

Teaching Brothers and Sisters to Use Cued Speech

Harriet Roffe, sister of Simon Roffe, shares her experiences with Cued Speech.

Harriet is six and a half years younger than her brother. Siblings are like yeast in the development of a deaf child who uses Cued Speech.

Facilitator: Tell us about yourself and talk about how you learned Cued Speech.

Harriet Roffe: I'm Simon's younger sister. My mom threw herself into Cued Speech when she learned with Simon. She worked as a CST (Cued Speech transliterator) when Simon went there. When I was four, Simon was in elementary school already. My mom would take me to a lot of school functions and school plays. I had a few friends that were deaf and cued, but I never cued with them. They were my mom's students or my brother's friends. My brother babysat me a lot, so he had his friends over and I would see them cueing to each other.

I went to the first Cued Speech Camp in Maryland. My teacher was a friend of ours, so I looked at it as a way to spend four days with her. That's one of the reasons why I didn't really learn. I went back the following year and I had Tom Shole as my teacher and I was in a class with other people my age. I learned to cue then, but not the real mechanics of cueing that I have learned now, like flicks and liaisons. We were just focused on getting the basics.

My brother is not the most patient person, so after I learned, I had it in my head that I wanted to cue with him. My mom pushed it, but I wanted to do it also. It took me awhile to get fluent. I would practice with my mom before I would have to say something to him because he would look away. He would know what I was trying to say. He would finish my sentence or he just wouldn't pay attention. I got aggravated because I would stand at

the door and shake my hand and he would know I was trying to say “Come eat dinner,” but he wouldn’t look. And he’s eighteen! So I got fast on my own and that surprised him. It helped a lot. It affected our relationship with each other because we could have conversations and he had someone else in the house that cued. So Simon and I could talk to each other and have private conversations.

Now that I am twenty, we have a very different relationship with each other.

***Facilitator:** You wanted to say something about sibs and Cued Speech groups.*

Harriet Roffe: I’m very happy that the community finally realizes that there are siblings that know how to cue. We should tell parents not to forget that you have other kids and that the deaf one shouldn’t get all the attention. You don’t always have to make it such a family effort. The other kids have their own identity and nparents shouldn’t pair that identity with the deaf sibling all the time. If one kid likes something, you shouldn’t force them to like what the deaf one likes. You should try to make them feel wanted. The hearing kids have their own friends as well.

The big difference between my brother and I, that I took advantage of, is that since he can’t hear, he isn’t the biggest music buff. He does like to read and watch movies. So I found music as my thing that he can’t relate to. Since he’s older, he’s done everything first. I had music that I could talk to my parents about and he didn’t really know what I was talking about. He would either go out or read about the latest music artist or whatever. I still feel happy when he comes to me and asks me about a specific person he might have read about in a business magazine. I feel excited that I can tell him about something that he doesn’t know about. When it comes to books I ask him “What’s a good book for me to read on the way to work,” because he knows that stuff.

I get to see movies in the theater before he does; he has to wait until they come out on video for the captioning.

The biggest thing is, don't always drag the kids. I was put into it because my mom is such a big person in the Cued Speech community.

My younger brother doesn't cue. He doesn't want to. That's the big thing, you have to want to. Maybe he will later. He's fourteen – I was eleven when I learned.

Q: As someone who has taught sibs at camps, I've always wondered whether it actually made any difference – if they don't cue at home. I thought home was more important than camp experience, but you think that camp made a difference in your learning?

Harriet Roffe: My mom would try and teach me sitting on her bed and it wasn't such a professional setting. I was used to being with the deaf community because of my brother. At camp I was with a lot of other hearing kids. That made a difference – having kids that could relate to me a little bit. My mom didn't really push it that much. After I went to the second camp I was like “Okay, mom, watch me, I'm going to do the ABCs” or I would watch myself in the mirror cueing slow songs. Camp was nice. I always look at Cued Speech as something that my friends don't know about. When I meet someone, I don't identify myself as someone with a deaf brother. When people find out, they think that I'm keeping a secret. I don't feel that it's so important. He's deaf, but he's not handicapped. He can still do his own thing. He still graduated from New York University (NYU). I know how to cue and I love doing it. I love doing stuff like this (How to Teach Cued Speech Share-Fair) because this is my thing - this is my family, and something we all do. I kind of have two identities. I'm glad I can cue.

Q: Should your mom have tried to teach you formally? Would that have helped you to learn faster, or was it better to be more relaxed and wait for camp?

Harriet Roffe: It was better in camp. I see kids and think that if their parents tried to teach them formally with a book, it wouldn't work. At camp they are with other hearing kids their age who have deaf siblings. When you meet a bunch of other hearing siblings, it's more fun because they can relate to you and you don't have that with your school friends.