

25 Years Later: Board of Education v Rowley: A Look at the Past and Looking Towards the Future

Amy Rowley

Abstract

Amy June Rowley shared her personal experience as a child caught in the middle of a special education litigation when her parents and her school district went to court regarding the issue of whether or not an interpreter was necessary for Amy to receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). In *Hendrick Hudson v. Rowley*, many issues were encountered and many directly impacted Amy's experience in school. Participants had the opportunity to analyze the information shared and see the transition from 25 years ago, when the Supreme Court decision was made to now. Amy June Rowley is a parent of deaf children and her experience in the case impact the decisions related to her children's education.



This is the kind of article you don't normally see in these kinds of publications. I have read many articles over the years and find that almost everyone has a scholarly perspective on the Rowley case. When I have a chance to talk with people about what they have read and what opinions they have developed as a result of these readings, I often find that the perspective that they have adopted is directly influenced by the readings. However, almost none of the articles published to date offer a personal perspective of Rowley.

As the child who grew up in these cases, I want to share my personal experiences. Not everyone will agree with my perspective, however I am not looking for sympathy or support. This is my story and not anyone else's story. What I hope readers will get from this is the understanding that in everyone's best interests, something will happen that is not in the best interest for the student caught in the middle of a special education litigation. The same is true for a child or children caught in the middle when parents are going through a divorce. Everyone wants to do what's best for the child, but everyone has their own ideas about what is best, which sometimes causes conflicts. I will show in this paper what some of the conflicts were and how I was caught in the middle at times. My comments in italics are exactly what I remember from that time.

A brief background on my parents and their educational experiences is essential to understand the full scope of things that were to happen regarding the Rowley cases. Clifford Rowley was a graduate of the New York School for the Deaf (Fanwood) in White Plains, New York which is not far from where the Rowley controversies took place in Peekskill, NY. Clifford Rowley is the younger child of Elmer and Thelma Rowley, who are hearing. Clifford was born as a healthy

hearing baby and became deaf shortly afterwards from an onset of meningitis. At the time, his parents contacted the New York School for the Deaf and inquired about educating their son. Elmer and Thelma were advised by educators of the deaf at the time that oral education was the way of educating the deaf and that they should not learn sign language if they wanted Clifford to be successfully integrated into society. Clifford was placed into a special program where all deaf kids did not sign; they were housed and schooled separately from the other deaf kids attending Fanwood who already signed. Administrators at Fanwood felt that the deaf kids who signed would prevent the new only-oral kids from learning to speak thus segregating the signers from the non-signers. However, this "experiment" was short lived as some deaf children in the oral-only group were from deaf parents and had already seen sign language even though their parents had only talked to them and not signed. But people back then did not know language could still be acquired from watching; therefore those deaf children from deaf families were able to successfully pass on the language of deaf people to those oral only children from hearing families. This is how Clifford Rowley learned ASL and the segregated program was soon declared a "failure" and the project was abandoned. All of the students then joined the rest of the deaf students in the Fanwood School and dormitories. Clifford Rowley grew up as a signing deaf person and was educated with full access to sign language, but his parents never learned to sign.

Nancy Rowley grew up in Rochester, New York and was born hearing. By the age of four, Nancy was struck with German measles and started to lose her hearing. By the age of 13 she could no longer talk on the phone and struggled with communication in school and with friends. She learned to read lips and her mother mostly filled her in on what was going on. As she became older, she learned of a college for deaf students in Washington DC. So she decided to attend college there upon her graduation from her Catholic high school. However many students at that college, Gallaudet College, knew sign language and she did not so she tried to learn as much as possible after she arrived at college. She eventually met Clifford and the two of them began courting. She graduated since she was older than Clifford, and attended a Master's program at Gallaudet to become a teacher of the deaf. Upon her graduation from graduate school, she moved to Pennsylvania to teach at Pennsylvania State Oral School (PSOS) in Scranton. The Headmaster from PSOS met with Dr. Powrie Doctor who ran the graduate program at the time and he explained to her about the importance of sign language being used in class. The headmaster interviewed and hired Nancy who felt very uncomfortable teaching orally due to her own experience of how frustrating it was in school. The headmaster gave Nancy her blessing to teach whatever way she wanted. Instead of wasting students' time, as she valued the opportunity she had to teach them, she used sign language in her classes and her students prospered greatly. A few other teachers from PSOS were also attending Gallaudet for their Master's degrees during the summer times, so PSOS made the transition from being an oral school to a deaf school that used sign language. After Clifford graduated from Gallaudet, the two of them moved to New York to start a new life there as a married couple. Nancy worked at Fanwood while Clifford worked as a chemist in nearby Ossining.

During her tenure at Fanwood, she saw how much potential many deaf students had and pushed her students to achieve and be the best they could be regardless of what others thought. Fanwood was considered to be one of the best schools during this time. However the environment at many deaf schools was that many other teachers there thought less of deaf children and thought that their being deaf equated with them not being able to achieve or learn adequately. When students transferred in to Fanwood from other schools, there was an obvious gap in the education of students transferred in and students who grew up at Fanwood. Despite Fanwood being one of the better schools around, students were still dealing with an educational gap compared with hearing schools because most students did not come into school with a language foundation from home. This was not always the case with deaf education but became more predominant in the 1880's and

1890's when Alexander Graham Bell pushed for the rise of oralism in American Schools. He is well known for his invention of the telephone but his passion was trying to assimilate deaf people into a hearing world. While he was trying to make a hearing aid, he invented the telephone instead. (VanCleve & Crouch, 1989). Bell helped the rise of oralism prosper and the focus on learning English by reading and writing shifted to learning to talk and read lips or use any residual hearing you had left. With that mindset, many deaf educators came in with a little purpose of teaching deaf children academically but pushed them to succeed vocally. This was still the method of teaching in the 1960's when Nancy Rowley first entered the education field. This may seem unique to Fanwood, but this is not the case. This was the general consensus of the environment at deaf schools at the time (Lane, 1999). Since oralism was supported by Bell and many others, many parents with deaf children never learned sign language thus their deaf children often had little or no language foundation when entering school. This automatically puts all deaf schools on an uneven playing field against hearing schools.

Deaf education has always had a lot of problems and continues to do so. Many other scholars write extensively on this topic and I will not delve into this here. The ground work for a shaky environment for educating the deaf had been laid and Nancy Rowley experienced this as a teacher and a former deaf pupil taught orally. Clifford Rowley experienced this as a student and as a deaf child with hearing parents who never learned to sign. Eventually Nancy Rowley left the teaching profession to raise her children at home. Her first child, E. John was born hearing and she communicated with him using her voice because she believed a hearing child needed to be successfully assimilated into a hearing world. If she used sign language to communicate with him, would he still fit in with other hearing people? She did not have any knowledge to support or contradict this so she always talked with John. A few years later I was born and she talked to me the same way she talked with my brother, John. It was not until about 15 months later she noticed I did not pick up on speech like my brother had. I also started signing because I had seen my parents sign with each other. Since both of my parents were born hearing, it seemed to be genetically impossible that I would be deaf, but Nancy had this feeling she could not shake. She knew I was deaf and made an appointment for a hearing test. But the appointment would not happen for several months. At this point, there was no time to spare and she dove into her former role as a teacher. She made sure I was always signed to and I always understood everything that was going on. She would continue with this role as my teacher for many years to come.

After the hearing test confirmed that I was indeed deaf, my parents started discussing what educational options were available for me. At the time, it seemed Fanwood was the only logical choice. I could also attend my local elementary school but that would mean I would have no access to the class because no one would be signing. That was an option that was unthinkable since Nancy Rowley remembers so clearly and vividly what frustration she went through in school without knowing sign language. It was only until she arrived at Gallaudet and learned sign language that she felt her world had been opened up with full access to information.

Shortly afterwards in 1975, Education for All Handicapped Children Act also called Public Law 94-142 was passed, which opened the door for disabled children to receive free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). My parents looked at this new development as an opportunity for me to be mainstreamed and receive an education like other hearing students. Nancy Rowley certainly thought this was a better option than the deaf school because after she learned I was deaf, I was progressing normally like other hearing children with hearing parents were. I was not part of the 90% statistic where 90% of deaf children come from hearing families and often are language delayed because their parents won't, don't, or can't learn sign language. Being in the 10% population, I was lucky to always have access to language. Even though my parents did not sign directly with me until after 15 months old, I could see them using

sign language and was able to acquire it anyway. If I attended the Fanwood program, many of my peers would be part of the 90% population and would most likely be language delayed. Compounded with that information, plus the knowledge of working at Fanwood, Nancy Rowley could only imagine that the local school would become the better option along with getting necessary accommodations. My parents would not be accountable for the financial burden of providing services since PL 94-142 outlined the premises for providing children with disabilities as part of FAPE.

Nancy Rowley communicated with the school about her desires to have me attend the Furnace Woods School and they responded with willingness to provide necessary services for me including a sign language interpreter. John was already attending school there and she was able to follow up with them about making necessary arrangements. Furnace Woods had a TTY installed which is what deaf people used at the time for communicating with other deaf people over the phone. Since my parents had a TTY at home, the school could call them anytime. While the staff and administrators at the school seemed to be very sincere about wanting to work with my parents, they were still a part of a bureaucratic system, Hendrick Hudson School District, which required them to report to the Superintendent.

When I started kindergarten, Nancy and Cliff fully expected that an interpreter would be present for my class. When there was not one, my parents inquired more and this set up the tension between the school district and my parents. Nancy and Cliff Rowley only wanted what they thought was best for me which was a sign language interpreter to fully understand my teacher's spoken words. Hendrick Hudson School District was advised by their lawyer to exhaust all other options first. My mother was not willing to put my education on hold while everyone could agree on exactly what I needed. She talked with my teachers every day and made sure at home I learned what was taught at school. In every sense of the word, I was home schooled but I was also attending Furnace Woods School.

Eventually an agreement was made to have an interpreter placed in the classroom on a "trial basis." The agreement called for an interpreter in the classroom for four weeks.

One day this man shows up in my class. I know he is the interpreter because my mom has told me he will be coming. But I am scared. I don't know what an interpreter is. I have never seen one before. I am only 5 and I don't know what I am supposed to do with him. He also looks scary. He is very tall to anyone who is little like me and he is wearing normal interpreter attire of all black clothes. But I don't know that white interpreters wear dark colors to contrast with their skin color. No one in kindergarten is wearing all black so there must be something wrong with him. I am even more scared. I am only so eager to walk away and keep myself occupied with other doings. Once in a while I quickly steal a glance at him and see him signing. I wonder why. I did not understand that he was signing what the teacher was saying.

To further complicate things, there were several observers in class and I knew somehow they were there because the man in black was there too. I could not wait until the entourage and the oddly dressed tall man left my kindergarten class in its normal state. As a result of my behavior, the interpreter was taken out after two weeks, two weeks less than the agreed-upon timeline. The tension between my parents and the school district was heating up.

I can feel it, but not from my parents. I feel it at school.

It is not until years later I fully understand the matters that took place but I can piece together what I remember with what I learned later. I progressed into first grade and had Mrs. Globerman to lead me through the year. She was very different from my kindergarten teacher. She didn't teach me or make sure I was following everything. Since I was already a good reader, I recall always working on my basal worksheets. I can't remember ever doing anything else in her classroom, but I am sure I did. What I do remember is that there was a steady stream of visitors and I could clearly see the displeasure that all of the visitors had on Mrs. Globerman. It was almost as if she lost all control of her classroom and who felt the brunt of her frustration? Me. I had a teacher of the deaf, Sue Williams, and she was scheduled to pull me out of class to make sure I was able to follow along in class, and what I could not follow along with, she would teach me. I greatly resisted these meetings because it drew more attention to me and made me look like I was totally responsible for all the disruptions going on in Mrs. Globerman's class. As R.C. Smith writes in his book, *A Case about Amy*, he was able to take excerpts from Sue Williams's diary and it clearly showed my frustration. One such entry for February 16th, 1979 shows the dialogue that took place between Sue Williams and myself.

"Feb 16. Had a heart-to-heart with Amy, who acted as if she didn't want to come with me.

I asked her how she was feeling.

"I feel bad," Amy said. "I don't want to come with you."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know."

"Amy, what did you think of the man who visited yesterday?"

"I don't like those things."

"What do you mean by 'things'?"

"All of the people coming."

"How does your mother feel?"

"She thinks I need an interpreter because I don't understand anything."

"Amy, you seem to understand things, not everything, but most things."

"Yes."

"Do you understand Mrs. Globerman?"

"Yes, everything she says."

"Well, what don't you understand?"

"I don't understand library."

"You mean the stories? You don't understand them?"

"Yes."

"You want to understand what's happening right?"

"Right."

"What about movies?"

"I don't understand them much." (p. 32).

I remember so well that I always insisted I understood everything. This was a defense mechanism I employed in hopes of everyone leaving me alone and things would just return to normal. This is an interesting concept for me to think about at this point of my life because I have never fully been exposed to "a normal classroom environment" so why did I resist everything so much? I don't know for sure, but I suspect I was able to pick up on body language and emotions better than I was able to pick up spoken words and the emotions made a big impact on me when I could see others not being comfortable. One thing I do know is that I preferred to be with the other students all the time and not being constantly removed from class to meet with my deaf education teacher or going to speech class or leaving for testing. Sue Williams really picked up on this feeling and tried to keep me in my class and work with me in class so I would not have to be taken out. However, while this was an ideal situation for me, it was bothersome for Mrs. Globerman since I was no

longer paying attention to her but working with Sue Williams and that was very distracting for Mrs. Globerman (Smith, 1996). Additionally, parents were complaining to Mrs. Globerman because Sue Williams was using sign language in the classroom with me. I seemed to be the only one who wanted to stay in the classroom but no one would let me stay.

When I moved into second grade, many of the frustrations I experience did not quell. I reacted by continuing to resist and act out.

During second grade tensions are at their highest. I am very aware of things happening all around me. Before the principal, Joseph Zavarella would come to my class occasionally, but now he comes to my class every day. My parents have already won one hearing at the federal level and an appeal is under way. Every year my parents have an IEP meeting with the school and every year my parents refuse to sign it because there is nothing on it related to provision of interpreting services. But the rest of the stuff on the IEP is the school's defense for trying to provide me with the best possible service they think I need (without an interpreter, of course).

Topics on the IEP included me having speech to improve my ability to have others understand me. It didn't help me understand others though. Wasn't that the point? I was required to wear an FM system with the teacher wearing a microphone. What's very interesting to me is that the FM system certainly amplified everything I heard but I still understood nothing. I think it is difficult for hearing people to rationalize that hearing aids and FM systems are not the same as eyeglasses. I imagine the noises I heard everyday sounded like loud power tools to hearing people. They constantly bugged me and I was happy to turn them off. I recall many times I watched the teacher and noises in my head certainly did not help. I remember reading that the school contested I had a lot of residual hearing so they felt it was their obligation to make sure I was able to use it. That comment was like a light bulb moment for me; it showed me how much hearing people really don't understand what deaf people actually hear. Every deaf person has a different audiogram and every deaf person reacts differently to their environment. If two deaf people with a similar audiogram were compared based on their audiograms only, one would find a lot of similarities. But if one looks at both people and sees how they function and how they communicate, the audiogram is often not an accurate representation of who deaf people are.

I do remember being "busted" a few times when I left my FM system off intentionally. I would always see a face either from Miss McLaughlin, my 2nd grade teacher or Dr. Zavarella, my principal. A facial expression by itself is worth a thousand words and I certainly got much more from those displeased looks than I got from all the static and garble being incessantly blasted through my FM system. The use of the FM system was the school's way of saying we are providing Amy with the things her IEP says she needs to be successful. But with the FM system, it brought so much attention to me and I felt like I always had a thousand eyes looking at me the whole time I was using it. It did not help having constant observers in my classroom. It was usually the principal, or some other expert witness the school or my parents hired.

I was also going to speech class and it didn't bother me too much because I wasn't going alone. A few of my other classmates were going to speech with me so I didn't feel singled out like I did with the FM system. Eventually, the number of students going to speech decreased. When it was just two of us left, I made a comment to my speech teacher, Mrs. Pasierb about how I was excited to be "graduating" from speech soon as my other classmates had. I doubt it was her intention to riddle my dreams with a barrage of arrows like she had but I never felt so discouraged after she told me because I am deaf, I will always need speech forever. I still remember that today as one of my most painful moments in school. It was the first time I fully understood that I WAS THE PROBLEM, I

WAS THE REASON behind all of the fuss going on. From that moment on I hated speech classes. I knew it was not for my benefit but to simply say that “everything had been done” to help this poor child.

With second grade out of the way and on to a new start in third grade, the overall environment improved for me because for now the school and my parents stopped fighting. They never really did stop but it was no longer obvious anymore. There were fewer disruptions to my class and we settled into everyday routines easily. The school district lost the first case and the appeal. After they lost the appeal, the school district was required to provide an interpreter. Having an interpreter in class could be considered a “new distraction” but the interpreter quickly inserted herself into our everyday routine and soon enough myself and my classmates could not imagine our class without her. For the first time I really enjoyed school, I was able to follow along perfectly in classroom discussions, and my interpreter made sure to interpret everything including my classmate’s discussions. My interpreter, Fran Miller, had deaf parents herself so she grew up communicating in sign language. Not only was she fluent in signing, she was also a skilled interpreter and fully understood how to be a language mediator. She did just that, mediated language between the other students, the teacher and I. I felt friendships blossoming and I could communicate and follow group conversations. If anyone asks a hard of hearing person, or a deaf person who lipreads solely, it is very difficult to follow a conversation involving several people. Most people in this situation would rather conduct one-on-one conversations where they can control the flow of information to make sure they can understand what is being said. Since I was fluent in sign language, the interpreter opened up a new avenue of complete accessibility for me. I enjoyed school now and I looked forward to recess where the interpreter would follow me out and interpret for me and other children to figure out what we wanted to do. Before I had always followed other kids outside and usually kids wanted to play kickball but I was often not included. So I would go to the playground and play alone or with a few other kids. But now, other kids were discussing in a group (which I could now be a part of since the interpreter just went ahead and interpreted those conversations) what they wanted to do. I felt I had a voice because I could say I wanted to play kickball and they would make sure I was involved. Third grade was a really good year. The added bonus of having an interpreter in the classroom meant that when I got home from school I only had to do my homework and not relearn everything I was supposed to have learned in class that day. So I really had a lot more time to play and “just be a kid.”

While school seemed really good and life “seemed back to normal” that wasn’t the reality. Things were actively brewing in the background. My brother had transferred to a private school about 20 minutes away. It was too difficult for him to continue to be enrolled in Furnace Woods Elementary. Many of his classmates and their parents did not understand what was going on between my parents and the school district and there was a lot of hostility towards John, my brother. He is the only hearing person in my immediate family and he was able to clearly hear and understand the comments from people around him. I am sure my parents and myself had people making comments around us, but we were not as aware of it as my brother was. While RC Smith was researching the experiences of everyone involved with the proceedings, he was able to find notes of people who came to visit the school and witnessed such hostilities. One such note from Mary Sheie comments about how she wondered “how surprised she was at how much anger there was in the classroom and in the principal’s office and how calmly Nancy had taken it” (Ibid., p. 36). This was written in reference to a visit by one of the expert witnesses that my parents had used in their trial. Of course it was okay to have the school’s witnesses in the classroom but not my parent’s witnesses? During that same visit Mary Sheie visited Dr. Zavarella’s office with my mother, and Dr. Zavarella practically scolded my mother because the school had provided so many other things such as the TTY and the FM System and never once did my mother say thanks. There was so much anger going on because so much was being done but it was not the one thing my parents asked for.

John transferred to a new school and he found that his problems followed him there as well. While the problems were not exactly the same, they still existed. Students made fun of him and picked on him because his family was different, we were all odd. *Who else had a deaf family? Probably no one else.* Deaf families are a rarity in itself and having one hearing child and other deaf children are even more of a rarity. Most deaf people have several hearing children and those hearing siblings with deaf parents are able to support each other while John had no one. Even as siblings, we were worlds apart; we were fighting the same battle but separately, which was almost like we were not struggling against the same thing.

When my situation had improved, it was almost as if my parents finally had the time to address his situation. But in reality the damage was done and the resentment that the school district and the community had towards the Rowleys was there, probably forever. People who had direct interaction with my parents or me were very supportive but others who saw us on TV or read about us in the newspaper felt so strongly that we had no place in the school.

Early in the proceedings, the school felt clearly that I should have attended Fanwood so they would not have to be responsible for the costs of supportive services. However as the case progressed, the positions changed. One of my many observations and testings was from psychologists. The school hired their own psychologist for different kinds of testing including IQ tests. Their psychologist did not sign so my parents challenged the validity of their results and got their own psychologist who signed. The results of the tests were different and it was admitted into evidence that I was very smart and I was a high functioning child with a lot of potential. The school district could no longer support that I would be better off at Fanwood when I was on grade level and would be ahead of many deaf peers who did not learn anything until they entered school, even though Fanwood was considered to be a good school. A few years ago I was asked to be a part of a psychological study for a deaf woman's post-doctoral project. In this study I was asked to take an IQ test and it was eerie because I remembered many of the questions. I had taken the test so many times that it became too familiar for me. Someone told me once that a person's IQ never changes but the more the school and my parents argued about the validity of the test, the more often I was given it and my score improved every time. I was not becoming smarter obviously, but I was becoming a smarter test taker. I observed things in pictures and was able to remember them and then the next time I took the test I could look for other things since I had remembered other things from a previous test. When I was older, one person made a comment to me that one thing I noticed in one of the pictures was one thing that no one ever noticed and, of course, I remembered that. After that, I always watched for the reactions on the faces of the people who gave me the test. I'd like to believe they knew it was impossible for me to be that smart but I had outsmarted them and beat the test. I don't know if that's true or not, but I do know that these types of tests are not designed to be given every year or even twice a year which was often the case. These tests were a tool for the school district to try to show that I was not as "smart" as my parents claimed me to be so there was no reason to provide me with an interpreter since I was passing in classes with above average grade. But that backfired with each test score improving and with my parents being able to get better results with a signing psychologist. I don't know why the IQ tests continued, but the controversy between my parents and the school district was far from over.

I entered fourth grade and things were different yet again. I had an interpreter still because an appeal wasn't made yet. But Fran Miller was not my interpreter anymore. In fact I didn't have an interpreter, I really had a teacher of the deaf. The school argued that I still needed to be pulled out for some one-on-one time to make sure I am following everything so their rationale was that my teacher could "interpret" what was being said in the classroom. Beth Freed was very nice but I missed Fran Miller. Beth Freed was a teacher and only told me what the teacher said. I did not

know what my classmates were saying and I was left to fend for myself at recess. I went outside with my FM system, but of course, I hated the FM. I couldn't play with that big bulky thing wrapped all over my body. One time I was on the swings, but instead of swinging in the direction towards the playground, I decided to swing towards the fence towards the marsh behind the fence. I swung and swung as high as I could. My FM was loose anyway because I never wore it tightly against my body since it was already uncomfortable. The FM swung right off and pulled the earplugs right out of my ears. I laughed in delight when it went over the fence and landed in the cattails. Since I was quite a monkey back then, I could have scaled the fence easily and jumped in the water/mud combination and picked up my FM. But why would I ever want to do that? No one else knew how miserable that thing made me. I was perfectly happy with my hearing aids and even more happier with an interpreter, a real one. Now I didn't even have that anymore.

The school district had taken away Fran Miller because she had too many connections to the deaf community because of her deaf parents. She was a threat and was seen as being too close to my family. The school district had to cover their bases and make sure she wouldn't be testifying against them in court if an appeal was granted.

In March 1982, when I was still in fourth grade, the US Supreme Court heard the oral argument between Hendrick Hudson School District and my parents. My parents lawyer, Michael Chatoff who was deaf himself, was the first deaf person to ever make an argument before the Supreme Court. He became deaf during law school from tumors on his auditory nerves. The surgery cut his nerves and he became permanently deaf. He struggled with neurofibromatosis but it didn't stop him from becoming a lawyer. Through chance, he met my parents and decided to take on their case. He never charged my parents for any legal fees, which would have been exorbitant by the time the case finally came to an end. Since he became deaf as an adult, he preferred to talk instead of signing, since his first language was English. The Supreme Court arranged for him to have a transcriptionist have his words transferred to a computer so he could read everything that was going on in real time. This was the first time such a venture had been undertaken. It is now the norm in courts all over America.

During the summer between fourth grade and fifth grade, the US Supreme Court announced that the two previous decisions of the lower courting my parents favor were overturned. They sided with Hendrick Hudson School District in the case of Rowley because they found that the school did provide me with adequate services to make sure I was passing. FAPE did not mean I was allowed to be the gifted child that I was. It just meant if I was passing which I was, then I was doing fine.

My parents already made a decision to move to New Jersey. There was no reason to stay in Peekskill, NY because I would never have an interpreter. My father commuted between New York and New Jersey everyday for many years, so it seemed logical to live closer to where my father worked. Nearby there was a day school for the deaf where many deaf children were mainstreamed. But before we could move, I would have to stick it out one more year at Furnace Woods. I had a teacher with an Australian accent. Mr. Brett and I had a love/hate relationship. My desk was right next to his so I could talk to him anytime I wanted to. But there were times when he was so frustrated with me because I could not understand him. He had big teeth that didn't make lipreading easy. Plus with that accent of his, I couldn't figure out what he was saying half of the time! One time, I kept asking him again and again what he was saying and he kept repeating and repeating and I was begging to him to please write down what he was saying and I was near tears. To make matters worse, his frustration level was ready to explode and it did. He yanked my ponytail and my head snapped back and I was in shock. I could not believe what happened. No other teacher ever touched me. I hated him for that and I tried to avoid him as much as I could from then on. One time we were on a field trip and he knew I was not following along, so he picked up a

piece of bark from a white birch tree and wrote down what the presenter was talking about. He wrote down the two words deciduous and coniferous and explained what they meant. I held on to the bark and when I came home from the field trip my mother saw it and thought that this act alone really showed that I needed an interpreter and the teacher knew it.

After all the misery he put me through, I'm glad he finally realized what it takes to communicate with me. I'm still mad about the map thing too.

One day in class Mr. Brett made an announcement about a map. He wrote on the board "M-A-P." I asked him for more information, and he said, "World map." I was scared. I would have to make a world map at home over the weekend. I arrived home and told my parents I had to make a map for homework. This was not unusual since I had done maps before, but never the whole world! Plus he didn't hand out map paper, so my dad and I drove to the next town to buy poster paper. We found a nice picture of the world and dad helped me outline the continents, then I worked on the map all weekend. I worked on it Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I was very proud of it when I finished because I put a lot of detail into it. I didn't know how much detail Mr. Brett wanted from me since he didn't give me a list. Monday morning, my dad helped me roll up the map and put a rubber band around it and I took it to school. I held on to my map and wondered when we would hand it in. Mr. Brett looked at me and handed me a big sheet of paper with a world map already printed on it. All of the students got one. I was dismayed that I really didn't understand that the map wasn't for homework. It was what we were going to be working on after the weekend. Mr. Brett asked me what the poster was and I told him it was nothing. My father asked me why I brought the poster home and I told him exactly what happened, but there was nothing he could do except hug me. Hugs have gotten us through many tough times.

My parents put up their house for sale, but the school district found out that we were moving and they put a lien on their house. We moved anyway, but my parents were not able to sell their house and the lien did not make matters easier. One thing after another, the conflict between the school district and my parents became a dogfight. Living in New York was just bad for my family and it was worsening.

The move to New Jersey was truly the best thing that happened, I started attending school with other deaf kids and it was the first time I truly didn't feel alone. I had an interpreter in all my classes. My brother had many friends; they didn't care that his parents and sister were deaf. They saw deaf students everyday so it wasn't too foreign of a concept for them.

I remember more than I would like to remember about my experience at Furnace Woods. I believe that I am supposed to remember stories like these so I can share my story in hopes that other children do not have to experience the same things I did. A lot of my experience regulates the kind of decisions I make today as an adult. If a conflict arises, and I know that I will have to put someone in an uncomfortable situation, I am more likely to avoid it. Such an example happened when I was looking for a doctor. I called a doctor's office and asked if they were willing to provide an interpreter for an appointment. Legally, they are required to accommodate me. The preferred accommodation is an interpreter, but that can also be the most expensive accommodation too. When the doctor told me no, I did not follow through with the appointment, I found another doctor instead. It makes no sense to me to work with someone who doesn't want to provide necessary accommodations to communicate with me. I'd rather work with someone who wants to communicate with me and values me as a patient. However, I know it is not always that easy. In the case of the school district, it is not easy to move and find a new school district and I wish that both sides never went into litigation to begin with.

Children should be allowed to be children. Too often children are robbed of their right to grow up without the weight of the world on their shoulders. I know the weight of my world was squashing me down during elementary school.

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