

FOREWORD

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Why should a book on captioned films for deaf people be written? Why is it important that the story be told? Captioned movies shown in theaters nationwide and captioned television programs are now taken for granted. Originally, captioned films were produced in order that deaf and hard of hearing viewers could understand what was spoken on the screen instead of guessing or imagining what was being said. In fact, captions have always benefited a larger and varied audience, especially people learning English as a second language and patrons of noisy places such as bars and restaurants. But captions have empowered deaf and hard of hearing people. Access has led to increased success. And as Harry Lang has shown in his history of the TTY (*A Phone of Our Own*), many of the advances in both telephone technology and captioned films involved deaf people. As described in both books, deaf people should take pride in the roles they played in these technological advances.

Having lived through much of the early stages of the evolution of both telephony and captioning, I gave little thought to how important history is to education until I read Harry's books. New generations of deaf people have available a variety of captioning technology and other telecommunication devices available to them in their youth. Reading about how hard the previous generations worked to gain access to leisure time entertainment may provide them with the motivation to continue the legacy. Those who know this history may be inspired to enrich it further.

For older deaf people like me, who learned to enjoy and depend on captioned movies and captioned television the hard way, one small breakthrough at a time, we know well what it was like. But there are surprises for us, too, in this book. Many readers may not realize the extent to which the captioning movement spawned the rapid rise of visual media as valuable resources in the classroom. Even the deaf and

hearing pioneers we personally knew were often too modest to share the many challenges they faced—the resistance of Hollywood studios to support open captions in theaters, the attitudes of people about captions being “distracting,” and the months-long wait for a captioned film to become available are just a few examples.

What began as a small program called the Captioned Films for the Deaf to distribute 16 mm films to schools and the Deaf community has blossomed into a modern multimedia resource program that enriches educational environments, utilizing online streaming of films, YouTube, Facebook, and a website accessible anytime and anywhere.

Harry Lang has documented many aspects of Deaf history and Deaf studies in his various writings, and I am pleased that he has undertaken this challenge of describing the complex history of captioning as it pertains to films and television.

After more than forty years of federal service, all with the Department of Education (formerly the Office of Education within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), I often reminisce about my own role in implementing policies that helped bring access to myself and thousands of other deaf and hard of hearing people. I often have wondered if a book documenting the evolution of captioning and the roles of key players would ever be written while memory is fresh and readily available. Even though I managed the Captioned Media Program, as well as personnel preparation (teacher training) projects, research grants, and the National Theatre of the Deaf grant, I seldom thought about how the captioned films story was unfolding. This is it!

This book is thoroughly researched and will be a welcome addition to the growing collection of histories of the roles deaf and hearing people have shared together in applying technological breakthroughs to improve the quality of our lives.