



Calgary Jewish Federation

Meshane Ha Briot: Inclusion Essay Contest, 2020

A Million Unheard Sounds

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Division B Winner, Grade 8

When I had just begun second grade, I migrated from the balmy land of Israel to the cold city of Winnipeg. I did not know how to speak a word of English. Maybe just an 'I don't understand', 'water', and 'bathroom' (The words my parents taught me days before).

I instantly made friends with the Russian and Hebrew speaking students in my class as I only understood them. My first interaction with an actual English student was a girl in my class. She had a minimized hearing ability or in other word deafness. The first day that I arrived in my small classroom filled with bright colors and signs that had bubbly writing about them, I couldn't help but notice the social worker standing beside our teacher as she welcomed everybody. I was confused at first. I have never encountered someone gesture sign language before. As I stared at the lady quickly moving her hands and fingers and mouth out the words so that the student would understand I noticed her looking at a girl who had a black earpiece connected to her ear. I was a 6-year-old immigrant in a Canadian public school who did not even know how to ask a question. Only once the day ended did I finally understand who she was.

People said that she 'suffered' from a reduced hearing ability. In my opinion, she wasn't suffering but was blessed. Every single day an average person hears numerous different sounds. The squeaky wheels of a bus stopping at its destination, a meaningless conversation your neighbors or strangers are laughing about, maybe even the whooshing sound of a pen scribbling across the empty paper or the clicks a computer is producing. This unimportant noises are something that echoes inside our brain and matches the surroundings of our site. People who are deaf also encounter these moments regularly. They either think in sign language or picture the vibration. Although sound can reduce some ability, I believe that people that suffer from it should not be degraded or less respected. In a recent research that I had done, I found out about a case in the US that did not allow Shakirra Thomas (a deaf person) to get a job due to the interpreter that she would have to hire. In 2014 a percentage of deaf people unemployed resulted in a 24% gap. Although many do get hired they feel isolated from the rest of co-workers as the coworkers doubted their knowledge.

The disgusting hatred disabled people have to face today is terrible. 'A Million Unheard Sounds' was a Russian movie filmed about adults who have the same disability as a student in my class. They, however, thought that being unable to hear was something that they were lucky to have as they said that they would 'go crazy' if they heard each sound produced.

By the end of the first month, I already knew how to speak the majority of English and had begun to learn some sign language to communicate with my new best friend. Each recess we would pretend to go shopping or even be superheroes running around the field. Although I was unable to be in my class most of my day (ESL classes), we still sat side by side no matter what. Every day that I would go to school, I would learn a new sign. I remember how I used to show my mother what I had learned when she asked. When I would show her the new sign that I was very proud to have memorized she would quickly stop me as she feared that I would be showing an inappropriate and offensive hand movement. I don't blame her. My older sister used to also have trouble with hearing. She was afraid that people would start bullying her for the 'shameful' problem that she was born with. During the classes, a microphone would be attached to the teacher's clothing and an earpiece would be connected to my sister's desk. Being a young teenager with a disability was already and hard and fearing of judgment she decided not to wear it. Although I hardly know what she had to face, I believe that many kids make gestures or even mimic deaf people.

The problem with my mom not to understand my new skill was settled with my teacher who dearly respected the student. Because of this teacher I have numerous ideas that I think would comfort and help people who are deaf. I think that there should be special programs or even classes at schools to help kids learn sign language so they could include and understand their classmates or friends.

Throughout the time that I was in the same class as my friend I remember a moment where some students were misbehaving and the teacher yelled at them causing the deaf student to wince because of the microphone that they were connected between them. My other idea is to explain to the students about everything that would affect and would the students should do and not do to respect them.

Thank you.