

Why Deaf People Must Write, by Karen Lloyd

WHY DEAF PEOPLE MUST WRITE

Deaf people in Australia are becoming more organised, more visible and vocal, we are becoming a 'movement' like women and Aboriginals, a force to be considered and reckoned with. We are beginning to realise we cannot sit back and let hearing people speak out for us, we must speak out for ourselves, and more and more deaf people are showing a willingness to take on the responsibility for our own destiny. That's what being vocal means: making decisions about what we want, and by making those decisions known, being responsible for what happens to us.

As a group we have now come too far to be able to turn back the tide to the old days of hearing people making decisions for us and speaking out for us. We must continue along our path to greater assertiveness and freedom. Part of that assertiveness and freedom is establishing a 'voice'.

Any organisation or group of people, to be effective and to be heard, must have a voice. By 'voice' I do not mean that thing we use to make noises in our throats; I mean voice in the figurative sense. By 'voice' I mean the written word. The spoken - and signed - word is gone in a moment and forgotten. The written word endures, it becomes a permanent record of our thoughts, it becomes our recorded history.

Australia doesn't seem to have much of a recorded history of the deaf. Deaf people have not been encouraged to be vocal and to write. Most of what has been written about the deaf has been written by hearing people. Although there are hearing people who do understand a great deal about deafness and the deaf, nothing they write about us can ever be quite as authentic as the same thing would be if written by a deaf person. We must record our own thoughts, stories, history, in our own way.

What we write tells something about us. So does the way we write. So does the simple fact that we are writing. Writing takes courage and belief in ourselves. When we write we lay a little of ourselves out for readers to see. Just by writing we are telling each other and the world that we believe we have

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something important to say and we have the courage to say it. Just by writing in our own words, whether they be 'proper' English or not, we are saying we are proud of the way we communicate, we are comfortable with our difference, we are proud to be who we are. That's very important.

On a personal level, we must write simply because we have the urge. Writing is creative expression. Anyone who has the creative urge must find an outlet for it or be forever frustrated. What we write does not necessarily have to be about deafness. It can be purely personal creative writing about anything under the sun or moon. But whatever we write, whether it is about deafness or not, contributes to the history and culture of the deaf, simply because we are deaf.

By forming a deaf writers' group we are setting ourselves up as pioneers. We are doing something that has never been done before in Australia. We are doing something important for ourselves and for the deaf culture. By writing, we will not only enrich the deaf culture; by contributing a new and different vein, we will also be enriching Australian history and literature in general.

So...if we want to take our place in history, WE MUST WRITE!

--Karen Lloyd