small boats, called "chalupas," people prepare food and sell beverages. The gondola is like an aqua-tic taxi. There are many and the competition is fierce.

Gilberto: This gondola is very old, but my uncle, who is my boss, is going to buy a new one, possibly in four months.

THE CARRUAJE HOTEL

Eugenio Reyes was born deaf. His sister is also deaf. He first learned the oral system and some signs. His parents wanted Eugenio to use the oral system of communication all his life. Eugenio's wife and children are hearing and they do not know sign language. When Eugenio was about twenty years old, he was already the owner and administrator of a hotel.

A: Where did you attend school?

Eugenio: When I was a child, I attended a school in Mexico City. I am deaf and there I received speech therapy and learned lip reading. I have communicated this way all my life. I don't know sign language. I was only taught the oral system. I read lips.

A: Why didn't you learn MSL?

Eugenio: I communicate orally. I don't know anyone who knows sign language. Who would I use sign language with? My friends in the United States, you Margarita, Carlos and his friendly deaf persons all use sign language. I can communicate with a few signs, but I am not proficient in sign language. I depend on the oral and lip reading system. With my employees and friends, I talk slowly and move my hands. My friends follow my lips and gestures. This is how I communicate.

A: Do you use a hearing aid?

Eugenio: That was a long time ago. I do not like it, it bothers me, nevertheless I understand that it helps a lot of people.

A: Can you tell us about your hotel?

Eugenio: (Moving his head affirmatively) My father bought the hotel a long time ago. Originally it was a gas station, but it wasn't a good business deal. My father then decided to build a hotel. He built a big hotel with 24 rooms. In the beginning, we continued to sell gasoline, but then my father removed the pump and in its place he built the hotel lobby, then later he replaced the lobby with a bar. In this fashion, little by little, the hotel was transformed. Today it has 50 rooms.

When I was 16 or 17 years old, I left school. I wanted to learn how to administer and maintain this hotel. I would observe the employees and how they maintained the hotel as well as the bartenders. Three years later I was the administrator and the hotel was mine.

A: Did you get help to carry on your projects?

Eugenio: I had an assistant who taught me the finer details of the business. If my assistant saw that an employee was slacking, I would reprimand him or her. I could lip-read very well. I wanted very desperately to learn about the business and I was highly motivated. This is my own hotel. My assistant is a good man who helped me tremendously. He left three years ago and I've been the sole hotel administrator for almost thirty years. I consider myself able and make decisions rapidly. I've been successful and keep at it. My current assistant is very helpful. He takes care of the shopping and makes the bank deposits.

I cannot talk on the phone, but I have an employee that handles the phone and has become my interpreter.

A: Does your hotel have modern equipment?

Eugenio: I have a new and bigger office, new computers, fax and telephone. I always try to keep up with technology.

A: Do you know how many deaf people there are in Guanajuato?

Eugenio: No, I don't. I have seen people signing, but I don't know who they are. I don't know how many deaf people there are here, except for my sister and me.

A: Do you have children? Are they hearing or deaf?

Eugenio: I have two children and they are both hearing.

THE DEAF ASSOCIATION

Victor Manuel Montes of Oca Sánchez, who is deaf, is an example of the importance of education. He has been able to achieve what very few deaf people achieve. He is about to share with us his experiences.

A: Being the President of the Mexican Association for the Deaf (ADMS), can you tell us about some of your rich experiences of life including your first encounters with reality as a child?

Victor: My parents are hearing and I was able to hear when I was born and for a few years. When I was four years old, I got very sick; one day all of a sudden I couldn't hear very well. I was wondering if it was punishment for doing something wrong. My mother discovered that I could not hear from one ear, which worried her very much. We were living in the city of Toluca, and she decided to take me to Mexico City. I attended a special school called IMAL. (Instituto Mexicano de la Audición y el Lenguaje) There I was able to speak better and learned considerably more. I studied at the Institute from the age of four to nine years, having learned all that they could teach me.

It was then decided that I should attend public school. I studied for four years and did the best that I could. It was not easy getting along in an environment where everybody else could hear. For this reason, I doubled my efforts. As a result, I achieved success. I finished school and even completed my university studies. It was a very serious and difficult task, but praise God, I achieved it. I have my diploma and my title. It excites me to be a good example of what the deaf can achieve. I have now been working ten years independently, and that has given me tremendous satisfaction.

The Association's Presidents have changed many times over the years. Mr. Montes de Oca Sánchez was the President at the time of this interview. Later the Deaf Association suspended its activities to allow the formation of Federación Mexicana de Sordos (FEMESOR), also presided by Mr. Montes de Oca Sánchez. Currently all of its deaf activities are held in restaurants.

THE FERTILE COMMITMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Perla Moctezuma Quiroga is deaf and used MSL and the oral system. She learned the oral system because her parents preferred she used it instead of MSL. Later she met and became friends with deaf people and started getting involved in the deaf world. She has three children. She has become one of the most outstanding figures in her community. She has a great desire to help deaf children but there are many political challenges that she must face.

A: Please tell us about your experiences.

Perla: First I used the oral system and next the MSL. I also learned to write. I was accustomed to oralism, but when I started using MSL, I discovered that I enjoyed it more and I understood things better.

A: Where do you work?

Perla: At present I am the Director of an unofficial school for the deaf. The PRI (political party) of the Federal District and the Educational Cultural Association and Social Services for the Deaf, are two organizations that are collaborating to help me. I work with deaf children, although the students do

not pay me. We volunteer to help them. I have been there for four years and I am very happy at the school.

A: Have you received state funding?

Perla: No, the government is not helping, but the PRI of the Federal District is lending us two classrooms. This is how politics works here. We couldn't find private classrooms so we asked if we could borrow them. It is essential to help children with hearing problems and most people lack sensitivity towards them.

A: Are you saying that they are discriminating?

Perla: At first, I imagined that we all were equal. That is what I believed when I was growing up and later working in television. I was wrong...very mistaken. Each world is different. There are deaf persons, some rich and others poor who don't know how to read. A few definitely know, but they are the minority. The basic difference is the lack of education. There are so many deaf who do not know how to read or write. They need more education. I asked myself, What can I do for these deaf children that their future will not be so dark? Mexico City is not the only city with these serious problems. Many challenges worry me, and I need to dedicate myself to try resolve at least some of them and to find the support of others.

A: Tell me who attends your school.

Perla: We currently have fifteen elementary school children and fifteen adolescents. We have a group in the morning and another one in the afternoon. When they meet, not everybody uses the same signs. They learn in three different systems: Oralism, MSL and by writing. We also use facial expressions and body language. It is very important to give them as many opportunities as possible

while they are young, so they will be able to deal better with life.

A: Do you know deaf people in the political arena?

Perla: There are not many deaf people who are well known in society in general, at least for the time being. Nevertheless we have deaf lawyers, several engineers, computer programmers and construction workers. We have a few in each one of these areas, especially those working with computers and in the field of dentistry. But, truth be told, very few are really successful. There may be about 10 deaf people who stand out in Mexico City.

A: Taking this into account, what could we do to provide more opportunities?

Perla: From what we have faced in the past, we need to establish a boarding school in order that the deaf children may eat, live and sleep at school. The parents tend to forget about their deaf children and abandon them. The deaf children's families in general do not live close to the school and lack the resources to pay for transportation. There are a lot of crisis at home and life is very difficult. It would be better if the deaf children were together and slept in the same bedrooms. More importantly it is imperative to hire more teachers. All of this responsibility worries me very much because it is impossible for me to resolve all of these problems without the support of more teachers.

A: You obviously think that this state of affairs does not only exist in Mexico City.

Perla: That is correct. For example, last week I went to the city of Toluca, in the State of Mexico. I visited the supervisors of the zone and I talked to them about deaf children. Next I went for the State of Guerrero and to ten other states. The directors and teachers do not know

anything regarding deaf children. I became astonished and worried. It is definitely a top priority to have a central dorm in a big building so deaf children may live together. We also need more people interested in leading this work.

A: Do you know if there is an official count of how many deaf people there are in Mexico?

Perla: There are no firm numbers, just a rough general idea. Today doctors are confirming that approximately 30 deaf children are born every day. This means that the deaf population is rapidly growing. I can hardly believe this number, it looks impossible.

A: Can you tell us about other activities that have made you well-known?

Perla: In the beginning, I worked in the theater. After a while they asked me to be on television. My first day was terrible. I was so nervous. Then I began to adapt and for thirteen years I signed the news on television. I loved to sign the news. It was a marvelous experience and I learned a lot until the program was taken off the air.

Working in the theater is good because in Mexico there are no interpreters, but of course there are also no interpreters on television.

Television very seldom has “closed captioning” and I have to rent movies. I would like to watch television and learn new words, not only for myself but also for those in the same situation. I can lipread very well at close range, but it is very tiring. We need more everyday television with subtitles.

The United States has its own television system and the movies always have subtitles, even in Spanish. I do not understand spoken Spanish. If people used fingerspelling, I would understand them, but the Mexican television and their actors do not understand the problems of the deaf.

Only recently have they started to do something about this matter.

A: Would you be interested in working again in television?

Perla: Definitely, I would love to work again in television. I would not just include the news, I would use cultural, educational and health issues as well as sign language segments in the program. I want to return and this time with a higher awareness and performance. We cannot forget that it represents a great help for the parents of deaf children.

At my little school, the parents can communicate with their children. Many other parents cannot communicate with their children and the children become isolated. That is why I'm trying to foster communication.

We must insist that parents and deaf children be close and communicate with each other. Children are precious and communication is fundamental. To understand what is being said in the news and the television is of great importance for the future of any child, but especially for deaf children. I will probably write children's books with sign language pictures. The beginnings will be very basic, and I hope the timing is right.

A PEDDLER

Mr. Raúl Fuentes Rivera is deaf. His parents were hearing and did not know MSL but they used home signs. He is one of the elderly who peddles in Mexico City.

A: Please tell me about your schooling

Raúl: While I was growing up in Mexico City, my mother taught me some home signs. In 1949, when I was thirteen years old, my father took me to school for one year. I didn't continue in school because my father needed me to work with him. Later on I met other deaf people who signed. That is when I became proficient in MSL. I also learned the oral system, but I am more proficient in MSL.

A: What kinds of jobs have you had?

Raúl: At first I worked as a shoeshine man near the door of a restroom. Then I worked as a carpenter and as a printer at various places. That's when deaf people started coming to me asking to print peddling cards for them. When other jobs were not available, I became a peddler because I needed money to support my family and some of us make good money. Nevertheless I don't always peddle. I have other skills like mime.

A: Why in the past did more deaf people than now not work or become peddlers?

Raúl: Because there is a discrimination problem. People say "no" very easily without thinking. Since there are no available jobs, they asked for charity. Years ago — and I'm not saying that it still doesn't happen to a lesser extent — many times deaf children only had two choices: their parents taught them to be peddlers because they needed money or the parents had money but didn't want their children to go

to school. It is not good for children to be peddlers. It is also true that Mexico lacks schools for the deaf. There are no public schools for the deaf children. Instead there are small isolated private schools. The problem is that teachers don't know sign language or their signs are not clear enough. The hearing people do not want the deaf to become teachers. Today at last we have one or two deaf teachers and that is good news.

A: I understand what you are saying. Can you share with us why you have chosen this profession and have not looked for another line of work?

Raúl: I went to America to become a peddler. America and Mexico are the same, but you get more money in America. Many people go to America seeking charity and then come back to their native country. Some go there to study, get married or become citizens. They believe America is better. In my opinion Mexico and America are the same. America used to be better, but today they are equal. I can't nor do I need to look for other things. I am satisfied with the life that I have, given my own limitations.

A STUDENT FROM THE INSTITUTO ROSENDO OLLETA

Reyna has a deaf son; she is hard-of-hearing. Her dream is that someday her son will be a college graduate. She hopes that he can have a good education. How she was able to get him accepted in school is a very interesting story.

My name is Reyna Adrocación. I am hearing impaired and my fourteen year old son is deaf. My hearing impairment resulted from a grave illness many years ago. I have an older brother that is deaf and a hearing impaired sister. I am the youngest one in the family. I also have a cousin who is hard of hearing.

I can talk well. I always look at the person's eyes that I talk with, and lipreading helps me understand a lot. I am fluent in MSL. I attended the National School for Deafmutes, but I still didn't receive a good education. The teachers were not competent, because they prohibited the use of the MSL. They would hit my hands when I tried to sign. It was very difficult to un-

derstand the lessons. I wanted to learn the oral system as well as MSL and I desire the same for my son.

My husband and I agreed to take him to St. Hipólito, a place recommended by a friend of mine. Everything came out alright. My son increased his vocabulary and began to show interest in words and signs.

St. Hipólito opened a new school for the deaf, Instituto Rosendo Olleta. It takes time to improve communication, but my son was very excited. He has been there for five years and I hope he will complete his studies in two more years. He reads and writes much better than he used to. Now that he



knows how to read, he asks me questions about the words he reads and doesn't understand.

The other day he told me that he wants a good education in order to get a job working with computers. I remember that a long time ago, many deaf men used to work as draftsmen, but today there are fewer openings in that type of work. Today it's more productive to know how to work with computers. My son says that he wants to finish high school and then go to the university. I find this very hard to believe, because I don't think they will allow a deaf person in the university. That is how things are in Mexico. A friend of mine tells me I should be patient. If my son is really motivated and wants a better education, there are programs for the deaf in America at the university level. The deaf there have access to special programs that do not exist here in Mexico. The government does not have special programs for the deaf. We do have some private schools who try to help, but that is not enough.



Deaf students at Instituto Rosendo Olleta

FRIENDS

Carlos Marquez speaks fluently. He has the same experience as Eugenio Reyes at the Instituto Mexicano de la Audición y el Lenguaje (IMAL) where they both became best friends. Carlos Márquez and Eugenio Reyes communicate orally and they understand each other very well.

A: When you were children, how did you communicate?

Carlos: I was first taught orally, in Mexico City, the same as Eugenio. We were friends in school and classmates.

A: Both of you grew up together. Tell me how you met him.

Carlos: Yes, we met at the same school, IMAL. Eugenio was my friend and classmate. I will never forget that when I moved my hands to sign, the teacher would catch me and hit my hands and make me put them behind my back. It was forbidden to sign! I had to hold my hands behind my back and move my mouth orally to communicate with Eugenio. I was scared of the teacher.

A: When did you learn MSL?

Carlos: I first learned the oral system. Then when I was thirteen or fourteen years old I learned MSL through being in contact with my friends in Mexico.

A: How did you both communicate?

Carlos: I couldn't use MSL with Eugenio because he used the oral system. It was the only system he was comfortable using. I speak Spanish, but the deaf don't understand me. Eugenio does understand me.

A: That means that the two of you communicated well?

Both: Of course!

A: Tell us about your job.

Carlos: I worked as a hotel supervisor for five years with Eugenio as my boss. I can hear a little and talk on the phone.

A: Do you use a hearing aid?

Carlos: Yes, with a hearing aid I would answer the phone for hotel business, like making a hotel, banquet or conference reservation. I would take care of it. Eugenio can't hear, but I can answer the phone for him.

A: What a great way to complement each other!

THE STOREKEEPER

Blanca Seoane is deaf. She is a courageous strong role model for deaf Mexican women. Blanca has a deaf husband and three hearing children. She has handled her situation well, including taking care of her children, cooking, cleaning a big house and caring for her husband who is in poor health. She also started her own business. She is going to share with us about her life and experiences.

I have three children, one girl and two boys. They all have learned MSL. I use Mexican Sign Language everyday, of course, because I am deaf.

My husband worked for thirty-one years for the government as a draftsman. He is retired and he now helps me with my business.

When my husband used to work, he did not get paid very well. One day walking down the street, I noticed a woman selling things to small children. That is when I thought about converting our home into a store. I finally opened a small store. The business grew and I moved to a bigger place.

Thirty years ago, I had a lawsuit against the government because it would not allow me to have a business in this zone. Nevertheless I won.

I went to the government and asked for special permits. I got a neighborhood petition to receive special zoning consideration and I won.

I am the only deaf storekeeper in this area. Most of the time communication is fine with my ability to lipread and gestures. When I can't understand something, the customers write it on paper. However, there is a blind customer who comes all the time. The first time, I was concerned. We couldn't communicate very well. So I patted his hand and got my daughter to come and help. Thereafter, when he could still come, and I would pat his hand to let him know I acknowledged his presence.

My worst communication problem was with the Indians. They cannot write. We cannot understand each other very well. The woman from next door comes and helps intepret for us.

I've been here 30 years. The people in the neighborhood know me and we respect each other.

TEACHER OF TEACHERS

Armando López lived many years in America where he learned a lot. When he returned to Mexico, he dedicated himself to teaching hearing teachers to teach MSL to their deaf students. This is his story.

My name is Armando López. I work as a MSL teacher. My job is to teach sign language to teachers so that they in turn can teach their students. This is very important. I have 30 students and they are all teachers.

I am one hundred percent deaf but I can lipread. I learned MSL when I was seventeen years old. I attended a party where I saw many deaf people signing. This was the first time in my life that I saw anyone signing. I was fascinated and decided to learn to sign and now I love it. Look at me, I'm a sign language teacher. I've been teaching sign language here for two years.

CHAPTER 4

CLIENTS

The next section of this book is devoted to client interviews with deaf Mexican emigrants from Mexico. All the interviews took place in California and Texas over a period of twenty years. I have changed the clients' names in order to protect their identities.

My research indicates that about 90% of the individuals I have interviewed were unsuccessful in leading independent lives. Based on my observations, I would say that their major stumbling blocks have been poor communication skills, a lack of education, and not having acquired a natural language like Mexican Sign Language (MSL). All these factors added together meant that they were unemployable and therefore had little chance of leading successful lives.

Without the ability to obtain an income, deaf adults in Mexico usually do not attain autonomy and end up living at home with their parents or relatives for their entire lives. This is usually not a good solution because in Mexico, as in other countries, there is a lot of ignorance surrounding deafness.

Most parents who have deaf children become frustrated and develop a very negative attitude because they do not know what to do with them. The result is that they often raise the child in neglect and isolation. By the time the deaf child reaches adulthood, he or she has endured a long series of negative experiences, mostly at the hands of family and relatives. In addition, the family usually ends up resenting their deaf family member because they see him or her as a burden.

The outcome of this negativity, which at times has even included physical abuse, is that by the time most deaf children enter adulthood, they have developed a very low sense of self-esteem and have lost almost all hope for a better future. The most common arrangement for these deaf adults is for them to become domestic "slaves" for their families by

taking up much of the household chores such as, cleaning, cooking, and babysitting.

Deaf adults who do not stay with their families and who have never attended school or received any type of education find it hard to get a job and usually become street peddlers. They wind up selling trinkets, keys, and ABC cards with illustrations of the manual alphabet used by many deaf people – the manual alphabet is also an important part of MSL and American Sign Language (ASL).

A recent trend that I have noticed is that more and more deaf people in Mexico are exploring other options. They are emigrating to the U.S. in larger and larger numbers because there are more opportunities for them here.

I was curious about this increase in deaf Mexican immigration so I researched my archives of client files from the past two decades. What I found was that there are three basic reasons why deaf people are emigrating from Mexico and settling here in the United States.

One reason is that hearing parents in Mexico who have deaf children are increasingly giving up hope that the Mexican government will ever come up with a solution to the appalling lack of educational opportunities for deaf children there. These parents sacrifice everything they have in Mexico and move their entire families to the United States. They make this very risky move because they know that the U.S. government guarantees an education for all children, including deaf children. They realize that the only hope for a brighter future for their deaf child is a good education; so they leave everything behind and find their way into the United States.

Another reason why deaf Mexicans are coming to the U.S. is to work in family run businesses where they, typically, become cooks or dishwashers. Others that have relatives that own farms or ranches end up as ranch hands or fieldworkers. These deaf people end up working for long hours with very little pay.

They generally do not learn MSL or ASL and are virtually illiterate. Communication for them usually consists of

only home signs and gestures with their family, relatives, coworkers, and friends. If you ask any of them why they are not pursuing an education, they will tell you that they are too busy working and that they fear they may lose their jobs if they miss a day; their constant work schedule prevents them from doing much of anything else.

The third reason why deaf Mexicans move to the U.S. is to pursue street peddling. They prefer to stay here, rather than in Mexico, because they can live off of government disability benefits and assistance programs like SSI and Welfare. SSI is the Supplemental Security Income benefits that are paid to individuals who are poor and/or disabled and may or may not have ever had a job. Welfare is another program that helps people who are unable to completely support themselves or earn enough to make a living. The deaf Hispanics who decide to take advantage of these government programs often also continue peddling on American streets to supplement what money they get from the benefits and assistance programs. With a higher income than what they could ever hope to achieve in Mexico, many of them feel that they are happier and better off here in America.

Deaf Mexicans in increasingly larger numbers, continue to leave their country behind and sacrifice their lives in Mexico to start a new life in America. Most of them have a better quality of life here, but if you measure freedom - which is something all Americans hold in high regard - as an indicator of success, few of them ever achieve it. Perhaps the only deaf Hispanics that have a chance for true success are the ones that get an education here in the United States; this is especially true for the children, the ones with the greatest potential for a successful life.

I hope that the interviews will shed some light on the trials and tribulations that these people have faced in the past - and are still facing today - and that by reading their stories you will understand them better, perhaps feel their sadness, but most importantly, see a glimmer of hope that exists for them all.

CLAUDIA

To: County Sheriff's Department

Re: The Deputy Sheriff's denial in providing an interpreter.

(transcription of the letter presented)

I would like to introduce myself to you. My name is Margarita Adams. I am deaf and an advocator for the intermediary/Interpreter services. I represent the Fundación de Sordos Hispanos (FSH).

I discovered a problem regarding a situation that my client had with the Deputy Sheriff. I called the Police Department yesterday and requested an interpreter for a deaf client. It is very difficult to communicate by lipreading or writing. The most practical thing is to obtain an interpreter for Claudia. The Deputy said, "We will try to get one", but he showed up without one.

Claudia's son's name is Juan and he is hearing, but he knows basic signs and fingerspells but nevertheless he is not a professional interpreter.

Yesterday we had a meeting and Claudia realized that the Deputy was giving her too much information and Juan was getting very tired fingerspelling. This is a rudimentary system, and you can only capture 40% of basic information while missing 60% of crucial important information. The Deputy kept going while placing a big burden on Juan who also happened to be sick at the time.

I said, "We better stop for now and make arrangements to get an interpreter and meet again tomorrow."

The Deputy said, "I don't think we will need an interpreter for tomorrow".

I informed him that I would call the Interpreting Service Agency and ask for an interpreter. We stopped the meeting and the Deputy Sheriff left the house.

The following day I called (AIS) and gave them the Deputy

sheriff's name and phone number. Later I called the Deputy and he said, "I do not think an interpreter is needed at this time, but I still want to contact the bank and find out exactly what is going on." It was obvious that this Deputy was not informed about the legal rights of A.D.A . He was denying the client's right to hire an ASL interpreter.

I went to Claudia's home again and the same Deputy showed up without the interpreter! Claudia and I were very upset. She asked me why he didn't get the interpreter and I explained to her, "He denied your rights to be able to communicate." Claudia was understandably upset. The Deputy once again continued to write back and forth on paper, which was time consuming. What the Deputy didn't understand was that Claudia did not know how to read or write and that it is indispensable to have an ASL/MSL interpreter so that she could communicate effectively, especially with legal matters.

After the Deputy left, we didn't know what else to do. The Deputy did not clearly explain that Claudia needed to write a letter and take it to the DMV and the bank. He only wrote the number of the case on the other side of a business card. This was vague information.

I took the matter in my own hands and called the Americans with Disabilities Acts and they said that the Sheriff Department is obligated to provide means for effective communication and if they don't provide it, the case can be taken to the Department of Justice.

Claudia was not satisfied with the Deputy's treatment. This is why I'm writing this letter with the purpose of obtaining another appointment and this time a professional interpreter must be present so that we can finally resolve this situation.

MURDER CASE

The challenge to be a translator for the Mexican deaf community was the main reason that eventually led me to become an Intermediary Interpreter between MSL and ASL.

In Mexico, deaf people don't always understand each other because they use different communication methods. For example, Mexican Sign Language (MSL) and different home signs and gestures are used. Some deaf Mexicans emigrate to the U.S. The majority of deaf and hard of hearing people live near the border and come from indigenous background with little education. They traditionally look for work in farms and restaurants. There is an ongoing crisis for interpreting and relay services that are needed among the Hispanic deaf population.

One day when I was taking English and Business classes, an interpreter informed me that he needed my services since I knew ASL and MSL.

José (not his real name) needed help in a FBI investigation involving a crime. José did not know MSL, just home signs which made my job difficult but I was still able to communicate with him.

In court I had to translate very important information that the deaf witness knew about the homicide. The court provided an ASL interpreter and I translated the information to and from the deaf client who used home signs. The FBI wanted to know exactly what had happened.

José finally was able to make himself understood and said that he was very afraid because his hearing friend started a fight with another hearing person. José did not know the origin of the fight. He said that his friend took out a knife and killed another man. The FBI agent again asked the same question to make sure that the deaf person understood, "Are you sure you saw your friend kill another man?" José nodded affirmatively.

We were all satisfied that José, the deaf witness had seen the crime and knew what we were asking him.

DCS (Deaf Community Services) liked the service I provided as an interpreter and hired me as an intermediary between deaf Mexican and hearing people in meetings.

To this day, I continue to be an important contributing member to Deaf Community Services.

BLANCA

(Letter sent to apartment manager)

My name is Margarita Adams; I'm a Deaf Advocate and American Sign Language/Mexican Sign Language Advocacy/intermediary for a client named Blanca.

I met with Blanca at her apartment. She was upset and very angry about a situation that occurred several months ago when you (the manager) approached her about moving her car in the handicap parking space that needed to be painted.

Here is the story:

Blanca is profoundly deaf, meaning she cannot hear at all and her neighbor Tina tried to tell you that. You kept on banging on her door, which didn't help. Tina tried to call Blanca through the TDD relay system but Blanca did not answer because she was sleeping at the time. You then sent an employee to bring a ladder all the way up to the third floor's window.

Blanca woke up and saw a man standing and waving through her window, which terrified her. She opened the door and you verbally informed her to move her car. She felt very humiliated. You should know that this kind of treatment is unacceptable.

To improve communication with a deaf person I offer you the following suggestions:

- Provide a doorbell so she can get a light signal for her door. When the doorbell rings, a light flasher will get her attention. Banging the door is useless to a profoundly deaf tenant and it disturbs the neighbors.
- If you need to contact her, please use the California Relay Services (CRS) and leave a message for her.
- Send out a memo in advance informing residents of any expected circumstance that may occur within the apartment complex.
- Please do not rely on a neighbor to convey information to another client. Either hire a professional certified interpreter or write a note. It is an undue burden to rely on amateurs trying to sign with a severely limited vocabulary, which can be confusing and frustrating.

I am writing this letter to clarify and educate you about the legal rights provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act. These regulations and rights for the hard of hearing and deaf help tremendously in removing communication barriers.

Title III Department of Housing and Urban Development states that local public housing must solve communication barrier problems providing a new door light flasher and installing it.

This action will solve the inappropriate attempt of banging doors. Blanca will be happy if all of this can be solved. Blanca appreciates and gives thanks to our advocacy center and hopes that everything will work out from now on.

CLUELESS LUIS

Luis, a deaf man has been to jail a few times. Being single, he would wander anywhere he pleased and lived in many different cities. In time, he got probation and was released three years later.

For many years, his job consisted of peddling trinket keychains door to door in different locations and cities. One day, it seemed he got up on the wrong side of the bed. On this particular day, after walking many miles trying to sell trinkets, he came upon a quiet house. He stood in front of the house ready to ring the doorbell and was tempted to check if the door was unlocked or not. He checked the doorknob and it was actually unlocked. He slowly opened it and quietly walked inside and took a peek in the rooms; nobody was at home apparently. He snooped in the hallways and walked into a bedroom. His goal was to find something valuable like the jewelry box and/or money. He found a jewelry box on a dresser and cash and shoved it in his pant pockets.

He returned to the front entrance only to see policemen outside surrounding the house with guns pointing at him. They yelled at him and Luis gestured, "I can't hear." They immediately arrested him once discovering the stolen jewelry and money in his pockets. The cops returned the items to the owner and brought him to jail for felony entering and stealing.

The authorities were well prepared in resolving communication barriers with Luis. The process they used was to call the interpreter's agency and hired two interpreters and an intermediary MSL. Luis stayed in a private room and a lawyer had a discussion with him before showing up in the courtroom.

The lawyer had an understanding that most deaf clients need to have an ASL interpreter in order to understand one another; knowing Luis was a deaf Mexican, he went one step further and hired me to ensure Luis had 100% access

to clear communication. Luis's facial expression showed astonishment upon discovering I could sign fluently in MSL and gestures. He no longer could get away with the excuse of not understanding the authorities.

I helped relay to Luis what the attorney explained, "This is not the first time you have broken in and stolen things from people's homes. You broke the law again, and this time it is a grand penalty since this is not the first time you've been to the courtroom."

The attorney mercilessly questioned Luis until he admitted he was aware of his wrongdoings and guilty of breaking the law. The attorney asked "Why did you steal the jewelry when you knew you just completed probation and again broke the law?"

Luis answered via gestures, "I have been good and have not caused trouble for over six years and I admit I made a big mistake of stealing again and I am sorry." The attorney advised him that he should never enter any stranger's houses in the first place. Luis's excuse was that he didn't know anybody was inside the house and entered since the door was unlocked.

He added, "I was just curious if the door was unlocked or not, so when I rang the doorbell and assumed nobody was home, I figured I'd check the house to double check to see if anybody was really home or not."

The attorney yelled back, "You can't go inside a stranger's house, that's against the law!" and added, "You were lucky as the owner could have had a gun and shot you with it and you could have easily died. You didn't hear the woman that was in the house and she heard the alarm system go off. You were clueless that the alarm system alerted the police and she waited for them to arrest you. Were you aware of that at all?"

Luis eyes widened with fright after realizing an owner could have easily shot him with a gun at her house. He admitted he was not aware of the alarm system in the house, nor that a woman was inside.

Luis promised he would never break the law ever again.

He confessed he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and was stupid for repeating the same crime. He learned a valuable lesson that many people have a modern alarm system installed in their homes because it helps them to protect themselves from harm/crimes and it's automatically set up to get the police to investigate as quickly as possible.

With this understanding between them, the lawyer brought Luis into the courtroom. The judge asked Luis if he knew that it was not his first time in a courtroom. Luis using Mexican Sign Language said, "Yes, I was here before." The judge commanded to him, "You have a penalty for committing a theft which is a felony. You are sentenced to three years in jail."

DESPERATE TONA

Through the eyes of a deaf person, I meet up with many deaf people everywhere I go, in what we call the small deaf world. For example, some places where we'd meet other deaf people are at churches, agencies servicing deaf clients, and public places and especially at deaf social events.

One day I meet a deaf interracial married couple. Her name was Tona and for privacy reasons, I am withholding her husband's name. Tona's husband is an American Caucasian, who used basic ASL (American Sign Language) and spoken English. Their six children are all hearing. Tona used MSL (Mexican Sign Language) and basic ASL.

Tona's parents and many of her brothers are all deaf. One of her oldest brothers peddled all through the States, selling keychains and trinkets. He eventually settled in America thus setting an example for his other deaf siblings to follow him.

Tona and her family met me at a public place. After getting acquainted, she asked for my FSH business card.

A few months later, Tona ran into serious trouble. She sought help from her deaf friend who was fluent only in ASL. Tona's deaf friend called me via TDD (teletypewriter device) relaying her message.

I quickly drove over and found Tona in an agitated state, hugging me gratefully for taking the time to visit her. After settling in, we sat down and she began to describe her overwhelming problems that had accumulated ever since she moved to America.

I felt sympathetic for her complicated, distressing problems. After a careful interview and clarifications to ensure we were on the same page and double-checking facts from distortions, the meeting took over couple of hours. After sizing up the entire case, I offered a list of problem solving actions that could help her:

- 1) Contact the Department of Social Services

- 2) Eliminate outstanding debt of \$13,000 through the help of Welfare & Medi-Cal
- 3) Hire a family counselor trained in culture awareness & sexual molestation that her children suffered
- 4) Apply for a green visa card from the Immigration's office
- 5) Halt her husband's violent battery and child abuse

I outlined each of the step-by-step actions, which we would need to work on together, to resolve all of her problems. I warned her it would be a tedious process and was willing to volunteer to help her get back on her feet. Tona felt reassured once knowing we'd make weekly appointments.

A week later, Tona's husband abandoned her. Tona felt desperate taking on all the burdening responsibility of taking care of her dependent children, dealing with poverty, and the lack of support system. Bemoaning that her husband had abandoned them, I reminded her of what he put them all through. With a renewed conviction, along with my constant support, she realized she would manage independently.

Tona was distraught for being illiterate. She had medical bills that she owed for the amount of over \$13,000. Since Tona never enrolled in the Medi-Cal health insurance, she was stuck with the shocking debt. The first thing we did was sign up for Medi-Cal to receive help with her medical bill. We discovered that in this case Medi-Cal was only good with emergency visits for pregnant women.

I interpreted this crucial information to Tona in MSL.

Tona explained that the original ASL interpreter did not convey or clarify which emergency visits the hospital would cover specifically. Tona thought that Medi-Cal would cover any severe illnesses. She was extremely ill and had to be brought to the hospital via the ambulance in order to have surgery. Afterwards, she stayed in the hospital for a few days until the doctor ordered her to return home.

The social worker apologized to Tona for the misunderstanding and was more than happy to seek a waiver with the health insurance via new data fed into the computer and also sent letters to the hospital.

With the social worker's instruction, I wrote letters to the collector's department, which took several months to straighten out the chaos. The hospital cooperated and resent all the bills to the medical office. We managed to finally clear up the confusion and Tona's confidence grew.

Next, I taught Tona how to seek and make appointments for professional counseling and very importantly, how to request for an ASL interpreter and an intermediary MSL. Tona and her children faithfully attended the counseling weekly sessions for over two years.

The next hurdle we had to overcome was to seek help from the Immigration Attorney's Office. The dilemma was that the Attorney's office provided free services if there was no need to pay for interpreters. This is what made the situation difficult since it was very hard to find an interpreter who would work for free. Finally I was able to locate a hearing person fluent enough in ASL although she was not a professional certified interpreter but was willing to volunteer her services for free. Tona was finally able to successfully obtain her green card which allowed her to stay in the country for three years.

In all the time Tona was with me, her ASL vocabulary improved immensely. She learned how to request an ASL interpreter when needed. Tona also successfully attended a community college and learned to read and write English. Later, she had an opportunity to get into job training and was able to quit peddling.

Much to her amazement, she accomplished her fervent goal of being a good mother to her six children all by herself. Working with her has been a highlight in my career. I discovered that with perseverance, patience and teamwork and bit of creativity, we could accomplish almost anything. We were also able to find an interpreter willing to work for free. God has always helped me!

A DEAF MAN CROSSES THE MEXICAN-U.S. BORDER

In the early eighties, the Interpreter Agency called me to resolve a problem they had. My job assignment was to drive over to the hospital and investigate in detail about a patient.

Juan (not his real name) was a deaf Mexican patient with both of his legs severely injured. Apparently Juan arrived with swollen injured legs and immediately hired an ASL interpreter. The certified interpreter tried to communicate with Juan to no avail. The interpreter admitted to the doctor that she could not communicate with Juan due to her incapacity to understand/sign and/or gestures in American Sign Language. The frustrated doctor terminated the interpreter's contract and this is where I stepped in.

By law, the doctor must have the patient's acknowledgement and consent via signing a release form in order to have the operation that he needed. The certified professional interpreter failed to act upon her responsibility to ensure a smooth rapport between a foreign deaf customer and a doctor. The interpreter was well aware of her duty that once a customer cannot understand her - to transfer over to another interpreter as soon as possible and not have another meeting three days later! This is a horrible and unethical example of an interpreter taking advantage of a deaf client. What made the situation worse is that due to the communication barrier, the victim's legs became infected with gangrene.

I was thoroughly disappointed in how the interpreter could be so arrogant to pretend she had the expertise to communicate in a variety of different sign languages; which was clearly not the case at all. I suspected she was putting off hiring another qualified interpreter to reap significant earnings.

With the best of my ability, I tried to communicate using signs and gestures with Juan. The doctor wanted to know how he injured his legs. He answered back with gestures:

“I crossed the Mexican-U.S. border. I found a gas station where I saw a cement truck parked nearby, I quickly ran over to the truck and climbed inside the rear of it and hid underneath the barrel. When the driver returned, he started the ignition which slowly moved the cement barrel. My legs were pinned underneath. I screamed in pain, but the driver did not hear me. A person at the parking lot heard me and gestured by waving his hands to alert the driver to halt the truck. The driver found me stuck inside and called for the ambulance and brought me here to this hospital.”

The doctor was satisfied with the report that I relayed to him with detailed and crucial information. Only then was he able to get Juan’s signature on the consent form.

The doctor asked Juan if he wanted to go ahead with the surgery. Relaying the question, Juan immediately agreed as to do whatever it took to stop the pain in his legs. The doctor warned him that he may have to cut either one or both of his legs and was he willing to accept that. Juan nodded his head in affirmation. With that clarification, the patient was whisked to the operation room.

The doctor thanked me profusely for my relaying service that resolved the communication barriers with his patient. He explained how frustrated he was with the first interpreter wasting his time and inflicting unnecessary suffering to the deaf man.

When I left the hospital, I grieved and cried my heart out. Why did this have to happen to the poor victim? This was pure injustice. Fortunately, I was able to help resolve the issue by bridging the gap between the doctor and Juan.

TINA'S AMERICAN DREAM

This is the story of Tina, a deaf woman from Mexico. I met Tina around 1983 and I remember her saying, "My dream is to move to America." Then about ten years later, it seemed as though her dream was about to come true. In 1993 she moved to Southern California.

Tina thought that this was going to be the beginning of the good life for her, but things did not work out as she had envisioned. She married, gave birth to a son who was hearing, and soon afterwards got divorced. However, she faced even bigger obstacles because she had minimal language skills, and did not know how to communicate in American Sign Language (ASL) or English.

Because Tina never received any formal education in Mexico, she only knew a little bit of Mexican Sign Language (MSL) and used mostly home signs; a rudimentary form of communication consisting of gestures and invented signs that she used with her immediate family. What that meant was that she was illiterate, unable to read or write in Spanish or English, as well as unable to communicate in any form of a true language like MSL or ASL.

In addition to her lack of language skills she faced other obstacles as well. She was living in the United States illegally because she did not have a Green Card; a government issued permit for non-citizens to live and work in the United States. Another problem for her was that her ex-husband was not paying her any alimony or child support. To top it all off, she received only a small amount of Welfare because only her son was eligible for benefits because he was born in the U.S., and she was not. She also suffered from various health problems and could not afford the cost of medical attention and had no health insurance.

All of these problems became so overwhelming to her that she ended up getting severely depressed, started having feelings of hopelessness, and began to gain weight. But, her story does not end here.

Because Tina was an illegal alien, she was in constant fear of being discovered. The possibility of getting deported back to Mexico was a daily reality; wherever she went, whatever she did, she lived with constant stress. Every time she rode the bus or trolley, she would break into a sweat. Tina would sit alone, terrified that someone might ask for her identification. Every time she used any form of public transportation, she would pray that nobody stopped her. No one ever did, but if they did, she knew that she would be in big trouble; especially because she could not speak, and could not read or write. Tina thanked God every time she returned home safely.

Tina had a desire to go to school and improve herself by learning to read and write. She realized that an education was important for a successful and independent life, but in order to attend school she had to have a Green Card, which she could not attain. The only help she was able to receive came from her local Deaf Community Services Agency. They did all they could to help her, but their resources were limited for her needs.

The only comfort and security that Tina could find was with her friends. It turned out that she was not alone; there were others like her, other people that emigrated from Mexico, others that grew up much like her, deaf with only minimal language skills. She found comfort with her friends and also began to learn ASL. To this day, Tina is continuing to learn ASL and with the help of her friends and her communication skills are improving daily.

Tina has thought of moving back to Mexico, but she knows that her son is better off staying in school and will have a better future here in the U.S. rather than in Mexico. Even though she feels trapped, with every day being a constant struggle, she has accepted the fact that it is best for her, and her son, to stay in America. Tina has come to realize that life in America is not much like the dream she once had, but maybe her dream can live on in her son.

CHAPTER 5 EXPERIENCES

“A dog can be a deaf person’s best friend”

Article published in the
San Diego Union-Tribune in the 80’s

Ms. Muciño is deaf. A dog-named Casper is her “ears.” Part collie, part mutt, Casper is one of only a half dozen so-called hearing dogs in San Diego County.

Ms. Muciño, 26 of Chula Vista, got him two years ago from the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty To Animals. At home, Casper is trained to get Mucino’s attention, gently, whenever her alarm clock or microwave oven buzzer goes off.

Away from home he also is prepared to, not so gently, defend her life. “Someone tried to break in my car outside a bowling alley in Kearny Mesa recently, and Casper barked and snapped at the person,” Muciño said. “He really protected me.” Born deaf in Mexico City, Muciño rarely speaks. Though she speaks both Spanish and English, she usually communicates in sign language, or through Tim, the interpreter, who “translated” during an interview the other day.

Reticent to talk about herself, Muciño became down right chatty when asked, via Tim, if she loves her dog. “I’m crazy about him,” she said, smiling as she made her signs. “He always obeys me. He has a lovely personality and follows me everywhere I go. He works



all the time. He's happy too. I can tell because his tail wags. We always play. We play ball. I throw the ball and he retrieves it. And I have a rubber donut ring. "If he's running after the ball and the phone rings he'll stop regardless of what's he's doing, and tell me. He's only missed once – when he was asleep."

Ms. Muciño is a secretary at Deaf Community Services of San Diego. The SPCA facilities in San Francisco and in Oregon are the nearest sources of hearing dogs. Deaf Community Services provides a number of services for the hearing impaired, including translators like Tim. The center maintains a communications relay network, which allows deaf people to "talk" on the telephone via Teletype machines. When Muciño's home telephone rings, Casper runs to her, stands on his hind legs and nudges her. She answers by placing the phone in a coupling device connected to a TDD (Telephone communication Device for the Deaf) The machine translates the caller's audible sounds into print. Muciño's replies are typed back. If the caller does not have a TDD, he may route his call through the Deaf Service Center relay service. Workers at the relay will "translate" Muciño's replies back into words. Ironically, dogs like Casper are part of the high technology deaf people are using to enhance their lives.

"He's kind of a warm-bodied way to replace some electronics," said the Director of Deaf Community Services.

Possessing a hearing dog has allowed Muciño to have a number of amenities previous denied the deaf and beside the telephone, microwave and alarm clock, Casper is trained to alert her to the doorbell, fire alarm, smoke alarm and car alarm. He has not had to warn her of danger yet. But one night last year, her compact car was stolen from outside her house. Now that the car is equipped with an alarm, Muciño is confident that the hearing dog will be alerted to any attempted car theft. She says, "I can take my dog anywhere – restaurant, airport, hotel – because of his orange collar and identification card. People read his identification card and let us pass. That's great. If I had to leave my dog at home, it would break my heart."

She leaves him at home while she's at work, however. Then, he doubles as a sentry to wait for her. The Muciño's twin handicaps made it easy for them to get Casper. The San Francisco SPCA director said, it gives priority to families where both spouses are deaf. Single deaf people are next in priority. Then come single hard-of-hearing people. People in "mixed marriages," where one partner can hear, get lowest priority.

Muciño said, she heard about hearing dogs while attending classes for the deaf at the Education Cultural Center (ECC) in Southeast San Diego.

"People from the SPCA gave a demonstration. They said it costs \$2,500 to train each dog. I applied to San Francisco and had to wait for six months. Final, they gave us Casper – for free."

For San Francisco transplant Casper, it wasn't love at first sight. "His trainer, Mal, came down with him and stayed with us for three days," she said, "He said he did that so Casper wouldn't be afraid. During the three days, Mal taught us how to reinforce Casper's behavior to respond to sounds. We were to give him little doggie biscuits, his favorite kind. Mal said when he got his food, and then he knew his work was done, he would lay down or go play, whatever.

"I was really happy. I love pets. Especially dogs. I had many pets in Mexico City, different kinds of dogs, a few cats, and birds.

"Casper was already a year old then, and the SPCA had named him. He was cute. His eyes were all sparkly and he was all white just like Casper the Friendly Ghost."

I thank the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals.

JUAN GARCIA MUCIÑO

I was born in Santa Cruz Ayotusco, in the State of Mexico, on November 24, 1939. I come from a large and strange family. I say strange because that's how we were seen in the village. For every healthy child, my parents had a deafmute. And I say large, because we were ten children in the family. Six could speak and four could neither speak nor hear. I was one of the deafmutes.



As a child, I thought everybody was like me. I didn't know what things were called nor what they were good for. My parents were poor country people. They didn't know what to do with the two deafmute girls and the two deafmute boys. They were never able to understand me well and didn't try to teach me by gestures the names of things. Only once, when we found a snake in the field, did my father point to the animal and with one hand draw his shape in the air. Then he bent his fingers to simulate jaws and pretended to bite the other hand. His eyes were sparkling and he twisted his mouth to give the impression of great pain. I got the idea, then, that the snake was dangerous. I was so impressed that during my entire childhood I kept dreaming of snakes.

I don't recall any other attempt by him to communicate with me. I felt extremely lonely. In the village, I only played with my brothers. The other children were afraid of me because, as I learned later, they thought my ailment was contagious, and even though I could not understand their words, I could tell from the expression of their eyes that they were insulting us. Since I never had any toys, I would amuse myself by digging holes in the ground and waiting

for the ants to come out. Sometimes I would spend hours at a time watching the birds. I still didn't understand many things, such as what animals were or why my father's throat would vibrate when I leaned on his chest.

Another thing I was never able to understand fully but which pained me greatly was to see how those in the village shunned my mother because she had deafmute children. My parents didn't realize I was aware of this, but I saw them crying many times. I felt a vague feeling of guilt and wanted to get as far away as possible.

THE NAMES OF THINGS

On one occasion, one of my aunts made a trip to Mexico City and discovered that there were schools for deaf-Mutes. She reported this to my father on her return. Shortly thereafter, my older brother Francisco was sent to Mexico City. I followed him when I was five.

I was taken to a boarding school for deafmutes located on the street of Santa Veracruz. I never again saw as many birds as in my village, but I discovered more interesting things such as, for example, turning a light bulb on and off. One morning, a man made us get in a line and walked us through the old part of the city until we reached a school on Leona Vicario street. It was there that I finally realized I was a deafmute.

The teacher was called Angelina. The first thing she taught me was my name and she made me aware that there were such words as Father and Mother. We were ten children in the group and every one had a different way of describing his father. Some would kiss their own hand when they referred to their father. One of the boys would place his hands on his stomach to indicate that his father was fat.

I would place a finger on my upper lip to show that my father had a moustache. Soon, the expression "Father" be-came standardized through the sign language of the deafmutes. Two taps on the mouth with the index and forefinger spread out like the letter V, and the thumb at the base of the forefinger, meant "Father."

During the three-year course, I learned the names of things. I was able to read them by following the movement of the lips of the teacher and then repeating them with gestures: cup, chalk, tree, table, etc. We were also trained to emit sounds and to try to form words with them. The teacher would pronounce the letter “a” and would point to the posture of her lips. Later, looking into a mirror, we tried to imitate her. To pronounce the letter “n,” we would close a nostril with one finger. For the “m,” we would place a hand under the chin and push upward. With water in the mouth, gargling, we tried so hard to reproduce the letter “g.” The vocals would come out by placing a metal tablet on the tongue to hollow out the mouth. We had to pronounce words such as “Father” at the same time we put out a candle.

LIFE IN THE BOARDING SCHOOL

In the afternoons, after class, we would return to the boarding school in a single Indian file. A man and a woman were the keepers of the old and melancholy building. For supper they would give us bread and atole, a hot drink made from cornmeal. The small boys would get half a roll of bread and the big ones a full roll. We loved the bread so much that sometimes we would go out into the street to beg for more.

It was an obsession with us. We would gather up to the last crumb on the tables. I would go to sleep thinking of the bread and would dream that someone was giving me bags full of rolls.

We never tasted meat or eggs during the noon meal. The food was so bad that many of the boys would throw it away. But if the watchman found out about it, he would make them pick it up and eat it. When someone got sick through signs we would tell the woman he had a stomach ache, she would reply with eye and hand gestures: “Just bear it. God has sent it to you.”

Still, I was happy at the boarding school. Nobody ever hit me, unless I broke something or committed some foolish

prank. I was better off than in my own house and my companions, deafmutes like myself, were so good to me. They never hurt me and I began to think there could not possibly be a country with much nicer people.

On Sundays we would be taken to Chapultepec. We would walk in line, one behind the other, wearing black boots and the blue denim overalls we ourselves had washed. In the afternoon they would take us to the movies.

I began to learn to read and write when I was eight. In the afternoons, they would teach us bookbinding. I spent nine years altogether at the boarding school. When I was fourteen, they gave me a diploma. It was equivalent to an elementary school diploma, but I still had difficulty writing and I missed many words when reading. I was aware that people used many more words than I did. The abstract words were the most difficult for me. Hate, intelligence and love are concepts that confuse the deafmute. For example, I sometimes felt a strange sensation that made me concentrate on something. This sensation thrilled me and made me feel good. Later, I learned the word love, but I did not relate it to that sentiment. It was an older deafmute who explained that the feeling I experienced was called love.

EARNING A LIVING

When I finished my studies, I returned to the village. My father was very proud of the fact I could read and write. The neighbors, many of them illiterate, were amazed that someone like me could prove to be better than they were. I was not happy. Work in the fields left me in a bad mood. For three months, I tilled the soil, lugged sugar cane and extracted aguamiel (juice from which pulque is made) from the maguey plants. I was working like a burro for only 12 pesos a week.

I couldn't stand the new life. I went back to Mexico City and got a job as a bookbinder at the El Negrito print shop. I worked eight hours a day and made 35 pesos a week. One day I discovered that an apprentice was needed at a jewelry

store shop. I called at the shop on Madero street, they accepted me and during several months I was earning 50 pesos a week for a half-hour practice every day. There I learned to polish diamonds and precious stones. After a year and a half at El Negrito, they hired me to polish diamonds and other gemstones at 135 pesos a week.

My new salary was a blessing. My family had come down to the city from the village and we were all crammed together in a room on the rooftop of a building, for which we had to pay 60 pesos a month. Only my brother Francisco and I were working. My father would return to the village every day to continue to work the land.

At the age of 16 I learned to draw, with the idea of getting a better job. A deafmute who worked with the Federal District government would teach me when his supervisor was away. I studied construction design three hours a day for eight months. Later, another deafmute friend got me a job as a draftsman in the office of a civil engineer. I was making 650 pesos a month by then. The engineers liked the work of deafmutes because we are fast and we never talk back. That's how I began. Now I am a draftsman with a company that makes civil engineering designs. My brother Francisco also works there. My salary, which fluctuates between 3000 and 4000 pesos a month, allows me to live quite well, together with my parents and seven brothers. I even have an automobile.

MY DREAMS

One of the things I want the most is a home. I also want to get married. I have a very pretty girlfriend who had the same physical problem that I do. I hope to be as happy as my brother Francisco, who also married a deafmute and now has two children who can hear and talk. I do not lack friends, both deaf and mute and those who can speak. My fellow workers treat me very well and are always trying to help me. There is only one thing that annoys me when I deal with other people; the curious stares of strangers when

they see us converse through hand signals. I am sure that eventually I will get over this, as my friends have done.

My dream is to create a great organization of deafmutes. I have already taken the first step in this direction, together with some of my physically impaired friends. It all began in 1962 when I had a chance to attend a basketball tournament for deafmute athletes in Los Angeles, California. I was very impressed. In Mexico, all we had were just a few football soccer teams. On my return, my companions and I organized our deafmute friends to play football soccer and parcheesi, a table game, and in 1963 we established the Asociación Deportiva Silente de México [the Silent Sports Association of Mexico], with about 100 members. We set our monthly dues at between three and 10 pesos and rented a place in the old downtown sector of the city for 270 pesos a month. I was elected president of the group.

Our football soccer team has won 13 trophies. We play against anybody who wants to play us. We also have swimming, track and field, tennis, cycling and Olympic wrestling teams. Last June, we were invited to take part in the Tenth International Games for Deafmutes, held in Washington. The nine of us who went were amazed. These games began in 1924 in France and advanced so quickly that 32 countries were competing in Washington. There must have been about 10,000 deafmute athletes and spectators.

WHAT WE SAW IN WASHINGTON

The organization was perfect. There were translators on hand, which made it possible for a Pole to understand an Englishman. At the banquets, when some important person gave a speech, several interpreters distributed throughout the room would translate it into sign language. We also attended a theatrical presentation, the tragedy Medea, performed by a group of deafmute actors who previously had interpreted several of the works of William Shakespeare.

In the Olympic games we competed in diving, tennis and track. We achieved our biggest success with a fourth place in

diving. Perhaps we will do better at the next Pan American Games for the Physically Impaired, which will be held in Rio de Janeiro in 1967, or in the Olympic games in Yugoslavia in four years. The Washington games were the first of this nature attended by Mexico.

Something else that impressed us in the U.S. capital was the school for deafmutes. Its curriculum included advanced studies for the leading professions. In Mexico, we have much to do yet. There are only three government schools for the 5,000 deafmutes in the Federal District, and five private schools with a tuition that is prohibitive for persons of limited means. In the rest of the country there are only six schools for 25,000 deafmutes. Then, too, government schools merely provide elementary school instruction. To learn to read lips and to conduct pronunciation exercises that would help the student to speak, it is necessary to go to private schools, which charge between 500 and 1000 pesos a month. Under such circumstances, thousands of deafmutes never attend school. They are illiterate and live in abject poverty. Some work as laborers, but most of them have to depend on public charity.

There are some who believe that the deafmute is ignorant and unable to learn. I do not share this view and not because I may be impaired, but because I have seen how my companions have striven to improve their own lot. There are dozens of excellent draftsmen in the Federal District who can neither hear or speak. They learned their profession on their own, by observation. I even know a deafmute who drives a bus to Acapulco. I dream of the day when, in addition to preparing athletes, our association can help the new generations of the physically impaired to experience the great joy of abandoning forever the world of silence.

A NOTE FROM MIKE ADAMS

My parents are hearing and they do not use American Sign Language and always preferred that I talked to them. I have three brothers and one sister.

I am grateful to my parents who cared for me so much and always protected me, but I wish they could have learned ASL so I could express myself signing with joy instead of speaking. I never complained to them and I will always remember how patient they were with me.

When I was a boy my favorite toy was a train. I could imagine myself traveling all over the world. I loved to watch tele-vision especially the action pro-grams. My favorite hero was Frankenstein.

When I was around 22 years old I started to work in the construction of homes in Lake Tahoe. I built many apartments and my own home. I now work as a Navy mechanic. I love to build homes and enjoy life.

When we visited our family on occasions like birthdays and holidays, they would talk about me. This made me uncomfortable but I always managed to smile.

I remember a very vivid memory. I used to see my dad put gas in the car and one day I wanted to do the same. That day the car didn't run and he took it to the service station. The mechanic told him that there was water instead of gasoline in the tank. My father knew I had done it, but he also knew that we had problems communicating.

It is my wish that parents of deaf children educate themselves to be able to deal with similar situations.



SIGNS OF DESPERATION AND VICTORY

The dreams of deaf Mexicans in America frequently become a living nightmare. A true tragedy occurred in 1998 in New York City.

This shocking news is unthinkable in this modern day; many deaf Mexicans are victims forced to work as slaves. A deaf Mexican ringleader and his wife/partner with their deaf daughter and son immigrated to Los Angeles and then settled in New York City.

The ringleader knew how to cleverly lure deaf Mexicans who were extremely vulnerable. They purposefully sought out uneducated deaf women and men that were gullible and brought them through the borders covering a wide region such as California, Chicago, and Texas. The long-awaited arrest finally took place in New York City for the first time in history.

The ringleader's family took advantage of deaf Mexicans who were profoundly deaf, non-speaking and illiterate. The ringleader's greedy goal was to force deaf Mexicans to work as slaves by peddling useless trinkets in the city streets, restaurants, airports, and bus or trolley stations all day long.

The deaf Mexicans were forced to penal servitude selling key chains, walking all day long in brutal weather conditions six out of seven days a week. The ringleader profited from each of the peddlers who were making \$200 to \$300 a day. The ringleader refused to give a dime to the deaf workforce. Some of the deaf people inquired where their earnings went. The ringleader lied to them stating, "I will put your money into your bank savings account. I have documented all of the funds in my book under your name."

With this verbal agreement, the deaf people entrusted all their money to him. The deaf Mexicans asked if the ringleader could mail postcards to send to their relatives in Mexico. Agreeing, the ringleader bought postcards with an image of

the Statue of Liberty and wrote, "I love America and earn a lot of money." That of course was all a lie.

The deaf people were malnourished from chronic starvation and always inadequately clothed. Whenever any of the deaf Mexicans were ill, they were still forced to sell trinkets. Once one very sick deaf peddler could not put in the full day's work and returned to his housing. This infuriated the ringleader; as a result, he beat up the deaf Mexican and punched him in the eye.

The ringleader's family threatened the deaf people if any of them tried to run away or escape, they'd be killed. They were held in bondage so that the deaf would further suffer more and be traumatized to the point of paralyzing fear.

The deaf Mexicans felt they were worse off than American prisoners. Some of the deaf tried to escape; they were hunted down, captured and shocked with electric stun guns maliciously applied onto their necks. The fear of tolerating any more inhumane physical pain had them submissive. In fear, they refused to fight back for fear of vengeance and punishment. Desperation and gloominess was all they ever experienced in the so-called, "Land of Opportunity."

Gratefully and with utmost bravery, one deaf person managed to sneak inside the police station during his round and made attempts to report to a police officer. The cop could decipher something was suspicious by the deaf man's gestures which looked awfully desperate. The investigations led the police to discover the ringleader's residence and he and his family were arrested. The New York Police department found the family ringleader had earned over a million dollars. The police discovered a filthy, overcrowded apartment with fifty deaf men, women and children. They were laid down in the room like sardines with an offending stench.

The deaf Mexican victims relocated to California and have sought FSH to help them. After conferring with FBI detectives, they were informed that the ringleader's family

was arrested and put in jail for these crimes. This has greatly relieved the clients; thus they can now anticipate hopeful dreams to at last materialize in America.

This story vividly shows that despite dismal conditions of oppression and inhuman conditions, deaf people can rise to the occasion and fight for their dignity and well-being.

CHAPTER 6

WORDS OF WISDOM WHEN MEETING A DEAF PERSON

When you meet a deaf person consider the following information:

1. Speak clearly and distinctly, but don't exaggerate. Use normal speed unless asked to slow down.
2. Provide a clear view of your mouth. Waving your hands, holding something in front of your lips, thus hiding them, makes lip reading impossible.
3. Use a normal tone unless you are asked to raise your voice. Shouting doesn't help.
4. Speak expressively. Because a deaf person cannot hear subtle changes in tone, which may indicate sarcasm or seriousness, many will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and body movement to understand you.
5. Before speaking to a deaf person, get his/her attention by gently waving your arm or touching the person's arm. Maintain eye contact when conversing. If you look away while you are talking, the deaf person may think you are finished.
6. If you are having trouble understanding a deaf person's speech, feel free to ask him/her to repeat what was said. If that doesn't work, then use paper and pen. Communicating is your goal. The method doesn't matter.

7. If you know any sign language, try using it. If the deaf person you are communicating with finds it a problem, the person will let you know. Usually your attempts will be appreciated and supported.
8. If a deaf person is with an interpreter, speak directly to the deaf person not to the interpreter.
9. When talking with a deaf person, try not to stand in front of a light source (e.g., a window). The deaf person will find it hard to see your face, which would be silhouetted in the sunlight.
10. Install a teletypewriter phone system (TTD) in your office and advertise it.
11. When planning a meeting, remember that visual aids are very helpful to a deaf participant. If a film is planned, provide a written script, outline, or summary of the film content.
12. This variety of options, which must be provided at no cost to the deaf and hearing-impaired patient, client, student, employee, etc. must include:
 - Advance notice by mail to client of any forthcoming meeting
 - Arrange for interpreters fluent in ASL and possibly MSL
 - Supplemental hearing devices for amplification
 - Written communication
 - Flashing lights for doorbells

CHAPTER 7

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

What motivated me to write my first book, “History of the Education of the Deaf in Mexico and Mexican Sign Language,” was my desire to draw attention to the plight of deaf Mexicans and inspire positive changes in the education of deaf children in Mexico. I also hoped that the book itself would instill a sense of pride in deaf Hispanics about their heritage, as well as give them a tangible record they could hand down to future generations.

Another reason I was compelled to write my first book was the realization that a lot of historical information is available about deaf cultures around the world, but I could find virtually nothing regarding Mexican deaf culture. I was saddened even more when I realized that the total number of deaf people in Mexico is about 1.3 million, and less than one out of twelve learn the sign language of their country, Mexican Sign Language. That adds up to more than 1.2 million deaf people in Mexico with virtually no language skills. It was clear to me that something had to be done, so I wrote and published, “History of the Education of the Deaf in Mexico.”

After the completion of my first book, I began to realize that there was also a real need for a follow-up book to fill in key information which would include personal accounts from deaf Mexicans and my own story. That is how my second book, “Journey Beyond Silence,” came into existence and hopefully it will provide the completion of my original vision.

It is my wish that these stories will motivate deaf Hispanics to experience the taste of freedom that comes from having good communication skills and therefore being able to successfully deal with others in the hearing world. Communication can bring a sense of purpose that cannot be taken away from us.

These experiences show the joy in our lives when we are able to express ourselves freely through our native language, whether it is MSL or ASL.

We have powerful deaf Mexicans who are role models to be emulated. They encourage us to feel proud of ourselves and provide inspiration to empower the deaf culture.

There is an urgent need to prevent our deaf culture from being extinguished; what will happen to the deaf children and the world in which they live if nothing is done?

I am painfully aware that parents and children need support and communication to strengthen family ties, but there is still hope.

Mexico and America are very different. Life for the deaf is better in the United States because the government offers support services to disabled and deaf. The government encourages and demands an education for everyone. It is a good system and the laws are effective. Many deaf persons have jobs and lives they enjoy. Nevertheless, there is no reason why this should not happen in Mexico.

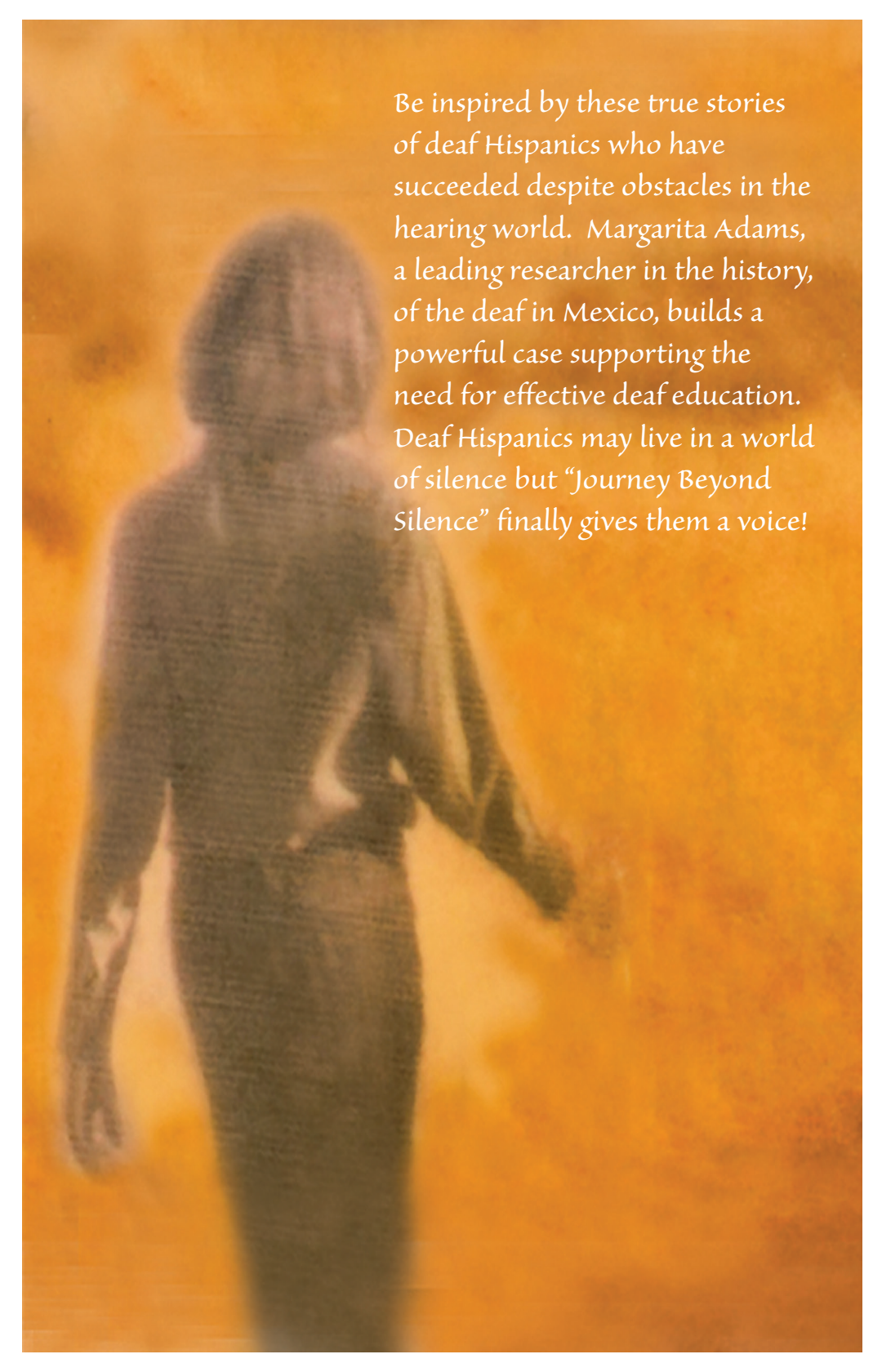
Many teachers have compassion for the deaf children in Mexico and are making attempts to use both the oral approach and signs in their instruction. It would be of utmost help if they had more information, materials, books, manuals and instructions regarding the use of MSL. So little is available. It is important to have guidelines and training to assist teachers to become successful and professional educators.

In one last effort to plead my case, I urge the Mexican Government to reopen the school for the deaf that was known as the National School for Deafmutes established by the Charter of 1861, the Institution of Public Schools for Deafmutes, and enacted by Benito Juarez, the President of Mexico, 1858-1872. During the time that the school was open at the Corpus Christi location, from 1866 to sometime in the 1920's, it held the promise of a better life for deaf Mexicans. After it was closed amid mysterious circumstances, that promise faded away. I now pray and hope that the promise has not been lost forever.

My true heart's desire is that my two books, "History of the Education of the Deaf in Mexico and Mexican Sign Language" and "Journey Beyond Silence," help to open the eyes of Mexico and serve as keys to once again unlock the doors to the promise of the Charter of 1861 with its offer for a brighter future for deaf Mexicans, a future that I envisioned many years ago, one that is filled with opportunities for all deaf Hispanics to lead successful lives.

I now believe that my life's ambition has been realized and I can hope and pray that I have done all that I can to bring awareness to a very urgent situation.

My greatest hope is that, one day soon, someone picks up where I have left off and carries my message of hope by taking further action that leads to real changes in the educational opportunities available to all deaf Hispanics everywhere.

A blurred, artistic photograph of a person walking, overlaid with text. The person is seen from the side, walking away from the camera. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color. The text is in a serif font, positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

Be inspired by these true stories of deaf Hispanics who have succeeded despite obstacles in the hearing world. Margarita Adams, a leading researcher in the history of the deaf in Mexico, builds a powerful case supporting the need for effective deaf education. Deaf Hispanics may live in a world of silence but “Journey Beyond Silence” finally gives them a voice!