

family



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FATHERS DIARY

Sign language—tool for survival

I can hear my mother's voice now: "Would you please shut up. All you do is talk, talk, talk. You're giving me a headache." There are times when silence can be golden.

But what if I was deaf? My mother would never have had the opportunity to tell me off about my chattering and I probably would have had a limited number of words to use.

Communication allows us to share our feelings and thoughts with other. The deaf person, however, is limited in his communication skills and, at times, becomes a prisoner of his body with inadequate means of understanding language or expressing oneself. Little if any communication occurs and thoughts are lost for a lifetime.

Dedicated men and women throughout history have attempted to communicate through systems of language transaction. For example, during the 10th century monks had no choice but to use sign language or finger spelling to adhere to the strict codes of silence.

The investigative work of Dr. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet in Europe on the 1800s brought sufficient expertise to the United States for a special school to be established for the deaf. In 1864 Dr. Gallaudet's son carried out his father's dream when President Abraham Lincoln signed the charter of the college for the deaf in the world. Gallaudet College is still helping the deaf to reach their goals, be productive citizens of an ever-changing world and have an inner harmony, knowing they are not prisoners of their bodies.

We all use sign language in daily life—waving goodbye, shaking our

heads no or yes, grimacing. We learned these forms of nonverbal communication by seeing others perform them over and over. To a deaf person, the signs are tools of survival. According to Lottie L. Riekehof, author of "The Joy of Signing" (Gospel Publishing House, 1980), the language of signs is gaining respectability in educational circles. A number of colleges, such as New York University, American University and the University of Minnesota, even accept proficiency in signs as fulfilling a foreign language requirement.

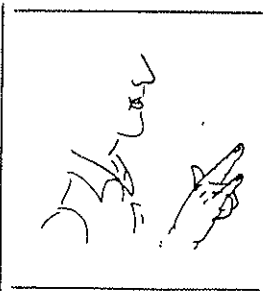
Today the deaf person can go to the theater, a ballet, concert and even attend a lecture given by the president of the United States and know all that is presented through the hands of an interpreter.

It is up to us individuals to investigate the joy of signing. Think how you would feel if on meeting a deaf person you could interact with him through signing.

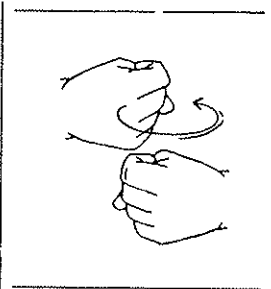
It is the contention of Dr. Riekehof that "both deaf and hearing people are enjoying new experiences through communicating in the language of signs, making it possible for them to live together with true understanding and mutual enrichment."

I wish to thank Gospel Publishing House for permission to use the several signing pictures and to extend the warmest thanks to the author of "The Joy of Signing" for giving all of us an opportunity to think about how we can be better people by attending to the needs of others, particularly the deaf.

Can you make these signs:



(Left)
I LOVE YOU



(Left)
COFFEE

(Below)
EAT, FOOD

