

Deafness Can Be a Strength

Gustavo Pedroza Medina

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What do you think of the title? How do you think deafness could be a strength?
2. What is an *assistive technology*? Share some examples of assistive technologies.
3. Think about the difference between *pity* and *empathy*. Discuss.

My Ears Stopped Hearing

When I was 25 years old, I began to notice that my hearing was fading. This was not a surprise. Since I was a child, I had been warned that I would gradually become deaf.

I am not alone. According to recent data from the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 1.5 billion people suffer from some degree of hearing loss.

I Learned to Pay Attention

Perhaps I am lucky. In my childhood, my deafness was mild, and my faith is strong. That faith gave me enough confidence to grow like any other human being. Over time, my ears stopped hearing, but they taught me something else. Being able to hear less taught me how to listen more. In silence, I discovered the value of attention, empathy, and authentic communication.

In my mother tongue, which is Spanish, I have perfected the art of reading lips. I develop an intimate connection with people by watching them form words and make gestures. I have to pay careful attention! I hate it when it is dark. It means I can't read your lips. When I am with other people in dark places, I turn on the flashlight of my phone. Sometimes, it's uncomfortable, for them and for me, but little by little they have learned how important it is to me. My flashlight is a kind of *assistive technology*. It helps me see lips and gestures.



Extra Effort and Empathy

The extra effort that it takes to communicate has changed some of my relationships. People around me have gained empathy. They improve their way of speaking. They don't mind me shining a flashlight at them. They make the world a little more accessible to me.

I do use hearing aids as well. These devices have allowed me to learn English, but it costs me twice the effort.

I consider myself fortunate. I am surrounded by people who don't look at me with *pity*, but with *empathy*. My friends are people who understand and accompany. They inspire me to continue growing. They not only listen to me, they understand me. And that, in such a noisy world, is worth more than any sound.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are the various ways that Gustavo considers himself lucky?
2. Read Gustavo's poem on p. 7. How does he use figurative language to convey meaning?

The Sound Goes Away

Gustavo Pedroza Medina

The sound goes away, like a river that hides underground,
leaving me alone with the echo of what once was.

I no longer hear the birds at dawn,
nor the warm murmur of the wind,
nor the name that loved me whispered in the afternoon.
Nor my name whispered by the person who loves me.

But in the vast silence I learned: there are voices that do not need words,
there are hugs that scream without making noise,
and glances that say everything the ear silences.

Losing the sound was not losing myself.
It was learning to see, to feel,
to read life
with an open soul
and an awakened heart.

Today I walk without fear, even if the world does not sing to me.
Because I have discovered that the true language
does not need to be heard: it is carried within.

Gustavo P. Medina is a student at Erie Neighborhood House in Chicago, Illinois. He is passionate about communication, and he believes in the power of empathy. His journey with deafness has not been a limitation, but an opportunity to discover new ways to see, feel, and connect with the world. He firmly believes that we all have something valuable to say, if we learn to truly listen.



ASL Poetry



Douglas Ridloff and Daniel Durant share a poem called "Spring's Answer." You can watch it here: www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1113637609013402

According to the National Association of the Deaf, American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language. The shape, placement, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and body movements, all play important parts in conveying information.

Each country has its own sign language, and regions have dialects, much like the many languages spoken all over the world. Like any spoken language, ASL is a language with its own unique rules of grammar and syntax.

Watch the poem and discuss it. What is it about? How do the poets express themselves?

Could it be a strength to be an ASL-speaker? Why or why not?

Find more ASL poetry and other resources here: <https://sites.google.com/view/aslresources13/resource-videos>

Source: <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/what-is-american-sign-language/>