

Submitted by Yiesell Rayon

Our youngest son, Markie was identified at birth with mild sensorineural hearing loss. Within 6 weeks, Markie was aided with bilateral hearing aids. At that time, my husband and I had decided that we wanted to raise our son using spoken language. Markie was always too curious of a baby to be interested in being tested in a sound booth. His audiologist wanted to sedate him to perform a second ABR, but we decided to wait until he was a year old. That was a big mistake. The results of the second ABR were very surprising. Our son had had progressive hearing loss and now had severe hearing loss.

Cochlear implants were not an option for my family, so what was next? Since it was not about his life being in danger, we did not want to put our son through any surgery. We did need to figure out how we were going to make sure our son had access to language. Thanks to his hearing aids, Markie currently has access to spoken language, but since he has progressive hearing loss we knew we needed to plan ahead in case he became profoundly Deaf. We discussed our concerns with our son's DHH specialist. She immediately offered to come to our home and teach us American Sign Language (ASL). Learning a new language sounded almost impossible because we have a busy lifestyle. At first, we were very hesitant about making the commitment. In fact, I was worried I couldn't teach our son something we did not know.

After mentioning our situation to my younger sister, she introduced me to an amazing Deaf couple who were friends of her. They were both born Deaf and had hearing parents. One of them was raised using spoken language, while the other one was raised using sign language. We discussed how the choices their parents made impacted their lives and how they would have liked to be raised differently. After meeting with them, we realized our son needed to learn ASL. What was supposed to be a one-day meeting, turned into long lasting friendship between my family and the Deaf couple.

Although I have a lot of work to do in learning ASL, I feel extremely lucky to have always had Deaf mentors throughout our journey. I have always had someone I can ask questions without worrying that I will offend them. Prior to having Deaf mentors, I did not know what life was like for Deaf adults and children. I had so many questions that my family and friends could not answer. I use to think that my son would never fully understand my love towards him. I feared I would never have the relationship with him that I had with my parents growing up. Having Deaf mentors has help us make decisions for my son along the way. Their advice has always been an impact when it was time to make choices. Every time we see each other, they remind me of the importance of learning ASL as a parent of a child learning to sign. I always advice other hearing parents to make connections with Deaf adults because only they would fully understand the needs of a Deaf child. It is always nice to have someone to show you full support and understanding.