Eight

I stopped reading from the first installment of the John Tracy correspondence course and looked up at Louise, who was listening from across the living room. Lynn, dressed in pajamas, snuggled down on Louise’s lap, and slowly turned the pages of a storybook.

‘‘Now, there’s a case of someone profoundly deaf from birth,’’ Louise began but did not finish her thought as Lynn wriggled off her lap to get another book. I knew what she was thinking.

I had read to her the story of a young woman in Alabama, a college graduate, who worked as a laboratory technician in a large hospital. Profoundly deaf all her life, this woman could talk to her fellow workers and understand what they said. She had adapted to a hearing world.

The John Tracy correspondence course offered more than we had hoped for: ideas, lessons for Lynn, scientific information on deafness. Most of all, it gave us something to do. It showed us how to plan a lesson, explained what to include, and then showed us step by step how to teach that lesson. Lynn settled into bed a few minutes later, and we spent most of the evening reading and discussing the course.

On Saturday morning, a few days later, I sat at the kitchen table with Lynn. Rays of bright sunlight streamed in the window and filled the room. Louise had collected blue, red, orange, green and yellow ribbons left over from Christmas wrappings. I cut each ribbon in two strips about four inches long. Lynn, kneeling on a chair, elbows on the table, chin in her hands, watched me with curiosity.

‘‘We’re going to match these colors,’’ I said. She had no way of knowing this would be the first of hundreds of lessons from the John Tracy course. She looked at my lips without understanding. Louise listened from the sink behind us as she dried the breakfast dishes.

I carefully placed the ribbons in two rows in front of Lynn, making sure that the various colors were mixed in a random arrangement. I picked up a blue ribbon from the first row and held it up to Lynn, whose bright, eager eyes followed every movement. At the same time, with my other hand, I pointed to the red ribbon in front of her on the table.

‘‘No!’’ I shook my head emphatically as I spoke. I pointed to the green ribbon. ‘‘No!’’ I shook my head again, still holding the blue ribbon in my hand. I moved it closer to Lynn, pointed to the matching blue ribbon on the table, picked it up, held it beside the one in my other hand, and nodded enthusiastically. I did my best to convey that I’d suddenly discovered a most important connection between these two pieces of ribbon.

‘‘Yes! This is the right one. It matches. This one is blue too. See, I have two blue ribbons!’’

Lynn looked back and forth from the ribbons to my face. A blank expression had replaced the interest. She turned to the ribbons in front of her, started to pick up the green one, let it fall back to the table, and then looked around at Louise, who was watching us.

‘‘Now you can match colors,’’ I said to Lynn, rearranging the ribbons in a new pattern. I picked up the red ribbon and held it out to Lynn, who took it. She looked at me quizzically and dropped it to the table; then, with a quick, sweeping motion she pushed all the ribbons into a pile at the side of the table. Several fell on the floor.

I looked at Louise, who was smiling at my valiant efforts. Patiently I retrieved the ribbons and again made two rows. For ten minutes I talked, sorted, rearranged, matched, shook my head, nodded, pointed. I matched all the different Christmas ribbons as if it were a game of solitaire. Lynn wouldn’t play. Or couldn’t. With the clear, decisive movements that told us her mind was
made up, she pushed back her chair, slid to the floor and ran off to play. I gathered up the ribbons.

"Lynn’s only twenty-two months," I said slowly. "The Tracy course says that some kids don’t want to match colors until they’re a little older. I think we should try the object matching sometime later today. Whatever we do, the instructions said we shouldn’t try to force her. In time she’ll catch on."

When Lynn woke up from her afternoon nap, Louise had collected a pair of shoes, two spoons, two cups, two forks, two balls and two blocks. This time I watched. Lynn and Louise sat on the floor with the matching pairs scattered in disarray between them.

"This is a shoe," Louise began, picking up the nearest one. "Can you find the other one?" Lynn appeared puzzled by the words on Louise’s lips. After a moment Louise picked up the other shoe and held them together for an instant.

"See, they match." She returned one to the pile on the floor. The puzzled frown disappeared from Lynn’s face. She picked up the shoe from the floor and held it high in the air as if she had made a great discovery.

"Good girl! You found the other shoe! You’re so smart!" Lynn reached out for the shoe Louise held, then hugged both of them to her body as if she would never give them up. Back they went to the pile.

"This is a spoon." Louise held up the shiny metal utensil. "This is the spoon for eating our lunch. Can you find the other spoon?"

Lynn sized up the silent expectations written on Louise’s lips and face without knowing that a fraction of her lip and tongue movement had formed a word. She reached out for the other spoon and held it up.

By now I couldn’t sit on the sidelines any longer; I slid to the floor just in time to add my congratulations. From then on, every time Louise showed one object, Lynn quickly retrieved its mate from the pile. After five more minutes of matching, she grew restless. We tried the spoon again and then the block, but when Lynn threw the matching block across the room we knew it was time to end the game. I gathered up the objects, put them in a paper bag and left it on the floor at the end of the couch.

That evening before dinner I sat reading the paper when Lynn found the bag, dragged it over to my chair and begged to play, one hand tugging on my pants leg, the other holding the bag. For six or seven minutes we matched shoes, spoons, blocks, forks, balls and cups two or three times. Lynn never hesitated as we went from one pair to the next. Her quickness made me sure she could learn anything.

Right from the beginning, the John Tracy course worked. But it also raised questions. How did matching colored ribbons, spoons and shoes prepare Lynn to speak? To lip-read? We had talked to her for months and she could already lip-read some things and even mouth a few words. Why couldn’t we simply hold up a blue ribbon and say “blue”? Wouldn’t she see the connection? The John Tracy course even told us not to expect Lynn to lip-read the names for colors and objects. We were only to work on matching.

I went back to the first two installments of the course and read them more carefully. What did the psychologists and audiologists at the John Tracy Clinic have in mind when they designed this course? A footnote in the first chapter indicated it had been developed from another course, used at the Wright Oral School for the Deaf in New York City. It was not haphazard. The references to scholarly works on the growth and development of children increased our confidence in the lessons.

I was impressed with a special section written by Dr. Arnold Gessel, who had been director of the Clinic for Child Development at Yale University. He emphasized that with patient help from parents, a deaf child could learn to speak to a gratifying degree.

Searching for the underlying rationale of the course, I came across one statement that seemed to answer many of our questions:
Every single thing a deaf child learns during the first years of life, every word he learns to lip-read or to speak, every action he learns to perform at command, *is consciously taught by somebody.*

I read that sentence again. I read it aloud to Louise. How different it had been with Bruce, who seemed to have learned everything spontaneously. Except for toilet training and a few “no no’s,” we couldn’t recall having *consciously* taught him very much. He listened and picked things up. He watched and remembered. His first word came effortlessly. We never planned lessons. We never matched objects. He learned his colors without special teaching. Deep inside there must have been some principle of growth and learning that worked spontaneously.

Deafness. How powerful this invisible handicap had become. It sealed Lynn away from our words, from our thoughts, from everything we knew.

We would have to teach everything consciously. *Training.* That word kept recurring throughout the John Tracy course. Auditory *training.* Memory *training.* Concentration *training.* Imitation-*training.* Observation *training.* Sensory *training.* Association *training.*

The matching games were designed to train Lynn in the art of association. Putting things together. As her ability to match colors and objects developed, she could more easily take the next step: *connecting them to our lip movements.* But that would require more training. It was easy to see that two blue ribbons went together or two old shoes, but the leap from these associations to matching a ribbon with tiny lip movements for the word “blue” would be much more difficult.

In time she would have to match words like “falling,” “running,” “jumping” and “eating” with the actions. That meant more training. And someday she would go further and match lip movements with unseen ideas contained in words like “justice,” “love” and “fear.” Finally she would have to learn another association, one all normal children take for granted: *that lip movements go together with the sounds of the human voice.* And then she would learn to make those sounds even though she couldn’t hear them.

Slowly Louise and I began to realize the enormity of our task. What started as merely *talk, talk, talk* must now be transformed into *train, train, train.* We began to see why the John Tracy course emphasized a solid foundation in sensory training and association training. Merely talking all the time would not lead to lip reading. Each tiny step had to be specifically taught. And we were Lynn’s first teachers.

Late one evening, after Lynn and Bruce had fallen asleep, we discussed the things that Lynn would have to learn. We tried to imagine what it would be like. I asked Louise to say something to me without using her voice to see if I could understand it.

“Tomorrow . . . Lynn . . . Bruce . . . school.” Her lips moved so quickly I could only guess at the words.

“Tomorrow I’m going to take Lynn shopping while Bruce is in school.” I filled in the missing words that I could not decipher from Louise’s lips. I’d seen her say those exact words dozens of times. I tried to lip-read other sentences, and then Louise read my lips. Sometimes we could understand entire phrases, even complete sentences. Even when the words were hidden inside our mouths we could get the sense of what the other person said. It never dawned on us that we were saying common, oft-repeated phrases. We didn’t grasp the fact that we already *knew* the words. Lynn did not. We only had to recognize them. Lynn had to start from scratch. We had already mastered the grammar of our native language. Lynn only knew a few isolated words. For us it was like picking out a familiar face in the crowd. For Lynn it meant looking for someone she had never seen, about whom she knew nothing.

“Let’s turn on the late news and see if we can understand without sound,” I said, looking at my watch. It was a few minutes after ten o’clock. The local news had already begun when the picture came on. We both concentrated very hard on the rapidly moving lips of the newscaster. The minutes crept by.
I was stunned—most of the words were undecipherable! The newscaster disappeared and silent pictures came on that were difficult to interpret. Then back came the moving lips and more words, disconnected, without meaning. I strained to understand but could do no more than recognize a phrase here, a word there. Isolated words that seemed familiar but didn’t communicate. I looked at Louise in dismay.

"That’s really hard to understand!" she said, shaking her head. "Can you make out what they’re saying?"

"Not very well."

"And Lynn doesn’t even know the words to watch for," she went on. "It must be like watching someone speak Chinese on TV with the sound turned off! How could you ever understand what they said just from watching their lips? Wouldn’t you have to learn Chinese first? Even then it would be a superhuman task to lip-read a whole language. I wonder if Lynn can really learn something that difficult."

"Maybe being deaf actually makes it easier for her," I answered, half trying to convince myself. "We’ve never tried to lip-read because we’ve never had to. Lynn practices it all the time and has from the time she was a small baby. That’s all she’s ever known. And later, with a trained teacher, I think she’ll be able to do it."

I was surprised and excited one day early in March to learn of a graduate student at Wheaton College whose wife had been trained in Australia to teach deaf children. She was unemployed and interested in part-time work.

Jill Corey arrived on a warm March afternoon; the last patches of snow had disappeared, neighborhood bicycles had taken over the sidewalks, and I could see the first buds on the tall elm in our front yard. Louise was out and Lynn cried vociferously when Jill came up to her. I put Lynn on the floor and we sat down to discuss her deafness and what Jill might be able to do.

Jill Corey was young and vivacious, enthusiastic about teaching the deaf. She agreed to come every week until the end of the semester. I wanted to watch Jill as she worked with Lynn; perhaps I could learn some of her skills by observation. From the little I knew, I half expected she would take Lynn on her lap, place Lynn’s hand on her throat as she talked and begin to teach Lynn to speak the words she could already mouth silently. I had seen pictures of teachers working with deaf children in this way.

"Lynn is really too young for me to do much with now," Jill said in a matter-of-fact tone. "I can help both of you and give you some ideas about how you can help her."

I tried to hide the sudden surge of disappointment I felt. "Is she really too young to start talking?" I asked. "She is already mouthing words; we hoped it might be possible for her to start adding her voice. We just don’t know how to get her to do it."

"She’s not too young. But it is best to emphasize lip-reading skills at this age. You want to build a solid foundation for later speech."

Lynn slowly lost her fear, crawled over and pulled herself up in a chair next to Jill Corey.

"I’d suggest that we start with one word and teach her that until she can lip-read it in any situation, until she has mastered that one word. Does Lynn have a ball?"

I retrieved the red ball we had used for matching games, then settled back to watch. Jill began the first lesson. Kneeling beside Lynn, she rolled the ball across the floor to catch her attention.

"Look at your ball go." She looked at Lynn as she spoke, rolling the ball in her direction. "This is a fast ball. Do you like the ball? Can you roll the ball to me?"

Lynn watched in silence. Jill picked up the ball and hid it behind the pillow on the couch. "Where did the ball go? Can Lynn find the ball?"

Lynn could not be passive any longer; she pulled herself up to the couch and found the ball. I repressed the urge to tell Jill that we had played these games before, dozens of times. I waited to see what she had in mind. She hid the ball behind a pillow on
the chair, rolled it across the floor, held it high in the air, then began bouncing it across the living-room floor. Between bounces she cradled it in her arms like a baby or rolled it toward Lynn. The way she handled the ball, the way she looked at it and talked about it, all suggested a reverence for this ordinary rubber toy. Lynn followed her movements as if transfixed.


After a few minutes Lynn began to lose interest and started for the dining room. Jill followed. Her enthusiasm for the ball picked up. She bounced it around the dining-room table and on into the kitchen, pretending to hide it in the sink. I followed, feeling strangely like a bystander. For nearly thirty minutes Jill, Lynn and the red ball took over the house. Finally Jill worked her way back into the living room and sat down.

"Well!" she said, catching her breath. "Lynn is a bright little girl and catches on fast. You must have been working with her because she watched my lips most of the time." I nodded, waiting for her to go on, to explain what would come next, what we could do.

"This week, before I come back for Lynn's next lesson, I want you to think up twenty games you can play with the ball. Different ones from what you saw me do today. Both you and your wife should play these games with Lynn several times a day. Always talk about the ball and make sure Lynn can see your lips."

Before Jill returned the following week, Lynn had seen the word "ball" at least a thousand times on our lips. She slept with the ball, bathed with it, ate with it, and all of us played with it at every opportunity. Before breakfast I'd bounce it around the house with Lynn still in her pajamas. Bruce entered into the games enthusiastically, as if we had created them partly for his benefit. I would play one or another hide-the-ball game before going off to school. The ball went shopping with Lynn and Louise; it sat on the table while Lynn watched her make bread; it went into the crib at nap time. Had someone been able to observe us that week and the ones that followed, they would surely have concluded that we all believed that little ball was a living, breathing creature, something sacred, almost supernatural.

I decided to test Lynn's lip-reading ability just before Jill came back for the second lesson. I sat down on the floor with Lynn and put the ball, a shoe, a book and a spoon between us.

"Give me the ball," I said. Her hand went out to the nearest object and she held up the shoe.

I tried again. "Which one is the ball? Ball. Can you give me the ball?"

This time she gave me the spoon. Each time I rearranged the items she would watch my lips closely, then reach out for the nearest one and hold it up triumphantly. A feeling of helplessness swept over me. I remembered a student who had stayed after class earlier that week to ask about an algebra problem from the previous night's homework assignment. I had discussed it in class and everyone had understood except Sandy. I couldn't understand her questions. I went through the problem on the board, but she shook her head and looked blankly at the symbols I had written. After class I went through it again, explaining each part of the process, moving slowly so she couldn't miss the steps involved. At last she shook her head slowly, gathered her things together, and with tears in her eyes, she said, "I just don't get it!"

I sat on the floor long after Lynn had grown tired of the game and left the room. I looked down at the ball and the shoe in front of me. We knew Lynn had already learned to lip-read some of our words. Now I began to doubt that she had lip-read them at all. She had merely read the situations in which we had spoken. We must have given off a hundred other clues that helped her understand what we had said.

"Shoe," Louise had said only that morning while dressing Lynn. She immediately raced across the room, picked up her shoes and brought them back to Louise. But "shoe" had become part of a daily habit—it was morning, it was time to get dressed, it was part of a sequence of getting dressed that followed the socks. Lynn could read the pattern, but she could not read our lips alone. "Spoon" went with breakfast, lunch and dinner. "All
gone” went with the disappearance of food and television pictures. “Bye bye” accompanied all the subtle preparations for leaving—picking up a purse or briefcase, finding a coat, last-minute kisses.

I said the word “ball” silently to myself several times. Then “spoon.” And “shoe.” Even without a mirror I could tell there wasn’t much difference between the small clues on my lips for each word. I felt very tired, almost overwhelmed by the task that lay ahead for Lynn.

Jill Corey bounced Lynn’s ball all over the house again for the second lesson. Near the end of her visit she put the ball aside, and when she had Lynn’s full attention, she suddenly fell on the floor. Lynn was taken by surprise and laughed out loud.

“Fall down,” Jill said, sitting up quickly and looking directly at Lynn. Then she collapsed again, repeating the words as she fell. Within minutes Lynn happily imitated this new action game.

“Continue to work on ‘ball,’” Jill said as she prepared to leave. “But if Lynn becomes bored, you can go on to fall down.”

Long after midnight Louise and I were still awake, talking about Lynn and Jill Corey and the John Tracy course and the auditory trainer and everything we had started teaching Lynn. The informal, constant talking had continued, but we now began to feel that the formal lessons were more important.

In the back of our minds we worried about Lynn’s going to school. At four, Bruce had started preschool classes; now he went off to kindergarten at Holm School. Watching and listening to Bruce only underscored the necessity to work hard now to help Lynn learn to lip-read and speak.

“We started reading groups today,” Bruce had announced one day when he came home from school. “Mrs. Owens had to go over the letters in the alphabet because some kids don’t even know it yet.” Every day Bruce told us about school, special projects or field trips planned by Mrs. Owens, what he had learned, who had misbehaved and which friends he had played with. He called his friends on the phone, he visited their houses, he brought them home for lunch, they stayed for an afternoon of play.

We began to realize that in addition to making school difficult, Lynn’s deafness could also isolate her from other children.

We redoubled our efforts to teach Lynn the lessons set forth in the John Tracy course. In a strange way, the lessons helped us as much as they helped Lynn. We worried less because we had something to do. We felt more acceptant of Lynn’s handicap and our responsibility to prepare her for a hearing world. We kept reassuring each other that eventually Lynn would speak. We recalled examples of successful deaf people reported in the John Tracy course. We talked to Jill Corey, who was impressed with Lynn’s brightness. “She’ll learn to talk and eventually go to school,” she assured us. We slowly came to accept the fact that “every word a deaf child learns has to be taught consciously by someone.”

Spring vacation arrived the third week in March and we packed our camping gear and headed through Indiana for the Great Smoky National Park in Tennessee. One important fact I could not leave behind: we had no time to lose in teaching Lynn to lip-read and speak. “Let’s bring some ribbons and things from the kitchen for matching,” I had suggested to Louise.

After only two hours on the road I had prodded Louise at least three times: “Why don’t you work on matching ribbons with Lynn?”

“I just want to relax for once and watch the scenery,” Louise said, a note of irritation in her voice. “Can’t you ever forget that you’re a teacher, just for a few days? Bruce and Lynn need to be able to act normal some of the time.”

“But don’t you understand that Lynn’s only chance at being normal depends on us helping her at every chance?”

Louise sat quietly for a long minute looking out the window. “Tom,” she finally said with a sigh, “all this matching and talk-talk-talk at every chance is stealing from us the times we used to relax, share things or just encourage each other. I think we need a vacation sometime.”

In the back seat Bruce and Lynn were laughing. Lynn pointed
excitedly at a small herd of cows grazing near an old barn. The smell of newly turned Indiana soil, waiting to be seeded with corn, filled the air. For an hour we drove on in silence.

We stopped briefly in Selvin, a tiny town in southern Indiana. The main street looked deserted but we found an old country store still open. Bruce and I climbed the wooden steps to a porch which badly needed a coat of paint; Lynn and Louise waited in the car. The place was dimly lit, pleasant smells of rope and chicken feed and smoke filled the air. On my left, behind a rough counter, I could see shelves piled high with coffee, sugar and canned vegetables. The store was long and narrow; the walls that ran to the back were covered with shelves and hooks. I could see stacks of work pants and work gloves; hammers, shovels and other farm tools hung in straight rows. Near the back I could make out several men sitting around a large woodburning stove. Curious eyes turned silently in our direction as we approached.

"Just passing through," I said hesitantly and came up to the edge of their circle. I looked nervously around in the moment of stillness that followed my comment. Bruce had spied a cardboard box with baby ducks and was trying to pick one up.

"Ancestors came from this area," I went on. "Would any of you know if there are any Spradleys living around here?" My eyes moved from one man to the next as I spoke. I could see two of them turn slightly to look at an older man, a white-haired farmer in faded overalls. His face was leathery from the sun; friendly lines appeared at the corner of his eyes as he said, "Spradley, eh?" He spoke slowly without removing the darkly stained pipe held precariously in the corner of his mouth. I waited. He stared at the floor in front of him for maybe half a minute. "No, not now there ain’t. None I know of. But there’s plenty of them up on the hill." He gestured toward the front of the store and a hint of a smile came to the other corner of his mouth.

"Which hill?" I asked.

"Go two blocks, turn right. Follow the dirt road. It’ll take you up to the hill. Probably ten or fifteen of ’em up there. Must have

...
could hear the first crickets beginning to chirp in the grass. A cool wind was blowing the trees and I pulled Lynn's sweater more closely around her.

With dusk turning slowly to darkness, we came to a large headstone. I could make out the name "Spradley" from some yards away. We moved closer, straining to see in the dim light. The name became clear.

ANDREW BYRUM SPRADLEY
1809-1874

I shivered and felt cold as the wind rustled the tall weeds beside the gravestone.

"That's where your great-great-great-grandfather is buried," I said to Bruce, recognizing the name that had been handed down from generation to generation and now belonged to one of my brothers.

For almost a minute we stood in silence, outlined against the sky. Somewhere near the edge of the cemetery I could hear the clear whistle of a meadowlark. I was holding Lynn; Bruce clung to Louise's hand. The darkness thickened and settled over the graves around us as it had done for centuries. I looked back at Andrew Byrum Spradley's gravestone. Then I wondered how the deaf had lived in his time. Had they gone to school? Had there been any deaf children in this little farm town? Was Lynn the first Spradley born without hearing? Probably not. Six or seven generations would include thousands of people and there was a good chance that one or more had been born deaf. I wondered what that had meant in those days. Deaf-and-dumb. Mute, unable to communicate except by crude gestures. Deafness had often been confused with mental retardation. Some deaf children had undergone surgical operations on their tongues in a futile effort to enable them to talk. In some societies the deaf were considered less than human, even put to death. An education for the deaf was, at one time, considered impossible. I looked at Lynn, then back at my ancestor's grave. Then we turned and walked through the darkness back to the car, glad to be living in the twentieth century.

We drove south to Kentucky, turned southeast into Tennessee and the Great Smoky National Park, where we camped for several days. Then we drove back to Wheaton, arriving by the end of the week to find a letter waiting from the University of Oklahoma, where I had applied for graduate work. It offered me a full-tuition scholarship and a teaching assistant position in the math department. We could hardly believe it. I reread the letter at least six times that night after I mailed a reply accepting their offer. Louise wrote to the Brandts telling them we would be joining them at the university. We were overjoyed. I tried to explain what it meant to Bruce and Lynn. I could begin courses in summer school, so we began immediately to make plans to leave for Norman, Oklahoma, in June. Our four years at Wheaton would soon come to an end.
Nine

Jill Corey came for Lynn’s third lesson the next week. It became more difficult for her to hold Lynn’s attention; she worked hard on “ball” and “fall down” but quit after only twenty minutes. We saw no change in Lynn.

“She’s still young,” Jill reminded us as she prepared to leave. She knew the questions that lay unspoken at the back of our minds.

That evening, after dinner, I sat in the living room grading a set of algebra quizzes. At the same time I listened to Louise, who sat on the floor with Lynn. A fork, cup, spoon, ball and shoe lay scattered on the floor between them, and as each of us had done many times before, Louise was testing Lynn.

“Where is the spoon?” Louise asked. Lynn watched her mouth, then reached for the cup. Louise shook her head and tried again. “Can you give me the fork?”

This time Lynn picked up the shoe.

“Where is the ball?” Louise asked. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Lynn reach across the pile. She picked up the ball! I froze. An accident, I thought to myself, and waited for Louise to try again. She rearranged the objects on the floor and made sure the ball was the farthest away from Lynn.

“Can you find the ball?” she asked again. Instantly Lynn leaned forward and picked up the ball.

“Tom!” Louise called softly, trying to keep the excitement out of her voice. “Lynn just read my lips! Watch, I’ll do it again.” I stayed on the couch, not wanting to distract Lynn by moving.

“Where’s the cup?” Louise asked, testing to see if Lynn would reach for the ball again. A puzzled look crossed her face and she picked up the spoon. But the next time Louise asked for the ball, Lynn broke into a smile of recognition and picked up the ball. Louise praised Lynn and gave her a big hug.

“Let me try,” I said and slid to the floor, my heart pounding with excitement. For the next five minutes Lynn picked up the ball six times. No matter what other words I said, if ball appeared on my lips, she went for the ball. “Fork, spoon, ball.” “Give me the ball.” “Find the ball.” “Hide the ball.” “Throw the ball.” Lynn would make a wild guess if I said “cup,” “fork” or “spoon,” but missed each time.

“She’s got it!” I shouted after I was certain we had ruled out chance.

For days we walked on clouds—a breakthrough! Lynn had read the first word from our lips unassisted by any gesture. A tiny step, but it foreshadowed thousands more. We could hardly wait to tell Jill Corey. Each day after that when I came home from school, if I said, “Go get the ball,” Lynn would dash off and return with it. Within a week she was mouthing “ball” in her silent fashion. It seemed too good to be true. We redoubled our efforts. The weeks and weeks of repetition, despite our doubts, had overcome what seemed to us like the biggest hurdle of all on the path to speech.

We soon discovered this was only the first of a long series of hurdles. Louise sent a progress report to the John Tracy Clinic for the first installment of the correspondence course. She wrote out several questions: “How can we get Lynn to use her voice more?” “Should we use such phrases as ‘eat your food’ only in natural situations or at other times with pictures or just pretending?”

But one occurrence puzzled us most of all. Louise had explained: “Lynn confuses the phrases ‘throw the ball’ and ‘fall down.’ Sometimes we will ask her to fall down and she runs and gets her little red ball to play with.”

Mrs. Thompson, director of the correspondence department at the clinic, answered our letter:
You asked how you could help Lynn not to confuse the two different phrases such as “throw the ball” and “fall down.” Evidently about all Lynn is seeing is the sound of “all” which occurs in both phrases. In using any noun we usually suggest varying a phrase. Talk about bouncing a ball, rolling a ball, throwing a ball, hitting a ball, picking up a ball, and occasionally say, “here’s a ball, I have a ball” and so on. In that way Lynn may gradually get to know that ball is the name of the object and she won’t have to identify the complete phrase.

Louise had also reported that although Lynn would gesture “come here,” she made no attempt to use her voice to say the words.

When Lynn wiggles her finger to say “come here” [the letter from Mrs. Thompson went on] she is probably communicating as best she can. If you always say “come here” when you want her she will gradually begin to understand the word and then if you give her an encouraging look, someday she may spontaneously say it.

That was the day we both dreamed about, hoped for and knew would come if we continued to work. One thing could speed up the process: a prescription hearing aid.

Shortly before Lynn was two, after learning that the audiologist at Children’s Hospital had moved to Canada, we went to St. Luke’s Hospital in Chicago for another hearing test. After the test was performed, the audiologist brought out a hearing aid with straps and cords attached. A small gray box about half the size of a package of cigarettes, the aid came with a harness that made it look like a miniature backpack. Louise placed the harness over Lynn’s shoulders and the audiologist helped Lynn put the earmolds in place. Interest and anticipation filled Lynn’s hazel eyes as she watched the audiologist click the switch to “on” and turn the volume control to 6.

“Bub, bub, bub, bub, bub, bub.” The audiologist spoke in a normal voice, as if she had no doubt that the hearing aid would enable Lynn to hear. We watched for the slightest response.

“Bub, bub, bub, bub, bub.” Suddenly Lynn raised her eyebrows slightly, looked at Louise for an instant, then smiled at the audiologist.

“I think she heard something,” the audiologist said evenly.

“Why don’t you say something to her?” I glanced at Louise. It almost seemed too good to be true.

“Hi, Lynn!” I hesitated, watching her face for the slightest clue. “Bub, bub, bub, bub. Can you hear me?”

She gave me a quick grin, then looked at Louise and the audiologist in quick succession. It seemed to us that she had recognized my voice.

The audiologist wrote out a prescription and we went to have the aid fitted. The Bishop Hearing Aid dealer did business from a two-room shop in Madison Street not far from the Loop. The dealer, a middle-aged man with a shiny bald head, gave us a friendly smile and invited us to sit down and talk about hearing aids. “Zenith makes one of the best aids,” he began.

I looked around the small consultation room. It must have been the only room in the store besides the front reception area. A bronze plaque hung on the wall to my left; pamphlets on hearing loss and modern hearing aids were strewn on a small table behind the chair where the dealer sat. He wore a white laboratory coat.

“I’ve worked with deaf children for five years now,” he went on. “I really enjoy it and I’ve helped a lot of them.” He pointed to the plaque on the wall. “I received this award for service to hearing-impaired children. You’ll notice a real difference after your daughter starts wearing her hearing aid. For some youngsters, when they put on their first hearing aid, they are able to hear Mom or Dad for the first time.”

After a few minutes, at his suggestion, I took Lynn in my lap. He brought out a small lump of plastic material and pressed it firmly into each of Lynn’s ears. She squirmed but didn’t resist.

“This will harden in just a minute or two,” he explained.
From these impressions we can make earmolds that will fit her ears perfectly. You’re lucky your daughter is being fitted while she’s still young. I’ve had kids who don’t come in until they are three or four years old.

‘You can pay a hundred dollars’ down payment,” he went on. “The rest will be due when you pick up the hearing aid next month. The total cost will be three hundred dollars plus tax.”

Driving home, we both felt elated. Finally Lynn would have her own prescription hearing aid. It seemed to us that we had waited too long already. Instead of being tied to brief periods with the auditory trainer, Lynn could wear this unit in the car, walking in the woods, at meals, when she played. All the time. And it was designed more for hearing than for auditory training.

A few days after Lynn had been fitted for her hearing aid, we received the first issue of the Volta Review. The John Tracy Clinic had advised us to subscribe to this journal, published by the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf in Washington, D.C. Bell had considered teaching deaf people to speak his most important work. One of his first pupils, a girl who had lost her hearing at age five, later became his wife. When Bell invented the telephone, the French government awarded him the prestigious Volta Prize and with the money he received, he founded the Volta Bureau in 1887. This world-wide information center on deafness was later renamed after him.

On the cover of that first issue was a four-year-old girl wearing a hearing aid with cords running to each ear. She almost looked like Lynn. With outstretched hands she was presenting the 1967 Alexander Graham Bell Award to President Lyndon Johnson.

Thumbing through the first pages of the journal, I eagerly read the advertisements about special schools for deaf children, about Gallaudet University, which is the national college for the deaf in Washington, D.C., notices about recently published books on deafness, and advertisements for hearing aids.

Even before I had read a single article, a strange feeling swept over me. We weren’t alone! I felt in contact with a whole world of people scattered across the country, people with problems like ours, teachers concerned with deaf children, professional researchers investigating deafness. The Volta Review seemed to end our isolation.

One full-page advertisement showed an old New England school. Gracious lawns spread out under beautiful evergreens; a huge ivy-covered building dominated the picture. Across the top it said: “The Clarke School for the Deaf, Northampton, Massachusetts.” I read and reread the description of their program.

Clarke School has employed the oral method exclusively since its establishment in 1867. Residual hearing is worked with continuously from admission to graduation. Pupils are admitted at four and one-half years of age and progress through the lower, middle, and upper schools. The course of instruction is planned to fit pupils for high school work with hearing children.

But it was the hearing-aid advertisements in the Volta Review that held our interest. In less than two weeks Lynn’s aid would be ready. The J. L. Warren Company in Chicago had a full-page advertisement about their compression auditory training units, which could be worn like hearing aids. “Even a whisper is heard distinctly by the aurally handicapped child using the new Warren Wearable Walkaway Units,” it said. The descriptions of hearing aids emphasized that most children had some measurable hearing, no matter how deaf they appeared. Hearing aids could build on the tiniest fraction of hearing. The powerful amplifiers did things we didn’t understand. They “cushioned sound” and “minimized distortion.” An advertisement for the Zenith Corporation stated that deaf students could hear the teacher at any volume. “Trust Zenith to remove clamor, clutter, and too often confusion from classrooms for deaf youngsters.”

When we went back to pick up Lynn’s aid, the dealer inserted the first earmold in Lynn’s right ear with a swift twisting motion. “Aahieeiou!” she cried out and without hesitating pulled out the earmold; the discomfort showed on her face. The dealer tried
the other one in Lynn’s left ear; she instantly removed that one, too, while looking defiantly at this stranger.

“They’ll be tight for a few days,” he said. “She shouldn’t wear them until you get home. Leave them in for short periods, then you can lengthen the time as she becomes accustomed to them.”

I thought we might test the hearing aid in the shop, but I was almost glad for his suggestion. In the privacy of our own home we could sit and talk to Lynn without someone watching us; we could take our time and observe more carefully whether she heard us. If Lynn wanted to speak, she wouldn’t be inhibited by the new surroundings or this stranger who had pushed these uncomfortable things into her ears.

“This volume control goes from one to seven. I’d suggest that you set it at about six.” Then he pointed to the switch beside it which had three settings marked by tiny etched letters in the plastic top. I could see an M, T and R.

“This switch allows you to put the hearing aid on MIKE, TELEPHONE or BOTH. When your daughter gets older she can set the switch to T and place the earpiece of the telephone next to the aid and listen to people on the phone.”

How great! I thought to myself. I glanced at Louise, nodding my head slightly. Bruce loved to use the telephone, calling his friends up and down the street to see if they could play, running to answer it first when he heard it ring. We had taken for granted that when Lynn grew older her friends would call. We hadn’t thought much about the fact that it might be impossible. She might not even hear the telephone ring—much less the voices of her friends. Now this problem could be solved with her hearing aid.

We paid the dealer and drove home. I thought about the hearing aid, which Lynn held in her lap. I hoped it would amplify sound better than the auditory trainer she had used. It seemed important that these earmolds, which carried the amplified sound, went inside Lynn’s ears. That would bring our voices even closer than the headphones had done.

A brilliant sun speckled the front lawn with shadows from the new leaves covering the highest branches of the elm. We went to the backyard and sat on the grass. Louise slipped the harness with the hearing aid in it over Lynn’s head. She fastened it in front.

The single cord from the amplification unit had a Y connection where it forked into two cords that ran to the earmolds. Lynn quickly appraised the situation, and when Louise began inserting one of the earmolds, Lynn struggled and cried out, trying to protect her ears. She wanted no part of those painful things! I took her in my lap and held her arms gently while Louise tried again. She pulled Lynn’s earlobe down to open the canal slightly, moistened the earmold, then pushed it into place with a quick twisting motion. The second one followed.

Lynn calmed down once each earmold was in place. Louise turned the volume control to 6 and we looked at each other, wondering who would speak first.

“Hi, Lynn! How are you? Can you hear me?” Louise knelt on the grass, leaning slightly forward, her face not more than fifteen inches from Lynn. We both watched for the slightest indication she might have heard; in the brief moment of silence Lynn watched Louise’s face as if she was waiting for her to continue.

“Hi, Lynn! Bub, bub, bub, bub, bub.” Still no response. Lynn spied a blue jay, pointed and looked up at me to see if I had seen it. I moved her to the grass between us, then when her eyes were on Louise, I spoke from behind. “Bub, bub, bub, bub, bub, bub. Hi, Lynn!”

Nothing. She did not look around or make any movement that suggested she heard anything. She was unaware I was trying so hard to communicate. I could see the disappointment on Louise’s face. Hundreds of other tests flashed before my eyes—the fire engines, popping paper bags, standing behind Lynn in her highchair, calling to her crib as she stared at the ceiling.

I looked back at Lynn, who was tugging at the right earmold. “Lynn. Can you hear me?” My voice came louder now. She
was looking at Louise and pointing across the yard. I was filled with consternation. Why didn’t she respond?

“Well,” I said slowly, trying hard to sound confident, “Lynn is tired and irritable. That was a long drive to Chicago. This whole experience is new for her. She may have heard us but just doesn’t know what sound is. She has to learn to use her hearing aid.”

“You’re probably right, but I thought she would show some response,” Louise said. “She seemed to hear the audiologist through a hearing aid.”

“Wait a minute!” I said to Louise, jumping up. “I’ve got an idea.” I ran into the house and found Lynn’s red ball. She could lip-read “ball” in dozens of different sentences. She mouthed “ball” whenever we played the games we had invented. If she was going to say anything at all today, it might just be “ball.”

When I came back outside, Lynn was sitting near Louise, who easily distracted her whenever she reached for the earmolds. Lynn saw me coming, pointed at the ball and immediately began mouthing “ball,” “ball,” “ball.” I sat down in front of her and held the ball between us, bouncing it lightly.

“Ball! Ball! Ball!” I directed my words toward the hearing aid, strapped to Lynn’s chest. We both waited, almost holding our breath.

“Ball.” Lynn’s lips moved in a clear, silent enunciation. She had responded to what I said. But why the silence? Why didn’t she make some sound? Even a hoarse whisper. I could see the same questions written all over Louise’s face.

“Ball! Ball! Ball!” I repeated, bouncing the ball more vigorously. Then, before we could stop her, Lynn pulled out both of the plastic earmolds and began tugging at the harness.

Louise held our dashed hopes in her hands—the tangled cords, the harness, the earmolds. Dejected, we carried Lynn inside and put her down for a nap. Neither of us spoke. I put the hearing aid neatly back into the box. We went into the living room and sat down.

“It doesn’t mean the hearing aid didn’t help her hear,” I said finally, fighting to regain some perspective.

“You’re probably right.” I could sense Louise’s trying to cheer me up. “It’s just so hard to wait. But as you said, she’ll have to learn to use it.”

Painfully we faced the truth. Hearing aid or no hearing aid, Lynn could not speak. Even with amplified sound, she still had to learn where the sounds came from, how they were made, what they meant. She still had to learn the sound of her own voice, to discover that changes in her vocal cords changed those sounds. It would take time for her to recognize the faint sounds that came through the earmolds. Like listening to some distant bird amid the city noises. Like hearing a cricket chirp at night on a busy boulevard.

It might take months or years to fully develop her residual hearing. As with the auditory trainer, it required repetition, association training and auditory training. We had to hope that her residual hearing would develop. No one is completely deaf. Every time we read that statement in the Volta Review or in some new book on deafness, our hope revived.

The last week in April, Lynn wore the hearing aid for brief periods each day, never more than ten minutes. Never without protest. Then her tiny ears became red and sore inside. When we tried to insert the earmolds she cried out in pain. We waited. Slowly the irritated passages healed. A week or two later she began putting the earmolds in by herself and leaving them for five minutes. The tightness had disappeared. Louise discovered it was better to put the harness on backward; Lynn could still pull out the earmolds but could not change the volume control or the selector switch.

All during May we tested Lynn over and over again while she wore the hearing aid. Louise came up behind her and spoke distinctly while I watched for any response. Lynn never turned around. Not once did she react to our voices or show she heard us.
Day after day we struggled with our feelings about the hearing aid. We became discouraged at the struggles to keep her wearing the uncomfortable earmolds for more than ten minutes at a time. We wondered if the aid was worth the money. It was difficult to understand why she easily mouthed “all gone” and “ball” but never made the sounds to transform them into words. The questions crept back into our thoughts again and again, as if spawned by our deeper fear that she would never learn to talk. A fear we could not express out loud.

About this time we discovered something about deafness that helped us understand what Lynn was up against. It came from a children’s science demonstration, part of a monthly series that Bruce received in the mail. This particular demonstration focused on different kinds of deafness and the physiology of the ear. It included a recording that simulated what a deaf person actually heard.

A clear voice read the first few lines from the Declaration of Independence as it sounds for a person with a conductive loss of 40 decibels. It sounded distant, but we easily understood it. The same sentences were repeated, this time simulating a loss of 60 decibels. We could barely hear the words.

The demonstration continued, this time for a sensory-neural loss. We noticed a marked difference at both 40 and 60 decibels. With a conductive loss, the voice sounded weaker, as if the volume had been turned almost all the way down. With a sensory-neural loss, not only did the volume decrease but the words became distorted and muffled. Finally, the recording repeated the same sentences, showing what a person with a 60-decibel loss would hear when the sounds were amplified with a hearing aid. For a conductive loss, the amplification made the sounds loud and clear. For a sensory-neural loss, the louder sounds became even more distorted.

“I can’t understand any of the words!” Louise said as we replayed the recording. “They’re all garbled and run together; it’s like someone talking underwater!” We could hardly have recognized it was human speech except that we had been told exactly what the narrator would say and knew the words by heart.

“And Lynn’s loss is somewhere around 100 decibels for most of the speech range,” I said, trying to fight back the doubts that she could ever hear our words clearly. We played the recording over again, listening carefully to the last part, which amplified the words for both kinds of hearing loss. The amplification for a conductive loss was like using a powerful magnifying glass that clearly enlarged a line of extremely small print. With the sensory-neural loss it was as if the magnifying glass revealed that the tiny print consisted only of broken and missing letters, so that not a single word could be deciphered.

Painfully the realization sank in. Lynn would never hear the way we heard, the way Bruce heard. With a profound sensory-neural loss, her hearing aid could make her aware of our voices; it could not make our voices clear enough for Lynn to understand what we said. But with lip reading, with whatever amplification she did receive from her aid, and with increased ability to use her residual hearing, we believed she could learn to speak.

We secretly clung to hope. And each issue of the Volta Review nourished our hopes for Lynn. It was Linda McArthur, a young lady we had never met, who helped most that spring. We had read about Linda in one of the first issues of the Volta Review. Linda McArthur was deaf. But Linda was also a freshman at California State Polytechnic College in San Luis Obispo.

I can still remember sitting in our backyard under the trees looking through the Volta Review which had arrived in the mail that morning. The tulips had begun to bloom; bright-yellow crocuses lined the back fence. “Learning to Be Self-Sufficient” was the title of Linda’s story. I started reading it to Louise. The similarities to Lynn struck us both immediately.

Linda had been deaf since birth. Profoundly deaf. She had a 90-decibel loss. We both found it difficult to believe she had written the article herself.
My parents should receive much of the credit for my achievements to date. Their secret was continuity. In fact, my mother recalls one incident after she spent a month-long vacation away from me in my early pre-school years. She says, "All I could get out of you was a squeak." And it took her three months to get my voice back.

Linda attended special classes for the deaf in an elementary school, but when she was eleven she lip-read and spoke so well that she changed to the regular school near her home. We had dreamed about Lynn going to school with hearing children. It had seemed impossible, given her deafness, that Linda had gone on to high school and even participated in competitive athletics. Now, in her first year at college, she was majoring in physical education. She made friends easily and seemed to live a normal life. Was she typical of deaf adults? We didn't know, but one thing was certain: Linda McArthur, profoundly deaf, had adjusted to the world of hearing people.

Soon we began to discover others through a national association of deaf people called O.D.A.S.—the Oral Deaf Adult Section of the Alexander Graham Bell Association. These deaf adults had become part of the hearing world by mastering the oral approach—learning to lip-read and speak. Each month the *Volta Review* devoted several pages to O.D.A.S. We learned about its national meetings, about the common problems of oral deaf adults, but mostly we read the personal stories of individuals. We knew nothing about those other deaf adults, the ones who used manual gestures, who could not communicate with normal people. With hard work, we believed that Lynn could follow in the steps of the oral deaf adults we read about.

Wheaton College, the town, our neighbors—they all held four years of rich memories for Louise and me and Bruce. Lynn had lived all her life in Wheaton. We knew hundreds of students. Some would return in the fall; others had scattered throughout the world. As we prepared to leave for graduate school in Oklahoma, it seemed unlikely that we would ever return except for nostalgic visits.

All the events of those four years seemed to pale, however, alongside that Fourth of July two years earlier. How much those screaming sirens and booming fireworks had changed the course of our lives!

As we said good-bye to students and friends during final-exam week, it felt good to know that our friends Dave and Melva Brandt would be waiting to greet us when we arrived in Norman, Oklahoma.

Before we left we asked Dave's mother to visit us. A wise and sprightly woman, Mrs. Brandt had come to Wheaton to live near her son when her husband died. She stayed in Wheaton when Dave and Melva moved to Oklahoma. For Lynn and Bruce, Mrs. Brandt had become a substitute grandmother. Her eyes sparkled with warmth and tenderness for children. She treated Lynn and Bruce with the same love she gave unreservedly to her own grandchildren.

Lynn loved Mrs. Brandt. Whenever we visited, Lynn would dash off to find her. They seemed to enjoy a special kind of silent communication; Mrs. Brandt played with Lynn, observed her from the vantage point of long experience with children, and most of all she understood Lynn. Lynn's deafness called forth a unique love from this magnificent woman. And she had a great deal of faith in Lynn, a faith that buoyed us many times.

"Lynn will make it," she used to say with a twinkle in her eye, "even though she's deaf. I can tell she's a smart baby. She catches on fast."

It was a warm evening in late May when Mrs. Brandt came for a barbecue in our backyard. We had finished eating. Lynn and Bruce ran off to play. As we relaxed and talked about Wheaton and Oklahoma, our conversation turned to deafness.

"I think Lynn's hearing aid is helping some," Louise said. "Just in the last few days I've noticed she makes more sounds when she wears it."

Then Mrs. Brandt recalled an experience from her childhood.
in Canada. "When I was sixteen, there was a deaf girl living in our neighborhood. Beth was her name. On warm summer nights my friends would come to our house, and Beth too. We talked by the hour. We went for walks. And Beth would join in the fun. She couldn't speak a word, but she watched us with an intenseness that made us all feel she understood what was going on. She would watch our lips and follow along whatever we did. She would make gestures or act things out and we understood her most of the time.

"But I can remember times when we would all be talking and laughing and I would turn and look at Beth. Maybe I would catch a glimpse of her out of the corner of my eye. Her face had the saddest look I think I've ever seen in my life. Her deep brown eyes would fill with a forlorn, lonely expression. She wanted so much to join in with us, to understand our laughter and talk, to tell us about her own feelings. But there was no way she could follow our train of thought, no way she could tell us what thoughts lay behind those lonely eyes.

"Beth felt the isolation terribly. She was smart and could have learned, too, if only people had known then. But it will be so different with Lynn. She'll be able to communicate; her deafness won't be such a barrier. I think about Beth every time I see Lynn. I wonder whatever happened to her."

There was a long silence after she spoke. Louise shifted in her chair next to me and pulled her sweater over her shoulders. I watched Lynn run across the yard. I thought about Beth. A sense of sadness filled the cool evening air around us, sadness mixed with hope. Someday she would speak. She would not be alone.