

# SOUND OFF

issue no. 2 dec. 1987

\$2-00

K NSW 2031  
without a valid and sufficient  
17 July 1987 should not be  
ons:

Form 41

elly dealer  
limited access  
I should not  
ngetting to  
h forgets to  
ing-

SOUND OFF is produced by Deaf Writer's Group, and is published twice a year.

Copyright remains with individual authors.

We welcome contributions on deaf themes: deaf history, culture, personalities, events, issues, and creative short stories and poetry from hearing-impaired people.

Hearing people are welcome to contribute to our Hearsay and Letters pages.

All the usual criteria for publication in a magazine apply. Although the authors (except for our Hearsay and Letters pages) must be hearing-impaired, nothing will be published simply because the author is deaf. Only those contributions which are suitable and worthy of publication will be accepted. However, all contributions will be considered.

Written contributions should, wherever possible, be typed in double spacing, on one side of the page, and with wide margins. Authors are advised to keep a copy. Please provide a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you wish material to be returned.

Send your contributions and any correspondence to: THE EDITOR, SOUND OFF, 12/38 Waratah Ave., Randwick, N.S.W., 2031.

EDITOR:  
Karen Lloyd

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS:  
Tony Nicholas  
Dorothy Budd

ARTWORK (unless otherwise stated):  
Astrid Carlsen

COVER: Tony Nicholas and Karen Lloyd

## **CONTENTS**

**SOUND OFF No.2, Dec., 1987**

---

WHY I CHOSE TO LEARN SIGN LANGUAGE - Heather Maurice.....2

INTELLIGENT PHONE CONVERSATIONS - Dot Shaw.....6

O'GOD! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HER? - Karen Lloyd.....8

LEAVING VIETNAM - Helen Van Ngo.....12

DID IT REGISTER? - Merrill Cook.....13

LETTERS.....15

EAVESDROPPING EYE.....17

### **APOLOGY:**

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Michael Uniacke's article as advertised in Issue No.1 of SOUND OFF, does not appear in this issue.

**THANKS TO:** Michael Clancy, The Adult Education Centre for the Deaf and Hearing-impaired, and W.A. Deaf Society for a generous donation.

Advertisements are welcome. Please contact the Editor for information.

# EDITORIAL

SOUND OFF is growing, and we hope you will agree, improving. The response to our first issue was gratifying. Much of the response was by word of mouth/hand, and this was when most criticisms were voiced. Most concerned the use of certain words.

Some disliked the word "deafie", others didn't understand the title SOUND OFF. "But I can hear, especially with my hearing aid, so SOUND OFF is wrong!" One reader questioned our use of the word "normal" in relation to hearing people, and a hearing person said, "I was amazed how often you used the word 'disabled'. I never thought of you as disabled."

Interesting objections! One could go on for pages debating the use of words, but for now, a few words about our title. The reader who said it is incorrect, was perfectly right: technically it is, since very few deaf people hear no sound. We chose it for its pun. SOUND OFF, of course refers to deafness, but it also has another, perhaps more important meaning. In the hearing world, it is an idiom: to sound off about something, have your say, speak your mind. So SOUND OFF is all about deaf people sounding off - and writing good literature too!

SOUND OFF has two basic aims: to give deaf writers an outlet for their work, and to share stories and information about what deafness really means, expand our understanding of deaf people and their culture. Though factual articles must obviously be about deafness, there is no rule that creative fiction must be too; after all, a deaf writer is part of deaf culture, even if s/he never writes about deafness. But we have found that most of us do write mainly about deafness.

Why is that? Are we all so preoccupied with deafness that we have no interest in anything else? Is our experience of the world so limited that deafness is the only thing we can write about with confidence?

Or is it a case of that old chestnut: "You can take the boy out of the country (away from deafness) but you can't take the country (deafness) out of the boy"? If you're deaf, deafness is an integral part of you, it touches in some way, big or small, everything you do and everything you are, whether you're profoundly deaf or hard-of-hearing. You can't pretend it isn't there, any more than Michael Jackson can have plastic surgery and pretend he's white with a great suntan.

Was that, I wondered, why deafness creeps into so much of our writing? Because writing at its roots, comes from the soul.

Then I found a marvellous book\* which in its Preface, sheds new light: "This preoccupation with the self, with one's own story, can be traced to the exposed existential position which members of a minority occupy in our society. The blacks have their tale of oppression and de facto second-class citizenship to tell, and so do the deaf. The deaf writer confines his imagination to the autobiographical mode because to him the struggle for dignity and assertion of the self in the community is an overriding and passionately absorbing concern."

It continues: "Yet...[this]..does not mean that the deaf writer is so preoccupied with the problems of the deaf in society as to forego the luxury of writing about the subtler and finer aspects of human perception and feeling."

Is that what we deaf writers in Australia are doing? Is that what SOUND OFF is all about? I rather like that idea.

So, now you can turn the page and read more of our engrossing, passionate, and perceptive deaf stories!

Karen Lloyd

*(\*Angels and Outcasts: an anthology of deaf characters in literature, edited by Trent Batson and Eugene Bergman, Gallaudet University Press)*

# WHY I CHOSE TO LEARN SIGN LANGUAGE

- HEATHER MAURICE

*"It was a language that  
could be mine"*

## COMMENTARY

- Dr Harry Blackmore

The article "Why I Chose to Learn Sign Language" was written by a highly intelligent and gifted young deaf woman. Heather Maurice is the pseudonym used, but there is nothing false about the experiences and feelings she has had since early childhood. While her considerable achievements are not representative of what most people can expect, especially those who are born profoundly deaf, her frustrations and fears are shared by many deaf people who strive to be understood in a hearing world. As a hearing person who has lived over sixty years among deaf people, family and friends, I have a deep sensitivity for their feelings and, in a special sense, I am a "deaf person who can hear and thus qualify to comment with some hope to be heard.

There is a widespread misconception that Deaf Sign Language is an alternative method for teaching the spoken language of society to deaf people. In English-speaking countries, signed English is sometimes used to teach sentence structure and grammatical syntax of the spoken language to deaf children. This involves finger-spelling the alphabet letters of words and using certain signs (modified to indicate tense). This technique is often used to supplement aural/oral training in spoken and written English, utilising the residual hearing by amplification and the lipreading of mouth movements in speech.

But signed English is not Deaf Sign Language. The latter is a graphic language in its own right which uses "body language", specific hand signals and facial expressions to convey concepts and experiences otherwise difficult for many deaf people to explain in the language of hearing people. For these deaf people, Deaf Sign Language is much less stilted and is more expressive to use than spoken language. It is not inferior to spoken language when we understand that it is not intended to teach spoken language. However, a few apt and deft signs will often enlighten a deaf person puzzled by some spoken concept. Deaf people can be bilingual with advantages for deafness self-acceptance and for communication with hearing people.

While I was growing up, I had to prove I was human. To prove that I was a person worthy of belonging to society. I had to speak, read, make friends, dance, play piano, do well in school just like any other normal child with normal parents with normal expectations. The only difference was I could not hear very well.

I remember my few days in kindergarten not knowing whether I could leave the class to go to the toilet (I didn't know other people asked), not knowing I could tell the teacher that boys were kicking me under the table or that I could make a fuss (I didn't know other children told the teacher things like that), not knowing why kids lay down and closed their eyes in the afternoon (I didn't know we were supposed to sleep. When our time was up, the teacher had promised to clap her hands. I never slept in the afternoon anyway. I found this boring but nevertheless closed my eyes and smelt the dust in the matting. I would blink to see if the session had finished and quickly close them if it hadn't, just in case I'd get into trouble.) I did know teachers were happy if I was good and not a nuisance.

When the first day finished, we lined up in classes in the quadrangle. The headmistress pointed in one direction and a mob of children moved and then she pointed in another direction and the rest of the school moved. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. Parents of other children came to pick them up but mine weren't there. I knew the flats where my parents, grandmother and I had just moved were down a street with lots of autumn colour and leaves. So I followed the second lot of children out of the school and started walking home like the few other kids who seemed to know where they were going. I was four and found my way in a new city like the other kids. I didn't understand why Nana and my

parents were relieved to find me. I was relieved to see them because I couldn't remember which block of flats we were in..

I wasn't in kindergarten long when I moved to another class where they read books and chanted multiplication tables and didn't sleep in the afternoons. I tried very hard to be good. Even though I was good, I was never given messages nor was I a class captain. (I didn't know I barely said a word in class. I must have talked a lot in my head.) Everything was happening. (I didn't know I was bewildered. I knew the teacher said things, pointed at times tables, flashed cards and then my classmates did things. All I had to do was follow and imitate them.)

But why did kids read books I had already read and I had to read the boring simpler stuff? Why did the kids write something in their books? The red headed girl sitting next to me, her name was Victoria. I saw her write her name on the exercise book in front of her. She wrote in the book, "Last Sunday, I visited my grandmother." I copied it. There was nothing to copy from the blackboard. The teacher was walking around the class looking over everyone's shoulder. She saw my work first and said it was good. I didn't know why, nor what I had done that was right.

I enjoyed the afternoons of painting. I followed what the other kids did in their finger painting, pointing and swirling when they pointed and swirled. (I didn't know I could do what I wanted with my hands and paint.)

I also loved the songs where we could move our arms. Our arms bounced up and down and became birds which flew away. I didn't know what the song was about, nor what words were sung so I sang with a soft voice so my teacher didn't know I didn't

know. (I didn't know she thought it was my strange accent anyway.) The National Anthem and the Lord's Prayer were more serious affairs, so I just murmured in rhythm with the other children. At least, I could hear murmurs, elongated rhythms, pauses and changes of volume. I knew I could hide my strange voice by closing my eyes and bowing my head like the others.

In the playground I did the same thing. I sang whatever I thought I was supposed to sing, but I never knew what the words were. But there was lots of action and I liked playing. I always had friends from my class, I was accepted there. They all took it for granted that I could copy them in class and ask them questions. In return, I'd help them with their spelling and maths.

But strangers in shops couldn't understand me; boys from other classes would lift my tunic with a ruler on my walk home from school. I'd never hear them coming up behind. I felt normal inside, but as soon as I said something like "Stop doing that" in what I thought was an angry voice, boys would laugh and do it all the more. They didn't do that to anyone else. Strangers would ask me what country I came from. People would stare at my box hearing aid and all its cords; mothers would try to stop their children from asking questions or pointing at me.

*"Think of blind people...the starving millions in India. Why did I want the world?"*

I tried so hard to be normal and I didn't know why I'd get upset if someone commented on how my speech was so good. (If it was so good, why did people need to comment on

it?) I'd cry if I didn't get 100% at school even though I was in the top seven in the top class. I'd cry if someone mentioned something about my accent. I'd get upset if people said it didn't matter when I asked them to repeat. I was often told that I had no reason to cry, that there were other people worse off than myself. Think of blind people, think of the poor people in wheelchairs and the starving millions in India. Why did I want the world? Not everyone could understand everything anyway. It was unsaid, but I got the message, I had no right to cry.

Yet I had no confidence, no feeling of security, particularly after my grandmother died. I knew what people saw was my difference, which wasn't me. I believed my parents didn't really love me. I never believed my friends liked me for myself. I thought they liked me for the things I had and the fun we had. No one believed me when I said my mother hit me if I didn't get my multiplication tables right. They said she was a lovely and interesting person. I knew otherwise. My mother would often use her nice phone voice and then ring off, saying she couldn't stand that person. When some of my deaf school mates asked me to go bowling with them, my mother said, "If you go, you'll only want to go out with them and not make any other friends." So I didn't go, feeling guilty about being deaf.

At school I had a choice, either to do French or Art. I enjoyed Art, but my mother said French was more useful. So I didn't do Art; I learnt French instead. I lived overseas for nine months speaking that language, but not very well. I went to university. I didn't know why I was crying all the time.

My deafness kept tripping me up and stopping me from being normal. I could talk and put on a brave front as

I had been doing most of my life. With all that practice, I was talented at acting but never chosen for plays; once again my voice. I couldn't ring my friends; once again my deafness. I couldn't go out to parties; they sat around talking in dim light with loud music. The world I lived in kept reminding me I was deaf.

But somehow I had to accept being deaf to stop crying. I couldn't communicate how different I felt to my friends. At university I couldn't speak in tutorials, I couldn't write essays. I was just a disorganised person. I knew I wasn't, but if I couldn't get my essays in on time, I must be disorganised. For so long, I had got away without having to communicate. I talked and people saw I was normal enough.

The only problem was, I wasn't normal. I was deaf, deaf, deaf, not hard of hearing but *deaf*, that crude four letter word. For others to cope with me, I had to say I was hard of hearing. Only then could they speak naturally without shouting or exaggerating their mouth movements as if I were a simpleton. Whenever I said I was deaf, I may as well have been a hack jester reiterating my well worn party piece - how I became deaf? how come I could speak so well? I got sick of performing and betraying myself.

I learnt sign language as part of a job I had. I betrayed all the work my mother and others had invested in me. Nevertheless, I continued to learn. I liked learning languages, particularly one I could see. I began to realise it was a language I could be sure of. For a change, I was sure of the information I received in sign language. I found I could see and copy signs so much more easily and quickly than imitating sounds I couldn't guess at. I found I was much quicker than other students for a change. I could play with my hands, make up new

signs with the same delight I had lying in bed as a child leaping and pirouetting to music in my head. I saw it was a language that could be mine, a language where I could pun, sing and tell jokes without everything falling flat.

Then I met more people like me. One night I was signing to a new friend and found to my shock I could see her heart and feelings. They were the same as mine. We were communicating and I could feel it for the first time. I'd forgotten we had been using sign language. Through her I met other deaf personalities. Dared I think I could be one of them?

I discovered I had been taking part with maimed legs in a race for two legged people. I had thought I was normal. That I consistently lagged behind in that race had made me feel inadequate. Dared I say I was a worthwhile person? Human? Deaf? Then I knew for me speaking and listening was more remote than showing and doing. Then freedom. I became free to travel between worlds, speaking and signing in different languages. But I couldn't communicate when I was fighting to please.

I was an only child. I didn't know my parents' pain. In the golden sixties, they were told I was deaf and dumb with below average intelligence and would never learn to speak. They were told to put me away in an institution and have other children. They fought in the best way they knew. I fought too, but I was a child and didn't know what I was fighting. I didn't know I was born in a society that didn't want me.

When I told my mother I was learning sign language, she burst into tears. (My mother didn't know I was searching for my self respect in a language I could understand.)

# INTELLIGENT PHONE CONVERSATIONS

- DOT SHAW



Seated by the window in a packed train rolling along the steel rails, smoothly and silently towards the West, the day deepening into dusk, Sandra raised her head from the book she was reading, looked out of the large paned window of the carriage, at the scene of suburban sprawl passing by.

It had been, only half an hour ago, that the multi-storied buildings of a city was the scene when the train left for the homeward journey.

Contemplating... she had been asked to work back a couple of hours in order to finish a batch of invoices and she had been busy on that and had missed the chance of asking the supervisor to ring home and let the family know that she would be late.

The dusk had deepened and the panorama outside the window was more of an open grassland with trees dotted here and there around houses scattered in the distance - a more sparse urban sprawl now. The train ground to a halt at a station, lit up along the platform. People alighted and streamed towards the gate and spread out in every direction towards their homes.

Sandra hurried to a public phone, made a call home, which was a good mile's walk up the road to the top of a hill, and hoped that at least one of her children would be there.

Listening...listening intently to the ringing tone at the other end and when the receiver is picked up, hearing a noise which signifies the other person's "Hello".

While her children grew up they developed a calling method in the home to attract their mother, who could only hear certain tones. Later on when they were teenagers, they evolved a question/answer code on telephone conversations between themselves and Sandra, their mother.

"Hello, it's me, Mum," and Sandra listened for the two "ooo...ooo..."

"Ooo...ooo..." came in, which meant, "yes."

Ok, thought Sandra, then she said, "Is that you, Sean?"

"Ooo..."

"Are you Boris?"

"Ooo...ooo..."

"Is Sean home?"

"Ooo...ooo..."

"Please ask Sean to drive the car down to the station to pick me up."

After a pause: "Ooo...ooo..."

"I will be at the public phone in Long

Street next to the station and tell Sean not to be too long."

"Ooo...ooo..."

"Thanks Boris, bye bye."

"Ooo...ooo..."

Sandra hung up.

Coming out of the phone booth, she stood at the kerb and looked up the road in the direction from which Sean would surely come. The wind was nippy and Sandra turned up the collar of her coat and waited.

There came the headlights of a car and in a moment it drew up alongside. Sandra got in and as she settled into her seat, Sean signed to her, "You are just in luck, I was just going to leave home to go to soccer training when Boris said you called for a lift home. I'll drop you on my way there."

She entered the house and went into the kitchen to make a cuppa. Boris came in, kissed her and said, "I'm going over to Andy's next door, to play some computer games with him."

"Okay," said Sandra, signing, "but don't stay there till very late, try and be back around nine. Bye Boris."

Sipping her tea, she thought about the things that had to be done that night. Oh yes, the ironing!

I'll finish my cuppa first...the light began to flash...oh it is the phone! Is it a TTY call, wondered Sandra, I'll take a risk and answer it on the TTY.

She took off the receiver and settled the handset onto the TTY machine and tapped out "Hello GA". When the display bar did not light up with an answering acknowledgement, Sandra wondered if it was a voice caller so she picked up the handset off the TTY and said "Hello" and listened.

There came, "Ooo...ooo..."

That means it is one of my children, thought Sandra. Okay, here goes...

"Hello, it's me, Mum."

"Ooo...ooo..."

"Is that you Vanessa?"

"Ooo...ooo..."

"Are you over at Gaby's place?"

"Ooo..."

"Mandy's place?"

"Ooo...ooo..."

"Are you staying with her for the night?"

"Ooo..."

"Do you want us to pick you up?"

"Ooo...ooo..."

"I'm sorry we can't pick you up because Sean has taken the car to his soccer training tonight. I think you better stay overnight with Mandy.

Will you please stay with her?"

"Ooo...ooo..."

"Thank you for letting me know where you are. See you in the morning."

"Ooo...ooo..."

Sandra hung up after saying bye bye.

Well, she thought, I'd better finish the ironing now. ●

I believe in my mind as a plant which will reach the stars above the sun and the brightness of the sky away from the weeds. I used not to believe that my deafness would move beyond the path to reach the stars, and that no one would give me chances of doing something.

I come from the war and touring around the world did not help me to grow towards the sun. My mind suggested to me that I am only a weed. But I have discovered the material with which teachers and friends helped me in spite of my deafness so that I can move toward the sun.

Helen Van Ngo

# O'GOD! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HER?

Karen Lloyd

St Anne's was an Anglican school and I spent my last two years of school as a boarder there. I was, as always, the only deaf person, but it was a good school and I was happy.

Although the teaching staff was lay, the school was administered by nuns and so religion played a major part in our daily lives. Evensong, hymn practice, divinity lessons, the Angelus three times a day, mass on Fridays and Sundays, serving as an altar girl (it was fun to dress up in a pure white veil and lead the Bishop, sometimes, down the aisle, carrying a heavy cross). I enjoyed it, the ritual and poetry, though I never learned a lot about scripture, probably because I turned a deaf ear to it. Until very near the end of my time at St Anne's, when I was subjected to an experience which turned me right off religion.

A session of faith healing missions was in progress at the Cathedral and religious fervour was rife throughout the school. Any girl who so wished could go, and every day girls returned with tales of the miracles they had seen.

One day Sister Chaseley, our headmistress, called me to her sitting room. She told me about the healing missions and said that she had been praying that I too might be cured of my deafness. Would I like to go to a mission with her? The Bishop would be there also.

I was dismayed and appalled. But this

was Sister Chaseley. Quite apart from her obvious excitement and sincerity in wanting to help me, I knew I was expected to go. But I also knew I could not perform with any conviction. So I told her that yes, if she really wanted me to go, then I would go, but I was sorry I really didn't believe it would work. She remained undaunted. It would be better, she said, if I went to the mission as a believer, but if I couldn't then perhaps her faith and the faith of others would be enough for me.

I discussed it with some of my classmates, who agreed that I could not refuse to go. Some were very excited and believed it would work. Others thought it too ridiculous and Carol raved and ranted about "all this religious rubbish". The rest were undecided. So I went to the mission. What I felt more than anything else was horror.

Besides Sister Chaseley and myself there were one or two other nuns and about five girls from my class, plus a younger girl who claimed to have had a vision. While the others sat behind us, Sister Chaseley sat beside me and explained what would happen. The service began. When the time came, together with others who had come to be healed, we moved to the front pew and kneeled there. Sister Chaseley had told me to pray, but I was quite incapable of pretending to God. And all the while I was tormented by the thought: what if I was wrong? Could I tell God I believed in this power to heal, just on the off chance it might be true? Wouldn't he see through me anyway?

Kneeling with her arm around me, Sister Chaseley rested her forehead on her other fist, closed her eyes and

prayed. Suddenly she began to shake. She shook all over, violent spasms which terrified me. If blood ever runs cold I'm sure mine did then. And finally I too prayed: "Oh God, what's the matter with her! Get me out of here. Please let it be over soon. Please God, make her stop shaking!"

We were at the end of the line. Now and then I stole a glance at the healer and the Bishop slowly advancing along the line of kneeling faithful. As people returned to their pews I wondered if they had been healed. I felt an idiotic desire to shout: "Did the miracle work for you?"

And then my hour came.

The healer laid his hands on my head. He prayed. He laid his hands over my ears. He prayed. Sister Chaseley prayed and shook all over. The Bishop prayed. And I looked at them all.

The healer stopped praying. Sister Chaseley and the Bishop stopped praying. The healer snapped his fingers near my ears. They all looked at me.

I shook my head.

The healer's hands went back upon my head and over my ears. He prayed. Sister Chaseley and the Bishop prayed and Sister shook all over. Everybody stopped praying. The healer yelled in my ear. They all looked at me.

I nodded.

The healer threw his hands in the air, Sister Chaseley squeezed me hard and the Bishop beamed.

In a very small voice I said: "If you yell loud enough in my ear I'll hear a noise. I've always been able to do that."

All faces fell.

The healer spoke in my ear.

I shook my head.

The healer's hands went back upon my head and over my ears. And so it went. On and on and on.

Everyone else had returned to their pews. We were holding up the service. Sister, the Bishop and the healer went into conference. Would I move to the side chapel over there? Obediently I moved to the chapel and the rest of our party followed. I looked at them and some of them were crying.

**"Could I tell God I believed in this power to heal, just on the off chance it might be true? Wouldn't he see through me anyway?"**

We went through the motions again, while behind me the girls sang the school hymn, "To Be a Pilgrim", in the hope that I might hear them: Sister Chaseley told me. Finally they gave up. We were all exhausted. Everyone was sad. Sister Chaseley and the healer asked if I would come again but I said I thought not.

Outside the Cathedral, I asked Ginny: "Why were you crying?"

She started to cry again and said, "Every time he threw up his hands he said 'Jesus' and I really thought you'd got it, but then he went back to praying and I knew you hadn't."

Sister Chaseley told me that the healer had said it had failed because I had problems with my belief. Their faith alone was not enough.

It was all my fault!



In this unhappy mood we all went back to school. Although it was late and against the rules, some of the other girls were waiting up. With bated breath.

Next morning at prep it all began again. It was all my fault. All I had to do was believe in it! Where was my Christian faith? How could I enjoy going to church, the hymns, the solemnity, and not believe in God's power to heal me? Why wouldn't I believe? Didn't I want my hearing back?

"Maybe I don't!" I said. "Listen, it's taken me years to get used to being deaf. If I got my hearing back I'd have to get used to it, I'd have to change again. The idea of getting my hearing back is scary! Maybe I'd rather stay deaf. Leave me alone!"

I was so confused. What *did* I want? What *did* I believe?

Some of the others were confused too, Ginny in particular. A pious girl said I was selfish.

"Leave her alone!" Carol shouted. "It's all a lot of rubbish!"

After prep a tenth grade girl with whom I was friends came to our classroom and asked me to go for a walk with her. We walked across the playing field. She was terribly upset. She wanted me to try again, to believe.

"Don't you want to hear the birds sing? The wind? Music?"

"Yes," I said, "I'd like to hear the birds sing."

More than all the bitter accusations, that hurt. Walking beside her, I thought about that other life, those distant days when I could hear, and I remembered how I had loved a particular combination of summer noontime sounds: the locusts, the wind in the trees, and the tune on the radio heralding the midday news.

In a way I felt betrayed: my friend was using her knowledge that I had once upon a time known the joys of hearing, to try and make me believe in something I had long ago accepted was impossible, to try and make me want something I had long ago learned to be happy without. Why did a friend who had always seemed to accept and like me just the way I was want so much for me to be "cured", for me not to be deaf that she would use any ammunition to try and make me want it too? Had any of these people who claimed to care about me been listening to what I was really saying? Why was everyone so deaf to undertones?

I told her about the little dead hairs in the inner part of my ears.

"When something's dead," I told her, "you can't make it come alive again."

"God can!"

I gave up. There was nothing else I could say. Never mind the scientific facts: it was a question of faith and a deafness that was different to mine, a deafness of the mind, a deafness with which you couldn't communicate in any language. Reasoning was useless. Emotion was useless. My friends' knowledge that I was a happy person just the way I was didn't seem to count. How could I explain that for me being deaf was okay, that to hear again would mean to be forced to become a different person?

"I really don't want to talk about it anymore," I said.

The story, of course, spread all over the school. Later that morning I passed the staff room and Mrs Kneipp, my geography teacher and a very firm atheist, was standing in the doorway. She stopped me and looked at me anxiously.

"I heard about the healing business," she said. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," I said. But I wanted to scream: No, I'm not all right; I wish it would all go away; I wish they would just leave me alone.

But seeing Mrs Kneipp's concern was like standing on a mountain in a flood. And it gave me courage.

The drama continued for about three days. Morning, noon and night, it never stopped. At one stage a few of us were in Sister's office. Would I go to another mission? No! Sister told me that she herself had the power to heal and that her shaking at the mission

had been God working through her. If I was shy, would I like her to try here, now?

"Okay," I said, feeling I really couldn't say no.

So we went through the motions again. Nothing happened, except everybody got upset all over again. I was growing very tired of the whole thing. It was all too macabre.

In what I interpreted as an effort to make me go, Sister called several of my classmates to her office and told them she would like the entire class to go to that night's mission. Naturally it was reported to me that everyone was going. Was I coming? No!

"Sister said that you're being very selfish!" the pious girl told me sternly.

I still wouldn't go.

But they all went anyway. Except Ginny. Alone that night we talked about it for a long time. Ginny was as confused, in her way, as I. We tried to understand the hysteria the whole thing had created. We talked about how angry and hurt I was. In a way I felt I had been used for some purpose I couldn't understand.

That night's mission was that year's last. The school breathed normally again and it all became yesterday's forgotten fetish. But whatever little conventional religious faith I had once held was gone, and when I left St Anne's I never went to church again.■

**"A deafness of the mind...you  
couldn't communicate in any  
language"**

# LEAVING VIETNAM

## HELEN VAN NGO RECALLS HER LAST DAYS IN SAIGON

When I was four, I went to school in Vietnam. I lived in Saigon, and at our school we had a big party for the last day of school.

One year, I didn't go to school for the party because I wasn't feeling well. My mum took me to her friend's place. They cut my skin on the back with a small knife. I got better but I couldn't hear very well. Then I went to the hospital to have a check.

I stayed at the hospital for about four days, but they couldn't fix my ears. My mum was very worried about me, and she had a small baby to look after. About four days after I came out of hospital, my dad told my mum to pack things ready for escape because my dad didn't want everybody worried, we had to keep away from the war. I stayed with my family but I didn't see my dad for a long time after that, my dad went away to help the people who had no money to pay the government.

My family stayed in a flat with my aunt while we waited until we could get on a boat. When I saw my Aunt Han's sister I was jealous that she had a beautiful watch. I asked my mum to buy one for me but my Aunt Han's sister gave it to me.

One day, two trucks came to the street near our flat. All the people left the flats quickly and went to the trucks. I couldn't find my jewellery in the cupboard. My mum looked, but we had to leave it behind. I was upset.

Two soldiers took us to a truck and we climbed in with a lot of other people. The soldiers were very cruel to us, and they poked us with their rifles. When I watched, my mum was crying. I didn't understand why she was crying. I felt so frightened of the war. We didn't have any seats, so we had to stand up. Then I understood that my mum was crying because she didn't want her sister to go on the other truck.

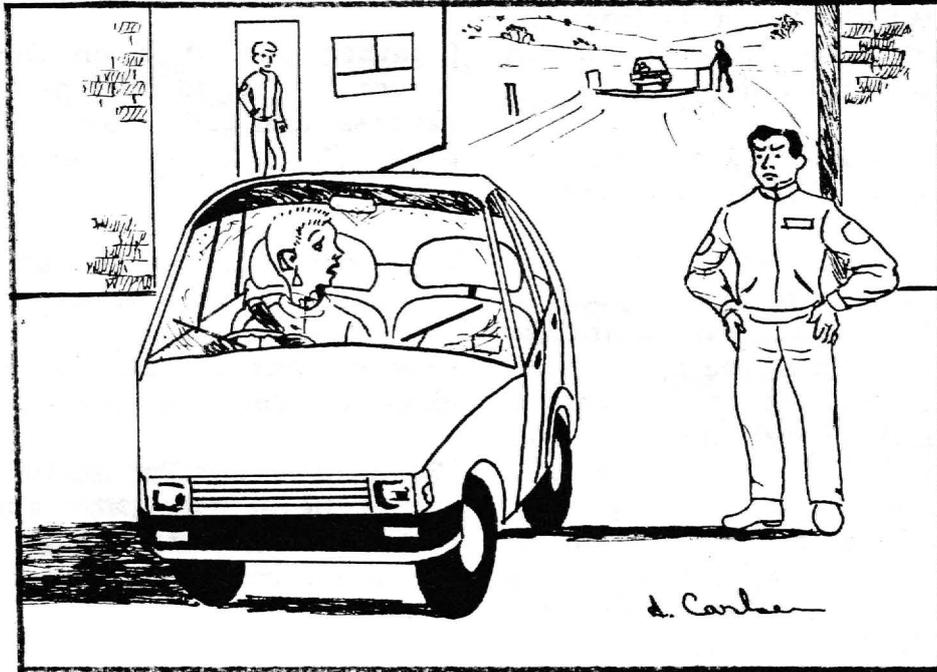
The trucks jerked as we moved along, and we bumped each other. Finally, we stopped at a path. The path looked like a railway line and each person had to walk in one line. We walked to the boat. I saw lots of soldiers standing on the other side because they might think somebody might try to swim to another country.

The boat was small and we couldn't fix it so the other people might go in another boat. They would have to wait for many months.

We didn't have any rooms for us so we slept together. We slept on the hard floor and we had a few blankets. We had to leave some clothes behind because if we took a lot of clothes the boat might sink and we'd all drown. I didn't know where we were going and I felt excited on the boat but I didn't understand about it, that I would never go home again.\*

# DID IT REGISTER?

-MERRILL COOK



It's a beautiful day. With the first blossoms of spring pouring forth their heady perfume, everything is marvellous and mind invigorating.

Having sailed off to the Registration Station, I find myself in a queue of cars. Everyone in front of me is about to undergo the blast of a human voice, beginning with "Lights!", "Right-hand turn!", "Left-hand signal!"

It is a sequence of five things, I observe. First of all, it must be the horn that is tested. Gee, that Holden in front has a bellow and a half!

I follow everything carefully as this is my first registration test.

All the other cars glitter unbearably. Mine has trapped the dirt from the snow, so I try to attract the officer with my most dazzling smile so that he focuses on that and not the car's dusty condition. He growls and bellows, "Horn!" My horn toots

happily, resonating with the warmth of the day.

The sound of a healthy human voice rings out once more, this time behind my head. I twist my neck to see his face.

"Sorry, I didn't quite catch that. Pardon?"

After his stunned silence, I manage to decipher that he wants me to put the brake on and off. Anyhow, I have injected a bit of variety into his day of forever yelling, "Horn!", "Windscreen wipers!" etc. The weather's too good to worry about what he thinks of me.

I line up behind the other cars waiting for the inspection of their private parts. Now I must not let the engine idle. That'll show them I know something about cars. Isn't it true that if you let it idle too long, wasted petrol fumes get into the atmosphere?

Oh! Oh! That fellow's waving to me. Blast it, I have to crank the engine. No impressive roar at first go. My brain hears, "Incompetent woman!" It seems to be a law of nature that if one establishes a reputation one must live up to it. So I immediately bang into the gutter which is protecting the mole-like mechanics underneath, in spite of instructions to do otherwise.

Goody! A nice smile. Full of teeth too. Just as well I came in the morning.

What on earth has happened to my conditioning? I'm expecting myself to switch on full beam automatically when I hear "Full beam, please." After all I did switch it on before, when the first officer only wanted parking lights. I fiddle with the knobs. To my amazement, the man goes on looking at the lights with an air of expectancy. Non-committally he repeats, "Full beam please." He looks up. That definitely is a glare.

My newly found friend who greeted me with such a nice smile flicks on the high beam with a quip to the other man, "Hey mate, you're getting her all nervous!" Just as well I had a crew cut yesterday and my hearing aids are showing. So once again I try my feminine smile, in spite of the fact he mentions a surcharge of two dollars at the office.

"Now for the brake test," he says. "When you get half way there, put on your brakes. Don't worry. The man down the end there will tell you when to stop."

My eyes follow his pointing finger, and I use my logic. Half way between that man and myself is that post. I won't be able to hear him above the noise of the engine, so I'll watch for his mouth to open.

The car revs up impressively, in fact, too impressively. I roar along the runway. The halfway mark is

reached and he hasn't opened his mouth, so I slow down, getting ready to stop. The car peters out on the machine where he is standing.

"A little harder dear," he says, "have another go."

I gather that it is on that machine where I have to stop half way. So I reverse, and get ready to slam on the brakes "as if someone walked in front of you, dear."

The operation seems successful; the screech of brakes is enough to scare the most hardened pedestrian into religion, but I stall the engine, and forget to apply the hand brake.

"Go a little further until I say stop and..." He demonstrates the emphatic pull and strain that ought to appear on my face when I use the hand brake.

I then move slowly off, waiting for the moment of action. Gee, something's wrong here; I'm nearly out of the doors of the station and he hasn't said anything. So I peer round to see him, standing hands on hips with a

frustrated look on his face. He visibly summons up all his patience. I don't know what has transpired, but his look of mounting anger melts into one of tried patience.

"I'll do it," he says.

I thank him profusely. I am still grateful, even when he says that the parking lights must be repaired.

On the registration form there are some squiggles near the temporary licence. Oh, that means my car has failed its first registration test. I can't get him to repeat that mumble again to confirm my hypothesis. I've put both of us through enough today. Trust my luck to fail at the first rego.

continued on page 15

continued from page 14

Mournfully I make my way home to console myself with some breakfast. The sun is still shining. I can even hear the day laughing. Deceitful weather, for sure. My fragile aura of independence has vanished.

While I am studying the registration papers, my father comes in.

"Nonsense!" he says. "The car passed after all."

(First published in the *Canberra Chronicle*, Wednesday 2 October, 1985, as "Car Passes, But Not All the Voices Register")

## ● ▲ ▲ ▲ ● LETTERS

I read with interest the first issue of "Sound Off", particularly the editorial which mentioned that the Deaf Writers' Group were so motivated to write that you finally decided to publish and be damned, unheeding of prevailing community attitudes about the limitations of deaf people using the written word.

In the 15-odd years I've been teaching deaf children I've espoused much the same philosophy, encouraging them to forget the limitations of vocabulary and syntax (these, after all, are easily "polished" in the proof-reading) and to ask themselves, first of all, whether they have something they would like to say. Of course, everyone, deaf or hearing *has*, and my experience has shown that many young deaf people are worth listening to: occasionally work is produced which shows considerable insight, clearly reflecting the great need many people have to express themselves in writing - a need which is not discarded simply because you happen to be deaf.

Much of this work is, of course, read and returned to the author, and subsequently lost to us forever. This, I've always thought, is a shame because it deserves to be read and remembered. Lately I've been storing some of it, just in case.

Now that I've seen your magazine, and realised that there *are*, out there, some deaf people who really want to write, my "just in case" is starting to take some real shape...have a look at what I've enclosed with this letter, and see if you don't agree that there might be a place in your magazine for "maturing" young writers who are just finding their literary feet, and who, while doing so, are giving notice to the hearing world that the literary output of deaf people is not to be underestimated.

Good luck with your magazine; I'll await the second issue in December with some eagerness.

Alan Jarman

OD Unit, Arthur Phillip High School  
Parramatta NSW

*(The two pieces which Mr Jarman sent us, by Helen Van Ngo, are on pages 7 & 12. When you read Helen's work remember that she is not only deaf; she also comes from a non-English speaking background.)*

Congratulations on the first issue of "SOUND OFF". I found the issue to be of an extremely high standard and must compliment all involved on a job well done. I look forward to receipt of the next issue.

Best wishes for "SOUND OFF" and I trust you will receive a good response from the deaf community of Western Australia.

John F. Levitzke  
W.A. Deaf Society

letters continued on page 16

2ND ASIA/PACIFIC WORLD FEDERATION  
OF DEAF REGIONAL CONFERENCE AND  
3RD ASIA/PACIFIC DEAF SOCCER  
CHAMPIONSHIP.

The above events will be held in Melbourne between 26th March and 3rd April, 1988. If you have heard about them and want to come to Melbourne to watch the Soccer matches and/or to observe the conference, you should obtain the Preliminary Registration Form which gives you all details about the events.

The form is obtainable from either the Hon. Secretary, State Branch of the AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF, or the STATE DEAF SOCIETY.

Please give your name and address on the form so that a receipt for your deposit can be sent to you.

If you cannot get the form, write to:

JOHN M. LOVETT,  
CHAIRMAN,  
ASIA/PACIFIC CO-ORDINATING  
COMMITTEE,  
C/-101 WELLINGTON PARADE SOUTH,  
EAST MELBOURNE. VIC. 3002.

ANDREW DONALD'S poem "CHAGALL" in issue no.1, puzzled some readers. Below, ANDREW explains who CHAGALL was: CHAGALL (Marc) pronounced sha (as in "shaggy")-gall (as in "gallery"). Born in 1887 in Russia. He spent most of his life as a painter in France. His highly imaginative style, painting more or less recognizable objects in unusual juxtaposition and floating rather insecurely in space, influenced Surrealism. He was noted for his colour-very rich and flamboyant; he said in an interview in the late 50's, that "colour was love" per se. He died last year, of a fine age. His illustrations can be seen in many art books, and covers for books, programmes, etc., also post cards.

16 sound off no.2 dec. 1987

letters continued from page 15

My hearty congratulations with the launching of "Sound Off"! It is truly a great start upon something that has been sorely needed within Australia's deaf community.

The articles are bright and are most informative; together with the artwork by Astrid Carlsen who's work seems most accomplished too.

I can well imagine the difficulties and long hours all involved with SOUND OFF would've spent, having been through similar experiences myself. However, the results are obviously well worth the effort!

I eagerly look forward to receiving future editions.

Best of luck!  
Ross Enticott  
Melbourne, Victoria.

Edition No.1 was great! I enjoyed all of the articles and look forward to No.2. Congratulations on such a good first edition.

Quentin Iokov  
Marion High School  
Clovelly Park, S.A.

I would like to congratulate all those involved with launching "SOUND OFF".

I enjoyed reading the first issue and wish your venture every success. I was particularly interested in the editorial, especially the last two paragraphs, which I found particularly challenging.

With best wishes,  
Stan Donald  
Editor- "BETTER HEARING"

AF  
WAINWRIGHT



# THE EAVESDROPPING EYE

OVERSEEN AT THE CONCERNED DEAF  
GROUP'S EDUCATION SEMINAR,  
SYDNEY, OCTOBER 1987.

Many deaf people feel small or embarrassed when people encourage Signed English and criticise Auslan, they feel bad because their language is not good enough, but when you hear people praise Auslan and say it's a true language, a beautiful language, you feel good again. All children should grow up feeling good about themselves.

I heard a terrible story about little children growing up thinking maybe they'll die when they finish school because they've never seen deaf adults, or some little children think when they grow up they'll become hearing.

We talk about deaf culture and how it's different. If you go to a party, half hearing, half deaf, who will go home last? The deaf people. Why? It's just their way, they say long goodbyes. If deaf people go to somebody's home, which room do they gather in? The kitchen. Why? I don't know—they just seem to like the kitchen best!

I'm talking about deaf studies. Do you all know what deaf studies is? Have you heard about deaf studies before? Does anybody teach it here? No? Good! It makes my talk more interesting for you.

If a hearing person tries to explain to a hearing parent about deafness they can't, it's better to have a deaf person explaining to the hearing parents what it's like to grow up deaf.

Many children don't know about the deaf club, the sports groups, all those things that deaf people have. They should learn that in school; they should know before they leave school that they have many places to go for help and for a social life.

Parents do not choose to have a deaf child but having a deaf child dictates that they have training for themselves and their children.

"MANY HEARING PARENTS OF DEAF CHILDREN NEVER SEE A DEAF ADULT. LIKE MY FATHER WHEN HE FOUND OUT I WAS DEAF. HE DIDN'T KNOW WHERE TO GO SO HE WROTE A LETTER TO AMERICA AND ASKED THEM IF THERE WAS A DEAF SCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA. THEY WROTE BACK AND SAID YES THERE ARE DEAF SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA. NO ONE HERE EXPLAINED TO MY FATHER ABOUT DEAFNESS. THAT WAS THIRTY YEARS AGO; NOW IT'S BETTER."

PLEASE DETACH FORM 41 (BELOW)  
AND RETURN IT IN THE REPLY PAID  
WINDOW FACE ENVELOPE PROVIDED  
0723-3051 39085N

Statement  
to be completed  
and returned to the  
Divisional Returning Officer  
for the

Division of  
PHILLIP  
PO BOX 519  
RANDWICK NSW 2031

I, KAREN M LLOYD  
of 12/38 WARATAH AVE RANDWICK  
state that proceedings for failure to vote  
reason at the election held on Saturday  
instituted against me for the following reason

I happen to be  
Therefore have only  
to media reminder  
have to pay a fine for  
to be for a government who  
able for the needs of hear  
impaired electors.

Signature of  
witness  
The statement at right was signed in my presence  
Date 28/9/87  
Address of  
witness

Signature of person  
making statement  
\* Where the form is filled up on behalf of an elector who is absent or suffering  
from a physical incapacity, the word "I" should be struck out.  
J. E. Murphy 93 Perouse Road Randwick  
K M Lloyd