

BOOK REVIEW

The Silents (Gallaudet University Press, 1996)
By Charlotte Abrams; \$24.95 - 272 pp. hardcover

Professionals in the field of deafness are treated to a unique story in Charlotte Abrams' book entitled, *The Silents*. Mrs. Abrams is the daughter of deaf parents ("Poppa and Momma" Herzberg) and she shares the story of her family life during the Depression and World War II. The Herzbergs were a close knit Jewish family that resided in the Chicago area during this era. Poppa, Momma, Charlotte and her sister Adelaide were called "The Silents" in their community and over time the two hearing daughters grew to realize how unique their upbringing was.

Momma Herzberg was born in Russia and immigrated to the United States at the age of five when she became deaf. She was educated in "special classes in regular schools" and favored a "structured" approach to life. She was a loving and sensitive mother who was "prone to nervousness." Poppa Herzberg was born deaf in Indiana and attended the state school until his teenage years when he dropped out to travel across the country. Poppa held a number of jobs during this period and loved to share stories of his journeys. He was especially proud of having won 55 bouts as a boxer fighting under the name of "Dummy Jordan" early in his career. The family was not immune from the problems and challenges that faced Americans during the Depression and World War II. Unemployment, housing and financial challenges were a way of life for the family during this period.

The author described how the family responded to these challenges and gave a fascinating picture of life for deaf families during this era. Following the World War II experience, the family was faced with the challenge of helping Momma deal with becoming blind as a result of Retinitis Pigmentosa.

Part two of this book described how the family dealt with all of the issues raised by Momma's becoming blind. Part two also offered a revealing story of two hearing daughters moving towards independence and being torn by their mother's need for assistance. The author described the unique feelings of responsibility that she always felt and talked openly about the tension this created in her own marriage and family.

The Silents presents professionals in the field of deafness with a unique opportunity to understand the experiences of a deaf family from the perspective of hearing child with that family. Mrs. Abrams told her story without bias and thus presented a powerful and candid portrayal of deaf family life in this era. The story of the Abrams' family is one that should be read by professionals seeking to understand the deaf experience in America.

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