

"SIGNS" AND WONDERS

Anna Beddow and Georgiana Murnaghan

Living Stones



They are sane, intelligent, caring people. They are capable of both giving and receiving love, affectionate, and have a sense of humor. They can marry, stay single, raise a family, and hold a job. They look no different than you or I. They dress appropriately and contribute to their communities. They are involved in sports, computers, the arts, theater, movies and politics. You have done your grocery shopping down the same aisle with them and have stood behind them

in line at the Post Office. They are, in fact, a particular sector of the population that perpetually feel the effects of discrimination, even though racism and prejudice are not as visible today as, say they were, in the 1960's or earlier. They walk in silence and rarely is there a voice heard to defend them.

Can you imagine not being given the opportunity to expand your vocabulary as you grew up, so you could communicate with the general public? Can you imagine knowing you'll be yelled at, ridiculed, mocked, taunted, neglected, and socially ostracized whenever you leave your home? Can you imagine ceaseless fear, day in and day out, because you do not know any other way to function? Can you imagine locking your doors incessantly throughout the day, then constantly checking them? So many years go by and eventually those locks wear out, that door frame gets too loose, those hinges and door knob no longer stay in place. Welcome to the experiences of deaf people.

If you can put all that aside, try to grab the impact of this: "Less than 2% of the deaf population ever go to church," Georgiana Murnaghan told me. She said "You have no idea just how very, very hard it is for the deaf to know Jesus!" "There are no bibles out there for the deaf...no one has made a bible in sign (language)".

As you read this, please try to picture my experience at this interview. I hope you are able to appreciate the circumstances of this particular Living- Stones article; as I fear it will not hold much value otherwise. This article has been, by far, the most frightening for me to compose. I am desperate to get it right, to respect those involved and to retell the story that all who may read it may give glory to God.

I was seated at a table across from a remarkable, smiling, humble, gentle, God-fearing woman named Anna Beddow. This is Georgiana's mom and she has been deaf her whole life. Georgiana interpreted for us as Anna shared her side of the story. I was totally captivated by the beauty of their sign-language and even as I write this, I find it extremely exhausting to locate the words that accurately expresses the power of their story and testimony. The flow of Georgiana's hands was like a dance and it was as if I was watching a miracle exchange through the air between she and her mom. I was so blessed that the Lord was letting me "hear" this silent language and I watched intently every movement of their hands and fingers. Anna is deaf, it is her "normal". But to me, being with she and Georgiana was huge, and I was the one who left "speechless" when the interview was over.

Anna raised Georgiana and her older brother as a single mom. She could only know of God through whatever she grasped from the lectures at the Catholic or Methodist Churches she took the kids too. Someone had indicated to her that Georgiana could sing, so she kept going to church, even though there was often no interpreter. Unfortunately, Anna's understanding of the Lord has only come in pieces. Perceiving just tid-bits about God is to no fault of her own. This world offers very little in opportunity for the deaf to "hear" who God is, what He has done, and how He works. Yet, despite the lack of help given her, Anna was always listening for God in her heart. The Lord guided her as she grew up, through her father. Her dad "loved-on" her deeply, and gave her the lessons for life that still "speak" to her today.

Last summer, Anna had to have her gallbladder removed. "She did not want surgery and she was so scarred", Georgiana told me, "but she had to go." Anna signs back, "After surgery, it was terrible...so terrible...the pain was just terrible!" Georgiana then told me about how the surgeon had done something wrong and that her mom had to now go back for corrective surgery. She was hospitalized for nearly three months. Georgiana continued, "She could have died...it was really, really serious...infections, abscesses, intestinal problems..." The doctors would come to Anna's bedside and indicate to her, "You really need to pray...just pray...pray". Georgiana was told at one point, "It really looks bad...You need to get your mother's things in order..." she continued, "there was death and fear on mom's face ...constant fear."

faith strong, some in particular came from Jeremiah 29; especially verse 11, "For I know the thoughts and the plans that I have toward you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." She took hold of God's hand while encouraging her mom in sign-language with His promise, "God's gonna take care of things, mom...He's gonna do it...He'll take care of everything."

"Everything" included Anna's 30 year old mobile home, "that no one would come out to repair," Anna said. "Everything was breaking...I had a really hard time keeping up with the old house...I worked my whole life and I just couldn't keep up...there was always something the old house needed." Anna's rehabilitation was the priority, though, so her concerns for the old house were put on hold.

Georgiana and her husband, Chad, helped arrange for Anna to go to north Jersey where Anna's siblings live. A sister to Anna helped her with rehab, which went very well. "What a big, big difference it is in north Jersey", Anna exclaimed, "there was so much snow...two, three inches every day...I was helping my sister cook, clean, and shovel the snow!" Anna laughs, "I was really able to increase my activity (level)...because of the snow...it was my exercise!"

While with her sister, Anna was healing and God was at work at her old home through Chad. Chad was able to negotiate getting a new home for Anna. Something that would not have happened if Anna never had surgery. It was her health and the need for rehab that brought to light the condition of her home. And get this: it was less expensive to get a new mobile home than a used one! Anna returned to a place where, "now there are no worries about repairs", she says with a broad smile, "what a relief, no repairs!" "I could not believe how beautiful it was." This is the first new home Anna has ever owned. When she went to her new bedroom, the cross that she had kept next to her bed was now over the door. Anna signs, "I see it (the cross) totally different now!" That's because not only did Anna get a new home on the old lot, she also got a new heart in her old body, she got Jesus in the house!

You see, after her return from north Jersey in January, Anna began attending a bible study that had begun last September. Georgiana had been interpreting the gospel message for the deaf, as it was taught by her father-in-law. Signing the message of Jesus came effortlessly to Georgiana so, without hesitation, she signed it for her mom. After "hearing" God through the teaching, Anna signed to Georgiana, "So... do I pray now or wait until I get home?" As Anna prayed to receive Jesus, Georgian was signing it the others. Can you imagine that moment?

For me, this was all too wonderful to absorb. Half way through the interview I was crying! I asked Georgiana to sign to Anna that I was overwhelmed and this was just too beautiful for me to take in. Here, Anna's house was falling apart. Here Anna's body was falling apart. How does God speak to the deaf? He knew all along the plans He had to bring Anna out of that deteriorating house and into a new home. He knew all along the plans He had to bring her out of surgery-gone-bad to rehab-in-the-snow, and rekindled the fellowship of her siblings. The Lord had declared Anna to be His own and took her out from the bondage of fear to bring her to a place of peace and great joy. "I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity..." (Jer. 29:14) God literally spoke through signs and wonders, both tangible and through Georgiana's hands. "We knew there had to be a way for the house to be replaced...God made a way...all these things had to happen.....it was a way for God to prove to her that He would take care of her," Georgiana says. "All this still amazes me, it still surprises me, it shouldn't, but it does! All this happened to mom so she could trust Him to save her life...He gave her a new home and new spirit." And Jeremiah 29:12,13 was there: "Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

I asked Anna, "What changes have you seen since that day of salvation?" She gave me a big smile and signed, "I am able to communicate more, to help others who are deaf...I am happy now...and now I know I will see my Father in heaven, I know it...and so what if the door is unlocked!" Georgiana bursts in, "She is so happy now...I can see it on her face, and the fear...she is not fearful anymore!" "There are so many positives from this one negative thing that happened to her."

"For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart." "My sheep HEAR MY VOICE, and I KNOW THEM, and THEY FOLLOW ME." (Jer. 24:6,7; John 10:27)