

## Fear the Unknown

You don't know what it's like. What it's like to always have people staring. And then avert their eyes in shame when you challenge them as to what they're looking at.

My brother is deaf. For a long time, that's something I couldn't say. Children were the worst because they had no knowledge that they were even doing something wrong. The conversation would go something like this: "Mommy, what's he doing?"

"Honey, it's rude to point," the curious boy's mother would scold. "He's deaf, he talks with his hands."

"How?" He would stare some more, his eyebrows lowering into a confused frown. My face would get hot every time I heard this familiar dialogue. It made me sick. But worse, ashamed.

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Five years of age seems abnormally young to be faced with any life-changing events, but that's exactly when it happened. Jay, my beloved partner in crime, had been diagnosed as deaf, leaving my naïve, young life turned upside down. We first noticed something was peculiar when Dad would call us both to the dinner table and time and time again only I would respond. Initially, we let it slide. He was a boy, too wrapped up in his G.I. Joes and video games to accompany us to the table, right? As these incidents grew more and more frequent, what-ifs and worry arose. Soon after, the auditory clinic's results arrived: our worst fears had been confirmed. I would no longer be growing up in a "normal" family.

While other children would be spending their days constructing elaborate Play Dough creations and playing tag at the park, I would be attending sign language classes to be able to communicate with my kin.

I dreaded family outings the most. Mother certainly didn't help, either. Inexperienced in the world of sign language, she relished her new talent, making a huge spectacle out of asking Jay even the smallest of things- gallantly circling and waving her arms about. I hated the attention it drew. I couldn't even bring myself to invite friends over. What would they think of me? My stomach did flips just imagining it.

One fateful day though, I had arranged a play date with my best friend, Jamie, purposely scheduling it during Jay's weekly hockey practice. Just my luck, practice was cancelled. And it was too late to bail on her. She would have to find out. Nervously, I awaited her judgment.

"I didn't know you had a brother, Laur," Jamie inquired, hopping out of the caramel colored van (the "poo" van as we called it), taking note of the unfamiliar figure shooting hoops on the driveway.

"Yeah, he's deaf," I muttered before she had a chance to probe further.

"What did you say?" she asked, puzzled.

"HE IS DEAF... Do I have to spell it out?"

"That's so cool! You know sign language? Why didn't you tell me? I've been dying to learn!" She excitedly countered, either disregarding my unpleasant tone or completely oblivious of it.

"Umm, I can teach you if you want..." I hesitated, unsure if she was serious or just being polite.

"Yeah!!!" she said enthusiastically.

I knew there was a reason I loved her. Soon after, similar scenarios happened with a few other close friends. They were all curious and impressed by my hidden talent. Why didn't I tell them sooner, they wondered? If only they knew.

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I'd like to say that from that point on, my anxieties and insecurities vanished, but that'd be a little overly idealistic. It took many frazzled diary entries and intense Truth or Dare games to become comfortable opening up to people. Children still stare, but most people think it's pretty cool, and accept me for who I am and how my family is. Jay isn't even that unique anymore: girls flock to him, he plays three sports, wears Abercrombie, and slacks off in school. Nothing abnormal about that. We also fight a lot like all siblings do; only we do it with our fingers flying.

Sound like a sappy fairytale ending? I thank god everyday that it turned out that way. I would have gone crazy overanalyzing every look or sideways glance thrown my direction. I know I was acting childish. And I regret everyday the guilt and embarrassment that overcome me about my own family. But like I said, you don't know what it's like.