Alandra's Lilacs: The Story of a Mother and her Deaf Daughter

The Story of a Mother and her Deaf Daughter, by Alandra Lilacs, is the autobiography of Tressa Bowers, who discovered that her daughter was deaf. In very harsh words, the physician described her daughter as “stone deaf.” She was not able to speak, communicate, or even acquire an education. However, Tressa did not accept this prognosis; instead, she took on the challenge of raising and educating her daughter.

The author was 19 years old when she discovered her daughter was deaf. She moved from one location to another due to her economic situation and so she could find the best school for her daughter. As a result, she dropped out of school for a while. However, and after settling down, she went back to school and earned an associate degree in law. Her struggle made her stronger and very determined to prepare her daughter with high-level communication skills. Therefore, she insisted on educating herself with every possible device or technology that could help her daughter acquire an education and communicate with people normally.

In the 1970s, people were still divided into traditional deaf teaching, which taught the deaf to speak and forbade the use of sign language. Although her daughter was enrolled in the first school for a while, she made a significant change when she noticed the difficulties that her daughter, her family, and herself faced with communication.

Communication at Home: The author’s parents knew little or no sign language, so they communicated with Landy, the author’s daughter, via speech reading, written notes, or “home sign.” A home sign is a technique the family used it to communicate with the Landy. Landy’s grandfather and grandmother made up signs that represented items or actions. This technique is about hearing member mimics the word until the deaf member understands. After a while, the deaf person gets used to it. The same sign would not mean anything to another person. This technique gave Landy and her grandparents an easy, comfortable way to communicate without extra effort. Also, Landy was proud to have a language that only her family could understand.

Hearing Aids: Bowers was worried that her daughter was unaware of what was happening around her. She reported that it was very hard to resist holding her daughter all the time. Thus, one of her solutions was to introduce her daughter to the entire neighborhood and explained to them that if she was in front of a driveway, she would not hear a car horn. She knew that was not the perfect solution for her daughter’s safety, but hearing aids were very expensive. It took some
time, but she eventually acquired hearing aid for her daughter.

The first time Bowers turned the hearing aid on, her daughter smiled and started making different facial expressions. Landy accepted the device and felt comfortable wearing it. She was excited to hear different voices. Also, her family enjoyed clapping just to make her turned around and smile. Brows and her family thought that Landy was hearing sound, but she was actually feeling the vibrations.

**TTY:** As Landy became a teenager and made deaf friends, she wanted to talk to with them over the phone. Her parents followed her desire and bought her a TTY (teletypewriter). Landy went to the deaf support center to learn how to use it. Then, this new technology became an easy to operate. TTY linked Landy to all her deaf friends, and she spent a lot of time using it. Her family was annoyed by the sound of keys tapping words constantly. They called it “gunfire,” and it was present all the time. Although Landy and her family complained about the size of the TTY and its several parts, they were amazed how it was re-chargeable and small.

**Telecaptioner:** This device hooks up to the TV, so the signal goes through the device to print the show in words that a deaf person can read. The author would not buy the device because of the price; however, she bought it for her daughter when a donor sold it at half price. Landy was very happy because she could watch movies with her family without waiting for interpreter.

In this book, assistive technology played a vital role in Landy and her family's lives. In several situations, the AT, e.g., written notes and home sign, saved the family and Landy massive effort and time in communication. Also, by using AT, the language barrier became less problematic. Thus, from very young age, her hearing aids made her aware of surrounding event and made her mother feel safe leaving her alone. That does not mean that she dealt with the hearing world normally, but she found ways to communicate. Moreover, having devices such as TTY and Telecaptioner linked her to the world.

One thing that captured my attention is that she did not mention any difficulties interacting with the AT. Was that because its adoption was easy? Or did spend much time and effort familiarizing themselves with these devices to overcome the problem? Finally, the most interesting finding is that Landy, after wearing a hearing aid for her whole life, decided to remove it to join the deaf community. It is interesting to choose not to hear and rely on sign language as a primary
language. The book did not discuss how and why she decided to not hear; however, I believe more study should be devoted to deaf people who reject hearing aids.