



AMY

My story

I was raised with a Deaf mother and a hard of hearing father. Only during my Deaf Studies course at Bristol University did I realise that there is a name for this - I am a 'Child of Deaf Adult' (also known as a CODA).

Growing up as a CODA, I experienced things in day-to-day life that my friends did not understand. From little annoyances like the fact that mum seems to always scream in quiet public places, to minor inconveniences, such as always having to be the interpreter if me and my mum went out anywhere, to situations that were completely overwhelming such as the summer my father went temporarily blind. My friends, as supportive as they are, needless to say didn't really know what advice to give.

Many CODAs feel torn between two worlds – the Deaf and the hearing. They feel a large sense of responsibility, having to interpret for their parents from an early age and therefore are often mature beyond their years. Sadly, growing up I never got the chance to meet any CODAs that would bring the hearing and Deaf worlds together for me and explain that my feelings of frustration were natural. However, last summer, I was lucky enough to go to a CODA Camp in America and discover the 'CODA Culture' I never realised existed.

I went from having met one CODA in my life (my brother) to meeting over 100 in just one summer! Watching the children share their experiences with each other, having someone to talk to about their problems and realising that they're not "different" for having these experiences was amazing to see. Camp encouraged these children to be proud of having Deaf parents, discuss the challenges they face and develop a support network and a sense of "CODA Identity".

My experiences also show me that many CODAs do not get the encouragement to develop good quality of sign language. My brother, for example, only started learning sign language last year, aged 24! Growing up he and my mum got by just writing notes to each other and fingerspelling, but my mum did not force the issue. I also know myself the problem of getting involved in sign classes at a young age – I had to wait until 15 and even then I was too young to enroll in the college course. I finally got to go after lobbying my MP and coming in as my mum's "interpreter" (at a BSL class!). The Family Centre offering sign classes to younger children is a great resource to encourage CODAs to develop their signing.

I believe the Family Centre would be a great experience for any CODA – to develop their sign skills, their 'Deaf' cultural pride and possibly meet other CODAs. The Family Centre also benefits parents of CODAs, giving them opportunity to meet other parents and socialise and talk about problems and ask for advice. If you are a Deaf parent of a CODA I heavily recommend getting involved.

I am currently studying Deaf Studies at Bristol University and training to hopefully become a Teacher of the Deaf. The influence that my mum and dad have had on me is immense and I wouldn't change my childhood one bit or I might not have gotten to where I am today. The only thing I wish I'd had was a network of CODAs or young people in the Deaf community to help me feel more supported. I hope to try and establish a network similar to the 'CODA Community' that they have in the USA here in the UK.

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