

https://dspace.org/

Colour me blue

Naude, Kelly

2019
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29173

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Colour Me Blue.



The History of the Blue Ribbon



Colour Me Blue.

The History of the Blue Ribbon

First published in 2019 by Roots Resources
Printed by ABC Press
ISBN 978-0-6399687-5-9



INTRODUCTION

Why do people wear ribbons?
Not to show sickness.
Not to show disability.
Not to show weakness.
No...
It's to show a determination.
A determination to succeed.
A determination to reach for more.
A determination to persevere despite being ignored, and misunderstood and rejected.

The same goes for the blue ribbon. This ribbon, that has sadly been forgotten will be neglected no longer!

Have a look at the meaning behind the Blue Ribbon, and you will find that you too, will be Coloured Blue!

THE PERSECUTION OF DEAF PEOPLE

It is a little known fact that Deaf people have been victimized throughout history. For as long as has been recorded, Deaf people have incorrectly been regarded as sub-standard.

Many were kept locked away and hidden at home. Most were not allowed to marry, own property or sign legal documents. At one stage, the church believed that the voice was an utterance of the soul. If someone could not speak properly, recite the Bible or sing hymns, then they surely did not have a soul.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, deaf children were thought to be God's punishment on a family or an act of fate, and so were often hidden away in shame.

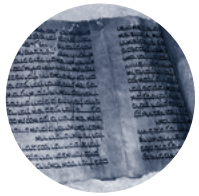


HISTORY OF DEAF PERSECUTION

A brief timeline adapted from Robert Traynor's, 2013 paper *Deafness and the Catholic Church: Historical Perspective.*

1000 BC

Hebrew Law did not allow Deaf people to own property





427-347BC

Plato believed inteligence present at birth. No outward sign of intelligence, therefore no intelligence in Deaf people

384-322BC

Aristotle believed people could not be educated without hearing. Greek was considered the perfect language. Those who could not speak it were Barbarians





384-430AD

St Augustine believed Deafness was a result of the sins of the parents

Middle Ages

Since Deaf people could not listen to or read the Word of God, they could have no faith





1939-1945

Deaf people were persecuted during the Holocaust of WW2

Some terrible facts:

One of the biggest documented cases of Deaf persecution in history was the Holocaust. Deaf people were regarded as genetically sub-human by Hitler, and even before World War 2, he made plans to have them sterilized. School girls were taken without their parents' permission, in order to put an end to their family lines. During World War 2, Hitler managed to pass laws that saw thousands of Deaf people gassed to death, a technique he perfected on Deaf people, and later used on Jews and Gypsies.

Until recently, Deaf people were not recognized as victims of the Holocaust, as the German state still considered forced sterilization to be a case of following the law, and not one of cultural persecution.

Scholars have been studying the Deaf community during the holocaust and now recognize Deaf people as victims of the Holocaust. Something that places the Deaf community as being equally important as the hearing victims. As a culture that was oppressed.



FROM THESE DARK PLACES

"From the depths of despair and murkiness of misunderstanding, a People managed to stand firm." Kelly Naude

Deaf people the world over continued to fight for their rights, to be included in society, to be educated and use their own language. Hearing people who understood the needs and rights of the Deaf Community stepped up and advocated for them where they could, and through inventive advances in Deaf education, perceptions about deafness began to change.

A professor at Gallaudet University in the United States of America, William Stokoe, studied Deaf people and how they communicated, and his research led to a world-wide recognition that Signed languages are, in fact, real languages. This information became widely known from the late 1970s and is still used today as it impacts psychology, anthropology, theoretical linguistics and philosophy.

In our time, we now live in a world that recognises that Deaf people are 'normal' and that they are allowed to, and have the right to, participate in and contribute to an inclusive society.

In our time, Deaf Culture is an acceptable and understood term, not by all, but by many. Deaf communities thrive and Sign Languages are used the world over.

From these dark places, Deaf people have risen into the light and demonstrated a brilliant, deep, rich, sustainable and poetic culture that makes them a united People.

In the 1990s, some Deaf activists, including Paddy Ladd, felt that something was lacking. Yes, they had a rich history. Yes, they had activists who had achieved a great deal. Yes, they had a public language and access to services, information and entertainment. But what some felt was lacking was an element of spirituality.

In times of need, people look to spiritualism to lift their hearts and souls. As Paddy Ladd explains in his explanation of the Ceremony, Spiritualism gives people hope, a sense of belonging and allows us to set our sights higher than our current situation. Spiritualism unites.

And so, the Blue Ribbon Ceremony was created.

HISTORY OF THE BLUE RIBBON CEREMONY

The ceremony of the Blue Ribbon was first performed in 1998, at the FDP literary Conference in Blackburn. Permission was granted for the purely Signed ceremony to be performed and it was received well. It was next performed at the WFD Congress in Brisbane, in 1999, and was watched by thousands of Deaf and hearing people from around the world.

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is a non-governmental body that acts as an association for Deaf people. The focus is on Deaf people who use Sign Language as their primary method of communication.

Created by Dr. Paddy Ladd, the ceremony was designed to give Deaf people an appreciation for their spiritual place in the world. Something to hold on to and look to, in times of darkness. Here is a part of the explanation Dr. Ladd gave about the ceremony, transcribed and adapted from BSL:

"The blue ribbon is important for us as the Deaf community. In the same way, if you look at Aboriginal or the Native American culture, they have spiritualism in their traditions. When life was hard, they managed to look at these and generate strength from within. And if you look at the 1960s Black Civil Rights movement in the USA, for example, they had some very strong links to spiritualistic beliefs. The image and the vision of Dr. Martin Luther King going to jail and the people outside with candles, singing, and the people inside the jail singing, joining each other. There was something empowering about that whole process. With the Deaf experience, we didn't have an equivalent. And really, the notion from that, I guess, is that there is an understanding of celebration, of actually looking at our roots and where our spiritualism comes from. Blue comes from the colour that the Nazis gave to Deaf detainees in concentration camps, and so it came to me from above."

Dorothy Miles was an American Deaf poet and activist, 1931-1993

For some, the idea of adopting a ribbon for Deafness, seemed to be adopting the idea that Deafness is a disability or sickness, something to be fixed. However the organizers persevered, believing that the ribbon would help give a sense of togetherness and a visual representation of not only the history of Deaf people, but the strength to overcome, persevere and thrive going forward.

As with the ribbon campaigns for breast cancer (pink), AIDS (red), and so on, these ribbons represent healing, solidarity and strength. Since blue was the colour given to the Deaf in times of oppression, it made sense that it should be used as a symbol of overcoming that oppression too.



THE BLUE RIBBON CEREMONY

The Blue Ribbon Ceremony, written by Paddy Ladd, is in a script format and presented as a drama. The script format enables future generations to use it and adapt it to suit specific needs and circumstances going forward.

Scene
A large auditorium. Interpreters are asked to step down. Lights are dimmed and 7 figures holding candles enter the hall. They take their place on the stage, standing in a semi-circle. When it is their turn to address the crowd, they step into the middle. When they are done, they return to the semi-circle. Each narrator has translated their piece from written English to International Sign Language.

Narrator One
We are gathered here this week to celebrate our Deaf lives and communities. To bear witness to what is in front of our eyes here – Deaf people from every part of the world, of all ages and colours – this diversity joined in unity. And we celebrate our survival. Despite adversity and oppression we are still here and stronger than before.

But let us remember that we are meant to be here, alive as a part of the rainbow diversity of the human race. And today, let us remember that many of us and our ancestors have suffered at the hands of those who believe we should not be here. We are here to remember them too.

Narrator Two
We remember those Deaf people who were placed in mental hospitals simply because they were Deaf and then were left neglected without communication at all for the rest of their lives.

And we remember, too, those Deaf people who were experimented on to try make us into hearing people - a practice which you all know has reared it's head once more, gathering steam by the day, so that somewhere in the world at this very moment, a Deaf child is being experimented on.

Narrator Three
We remember those Deaf people who were victims of Oralism* in their education, denied their sign languages and Deaf teachers and forced instead to attempt only to hear and to speak, as indeed, has happened to most of us here. And we remember those who were brainwashed into fearing contact with their Deaf communities, who, rejecting them, tried to fit into the hearing world as a hearing person, and failing, spent and still spend the rest of their lives in isolation.

**The Oralism referred to here is that of children being forced to speak and not being given a choice.*

We remember the constant attempts to either eliminate us or prevent us from being born, by not allowing Deaf people to marry each other, or through enforced sterilization. We are all too aware that this spectre has

not vanished with the Nazis, but has gained new life through the immoral glamour of genetic engineering.

Narrator Four
We remember those deaf people who were divided from their families because of Oralism. We remember the suffering of all of our hearing parents, brainwashed and confused, unable to communicate with their own Deaf children.

And we remember our own hearing children, who suffered the daily oppression that comes with being members of a Deaf family. We remember how the responsibility of interpreting for their parents led them into having to grow up too quickly, into a world which does not recognize their own identity.

Narrator Five
But we are meant to be here! We offer the world the example we set as Deaf citizens of the world. Our sign languages communicate right across the Earth, over the borders of the petty nationalisms. We show that all races can unite as equals.

Our beautiful sign languages enrich the entire world with new ways of seeing and being. We inspire those who lose their hearing to know that being deaf need not be the end of the world. We take joy in our Deafhood, and we are strong and positive as Deaf people.

Narrator Six
These experiences and beliefs have come together in the symbol of the Blue Ribbon. The ribbon itself represents remembrance of those who have suffered oppression. And blue was the colour given to Deaf people by the Nazis. We encourage all who bear the ribbon home to spread it's message around the world, in your own ways, in your own clubs, in your own schools. Take this message to the hearing media that it may spread more rapidly.

continued...

To wear the Blue Ribbon is to pledge yourselves not only to the memory of those who have suffered, but to those who are still suffering today. And it is to pledge yourselves to fight to end that oppression now for all the world's Deaf children and the others still to come.

The Last Scene:
When all the narrators have addressed the crowd, they form a tight semi-circle near the front of the stage, with a Deaf child at the centre. They look at the child and then back at the audience. They all file off stage. The lights are turned back on.

Text of the Blue Ribbon Ceremony: XIII World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf, Brisbane, Australia, July 25-31, 1999

Watch the original 1999 performance of the Ceremony: www.joeybaer.com/blue-ribbon-ceremony-video-1999/





COLOUR ME BLUE

In today's world, we are very fortunate to have access to so much information, education, news and entertainment. The Deaf people of today also have more opportunities than those that came before, with technology, interpreters and a better understanding of the needs of their community.

Although conditions are better, let us not become slack in our endeavour to improve our understanding and willingness to go deeper into accepting the Deaf as a community of people sharing a unique and spectacular culture and language.

As you reach into the Deaf world, hold on to the colour blue. May it remind you that Deaf people have struggled and overcome more than we know. May you be inspired to delve deeper and enjoy all that this beautiful, expressive and rich culture has to offer.



Practical ways that you can get involved in the Deaf community

- Learn Sign Language
- Attend socials
- Volunteer at schools for the Deaf when they have events
- Respect parents of deaf children and the choices they make
- Get involved in early intervention
- Can you think of any others? Why not start today?

Some Interesting Resources

- The Wits Centre for Deaf Studies (CFDS): Deaf Education Training and short courses
- HI HOPES: Family support and Early Intervention
- THRIVE: Parent-Led parent support group
- Roots Resources: Resources for and about the Deaf
- EYEBUZZ: South African Deaf driven initiative with a focus to bring you everything Deaf related through photography and filmmaking
- DEAFSA: Deaf Federation of South Africa
- SANDA: South African National Deaf Association
- eDeaf: Organization providing Deaf skills development training and employment/recruitment support for both Deaf employees and their employers
- Hearing Girl Signs: YouTube Channel, Facebook page and Instagram account, with variety show in Sign Language and general information around Deafness
- News in Sign: found on the Hearing Girl Signs YouTube channel. Week day news in SASL
- My Silent Hands: Instagram account by a Deaf person, for and about Deaf issues
- We Love Sign Language: Facebook page, based in America
- RealSASL: Facebook page
- Language First: Facebook page about Sign Language

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A Narration of my own

Since the Blue Ribbon Ceremony was written to be adapted, here is my own narration, regarding deaf or hard-of-hearing children and their families.

We remember those deaf children who are given to hearing families. Who's attempts at communication go silent, not because of a lack of love or willingness to understand, but because their parents do not yet know how.

We offer love, support, education and partnership to these families and know that they are capable of achieving a loving and unbreakable bond with their child. We display patience, unbiased support and ongoing companionship as they navigate this new terrain with their deaf child.

May families come together in love and understanding. May children and parents learn to communicate using a rich and rewarding language that matches the needs of the child and family unit. May all deaf children, the world over, be given exactly what they need, in a way that they can use it to it's fullest.

And may we all be.... Coloured Blue.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kelly Naude is the national leader of the Deaf Friends programme of HI HOPES, South Africa. She has been involved in the Deaf world and Deaf Education since 2001. She is a fluent Signer and enjoys learning more about Deaf Culture. She launched News in Sign, in 2019. She is a teacher for the Deaf and is currently teaching grade 3 at Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf. She lives with her life partner and beautiful twin daughters.

References

- Blue ribbon ceremony: www.deafhood.com
- The Other Victims of the Nazis, Ina R. Friedman: www.socialstudies.org
- Quora: Michelle Westfall, 2017
- Deaf People in Hitler's Europe, Donna F. Ryan and John S. Schuman, Editors, Gupress.gallaudet.edu, 2002
- Forgotten Crimes: Suzanne E. Evans, 2004
- Introduction to Crying Hands: Henry Friedlander
- Crying Hands: Horst Biesold
- The Borgen Project: Deafness in Sub-Saharan Africa
- The Centre for Deaf Studies: Study Web


ROOTS RESOURCES · ROOTS RESOURCES ·