

FOREWORD

Christine L. Gannon

Jack R. Gannon, my father, has dedicated his adult life to the Deaf community. He has been an important leader and activist, a prolific author, and has had many more significant roles in helping improve the lives of Deaf people. He has always staunchly advocated for full access to American Sign Language, for the importance of Deaf role models for younger Deaf youth, and for raising awareness in the hearing world of what Deaf individuals are capable of achieving.

To me, his most important role is that of my father—my “Pops.” He has been my dad, my teacher, my support, my editor-in-chief, and my first friend. In our parent-child relationship, I wasn’t able to call out to my parents, and as a result, got stuck in a tree longer than the other kids on the block or had other similar unique experiences (some shared in this collection). Still, I have always viewed my father being deaf as a blessing. It provided him with opportunities he otherwise would have missed,

JACK R. GANNON

including being mentored by many influential Deaf leaders and obtaining a college education that was covered by vocational rehabilitation.

This collection of stories captures many of his poignant experiences as a Deaf man, leader, husband, and father. These memories pay tribute to a great mind that has served my father well and allowed him to give so much to his beloved Deaf community. My hope is that these memories of “the way it was” will be preserved and cherished for their positive messages and insights into the life of this extraordinary Deaf man.

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Jeff D. Gannon

My dad has worked on this book my entire life. Now, just a couple of years away from my fiftieth birthday, I am filled with great gratitude and joy to read his last book. On these pages my dad generously opens his life up for his readers. He shares his confusion and hurt when illness leaves him deaf as an eight-year-old boy. Little did that sweet Ozark hillbilly and Mama’s boy know that that moment would open the wide world to him. Within ten years, he became the first in his family to go to college, where he thrived. He fell in love and got married. He became a respected

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leader, mentor, and historian. He wrote books. He curated a national touring exhibition that was displayed at the Smithsonian Institution and eleven other sites. He played a key advisory role for a PBS documentary about Deaf life in America and was interviewed for the film. He has shaken hands with presidents and traveled the world. He has made a difference.

To me, though, he's Dad. And that's who I want to share with you.

We've always been close, in spite of a few bumps along the way—like when I grew my hair long, wore a black leather jacket, and worked hard to be a rebellious teen. In the grand scope of our time together, that was nothing. Even then, we shared a love of work, of sweat and dirt. We both love old pocketknives, fine tools, pickup trucks, wood split for the fireplace, and a good day's labor. I was probably not more than twelve when my dad had me shimmy twenty-five feet up a large wild cherry tree. I set the rope that controlled the direction the tree would fall when, moments later, my dad took a chainsaw to its base, and I tugged the rope out in the yard.

We lived in Silver Spring, Maryland, the heart of suburbia. But my Dad's hillbilly soul slipped out around the edges—the large garden plot in the backyard, the shed cluttered with planting pots and wood scraps, the woodshop in the basement, the pickup truck in the backyard loaded with mulch. That hillbil-

ly soul, full of grit and determination, runs deep. My Missouri grandfather left school in the third grade after his dad died and started working to help support the family. That hardscrabble man grew up, made a living, and married my grandmother. Together they had four kids, the third being my dad. In 1938 he and his wife packed up their kids and drove to California to work for the war effort. There, my grandmother became one of the original Rosie the Riveters while still managing to care for her four kids. The Gannons have always been tenacious.

Hillbillies make great storytellers, and my dad is no exception. My dad, still a young boy, was a student at the Missouri School for the Deaf (MSD). His family could only afford bus fare at Christmas and summer break, so he mostly lived at school. But those long bus rides were memorable. Young Jack surveyed the other passengers for the most interesting and successful person, maybe a doctor, or a lawyer, he could converse with. He would pull out his notepad and pencil and write, "Hi, my name is Jack. I am deaf. What is your name?" On one of these trips, he was disappointed to learn that his distinguished seatmate was an artist, but he managed to hide his disappointment and continued his conversation. The man was L. L. Broadfoot, a Missouri artist whose work chronicled life in the Ozarks. That day he kindly offered his young friend Jack, along with Jack's classmates, a tour of his studio followed by sandwiches during one of the bus pitstops.

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Thus began a lifelong friendship. My dad has always been curious and friendly. He learned from his old friend L. L. Broadfoot that people will always surprise you.

My hillbilly grandfather came up tough. That meant never showing his tender heart, never telling his son how much he loved him. Lucky for Jack Gannon that he met and married Rosalyn Lee. The Lees were an affectionate lot, full of love and hugs for their new son-in-law. Lucky for me, too, because my dad vowed that he would always tell his future children, "I love you," and he would show them too. Lucky for us all, I have never in my life doubted that full heart, that love.

PREFACE

This book is a collection of stories from a lifetime; none of it lived alone. I had the great benefit of caring parents who gave all they had. I had thoughtful teachers, many of whom were Deaf, who encouraged and challenged me. Deaf mentors guided me and gave me the tools to advocate for myself. Chance encounters enlightened me in ways both positive and negative, but the awakening is part of my understanding of human relations. Dear friends have helped in ways more numerous than I can list, especially as I start to slow down. Most of all a loving family has sustained me.

Coming from West Plains, Missouri, a small town in the Ozarks, gave me a sense of identity that stuck with me through all the years. Despite a career that took me many places, I remain tied to the people of those Ozark mountains.

Deep thanks go to the reviewers of the manuscript. Colleagues, friends, and critics, they helped me to better convey stories. Laura Jean Gilbert, Connie Garcia-Barro, and Jean Lindquist Bergey gave feedback on all stories in this collection. In

addition, Bobbie Galuska, Mervin D. Garretson, Natalie Gawdiak, Astrid Goodstein, Rae Johnson, Maria Limperic, Molly Luby, Bette Martin, Maureen Nichols, Pete Ripley, Virginia “Ginny” Thompson, and Kathryn Walker offered comments on several of the stories. Their input and critique and occasional nudges to get going pushed this book along. Deaf reviewers could often relate to the experiences described while hearing reviewers gave me a sense of how the text might be interpreted by those just learning about the cultural and linguistic community of Deaf people. Helena Schmitt came to my rescue with technical solutions as computers and programs progressed faster than my ability to keep up. One and all helped the book get to press, and I am deeply grateful for their assistance. That said, I take responsibility for the stories as shared.

Deaf poets added to this book, finding words and patterns that artistically echo the sentiment of the stories. Permission to use the poems came from the poets themselves or their family members if they had passed on. To them, sincere appreciation for the generous sharing.

Ivey Wallace at Gallaudet University Press has given more support than most publishers ever would, simply by remaining interested and supportive of the book. Her friendship has meant a lot over the years.

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Jean L. Bergey wrote the introductions to each chapter as well as the about the author statement. Her steady support and friendship has meant a lot and helped get this book to the press.

My most heartfelt gratitude goes to my family. Rosalyn, my wife of sixty years, is the truest of companions on life's journey. She reminded me the book has meaning beyond our family and that it must get done. Rosalyn is the rock of our home, and she has the key to my heart. Our children Jeff and Christine helped with this book in numerous ways, including reviewing stories and offering feedback.

Most importantly, these stories are not mine alone. They are also Rosalyn's, Jeff's, and Christine's. To them go all my love.