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Book Review

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BOOK REVIEW

What's That Pig Outdoors?: A Memoir of Deafness by Henry Kisor; (Hill and Wang, New York; 1990; \$18.95)

When asked by the editor to review this book for *JADARA*, I was taken aback by the request. I grew up as an oralist in the Chicago public and Catholic education systems, but later wholly embraced deaf culture along with American Sign Language. It did not seem to me that a person with such a biased and somewhat contemptuous view of oralists who refused the enlightened path of the deaf culture should be reviewing this book. However, as the reader will see, I did accept this assignment and now am glad I did.

Kisor opens the autobiography with a succinct account of the famous "Gallaudet Revolt" and explains how it inspired him as a deaf person to see other deaf people stand up for their rights. He ends the book with a discussion of technological advances that have helped deaf people and how it inspired him to admit to his deafness. In between, the reader is taken on a journey of self-realization and understanding of one's limitations.

Throughout the book, Kisor admits that life as a deaf person has not been easy; his job as a journalist and book-review editor of a major newspaper is certainly not an occupation often chosen by deaf persons. One must accord Kisor at least grudging admiration for his achievements. Having grown up in a similar vein, I can appreciate some of the travails he encountered in school, social life, and college without any real support service system. While some segments of the book make for slow reading as he dawdles on his efforts to secure interviews with authors and his efforts to enjoy interaction with members of the opposite sex, the reader will quickly find a certain "pigheadedness" in overcoming barriers thrown up by the hearing society. Kisor accurately depicts his problems as those of others rather than his own. I shared with him his anger at his wife, who intervened with the officials in Barbados without asking his permission, and his bemusement at using his deafness to expedite customs clearance at

Kennedy airport (aren't hearing people in general so naive!).

There are recurring themes that merit close attention by any professional interested in understanding the unique perspectives of the deaf individual, be that person oral, manual, or ASL. There is the resentment towards the professional who presumes to tell the deaf person what he/she is feeling, needing, or wanting. There is the frustration against the attitudes of society towards its disabled citizens. There is that opportunity to comprehend the emotions one feels in an environment (classroom, work, social setting) when there is not complete understanding of what is happening. Finally, there is that chance to smile at the foibles of the hearing world in trying to cope with a deaf person. In essence, Kisor shares considerably his techniques for coping with a hearing world but allows that his techniques may not work for other deaf individuals.

This is a book along the same lines as Leo Jacob's *A Deaf Adult Speaks Out*, which speaks to the thoughts and feelings of a deaf person who is totally immersed in the deaf culture. Kisor's book provides another perspective: that of the deaf person who, by choice, is not so involved in the deaf culture and who wishes to be part of the hearing culture. There are, however, certain phrases that indicate the author may not have completely accepted his deafness. For example, when talking about his first experience with a TDD he remarks: "For the first time, [TDDs] enabled me to 'talk' on the phone with the hearing world at large—with fellow members of my own culture." Nevertheless, he presents a more positive image of himself and others of the same ilk than did David Wright in his book, *Deafness*. As a deaf person who has endured trials and tribulations akin to Kisor's, I can validate much of his experience and find much to which I can relate. That being so, any counselor or educator for the deaf will find *What's That Pig Outdoors* illuminating.

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