

# **A Life After Deafness**

**- a novel -**

by  
**George B. Joslin**

## **Other Works by George B. Joslin**

**Manual for Work with the Deaf**, 1966  
**Let's Sign**, ASL textbook, 1983  
**Religious Sign Language Vocabulary**, videotape, 1984  
**Let's Sign, Year 2**, church interpreting textbook, 1984  
**Mini-Signs**, 10 lesson ASL introduction, 1985  
**Signs of Faith**, devotional booklet, 1985  
**How to Have a Deaf Ministry in Your Church**, video, 1985  
**Stories from Gina**, ASL textbook, 1987  
**Amplified Sign Language Dictionary**, with Randy Cash, 1991  
**iDEAFile**, a "how to" book for churches, editor, 2000  
**ASL Hymnal**, editor, 2004  
**History of the Missouri Baptist Conference of the Deaf**, 2004  
**Exploring the Bible**, quarterly Bible study for the Deaf for LifeWay  
Church Resources, writer/editor, 1998-current

This is a work of fiction. The town of Red Bluff and Jones County, Missouri do not exist except in the author's mind. The author will be pleased if the characters seem real, but they are only figments of the author's imagination, based on years of contact with many Deaf people. All rights reserved. No part of this book shall be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without written permission from the author. (gbj)

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for encouragement, proofreading, and patience!

And, to many **Deaf friends** I have known through the  
years. Their characteristics became the kernels of truth  
within this work of fiction.

# Foreword

by Judi Barker

With **A Life After Deafness**, George Joslin has captured the heart and soul of a small population of Deaf friends in a fictional town in Missouri. He leads us through many cultural situations while keeping us captured in the mystery and intrigue of the plot. George draws from his background of almost fifty years of professional experience with Deaf people. The many instructional situations in this work of fiction make it a “must read” for anyone interested in working with Deaf people. It will be a good companion book for any text books in an interpreting program or ASL curriculum.

I first began learning ASL and meeting deaf people in 1979. At that time, I was encouraged to read the book, **In This Sign** by Joanne Greenberg. This was also a work of fiction that presented much insight into Deaf culture. While Greenberg focused on one family, George gives us a cross section of a Deaf community. **A Life After Deafness** introduces the reader to about fifty individual Deaf persons, covering significant events over a period of about thirty years. The book ends with a presentation of the new technology Deaf people have access to now.

In teaching ASL classes, I have referred my pupils to older books to help in understanding Deaf culture. I am thrilled now to have an updated work that is easy reading as well as informative. It has been my pleasure to read this book and my honor to recommend the book to all who want to understand the Deaf community better.

(**Judi Barker** - RID and Missouri certified/licensed Interpreter. Member of the Board of Certification of Interpreters for Missouri since 2003. Visual Communication Specialist for Special School District, St. Louis County since 1980. Deaf Field Consultant for Missouri Baptist Convention since 1985. Workshop presenter and American Sign Language teacher for twenty years in local and national settings.)

# Preface

by Rick Snider, your host and narrator

**Welcome to my Deaf world!** People who have no experience with the Deaf world might think it impossible to have a life if they could not hear. They are wrong. We have a life after deafness. A full and meaningful life.

In this book, you will meet many of my friends. Four of them are very special.

**Anna Karchmer** is our heroine. Most of the story revolves around her. She is not a “typical” Deaf person. No one is “typical.” You have probably known many Deaf people similar to Anna, but none just like her.

**Marty Taylor** is the levelheaded businesswoman with a creative mind. A peacemaker. A friend who can know your greatest secret and never share it.

**Fredrick Aumon Bastrop, BS, MS, PhD, EdD** is like me only in that we are of the “older generation.” We enjoy talking about the “old days.” He is a retired educator who continues to educate everyone who talks with him.

**Robert “Bob” Steward** enters the story later than these three, but he becomes important, especially to Anna. A Deaf son of Deaf parents, he brings a unique perspective to every situation.

And then there is me, **Richard Bernard Snider, PhD**, retired rehabilitation counselor and evaluator trying to become an author. I am a writer now -- I want to be an author. You don't know the difference between a writer and an author? An author is able to sell what he writes!

We live and work in the little **town of Red Bluff, in Jones County, Missouri**. On your map, it will be half way between Jefferson City and Versailles on state highway 78.

It is highly possible that your map will not show this town, but it exists, at least within this story!

With us from time to time are other Deaf folks and some hearing friends and interpreters. The Deaf people you will meet are not real, but they act like real people. They are good and bad, smart and not so smart. You may not be able to remember all their names, but you will learn from them about their unique language and their distinctive Deaf culture.

Those of us who make up the “story” are all fictitious, of course. But our experiences, our cultural values, and our equipment for coping with deafness, are all real. The meetings and experiences are based on reality. Statements of fact about deafness, sign language, and assistive devices are valid, based on the author’s best research efforts.

**Miss Deaf Missouri** and **Miss Deaf America** are real people, as are the Deaf actresses. So is the excellent ASL teacher in Springfield, MO, **Jane Ross**. **Ben Soukup** from South Dakota is a real person, but he may not have spoken at that particular meeting in Missouri.

On the other hand, even the fictitious characters are based somewhat on real people -- a bit from here, a bit from there, until they almost seem to be people you have met! For example, Fred Bastrop is a fictional character, but you may have met one or more of the many Deaf gentlemen who have some of his fine characteristics.

Every day life of a group of Deaf people who interact with one another and with the hearing community. They experience various problems, **including a murder!** Who did it?

Thank you for joining me in this experience.

**Rick Snider**, your host and narrator

## Cast of Characters

(Those who appear more than one time in the story, in addition to the main players listed in the Preface.)

Two hearing ASL students, not named  
Rosita Flores, clerk at Busy Bee store  
Lucian K. Frost, III, “Luke,” defense attorney and friend  
Jackie Gooch, hard of hearing, a little slow, loveable  
Helen Kimball, interpreter  
Michael P. Martin, owns Martin’s Clothing Store  
Evelyn Martin, Michael’s daughter-in-law and clerk in his store  
Charles Maxwell, Jr., “Chuck,” age 14, Anna’s friend  
Janine Moore, owner of Keyboards & Moore  
Irma North, interpreter referral business in Jefferson City  
Mr. and Mrs. Placer, older Deaf. He is the “fixer.”  
Delbert Quinn, clerk at Martin’s store  
Roxanne Ramsey, leader in the Deaf community  
Freddy Stone, has limited English, occasional peddler  
Hector Vickery, troublemaker  
John V. Williams, John the suit man, at Martin’s store  
Judi Whitman, works at the bank, Marty’s friend

### **And some *real* people:**

**Kevin Babin**, Minister and Interpreter, Springfield, MO  
**Clifford Bruffey**, former Deaf chaplain at Gallaudet Univ.  
**Matt Gwynn**, Sprint representative for RelayMO  
**Jane Ross**, ASL teacher in Springfield, MO

### **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to

金雁凌

**Precious granddaughter.**



# 1. Stranger at my Door

April 1997

I had just stretched out in my recliner. Beside me was a hot cup of Sleepy Time tea with a dab of honey. Then, the door light flashed. I looked at my watch - 9:16 p.m. Instead of a door “bell” I have a door “light” because with my hearing loss I need to “see” the doorbell.

I hate that door light. Too often, especially at night, someone wants to sell me something, and since I live in a silent world I have little idea of what he is trying to say. Lip reading is mostly guesswork and the porch light is usually too dim for me to read their lips. It seems to me they all need lessons on proper diction. Nevertheless, my curiosity is stronger than my aversion to strangers, so I went to the door ready to shake my head, point to my ears, and slowly, politely, close the door. However, this was no salesman. This was no kid trying to raise money for the school band.

The waif standing there looked so forlorn I immediately thought I should take her in and feed her some graham crackers and milk. Her clothes looked like rejects from the local welfare thrift store. What I could see of her hair that showed from under the grimy baseball cap looked like a wig that had gone through the washing machine and left out to dry. The laces of her long-ago-white shoes were dragging behind her.

Most of my attention went immediately to her hands. They were moving rapidly in front of her as if she were swatting flies. No, she was signing. She was Deaf. And since I lost my hearing and learned American Sign Language many years ago, I could communicate with this stranger easily.

“Hello,” she signed. “My name A-n-n-a. M said you maybe help me?” She was so scared she barely moved her hands, but I understood clearly) The “M” handshape was placed at her right cheek, and I knew that to be the “sign name” for my good friend, Marty Taylor.

Marty also is Deaf. Has been all her life. She owns a little shop in town where she performs fantastic alterations on women’s dresses. Women come in with a \$200.00 dress that once was stylish, used to fit, and made them feel like a lady. Now they have gained a pound or ten, styles have changed, and it looks like 200 dollars worth of dowdiness. Marty transforms the garment into something that looks like it came from the latest fashion magazine. She does the same for men’s suits that have “shrunk” because the owner has increased his hand-to-mouth interaction and reduced the amount of foot-to-pavement activity.

Marty has sent Deaf people to me in the past, asking favors, often looking for advice about jobs or business. This straggler looked like she had been on the streets for a month.

“My name R-i-c-k,” I signed back. I made an “R” handshape with my right hand and touched it to the inside of my left wrist. “Come in,” I signed with a quick movement of my palm. At the first recognition of my signing, her eyes lit up. Out of the haze of perplexity, her smile grew like the sun breaking through the clouds.

“How can I help you?” I said, as she dropped her ratty backpack on the nearest chair.

“Me A-n-n-a,” she fingerspelled again so I would be sure to understand. “Sign A” (placing the “A” handshape at her right temple.)

We had quickly dispatched with the first exchange of information when two Deaf people meet. We now knew

how to spell each other's first name, and we had established our sign names.

Sign names are somewhat like nicknames. It is not a signed equivalent of that name, but an identifier for that individual. Most sign names include an initial from the first or last name. The handshape is placed at one of several locations on the body -- the temple, the cheek, the chin, the opposite shoulder, the chest, the forearm, or the wrist. Traditionally, Deaf people have used either the initial or a descriptor, but not both. More recently, the sign name may incorporate some characteristic of that person such as long hair, glasses, occupation, or some other descriptor. A person does not choose his own sign name. The Deaf community in which he is involved bestows it on him.

This night, having established our names and sign names, we were ready to proceed with our conversation in American Sign Language.

"Many problems." Anna said. "Many problems, me. Need help now."

I could see that. She looked like a shopping list of "help needed."

"Wait," I signed, waving my right open palm slowly before her. "You hungry?"

This seemed to startle her, but somehow, I sensed her immediate needs were basic. What was it we learned in Sociology 101? Food. Shelter. Safety. It was obvious she needed at least the first two and more than likely the third as well. (*Rick, the licensed, but retired, rehabilitation counselor, ready to swing his sword of "solutions" and defeat the dragon of despair.*)

Her answer was expressed with upraised eyebrows and a slight circular movement of her right palm across her chest, politely saying, "Please?" ASL is not limited to signs and fingerspelling. The eyebrows add significantly to the

context of the signs. In this case, the raised eyebrows added a big question mark to the sign “please?”

“T?” I signed with my own upraised eyebrows. The “T” moved back and forth very briefly. It is one of several signs for toilet or restroom or, in this case, a verb question equivalent to “do you need to freshen up?” I pointed to the hallway, with all of my fingers extended, and then bending to left – showing her where to freshen up. Deaf people give directions with the whole hand, not just the “pointer.” The index finger points to an object or person as an all-purpose pronoun -- he, it, those, you, me.

As I looked quickly into the refrigerator for something to feed her, I pondered the situation. What would her story be? Another Deaf kid who dropped out of school with no skills, no job, no money, and no ambition? Or is she a victim of abuse? From whom? Boyfriend? Parents? Husband? Or would she be one of those unfortunates displaced from the residential rolls of a mental health facility to become part of the undocumented statistics identified as “street people?”

My culinary skills aren’t the best, but I can put together a decent meal when I try. This time, however, I just grabbed four slices of bread and some sliced ham, added a couple slices of tomato, some lettuce, and mayo. She came into my kitchen and looked at those ham sandwiches as if they were the crown jewels. She ate one before I could get her to sit down at the table. Meanwhile I had poured a glass of milk for each of us. (*Rick, the fast-food expert.*)

“Now, tell me what’s up,” I said. “What’s up” is an American Sign Language idiom based on the sign for “excite.” Sometimes, however, what’s up is not very exciting. Unfortunately, tonight looked like it was going to be one of those less exciting times.

Anna began signing hesitantly and picked up momentum as she realized that not only could I understand her, but also that maybe I even cared. She anticipated my questions and answered before I could ask. I got the feeling she may have rehearsed this litany in case she needed to explain herself. Typical of many Deaf people she looked away from me as she signed her story. This seems to be an effective way of warding off any interruption.

It was a long story, but the gist of it was that she was from St. Louis. She had run away from a domineering mother and father. She had a rental car outside and she did not know what to do with it. No, her parents do not know where she is. She did not leave them a note or tell any of their friends where she was going. She was afraid her father would have the police looking for her.

“Drugs, you?” I signed.

Anna looked at me for few seconds to sense my meaning. Was I accusing her or just asking a straightforward question. With an emphatic, “No,” she proclaimed she did not do drugs.

“Not trouble with police any, me.” She just got tired of being kept at home by her parents. “Now,” she signed, “I independent!” (*Yeah, independent from her parents but with no idea of what to do next.*)

I could sense an even longer story about to develop. It would be typically chronological, with no detail omitted and many details repeated several times. As a vocational counselor, I had learned through hundreds of client interviews to ask enough questions to get all the details cleared up. Too often, I would ask questions wanting a one-word answer and get paragraphs of more than I ever wanted to know. However, the hour was late, and I wanted to bring this discussion to some kind of a recess until we had more

time. (*Rick, usually the kindly listener, who tonight was growing impatient!*)

“Wait,” I demanded again, almost interjecting my hand between the two arms moving before me like a policeman stopping traffic. “Car first. We must take car to airport. Can go now,” I added as I looked at my watch. It was just a few minutes past ten and the car rental desks did not close until midnight. The airport was just a forty-minute drive from my home.

“Tomorrow?” Anna signed with just her right eyebrow raised. “Tired, me.” When she signed, “tired,” she let her hands drop almost to the floor on both sides of her chair. “Exhausted.”

We discussed this for a few minutes and she showed me the car. It was full of clothes and “stuff.” We finally decided to put the rental car into my garage and take it to the airport very early the next morning. The rental slip indicated she had two more days left on the contract.

“You want me get your things from car?” I asked and received a warm smile and, “Yes, thank you.”

Anna seemed to have assumed from the first moment that she could stay at my house. I was amazed at her openness and her willingness to trust me. I reasoned that there were two or three factors involved in that. First, Marty sent her to me and she trusted Marty. I could communicate with her in ASL so I knew something about Deaf people. I was seventy years old to her early 20s. And, as I learned later, she felt she was out of any other options. She hoped I could help her and that hope translated into trust.

I surprised myself in that I did not try to find her a place to spend the night other than in my house. Though I had plenty of room and lived alone, I was not in the habit of “taking in strangers.” But that is what I did.

I showed her to the guest room and the shower, and gave her an oversized tee shirt to sleep in. I told her I would take care of the car. I figured that was a quick ten-minute job.

Upon closer inspection, Anna's car looked like she had lived in it for weeks! According to the rental slip in the glove box, it had only been four days. She had told the truth about St. Louis. At least that is where she got the car. She had her real name on the contract and possibly her correct address since they would have demanded to see her license. She had paid cash for it, for a week, so she would not owe any additional money if we waited until morning to return it. I moved my nearly new Dodge Ram 1500 (red, 4x4, with club cab!) pickup truck out of the garage and parked her white Chevrolet Cavalier with rental plates inside where neither the cops nor my curious neighbors would notice it. Also, it would be easier to empty the car of her belongings before returning the rental.

Maybe I was not as ready to trust her, as she was to trust me. I did not send her away as I might have done. She had touched my compassion button quickly and I could not bring myself to frustrate her further. (*Rick, always a sucker for a damsel in distress!*) I invited her into my home. I fed her. I offered her a place to sleep. Perhaps I based my lack of complete trust on many years of experience dealing with people. Such experience can tend to make a person cynical!

Anna said, "thank you" when I asked if she wanted me to empty her car. With that encouragement (*and my natural bent toward ~~inquisitiveness~~ snooping*) I went to work on her car. I pulled a small garbage can over to the car and as I took out her sacks and boxes of things, I dumped the fast food containers into the trash and empty plastic soda bottles into the recycle box. Thirty minutes later, I went into the house. All of her things were now stacked along the garage

wall – thirteen plastic grocery bags, two cardboard boxes containing who knows what, her junky computer with its attending peripherals, and a laundry basket full of clothes that appeared to be greatly soiled, and most in need of repair. The computer did not seem compatible with the condition of the clothes. *(There must be more of the story to explain this contrast.)*

Back inside the house, I discovered my unexpected houseguest had made quick work of the shower, leaving a trail of cast-off clothing inside the guest bedroom door. She had sprawled onto the bed, leaving the light on and the door open. *(There is that trust level, again. No chair propped against the door as she surely had seen in dozens of movies.)* She had pulled a blanket over her before she was off to dreamland. I moved her feet up onto the bed, spread the blanket more fully over her, and turned out the light. In case she woke up, I left the door ajar and a nightlight in the bathroom across the hall.

Now what do I do? It is past ten on a Monday night. I have a most unusual houseguest who obviously brought more than her computer and soiled clothing with her. She probably brought enough problems to keep several professionals busy for months.

In my rehabilitation counseling experience, I had determined that with a little advice and encouragement, most people can do most things for themselves. However, there are times when their situation is like that of a man with his car in the ditch. At that moment, he does not need a lecture on how to drive on ice. That can come later. Right now, he needs help to get out of the ditch.

In my work as vocational counselor I had applied that philosophy to clients who came to see me. If it was after five p.m. and my client was hungry, I might give him a five-dollar bill and show him where he could get a free



room at the Salvation Army. Then tell him where to show up the next morning for a “day” job -- the kind where a person can work at various jobs and get paid daily. The next evening, when he came to see me, I would start to talk with him about finding a job, getting training, or whatever was appropriate for him.

Anna seemed to me to be in a ditch. Her first need was to get rid of that car because it could become a huge liability in terms of dollars, parental pursuit, or whatever. Then we would be ready to talk about “what’s next.” I was willing to help her elude her domineering parents, as long as she was telling me the truth. Her situation, unfortunately, was not unique. Well meaning parents often stifled their Deaf child’s opportunities for independence.

First, a little housekeeping. Before I closed her door, I gathered up her scattered clothes and decided the best place for them was the washing machine. The clothes looked like they came from several people, not from the body of one individual. Her blue jeans were worn out at the knee (*stylish!*), but were pinned in the back to make the waist small enough. Her outer shirt was a man’s flannel, with the sleeves rolled up. Under that, she had worn a T-shirt with a beer logo, pulled apart at the seam under the arm, and stained like a sampling of a cafeteria menu.

Her coat was on the chair in the living room. It was heavy, also dirty, and obviously too large since she had turned the sleeves up, inside.

Still concerned about the implications of housing this intriguing guest, I took the liberty of examining her pockets. The coat revealed some used tissue (*into the wastebasket*) a crumpled one-dollar bill (*onto the table*), two cough drops (*wastebasket*), and a ballpoint pen that didn’t work. (*Clunk, into the trash.*) In her pants pocket she had some loose change (*total 64 cents*), lip-balm, and

finally – a wallet. Her driver’s license showed she had told the truth to me as well as the car rental folks. She had a card that read, “I am Deaf.” There was a picture of a boy about thirteen or so, sitting at a computer. On the back, it said, “Chuck.” Another forty-three dollars and some other identification cards, and that was it.

All I knew from this inventory was that she is Anna Marie Karchmer, age 22, with a social security number and a street address in Ellisville, Missouri. She is 5 feet, 4 inches tall, blue eyes, blond hair, and apparently brought no drugs with her.

Well, she could not put those clothes back on her clean body tomorrow morning, so I dumped them – coat, shirt, jeans, and underwear, all together in the washer. No need to read the labels about washing instructions. These items were past ruining. (*Rick the neatnick.*)

I have already confessed my curiosity. I convinced myself that this person had deposited herself on my doorstep, so I had the right to know more about her. Actually, I was afraid that among the items I removed from the car I would find something that would be a problem - such as drugs, or worse. So, after deliberating with myself for all of ten seconds, I headed for the garage again. (*Rick, the self-appointed detective!*)

I began systematically to sort through her junk. Again, I dragged the garbage can near, located a couple of empty boxes, and started in. Clothes were dumped into a pile – more laundry to be done. I found not one clean item of clothing. And like those she wore, they looked like they were taken from several back-yard clotheslines – with random sizes and styles. There were a couple pairs of still useable shoes -- into a box. There was a handful of floppy disks and other computer related items -- into the second box.

Mostly it was clothes. No drugs. No erotica. No evidence of prior abuse – either as abuser or abusee. It was a sad collection of memorabilia of a life. (*Rick the late-night philosopher.*)

I gathered up a couple bushels of laundry, sorted it into three reasonably appropriate piles, and started a new washer load.

As I pondered her wardrobe, I knew there must be a story here somewhere that explains all this mess. (*And tomorrow I would find out.*)

## 2. Day Two -- The Car

April 1997

I awoke early Tuesday morning and immediately switched clothing from dryer to basket, and washer to dryer. I took the freshly laundered clothing she had worn the day before and quietly placed it on a chair beside her bed. She had not moved from the position she was in when I turned out the light the night before.

Uneasy about the status of the rental car and the possibility of a police search instigated by an angry father, I decided to take action early. I made a pot of coffee, started some eggs and sausage cooking on the stove, and went to awaken her. She jumped when I flipped the light switch, very startled and obviously disoriented, though she had surely used an alarm light many times while in school. This time, however, it took her several seconds to realize where she was.

In the Deaf world, lights replace sound. In most Deaf homes, like mine, you will find lights in addition to sound for the door, telephone, smoke alarm, and alarm clock. These devices change sound into electrical impulses to cause a light to flash. Parents of infants have a "baby cry alarm" to let them know when the baby makes noise. After a little while, the parents can tell by the way the light flashes if the baby is just making noises or if he is screaming at them.

"Good morning," I signed, "eat five minutes." Anna smiled and nodded. I went out and closed the door, leaving the overhead light on. In a few minutes, I heard her close the bathroom door and start the shower.

Five minutes later she appeared, dressed as she was the night before, without the coat. She did not seem to notice that her clothes were now clean. She immediately headed