

I was introduced to the gospel and baptized during my time as a university student in Washington, D.C. I subsequently served a mission, but toward the end of it, I needed to decide whether to return to school or to go home to Kamloops, British Columbia, where my father and brother lived. Because I am deaf and because I am the only member of the Church in my family, I was worried about finding a place to attend church where I could communicate with my brothers and sisters in the gospel.

I told my mission president my concern, and he was able to get the address of the Vernon British Columbia stake president. I wrote to him and within a few weeks received a reply telling me there was a woman, Sharon Hara, in the Kamloops Second Ward who knew sign language. Sister Hara had learned to sign years earlier as a university student. She had been taught sign language by a woman who served as an interpreter for two deaf sisters in their ward. I later learned that Sister Hara and her husband had also taken two deaf foster children into their home.

I wrote to Sister Hara, who seemed excited to meet me. She even invited me to live with her family. After praying about where to go, I decided to move to British Columbia and live with the Haras.

Soon after my arrival, Sister Hara decided to start sign language classes in her home so other people could communicate with me. I started teaching too, and the class became so well attended that we moved it to the ward meetinghouse. Eventually, we had two separate classes—one for adults and one for children. Later, teaching a sign language class became part of my calling, and we extended the class to the whole community, not just the ward.

I enjoyed teaching the one-hour, weekly classes and did so for almost five years. Several of the class members became proficient enough to serve as interpreters in Sunday School and Relief Society when Sister Hara wasn't available because of other callings. All of us who were involved with the class gained from the experience.

I later moved in with the Davy family, who all learned sign language and also became my close friends. I am now married and live in Alberta, Canada.

Teaching sign language was a challenge for me at times, and I am sure learning sign language was a challenge for others. But I am grateful for their efforts, and I know that being able to communicate with each other is a blessing that has helped us become friends in the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

Signs of Friendship

BY MELINDA
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