

MIGRATING TO A DEAF WORLD:
A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF HEARING PARENTS
OF DEAF CHILDREN¹

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I use Erica's (my profoundly deaf daughter) and my story to illustrate how migration theory, drawn from anthropology, can be used as a model to understand the experiences of hearing parents of deaf and hearing impaired children. I have selected some aspects of migration theory for discussion including deciding to migrate, home and homelessness, language, and success stories. Photographs of the shared activities in which hearing parents and their deaf and hearing impaired children participate play an important part in this paper. They indicate the settings where hearing parents begin telling each other the stories that create our cultural position on the margins of the Deaf world. This is a position from which our children can make the final leg of the journey into the Deaf world without us, and without the trauma that many Deaf adults recount. Studying hearing parents' experiences with their deaf and hearing impaired children has provided me with new insights into culture, language acquisition and socialisation.

INTRODUCTION

I am a hearing parent of a deaf child, Erica. I am also an anthropologist who at the time that Erica was diagnosed as profoundly deaf in 1992 had been exploring the concepts of migration, biligualism, biculturalism, cross-cultural communication, racism and cultural contact for twenty years (Metge and Kinloch 1978, Kinloch 1985) I introduce this paper with an explanation about why Erica and I think it is worth telling our story. This is followed by a discussion of my understanding of migration theory and its application to the process of parenting a deaf child. This discussion concludes with a justification for using Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich's (2002) model for analysing our migration

story. Erica's and my story about migrating towards the Deaf world is then presented using this model.

THE VALUE OF TELLING OUR STORY

I decided to write Erica's and my story to show how migration theory was immediately useful in making sense of my experience of becoming a hearing parent of a deaf child. Migration theory has remained a constant framework within which to construct our story. This has meant that unlike most hearing parents of deaf children I have not had to search for a framework within which to make sense of my experiences at the same time as I have been meeting the challenges of parenting a deaf child. My experience, of listening to other hearing parents of deaf children who have begun with one framework, discarded that and tried another and another in a search for a way to make sense of their experiences, persuaded me that it was worth sharing our story.

Erica's and my participation in debates related to her education has convinced Erica that it is worth telling her story. I understood the space between worlds as a liminal space (Turner, 1967). For me a liminal space is a dangerous place where stories are fragmented, people get lost, lose their minds and sometimes their lives. The fragmentation began when I raised the possibility that Erica was deaf. She was eleven months old in 1990 and our general medical practitioner (GP) would not believe me. The GP thought Erica had no need to speak because her large family did so much for her. My understanding of liminal spaces was behind my decision to involve Erica, even before she could understand what was happening, in as many 'storytelling events' as possible. From the age of two and a half in 1992, when Erica was diagnosed as profoundly deaf, she heard the debates about issues relating to her education. The debates included:

- how to ensure the early diagnosis of deaf children;
- whether or not to use sign language before she could read;
- when to learn sign language;
- what skills her itinerant teacher and teacher aid needed to support her in the mainstream;
- whether or not she should be in a Deaf Unit or at a school for the deaf;
- whether it was more helpful to have her itinerant teacher of the deaf (ITOD) change regularly or remain a constant in her life;
- how and when to connect her with deaf adults; and
- whether or not to explore the possibility of a cochlear implant.

As I became more and more involved in the parents' group advocating for the needs of deaf and hearing impaired children, Erica came with me to meetings, including ones at the Ministry of Education, to advocate for:

- free access to New Zealand Sign Language for children and their families;
- more advisers of the deaf to work with newly diagnosed families; and
- different and more equitable criteria for verifying deaf children for the purpose of funding the support that they need to access the curriculum.

Erica developed her own views on some of these matters. While Erica goes to a mainstream school, for about a year when she was twelve she attended the Deaf Unit on Fridays to participate in Deaf language and culture classes with her peers. She was mentioned in a newspaper story about the children in the Deaf Unit that made her angry because of the way the students had been portrayed. The journalist made it seem that deafness was disabling and excluded the hearing experiences of deaf people. Erica wrote a letter to the editor explaining her position as a profoundly deaf young person who can hear, and who wants to hear but who also sees herself as culturally Deaf and is happy about this.

Currently there is a controversy around the Ongoing Reviewable Resources Scheme (ORRS) and the criteria used to verify deaf children. The level of verification can be very high, high, moderate and low. To get sufficient support for a profoundly deaf child the child needs to be verified very high. A criterion that is inclusive of deaf children is dependency on New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) for accessing the curriculum. Alternatively, a criterion that excludes deaf children is the use of age appropriate language. It is assumed that if you have age appropriate language you can use it to access the curriculum. Erica uses many communication strategies (lip-reading, note-taking, observation and reading), however, without NZSL she cannot access the curriculum. At the same time, her speaking indicates that she has age appropriate language. The verifiers have yet to understand that age appropriate expressive written and spoken language is not indicative of a deaf child's ability to access the curriculum.

Last year Erica's ORRS funding was reviewed. A huge effort was made to provide evidence to support Erica's verification as very high needs. An equal amount of effort went into ensuring that all of the evidence was as accurate as possible. A picture of Erica's skills and abilities was portrayed at the same time as the methods she uses to access the curriculum. Erica, her support teacher, the school, the audiologist and I worked together with Erica's ITOD as

she was preparing the case. The result was that Erica retained her very high verification. Other parents and teachers saw this as a precedent because other profoundly deaf children were losing their very high verification.

Three weeks after her verification was confirmed the Ministry audited Erica's verification. Meanwhile the parents' group (the New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children) and the Deaf Education Agency (DEANZ) were in discussion with the Ministry of Education about the verification process and its dependency on how well forms are filled in. Erica was aware of these discussions and wanted other deaf children to have the resources that she has, and so she agreed that her verification documents could be used as an example of how to fill in the forms to achieve the appropriate verification.

The auditing process caused us great emotional upheaval. Erica's support teacher said that she would continue to work with Erica even if she were not paid. After this both Erica and I relaxed a little. For many of the profoundly deaf children who have been successful academically there have been ITODS, support teachers, teacher aids and advisers who work beyond the call of duty to help this happen. The auditing process confirmed Erica's verification as very high and we all heaved a sigh of relief. Migration theory informed how I thought about this verification process. From my PhD research with Samoan secondary school children who had migrated to New Zealand I knew that a child's level of educational achievement was probably the most important predictor of bilingual and bicultural competence. This was one of the reasons we had put so much effort into compiling the evidence on which Erica's verification was based.

The emotional upheaval that the review and auditing process caused us convinced Erica to share her personal verification documents with the people who could make a difference for other deaf children like her. From this thinking it was a short step for her to agree that telling our story in this context was worthwhile.

While this is Erica's and my story, one of the reasons for writing it relates to my partner, Erica's dad – Martin. Martin and I were in our forties when Erica was born. Martin had experience parenting three children, Charles, Gina and Joe, with his late wife Di. Their youngest child, Joe, was ten at the time of Erica's birth. I had experience parenting two daughters, Emma and Nicola, with their father Bruce. Bruce and I had separated when Nicola was one and a half, and I had been a solo parent for about twelve years when I met and married Martin. Nicola was fourteen when Erica was born. Martin and I both had

careers: I was a senior lecturer in social work at Victoria University of Wellington, and Martin was a lawyer in private practice.

Martin worked with Maori legal matters before this became fashionable. He was instrumental in placing Maori Law on the legal map. Many of the cases that he was involved in resulted in precedents and legislation that benefited Maori people. We originally met as a consequence of our common interest in seeking justice for Maori.

Martin's work was all-consuming, yet he managed some involvement in parenting Erica. He supported my use of migration theory to understand our experiences with Erica, and he participated in important decision-making. He attempted to learn NZSL, including attending a language immersion camp. He took Erica to weekend camps for deaf children and their families and he participated in all but one individual education plan (IEP) meeting. When Erica was about seven years old the three of us went through the process of deciding together whether or not Erica would have a cochlear implant. Martin's participation in Maori language cases, arguing for Maori to become an official language, informed the value he placed on NZSL and his view that it was an appropriate first or second language for Erica and for us. When Erica decided that she was strongly against having a cochlear implant we supported her decision and recognised that this meant that NZSL was very important to us.

Martin was the honorary lawyer for the Wellington Association for Deaf Children, and he helped draft letters to the Ministry advocating for some of the issues that are identified above. He encouraged the group, and some of the parents on Federation, to think about using the law to achieve justice for deaf children, young people and their families. He provided us with some guidance on how we might begin to do this.

The demands of Martin's work disrupted our family life. Consequently, in 1998 I chose to live separately with Erica. Martin was upset about this, but after we separated, Erica and I, and especially Erica, spent more quality time with him than we had when we shared a home. While Erica and I migrated towards the Deaf world he continued to act as my anchor in the hearing world. On May 14, 2003 Martin died. Just before he died I injured my right leg very badly and was off work for nine months. Erica's and my world was in an upheaval.

Martin's death shook my sense of identity. I had taken steps to become independent of Martin, and I was taken aback by how angry and upset I felt about his death. I took up my pen as a way of exploring this identity crisis,

and through my writing I discovered how important my identity as a hearing parent of a deaf child had become. When Martin died I was adrift at sea – my anchor had gone. Writing about my identity, as a hearing parent of a deaf child who uses migration theory, has helped me to make sense of a world without Martin.



Figure 1

In this picture (Fig 1) Erica is three years old;³ it is six months since she was diagnosed as profoundly deaf. Erica has few words and no sentences. She is never without her hearing aids and even wears them to bed. When she is not at the university creche she is in the company of one family member or another.

MIGRATION THEORY

I am an anthropologist who is also the hearing parent of a deaf child. When I was studying as an undergraduate anthropology student in the late 1960s, Deaf cultural communities, such as Martha's Vineyard,⁴ were used to illustrate different types of cultural and language groups. In Martha's Vineyard sign language was used as the main mode of communication as it is today in a village in Northern Bali (Branson, Miller and Marsaja 1996). For my PhD, which I gained in 1976, I studied the migration experience of Samoan secondary school children in New Zealand. I used the linguistic ideas of Roland Barthes (1967) about how meaning shifts and changes in different contexts, and how words and phrases signify disparate meanings in arbitrary ways. I used these ideas to explore what happened to Samoan young people's language and culture after they migrated from Western Samoa to New Zealand in the early 1970s. Many families migrated hoping that their children could become well educated and find well paying jobs. But English as a second language had only recently been introduced at the school where I did my fieldwork, and the Samoan children struggled to learn the language of their new country. They also found it hard to clarify their view of their home country and original language. Their issues included:

- how to maintain their Samoan language when it was the language of a cultural minority;
- whether or not to use their Samoan language at all;
- how to learn English when school only gave them access to some of what they needed to know; and
- how to become bilingual and bicultural.

The ability of the children to succeed at school had a significant impact on how bilingual and bicultural they could become. Some young people fell through the cracks, ended up with minimal linguistic and cultural competence and were continually in trouble at school and with the police.

To gather the information on which my research was based I listened to the stories of fifteen secondary school-aged young people at one secondary school during school hours. I was part of their daily lives for eight months. I heard about what led to their families migrating to New Zealand, or about what led families to send individual young people to families that were already here. I visited some of their homes, talked to their teachers, and taught some of them English as a second language as a relieving teacher. Much of our conversation was about how different ideas, words and phrases translated from Samoan to

English and vice versa. They also shared their views of life in Western Samoa and asked many questions about my life. My PhD research informed the book, *Talking Past Each Other: Problems in Cross-cultural Communication* (Metge and Kinloch 1978).

When Erica was diagnosed I immediately thought, ‘Wow, another language and culture to learn.’ The sinking feeling of being overwhelmed at the prospect was balanced somewhat by the knowledge that I had the skills to undertake this adventure successfully.

When I decided to write about my use of migration theory to understand my experiences as a hearing parent of a deaf child, I searched the literature to see what other hearing parents of deaf children had written. I discovered that hearing parents are often represented in books written from a Deaf cultural perspective as the oppressors who traumatised their children. They keep their children in the hearing world and do not ensure that they have adequate means of communication (see for example Cohen 1994). This was not my experience.

Parts of the stories of hearing parents of deaf children often feature in books for parents that professionals write in order to instruct hearing parents how to parent their deaf child. Their advice is often framed by the educational theories of the day rather than based on the experience of parenting a deaf child (see for example Marschark 1997). Mostly this literature represents individual hearing parents as people who experience emotional and psychological distress at learning that they have a disabled child. This was not how I felt.

I found two books written by anthropologists about having a deaf child, and about Deaf culture. One was *Deaf Like Me: The Inspiring Story of a Family’s Struggle to Reach Across the Barriers of Silence*, by Thomas S. Spradley and James P. Spradley (1978). Thomas Spradley is a hearing parent of a deaf child. James Spradley is the anthropologist. The other was *Damned for their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled*, by Jan Branson and Don Miller (2002). They are hearing parents of deaf children. I couldn’t find anyone who had used migration theory as a framework for the personal stories of hearing parents of deaf children in the way that I had.

Nowhere in the literature could I find hearing parents discussing their cultural position in relationship to the Deaf world or how this might be shaped. I was struck by the lack of stories – by the silence.

Feminists (Harding 1998; hooks 1984; Stanley and Wise 1993), anthropologists (Abu-Lughod 1993; Myerhoff 1992; Bonisch-Brednich 2002) and indigenous peoples (Dei, Hall and Goldin Rosenberg 2000) have developed the idea that the insights people gain from cultural positions at the margins of two worlds can be enriching. The experience of becoming a hearing parent of a deaf child results in meeting lots of new people from diverse backgrounds. Whenever we meet we discuss our experiences and retell stories of trauma, frustration and success. I have discussed writing our stories with other hearing parents of deaf children and we have begun this project. The stories we have shared have influenced what and how I present my thinking in this paper. However, the purpose of this paper is to present some examples of how I have understood my experience and constructed Erica's and my story using migration theory.

Bonisch-Brednich's (2002) recent oral history of German migration to New Zealand offered a model for analysing migration stories that I could use to structure the presentation of some aspects of Erica's and my story of migrating towards the Deaf world. I have selected four headings that Bonisch-Brednich used to organise her discussion of what she called the 'ready-made' stories that German migrants shared with her. 'Ready-made' stories have been told many times, and the storyteller does not have to think about what they are going to say. The headings that structure this presentation are: deciding to migrate, home and homesickness, language, and success stories.

DECIDING TO MIGRATE

Migrating from the world in which one is at home is usually a considered decision. Samoan families had thought about the future opportunities for their children and young people and decided that there were benefits for them and the wider family from migrating to New Zealand. In the New Zealand of the early 1970s they expected to have access to a better education, better jobs and a greater income than if they remained in Western Samoa. They had a vision of a better life. The German immigrants in some periods also made considered decisions. Some German people came to New Zealand as refugees fleeing from oppression in their home country. Some choose to live half-time in New Zealand and half-time in Germany.

Hearing parents of deaf children fall somewhere between refugees forced to move and migrants with a vision of a better world. The decision to migrate was made for me when Erica was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at age two and a half in 1992. We did not choose to have a deaf child, and receiving this diagnosis was traumatic. Because of my discipline in anthropology, the trauma

was minimised in a number of ways. When I was doing fieldwork in Western Samoa in the early 1980s I was fascinated by the way people communicated over distances, especially with children. Rather than shouting to attract attention, people have become extremely adept at flicking tiny stones long distances so that they strike a person on their body, arm or leg. Once a person is attending, gestures are used to convey the message. Recently I have discussed this form of communication with Samoan colleagues, and it is possible that this is a sign language, but further research is needed to confirm this.

When Erica was born I decided to watch her carefully to see if there were natural gestures that could be used in pre-lingual communication. When Erica was seven months old she and I had what may have been meningitis. There was an epidemic of it, and a number of university students were among the sick. I had been taking Erica to lectures because I was breast-feeding. We were not hospitalised, but our GP visited us two or three times daily, and we completed several courses of antibiotics before we recovered. Two years later Erica was diagnosed as profoundly deaf. The shock of the diagnosis was softened for me because in the research class I was teaching that year there was a profoundly deaf Maori student, and an interpreter who was retraining as a social worker because she had fallen and broken both wrists in a tramping accident. Sometimes the Deaf student's hearing aid batteries would go flat and I would find the interpreter beside me signing the lecture. The whole class took turns to make sure that notes were written on the board, and I was never allowed to talk when I was facing the board. A third student had been a coordinator, supporting parents with special needs children, including deaf, and she wrote her research report on the value of mainstreaming and special units for high needs children. I had raised my concerns about Erica's hearing with these three mature students and they made no judgement but encouraged me to go back to my GP or seek a second opinion. When I reported the audiologists' diagnosis to them, they were not at all surprised.

Even before Erica was diagnosed I had some experience on which to base a decision to migrate and to shape a vision of the Deaf world to which we might journey, but the diagnosis was out of our hands. As far as I was concerned we were dealing with another language and culture, and so the idea to migrate was a natural decision. It was a decision that Erica's father supported. It was not a family decision. Some of the family went on the journey while others stayed squarely in the hearing world. The incentive to go on the journey was the extent to which each family member was aware of what was needed to communicate successfully with Erica and the resources to learn NZSL.

Not a refugee but...

While the decision to migrate was to some extent made for us, Erica and I are not refugees. I could have followed the received wisdom at the time and believed that Erica would be oral and therefore we would not need sign language or a relationship with Deaf culture. I could have seen her as disabled and lowered my expectations of her ability to socialise with Deaf and hearing people, or to become well educated. Treating a deaf child as disabled often has heart-breaking consequences for them (McKee 2001; Cohen 1994; Holcomb 1997). I struggled with teachers over whether or not and when Erica and I would learn sign language. A struggle continues about how to ensure that parents can make informed choices for their deaf child in relationship to sign language learning (See McKee this volume).

Experiences of migration/living in other cultures

I knew that one way of recognising well-adjusted young people is to notice their ability to move from one social setting to another easily, including between some settings that are culturally different (see for instance Mayall 1996; James and Prout 1997; Holcomb 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1987). A person has to have a strong identity to do this well.

Thomas Holcomb was surprised to find a small group of students in his Deaf culture class who claimed that their journey towards a strong Deaf identity was not a long and traumatic one. 'These students had parents who learned to embrace Deaf culture early on and made sure their deaf child had access to the Deaf Community' (Holcomb 1997:93). And, these students saw themselves as bicultural. The concept of migrating towards the Deaf world is implicit in the reality of the biculturally Deaf. A group of Wellington parents arranged NZSL classes for themselves with a Deaf tutor and this was the beginning of access to the Deaf community for many of us and for our children.

Re-migration

While I had no previous experience of migration, I had studied this topic, and I had lived in other cultures and learned other languages. There was a decision to be made, so we were not refugees. On the other hand, once the decision to migrate was made, the likelihood of return migration was remote if it was possible. The decision to migrate towards the Deaf world changed our lives irrevocably. Every day Erica and I participate in the hearing world, but it is not the one we set out from. We are marginalised in the hearing world

– our whole family seen as disabled. Bonisch-Brednich (2002) talks about German people who travel back and forth annually between Germany and New Zealand and wonders whether they can be identified as migrants. They live successfully in two worlds. Many Maori people live in two worlds without travelling around the globe, while remaining in New Zealand.

HOME AND HOMESICKNESS

When Erica was diagnosed as deaf I had just come home from an overseas conference, and there was a message on my answer-phone from my GP saying that we had an appointment with the audiologist the next day. The verdict of the audiologist was to fracture my sense of home.

Migrants work hard to keep alive memories of their home. Samoan people found that when they returned home on holiday, the cultural practices that they remembered had changed in unexpected ways. Their memories had caught them in a time warp. Some German people, Bonisch-Brednich (2002) suggests, can only tentatively be described as migrants because they travel back and forth between Germany and New Zealand on an annual basis.

For me migrating to the Deaf world was a frame of mind. Our family remained 'at home', but the way that we were viewed, and the way that we viewed home and participated in the hearing world, changed. For instance, I presented an earlier version of this paper at the Deaf View conference in mid 2004 and felt as if I was contributing to understanding relationships among a group of Deaf-related people. I also presented an earlier version of this paper at an Anthropology conference at the end of 2004 to hearing people, many of whom are colleagues and have been friends for more than thirty years. Some members of the audience said that listening to our group of presentations (including presentations by Sue Nicolson and Kirsten Smiler this volume) was like doing fieldwork. Some of the questions they asked made me feel as if they were objectifying my experience, and their questions felt voyeuristic. It did not feel good, but it gave me a much better understanding of how Maori and Samoan people had told me they felt about anthropologists who were outsiders doing fieldwork in their cultural homes.

Grief about what might have been if Erica had been hearing

When parents find out that their child is deaf or hearing impaired they feel grief. Other people usually interpret this grief as being about having a disabled child. My grief was about the expectations of a life – my life – that would

be different. From the perspective of deciding to migrate, the expectation of a different life is positive and exciting even though the migrant is journeying into the unknown. The grief that I felt was less for Erica than for myself. If I was going on this journey, then it was inevitable that I was going to have to uproot my sense of being at home in a hearing world. And, I have often experienced feelings of homesickness because I no longer feel completely at home there. Significant numbers of hearing parents with deaf children move from Wellington so that their children can attend one of the two schools for the deaf, Kelston in Auckland and van Asch in Christchurch. This was not an option for our family because Martin and I had established careers in Wellington, and our five other children were settled at schools and university in the city. Wellington was also the city where we had both grown up. Our home is situated on the periphery of the Deaf world, centred as it is on the schools for the deaf.

Getting stuck BETWEEN hearing and Deaf worlds

Hearing parents of deaf children may choose to become migrants journeying towards a Deaf world. We may uproot ourselves from our homes in the hearing world, both literally and figuratively, even knowing that we can never arrive in a Deaf world. Other migrants find landfall in a new country. Hearing parents of deaf children may get stuck between hearing and Deaf worlds. We are always deaf-related, never Deaf, and no longer hearing as the hearing understand themselves.

Getting stuck between two worlds or two cultures is a dangerous place to be. It is certainly not a place from which to parent confidently. If parents stay here, this has significant negative implications for deaf children's success. We don't know how many parents get stuck.

Finding other hearing parents of deaf/hearing impaired children

In this in-between place, on the border between Deaf and hearing worlds, I found other hearing parents of deaf and hearing impaired children who were working together. We tell and retell each other 'ready-made' stories to make sense of our new cultural position at the margins of two worlds. Hearing parents help one another to create a new cultural identity for ourselves, and a cultural space through shared activities. This is a place of arrival, and a place to thrive in.

Migrants take photos to record their presence in a new country and the ac-

tivities out of which they construct their new lives. As hearing parents of deaf and hearing impaired children journeying towards the Deaf world, we also take many photos. Our photos record moments on our journey and also the activities out of which we construct a place for ourselves at the margins of the Deaf World. The settings that are illustrated in the photos that follow depict some of the places where we tell and retell our stories.



Figure 2

The teachers of the deaf arrange several Keep In Touch (KIT) days each year. They are intended to enable deaf students who attend mainstream schools to get to know each other. Parents are encouraged to participate. For many parents a KIT day is the first time that they have met other parents of deaf children. We tell stories about how our children were diagnosed as deaf, how we chose the school that our child attends, what it is like working with the IEP team⁵ and what educational expectations we have for our children. The Deaf mentor and other Deaf adults often attend KIT days, and contacts made can be a way of linking with the Deaf world.

At the KIT day shown in Figure 2 the children participated in cooperative sporting activities. On other KIT days children have gone swimming, ice-skating and on train rides. They have gone to barnyards, a bread-making factory and a museum. Deaf children have to be taught almost everything they know, and KIT days fill in some of the gaps created by their lack of 'peripheral

learning’ – the learning that happens by ‘just being there’ and overhearing adult talk.

The Wellington Association for Deaf Children, like the other parents’ groups around the country, also provides experiences to enrich the lives of deaf and hearing impaired children and to build a sense of local community.



Figure 3

The events that we have organised include a fishing trip to Happy Valley landfill, as illustrated in Figure 3. We have also taken groups to the circus, to the zoo and to captioned movies such as the *Lord of the Rings*, *The Return of the King*. The parents’ groups do the fund raising and subsidise the costs to families of the outings. A regular annual event is the family camp. Images from our last family camp are captured in Figures 4 and 5. Family camps are held over a weekend and usually combine activities for the children and at least one workshop for parents on some aspect of parenting deaf and hearing impaired children.

All communities have their celebrations, and on 17 August 2003 Wellington Association for Deaf Children celebrated its 45th anniversary. Figure 6 shows the late Norma Taylor, the last of the original members, cutting and distributing the cake at a special luncheon. She died six months later and is greatly missed.⁶ Many community events involve people of all ages, both Deaf and



Figure 4



Figure 5

hearing, including hearing children of Deaf parents. Most of these groups are represented in Figure 7, a photo that was also taken at the 45th anniversary.

Although many Deaf adults were present at this celebration it was still a gathering on the margins of the Deaf world.



Figure 6



Figure 7

LANGUAGE

Migration is often associated with learning a new language, or at least new connotations for familiar words and phrases. Learning sign language and about how deaf children acquire language provided me with new insights into the relationship between language and speech.

Access to New Zealand Sign Language and learning a new language

From the perspective of migration theory NZSL is not an alternative to hearing aids or cochlear implants. This view diverges from the medical view that, at least in the past, has seen cochlear implants as positive substitutes for sign language. Hearing parents and deaf children need access to NZSL no matter what hearing aid technology they use. It is an essential part of the new world to which we are migrating.

Erica and I were lucky because when we finally started learning a sign language there was acceptance that it should be New Zealand Sign Language and not signed English. Even though parents of deaf children get together it is hard to maintain the NZSL that we learn. Some parents have changed their jobs, becoming teacher aids and teachers of the deaf, as a way of maintaining their language competence. Although parents and children may start off learning NZSL together, eventually our children overtake us. Like the children of other immigrants they learn the new language quicker and become translators and interpreters for us. (For the implications of this for children of Deaf adults, see Walton this volume.)

Erica is mainstreamed at school. People were worried that as she learnt to sign she would give up speaking. The exact opposite happened: the more language she has learnt, whether it is English or NZSL, the faster she has progressed.

Language and Speech

Erica speaks to hearing people even if we sign to her. The quality of Erica's speech leads to complications: listeners think that she can hear at the same level of competence as she can speak; they think that she has learnt her language in the same way that hearing children do. However, Erica's first encounter with language was the experience of lip-reading. For deaf children speech and language are very different experiences. When Erica brought her spelling list home from primary school the first task was pronunciation – how to shape the words in her mouth. Once she was confident with the pronun-

ciation we added the NZSL sign if there was one. Next we learned to finger spell the words. We practiced writing and spelling the words. And finally, we talked about the meaning of the words, and wrote and signed sentences. The language she knows was taught using a combination of lip-reading, NZSL, listening, reading and speech therapy.

SUCCESS STORIES

The success stories that Samoan families told in the 1970s were about young people who had fulfilled the expectation that they could achieve academically and become at least bilingual and bicultural, if not citizens of the world. Bonisch-Brednich (2002) describes how German migrants construct ready-made success stories to justify to themselves and those they have left behind that migrating to New Zealand was the right decision. When hearing parents of deaf children construct 'ready-made' success stories, they often include descriptions of events that frustrate their efforts to support their children, like the story about Erica's verification and the audit of the verification. We are often thwarted in our attempts to access the resources that our children need to become bilingual and bicultural. Our success stories describe the great lengths parents will go to in seeking the best for their children.

Recently I met with one of Erica's teachers who had taught deaf children in Britain. She said that she had never come across a deaf child like Erica – so confident, self-assured and academic. She asked me how this had happened. I am often asked about this, and I reply with a ready-made story about how Erica has never been treated as disabled. From the beginning she has been treated as culturally different and her difference celebrated. Her educational achievement has always been seen as crucial to her ability to become bilingual and bicultural. We, her family, celebrate our ability to communicate successfully with Erica and to maintain a good relationship with her. The whole family celebrates her achievements whether or not they have migrated towards the Deaf world. At the same time there is an element of justification in our success stories. We want to justify our parenting decisions to the professional educators of deaf children, many of whom still seem caught up in educational paradigms that do not recognise sign language as equal to any other language in terms of realising bilingual competence. They still seem to see NZSL as a language of last resort for deaf children rather than their human right. (For further discussion of this phenomenon, see McKee this volume.)

Hearing parents come from so many different backgrounds to navigate world shattering decisions. As a group we tend to support each other's stories even

when the decisions we make result in stories that diverge from one another. Our success stories are the ones that we make and that are right for us even when they add further diversity to our collective story.

Children are well-educated

One of our success stories is about how, with teacher support/teacher aid and ITOD, Erica has achieved academically. Despite the fact that Erica did not learn to talk until she was five, in 2005 she is in Year 11, aged fifteen years. On occasion she tops her class for a written assignment and she no longer fails maths tests. She is achieving above average for her age and planning her tertiary education. She speaks clearly in English and is fluent in NZSL.

Parents are actively pursuing success for their children

I am often asked to explain Erica's achievement, and consequently I have a 'ready-made' story about this. I have actively pursued success for Erica, making decisions informed by migration theory. I have joined the Wellington Association for Deaf Children, becoming President of this association, and getting elected to the executive committee of the New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children. I am also a regional parent representative on the van Asch Deaf Education Centre's Board of Trustees. In one way my cultural identity as a hearing parent of a deaf child is signified in these memberships. Such memberships have made a significant difference to Erica's achievement insofar as I know what resources are available and how to access them. Equally important are the stories I have told and retold in the process of making new friends.

Migration theory has helped me to think about what we needed to ensure Erica's success. Our family worked as a team to make Erica's life full of interesting experiences to make up for her lack of peripheral learning, and we began to see our world through her eyes. The IEP team worked as a team, and Erica has always been a member of it. I used the itinerant teacher of the deaf as a resource to teach me how to teach Erica the things she did not learn in school. It helped that I am a trained teacher. It did not help that this re-teaching happened when Erica came home from school and I came home from my full-time employment.

Children participate successfully in Deaf and hearing worlds

I have arranged opportunities for Erica to learn NZSL and Deaf culture during school hours, taken her to events that are important in the history of Deaf

culture in New Zealand, and regularly invited Deaf people into our home. I have shown her that I value this Deaf world that we have migrated towards. See for instance Figure 8, the photograph of us in the crowd taken on the steps of parliament following the first reading of the NZSL Bill on June 22, 2004.



Figure 8

The Wellington Association for Deaf Children and the New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children have been crucial. These are groups where parents can talk about our experiences and can be supported. They are places where we are able to craft stories about what it means to be a hearing parent of a deaf child. These stories are different from individual parents' stories used to support professional agendas such as newborn hearing screening or other selected topics (see for instance Nikki MacDonald's article in the *Dominion Post* for Monday, July 12, 2004 entitled 'Catch the Sound of Silence'). They are stories parents only tell to other parents, and which are rarely heard, yet they help create our unique cultural position.

The importance of the New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children results from the role that the member associations play in providing a landing place for families who have embarked on a journey towards the Deaf world. It is

often through these groups that parents meet adult members of Deaf culture. They are perhaps the only places where an identity as a hearing parent of a deaf child is really valued.

We need everyone to understand that hearing parents of deaf children have a collective story that defines our cultural position. We need to understand how this is constructed. It should become a matter of course for parents to be guided to parents' groups so that new parents can decide whether or not they want to participate in the storytelling that creates a safe cultural haven for our children and ourselves, a place from which our children can embark on the final leg of the journey towards a Deaf world, alone, yet confident.

CONCLUSION

This initial exploration of the implications of using migration theory as a framework for constructing Erica's and my story has been very productive. We began our migration in 1992, and so our story relates to a period when NZSL was beginning to be accepted as a language and was accessible to some parents. KIT days were established and Deaf mentors were introduced, thereby increasing the pathways for hearing parents and their deaf children to journey towards the Deaf world. The parents' groups were well established. A national plan for deaf education had provided forums for Deaf people, professional educators of deaf children and parents to identify our different positions, to argue about them and to begin working together in spite of them. Particularly it has helped me to identify more clearly the cultural position of hearing parents in relationship to the Deaf world. I suggest that this relationship is different from other hearing people who relate to the Deaf world, such as the professional educators of deaf children.

Migration theory provides a conceptual model that supports hearing parents of deaf children to take an active role in assessing the advice that we receive about appropriate modes of communicating with our children, how to think about hearing aid technology and expectations of educational achievement. Using migration theory as a starting point, storytelling can be used to navigate dangerous liminal spaces created when a diagnosis of our child as deaf or hearing impaired fractures our sense of home. This model indicates the importance of a place to tell stories, and of learning to construct ready-made stories. Telling stories helps hearing parents of deaf children to avoid getting stuck between worlds. Storytelling can be used to construct and celebrate our marginal cultural position and the cultural identities of our children as bilingual and bicultural.

NOTES

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at The Deaf View Conference and published (Laing 2004). It was subsequently revised and added to and presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of Social Anthropology in Aotearoa/New Zealand in December 2004.
- 2 I have previously published under the name of Patricia Kinloch.
- 3 All of the photographs used in this paper have already been published or were taken for the purpose of publication in newsletters.
- 4 For a description of Martha's Vineyard, see Groce 1985.
- 5 An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is prepared for Erica at least every six months. The team comprises the teacher aid/support teacher, itinerant teacher of the deaf, adviser of the deaf, class teacher, parents and child. The plan sets out the learning goals for the next six months based on a review of the previous IEP.
- 6 For an obituary celebrating her life see the New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children's Newsletter March 2004.

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