

A Difference of Hearing

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The delicious smell of cajun cooking overwhelms my nostrils as I stand over the sizzling pans of food cooking. It's another wonderfully busy day at the Ragin' Cajun filled with waves of heat coming from the fiery stove tops and a blur of people communicating with their hands. I smiled as I sprinkled spices onto the jambalaya and thought how splendid the last few weeks of business at the restaurant have been. As I turned to look out at the dining area, a particular sight caught my eye. I had to squint to focus on her since my vision has been worsening, but what I saw was an unfamiliar sight-- A lively little girl who seemed to brighten up the room with her presence. She wasn't one of the deaf who frequented the restaurant because she was trying to speak to all the strangers in a very friendly manner. From my distance, I couldn't exactly tell but there seemed to be something off about her face and her mannerisms. I decided I would go introduce myself to this new visitor and her family.

I walked over to their table grabbing my friend Karen along the way because she would be able to translate to sign language for me. I waved hello to the little girl whose face instantly lit up with a smile. She began speaking to me as if I was an old friend and Karen quickly signed what she was saying. I noticed her poise and assurance was very much like that of a sociable adult. I quickly signed to Karen to ask her what her name was. Karen's response was, "Hello, my name is Heidi, nice to meet you. Are you deaf? What is your name?" I was taken aback by the curiosity and the directness of her questions. I quickly signed back answering that my name was Danny and that I was indeed deaf and slowly going blind because of a disease called Usher syndrome. She was excited to tell me that she had William's syndrome and is almost the opposite of me because she can hear very well. She went on to explain how she could not imagine being unable to hear and talk normally, to which I responded how I wouldn't want to be able to hear because I enjoy a world of silence.

Heidi's family asked me to sit with them for a bit since Heidi took an interest in what it was like to be deaf. One of the waiters brought over some bread and I saw Heidi's mother asked her how many pieces there were. Karen looked over and motioned to me that Heidi had said there were 3 pieces even though there were clearly about 10. This was strange to me how someone who seemed so intelligent in their language was so bad with numbers but I understood it to be part of her illness. I had clearly made a face; however, because Karen signed to me that Heidi had read my expression to be of confusion. I could tell she was very good at picking up facial expressions and I gave her a big smile to show that everything was alright. Her parents had previously ordered their meal by pointing to items on the menu and the food had just started arriving, which was good because I could see Heidi had become impatient.

Heidi was thriving in this social setting. All people and interactions interested and distracted her and she asked many questions. She turned back to me and asked Karen to sign, "Danny, how do you make your food if you can't hear and have a hard time seeing?" I started to sign back to tell her my other senses seem to be more keen. They're making up for my lack of hearing and my loss of sight. My sense of taste is especially acute, which may be why I decided to become a chef. Heidi had been listening to Karen translate my sign language but was suddenly distracted by a large burst of flame in the kitchen. I could see she was very curious but also lost interest in a short amount of time. Finally, after she had lost interest in what was going on in the kitchen she turned back to me.

"Sorry, what were you saying?" she asked ever so politely. I continued to explain to her how my vision would be lost eventually and I didn't know what it was going to be like, but for now I was very happy and I knew I could learn to live with no hearing or sight as many people with Usher syndrome have already done. Heidi excitedly told me that she also knew she was different but that she was still very happy and excited about her future.

I could see that we both have a very positive outlook on life despite our situations and that made me very happy to realize. Heidi and her family had almost finished their meal so I decided to say my goodbyes and return to the kitchen. I was very glad to have met Heidi because we

were both similar and opposites. She had her talents, acute hearing and being very eloquent with language, some of the exact abilities that I lack. However, I realized that I have unique abilities that go along with my other stronger senses and I am amazingly able to communicate without hearing or speaking. Some people may view Heidi and I as people who have disabilities and aren't able to fully fit in with the world and have a good life. However, I see us as unique individuals who have made our illnesses work for us and provide us with extraordinary abilities and an exciting life. Humans are able to work through their lives no matter what obstacles are thrown at them and I'm glad Heidi and I have realized that.

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