
6 Months of Workshops with the New South Wales
Theatre of the Deaf
1984



Margi Brown

MEMBERS OF THE N.S.W. THEATRE OF THE DEAF, June, 1984

Marcia Girke

Sarah Girke

Bronwyn Gallea

Stefan Kater

George Kranz

Chris Sharp

Colin Thompson

John Windsor

CONTENTS

Poems, by Stefan Kater.....	Introduction
Summary.....	page 1
Steps used to free our thoughts.....	page 2
Conversations.....	page 4
Marcia's Story.....	page 8
Sarah's Story.....	page 12
Stefan's Story.....	page 14
George's Story.....	page 17
John's Story.....	page 21
Colin's Story.....	page 22
Skeleton Scripts to be worked on.....	page 24
based on Colin's life	pg 24
learning how to talk	pg 27
sensitivity between hearing and deaf	pg 28
lipreading errors	pg 30
based on Marcia's life	pg 33
The telephone.....	page 34
The telephone dream, by Stefan Kater...	page 35
Dream sequence by Stefan Kater.....	page 37
Personal Symbols.....	page 38
Stefan Kater's paintings.....	page 39
Appendix 1,2,3,4,5,6.	

SUMMARY OF 6 MONTHS WORK WITH N.S.W. THEATRE OF THE DEAF

The great drive in all human beings is for communication. The use of the printed word enables us to relive an experience through the use of language memory, and to share the experience with others. As a deaf theatre group, we wanted to record our thoughts, feelings, wants, fears and loves. Until this time, we have had little opportunity to work together in this fashion. We would write in our own language.

We met several times a week for almost 6 months. We met either at the Deaf Club at Stanmore, or Margi's home. One intensive weekend was spent at Kurrajong on a farm, where we walked through the bush covered with hundreds of wild flowers. We found time to explore our dreams and secret fantasies, along with having a scrumptious barbeque and picnic.

We grew very close during our time together. We learned to trust one another, to love one another. It was difficult to say goodbye when the first part of the project finished. Together we had studied our lives, our personal symbols.

Our objective was not only to record on paper our feelings and ideas about deafness, but to devise a production so that an audience could see our stories in sign language.

Our evenings were spent talking, talking, talking. Most of us were not used to writing down our ideas, our poems. We always signed them, for ours is a visual language, but we took on the challenge with vigour. We used several stepping stones to reach a point where we could openly share our innermost dreams.

STEPS USED TO FREE OUR THOUGHTS

1. Drawing. We drew something without thinking, folded it, and passed it on. The next person would draw something else and pass it on. Finally, after we had all contributed, someone would volunteer to sign the story. Most of the stories were very funny. We decided to use this technique to devise our performance when the time came, for it seemed a powerful tool. (see Appendix 1)

2. Doodling. We would doodle, our eyes partly closed, trying to keep our mind as empty as we could. When we had finished we would then select several shapes from our doodle and proceed to link these shapes together in a narrative. Our objective was to cross the hurdle of feeling that we had little to write about. (see Appendix 2)

3. History Wheel. One of our most valuable stepping stones was our history wheel. We all drew a large circle and divided it into however many years we had lived. We summed up each year, then reached for crayons and coloured our feelings about various periods in our lives. With this wheel we were able to see our lives at a glance. Not only was it a most enjoyable exercise, but we now felt we were ready to write.

We wanted to record our feelings because we believed that DEAFNESS CAN BE OVERCOME BY COMMUNICATION. Without communication, deafness leads to isolation. With communication, deafness leads to discovery, the discovery that a deaf person's life is a normal, and rich one.

This is a record of our work during a six month period. We use the English language in a way that may at first

seem unfamiliar to you. We make the language work for us; not only do we write it, we also move it through the air, words leaping out of our hands onto the page below.

To stimulate our conversations, we decided on a list of questions. Each meeting began with a question or two, but sometimes our conversations would run away with us, and more relevant information would be forthcoming. We wanted to find out what that first day was like when we learned that we were deaf.

1. How old was I when I learned that I was deaf.
2. Where was I?
3. What was the day like: rainy, fine, summer, winter?
4. Who was I with at the time?
5. What did I have on?
6. Did I feel sad, frightened, lonely, or what?
7. What was I thinking at the time?
8. Did I think my world had come to an end?
9. When I understood what deafness was did I feel special
10. Was I teased by other children because I was deaf?
11. Was I confused about what deafness was exactly?
12. Was I scared about what this would mean to my life?
13. What did my mother do when she noticed other people making fun of me?
14. Did my family try to hide me from other people?
15. Was I protected by my family?

What was School like?

1. How old was I when I was sent to school?
2. Did I write letters home?
3. Did I receive letters from home?
4. How did I feel the first time I received a letter from home?
5. What was the first word I uttered...who taught it?
6. At school did I write about what I did?
7. Did I enjoy school?
8. What did I like about school the most?

CONVERSATIONS

Because we are deaf we do not need a huge vocabulary.
We paint the words and our hands communicate
an infinite variety of nuances.

We talked about signing. Some of us learned signing at
a young age.

Stefan: I was signing from 8 until 12. Then I went to
England. And for four years only communicated
orally. Then when I was 16 I returned to
Australia and resumed signing.

Marcia: I learned signing from the day I was born; you
see, my older brother was deaf.

Some of us learned signing quite late:

Colin: When I was 15 years old, I learn sign. Before
that I thought sign language was only for the dumb.

We talked about what it was like being deaf:

Colin: After I learned I was deaf I grew to hate being
deaf.

Stefan: Yes, I was jealous of the hearing.

Colin: I wanted to talk and hear. I was lonely. I was
disappointed. I wanted to be hearing. Why me...
why me...I kept saying.

Stefan: I thought deaf would become hearing as they
grew up. You see I used to only see the
hearing adults use the telephones. So I thought
I could use the telephone when I grew up.
I thought I would be like those old deaf people,
using sign language. I did not want that.

We talked about our hearing aides.

Stefan: I was embarrassed to have hearing aide. When young girl made fun of my hearing. I didn't want anyone to know. I still hide my hearing aide: when I go to the movies I pull it out when the lights are out.

Colin: After school we would remove our hearing aides. on the bus I'd take it off, but keep it in my pocket. One day I forgot to turn it off so it whistled. I was signing, and thought that everyone was making fun of my signing, but in fact everyone was just looking because of the whistling.

Stefan: I used to tease my teachers by making my hearing aide whistle.

John: I used to have fun making mine whistle while my family was watching T.V.

Stefan: My mother once thought my hearing aide was a baby's dummy. Also, I did not believe the sea had sound. When I wore my hearing aide I realized that the sea is a very noisy place.

Colin: In my dreams I am hearing...I sleep talk.

We talked about what it was like to be young.

Stefan: When I was 8 years old, I saw an ad on television, for air fresh. When you spr ayed, flowers appeared. I saved up...for mothers day. I thought that when Mum sprayed, flowers would come. I cried when it didn't happen. It was just a spray.

John: My mother gave me 150 cars.

George: I was 5. I cut up my clothes. My aunt had to mend them.

Colin: I liked to light fires when I was young. I'd make marks on them, and I thought my mother would think it was vegemite. Sometimes I would pray to God: please make me hearing. I was a quiet boy. I had five sisters and seven brothers. One of my brothers was deaf.

Stefan: I remember as a boy my first word was car. My mother made me say it.

Marcia: I always signed.

John: I was 2 years old. My mother called out to me. I did not respond. Mother went to the doctors with me. They did lots and lots of tests. As a result I was given a hearing aide. It was one of those that sat on your chest. I kept pulling it off cause the sounds were very upsetting. The background sounds merged into the foreground. Confusion. My sister hated me because I was deaf. I did not know sign language at school. When I went to work I felt very isolated. People were talking and I couldn't follow what they were talking about. So my mother suggested that I come along to the deaf club to find people of my own. When I came here I saw sign language. I was 16 years old. I was given a card with the alphabet on it. I learned alphabet very quickly. It seemed the natural language. My mother had never heard about signing.

Chris: I teach swimming sometimes, and one day I was there and saw a person interpreting. I went up and found out what was going on. This person said that the only place you could learn sign language was at Nepean College and you had to learn how to become a deaf teacher. So I went. I became a teacher of the deaf. But I haven't actually taught them. I didn't like the system. Now I come to the deaf club.

George: I went to the spastic centre. I was the only deaf there. They sent me away to an old school, Darlington Deaf School, each morning and the spastic school in the afternoon. This went on for three years. Then I left Darlington School, because more and more deaf were coming to the Spastic Centre. I went to St Gabriels later on, because I didn't do well in reading and writing. I used to be oral deaf. I had a very limited vocabulary. But with sign language my vocabulary improved. When I was at school, I kept turning

off my hearing aide. They then attached it to my back, so I couldn't take it off. A teacher never understood about deafness.

Colin: I only though I was different. I came home and told my mother "I am deaf"...my mother just smiled.

George: When I was young, I was always bored. Everyone was having a conversation talking to each other yet when I asked what's going on my parents always said 'tell you later'. Then when I joined the deaf club they came with me and asked What's going on.
Tell you later.
I felt great. Now we were equal.

John: When I was learning to drive, my father was very nervous. Dad was a backseat driver...screech...turn here...pant pant pant uggghhhh go and get professional lessons.
He experienced absolute shock when I passed.