

The SAID In The Philippines

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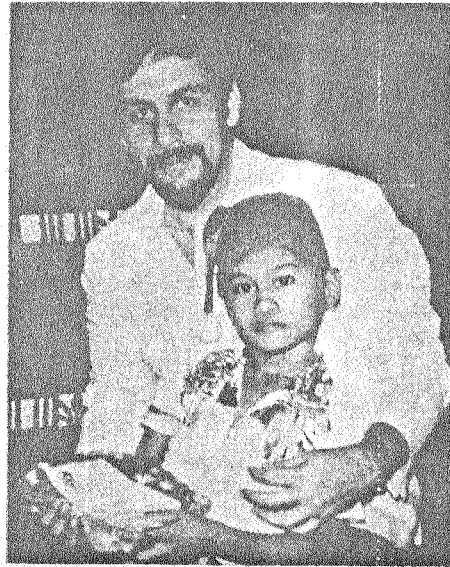
Makati, Rizal, Philippines

Author's Note: Faithful DEAF AMERICAN readers who have followed our articles in these pages over the years have probably wondered what ever happened to your battle-scarred reporter. We would like to present in this short article a progress report of our efforts to spread total communication "in our little corner of the world," and to introduce DA readers to "The SAID"—a development which the deaf of America can be justly proud.

The Philippines

The Philippines is a land of contradictions. Four hundred years of exposure to the "elitist" education of the Spanish colonizers followed by 50 years of exposure to the American concept of universal education produced an educational system which boasts of a schoolhouse in every barrio; one of the highest literacy rates in all of Asia; and for which per capita enrollment in higher education is second only to the United States (followed by Israel, Australia, Japan and Sweden; Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1968). Yet economically, socially and demographically the Philippines is aligned with the developing countries. In a country which does not grow enough rice to feed itself; in a country whose only bumper crop is the annual crop of doctors and lawyers (Did you know, for example, that more Filipino doctors practice in the United States than any other alien group?)—in such a country it is easy for a minority group, like the deaf, to get "pushed aside" in the hustle and bustle of trying to keep up with a myriad of problems.

But the deaf of the Philippines are indeed more fortunate than many of their neighbors. What is believed to be the first "special education" introduced in all of Asia was the school for the deaf started by the American educator Dr. Delia Delight Rice in Manila in 1907. (See "Land of the Morning, Child of the Sun



The author poses with his adopted son, Cecilo, one of S. A. I. D.'s first students.

Returning." The DEAF AMERICAN, December 1970.) Until World War II this school produced a small number of well-educated graduates; these graduates are still the leaders of the Philippine deaf community today. After the war, however, the school of Dr. Rice, now known as the Philippine National School for the Deaf (PNSD), switched to the "pure oral" method; today the average high school graduate of the PNSD, the country's only government school for the deaf, is functionally illiterate, having less than a Grade Two reading level.

The Philippines' only association for the deaf, the Philippine Association of the Deaf (PAD), is operated by hearing persons outside of the field of deafness. They operate a unique and well-known "coffee shop of the deaf" which employs a large

number of deaf persons who otherwise would have no means of livelihood (See "The Happy-Sad Anniversary of the PAD," The DEAF AMERICAN, January 1974.) Though this coffee shop has been a source of frustration to many who feel that it portrays the deaf as menial laborers—it was at this very coffee shop on 31 July 1970 that the deaf first communicated by telephone across the Pacific when PAD Vice President Richard West exchanged TTY greetings with NAD president Robert Lankenau (See again "Land of the Morning, Child of the Sun Returning.")

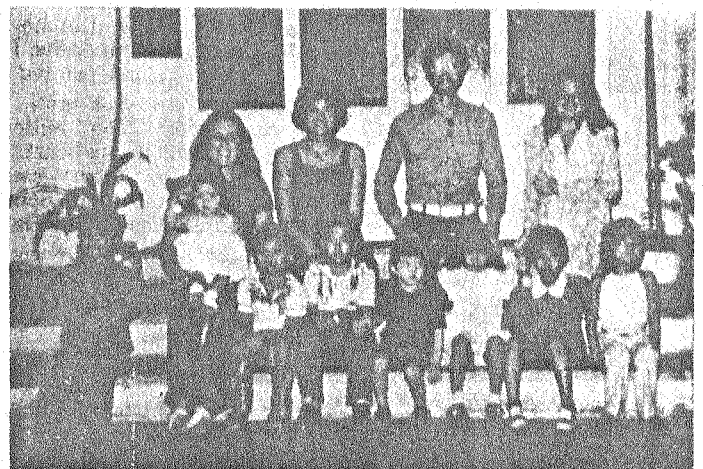
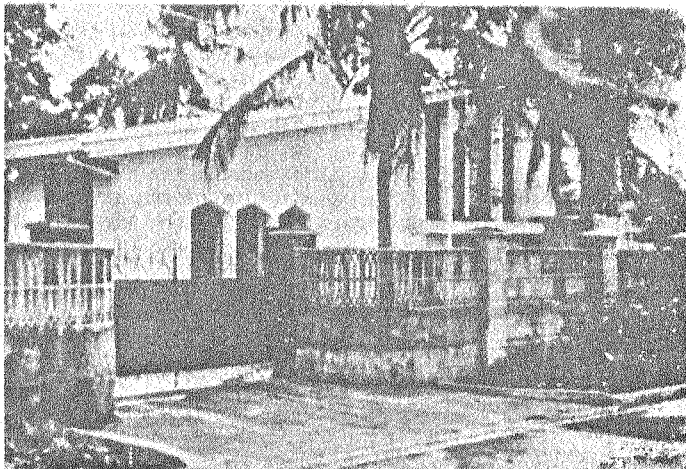
The Philippines is indeed a land of contradictions—to bring the deaf of the Philippines to full first class citizenship the deaf need a messiah and that messiah is education.

A Star in the West

The Wise Men of old looked to the Star in the east for their Messiah, we looked to a star of our own—a star in the west! And an ironic star!

Frances M. Parsons, now a professor at Gallaudet College, spent her early years in Tahiti. Shortly after her return to the United States she was tutored by our own Dr. Rice. She used to revel in the stories Dr. Rice told her of the Philippines. Perhaps this is why Frances was particularly interested when she first read our articles about the Philippines. Frances first wrote to us in March of 1972—what an inspiration it was to hear her encouraging words and receive her support. Our letters volleyed back and forth across the Pacific for two more years until finally, in May 1974, our star arrived!

For years we had preached that total communication was the answer to unraveling the mess our educational program for the deaf was in. But we are hearing and can't speak with authority. Now, here was a woman who was born deaf, did not



Left: Quezon City's United Community Church is the temporary home for the Model School classes of the S. A. I. D., Inc. Right: Model School teachers and students pose after their first Christmas program.



Left: Peace Corps volunteer Daisy Slagle and her young ward, Jennifer Lim. Although only two years old, Jennifer attends classes daily and is developing communication at a pace comparable with her hearing peers. Right: Another Peace Corps volunteer, Pauline Spanbauer, uses Signed English with this group of older children. Pauline, who has good residual hearing, also conducts the speech training sessions.



learn to speak until she was 10 years old, a college professor who spoke more eloquently than those who were telling us that "sign language will ruin your deaf child," "if deaf children use sign language they will never learn to speak," etc. A week long seminar at Manila's prestigious De La Salle College was jam-packed every night with parents who couldn't believe their eyes and their ears! Teachers and officials from the government school for the deaf boycotted us—but it was no use—the parents were fired up and, as one educator has said, "Hell knows no fury like the wrath of an irate parent!" The parents demanded: Why aren't our children like her? Why weren't we told about total communication? Why were we lied to for so many years?

Our star soon flew away to spread the word to other lands—but out of the fire she kindled was born the "SAID"—The Southeast Asian Institute for the Deaf (S.A.I.D.), Inc., a group dedicated to improving the lot of the deaf not only in the Philippines but throughout all of Southeast Asia. We hope that someday our star will return to see the fruits of her labor—how ironic indeed that Dr. Rice's former student, author of *Sound of the Stars*, should someday return to restore the work of her mentor.

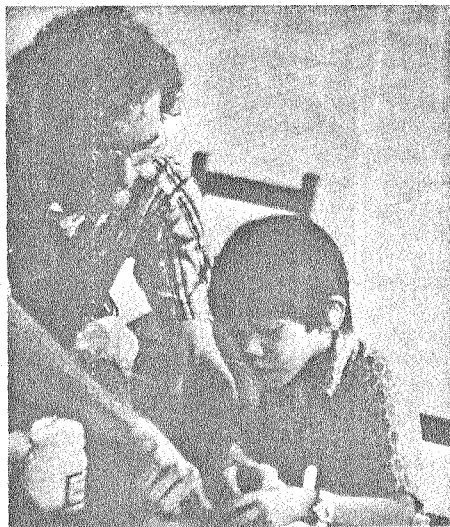
Enters The Peace Corps

One of the first projects of the S.A.I.D., Inc., was the establishment of a model school patterned after the Kendall Demonstration School at Gallaudet College. Since the few schools for the deaf in Southeast Asia are mostly oral (there are a couple of "manual" schools here and there) the S.A.I.D., Inc., a model school would be the first truly total communication school since it would combine electronic equipment for oral training with Signed English for language training. This model school could not be staffed by our local teachers because of their lack of experience. Only one "TC" training program for teachers of the deaf exists in the Philippines (See "Dateline: Philippines—Summer 1973," *The DEAF AMERICAN*, July-August 1973.) We also felt that our

teachers should be deaf as they would have a great deal more understanding of the problems of the deaf. Obviously we could not turn to our local deaf community.

We turned once again to our deaf friends abroad—in particular we felt that concerned, socially aware Gallaudet students would be interested in spending some of their time with us to help improve education of their deaf brothers and sisters across the sea. Most students, of course, would be limited in their finances to pay for transportation halfway around the world. The answer was found with the cooperation of the United States Peace Corps/Philippines which agreed to sponsor the travel of two volunteers for the first year of our model school program.

Our first two Peace Corps volunteers, Daisy Slagle and Pauline Spanbauer, arrived and together with two independent volunteers, Linda Cox and Guy Vollmar (our head teacher), have established the first class of the model school. Classes are held in borrowed space from United Community Church, thanks to the generous support of their pastor, Bishop Enrique



Head Teacher Guy Vollmar conducts a work-play session for older children. A psychology major at Gallaudet, Guy is one of the S. A. I. D.'s independent volunteers, having paid his own transportation to the Philippines to work with our deaf children.

Soprepena, whose great-grandson, Enrique Sobrepena IV, was one of our first students.

Though with only a few weeks of practice, our first class presented their first Christmas program—and it was an academy award presentation! Certainly the finest Christmas present our parents could have had—a Christmas filled with hope for the future of their deaf children.

A Regional Center

It is envisioned that S.A.I.D., Inc., will become a regional center for education of the deaf. Folks have asked us why.

Well, first of all, since we have the first total communication school in Southeast Asia—the first such school outside of the United States staffed entirely by Gallaudet graduates—we feel that we have a commitment to improve education of the deaf throughout our region—not just in the Philippines. But the answer must go deeper than that. We recently visited all of the schools and associations of the deaf in Southeast Asia and found that the deaf of the Philippines, though pretty badly off, were no worse than average.

In some of the more advanced countries, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, the deaf have good opportunities but have been shackled by the bonds of oralism too long. A good case study would be Singapore which has had an educational program for the deaf for only the past 25 years. They developed two simultaneous programs, a Chinese language program which was pure manual and an English language program which was pure oral. The better students were channeled into the oral program (particularly those who could afford to purchase hearing aids) and the other students were channeled into the manual program. Results: Twenty years later only three Singaporeans have ever attended Gallaudet College—all three were from the manual program. In fact the students from the manual program, who had to learn English as a second language, outperformed the students in the oral program who had learned English as a first language! One of these students,



THREE KINGS—Cecilo Argita, Eric Sobrepna and Gerry Dulalia (left to right) point to the Star while Angel Jennifer Lim looks on. With only a few weeks practice, Model School students put on an "Academy Award" presentation.

Chin-Heng Lim, now studying at Gallaudet, will join us next year for training in our Model School before he returns to Singapore.

In some of the poorer countries the situation is considerably more bleak. In Burma, for example, (a country which doesn't even have a television station) there is a small oral school in Rangoon, but no opportunities for the deaf in the provinces. In Laos there is not even a school or classes for the deaf!

It would be most difficult for countries like these to establish a program in total communication "from scratch." Poor countries cannot justify expenditures for "special education" when the masses are not even given minimal education. A regional center pools together the resources of several countries and many individuals to assist the poor country in establishing a program for their deaf. International pressure often makes poor countries realize that the deaf population in their country are a valuable resource which cannot be wasted—a resource which can be a potent force in national development. This, of course, is an area in which a regional center can be valuable.

Another area is the development of educational materials which would be impractical on a school-by-school or even country-by-country basis. Combining specialists from several countries can result in materials for education of the deaf far superior than that which would be developed by any single individual in any one country.

Perhaps the most important reason for the establishment of a regional center for education of the deaf is the old adage, "United we stand, divided we fall." In talking to our neighbors in Southeast Asia we were struck by how little we know of each other's work. Our friends in Malaysia knew more about education of the deaf in England than they knew about in the Philippines (even though our borders touch) and we knew more about education of the deaf in America than we did about Malaysia! As we said, it is easy for the deaf to get "pushed aside" in developing countries—and only a united effort by all of the deaf can stand up against the pressures of individual problems in an individual country.

Why the Philippines?

The next question folks ask is "Why the Philippines?" to which we reply "Why not!"

Historically the Philippines has been in the forefront of education of the deaf. The Philippines is a society in which education is valued very highly. A farmer would sell his last workhorse to send his son to college. What better environment for an educational center?

Geographically, the Philippines is the gateway to Southeast Asia, no more than two hours flying time to most capitals and at the crossroads of international airline routes from Europe, Australia and the United States.

Socially the Philippines is a most hospitable country. Filipinos are bilingual and English, the lingua franca of Southeast Asia, is spoken everywhere.

Politically, the Philippines is experiencing a period of stability and growth under the charismatic leadership of President Marcos and the establishment of his "New Society." Many recall those "thrilling days of yesteryear" when Manila was a wide-open town and people openly toted guns—those days ended with the proclamation of martial law in 1972—never to return.

Economically, the Philippines is still one of the best bargains around. Where else could a visiting scholar get room, board, transportation, books, clothes, laundry and all other necessities (including a fair

amount of entertainment) for less than \$100 a month? Or less than \$50 a month if he wants to "rough it" a bit. The availability of highly trained professionals at very low cost makes the Philippines an ideal location for an educational center—and low cost Philippine electronic components enable us to build "home-made" electronic equipment for speech training at a fraction of the cost of imported units!

Why the Philippines? Where else!

Write the SAID

The American deaf can indeed be proud of their representatives in the Philippines. The pioneers who have given up the comforts and luxuries of life in a developed country to share their talents, abilities, skills and education with us. The American deaf can be justly proud of our star—their star—Frances Parsons.

What the future holds, we don't know. But if you'd like to be a part of our future—if you can share your concern for your deaf brothers and sisters across the Pacific, write to us. Memberships are available in the SAID—if you are willing to spend two years of your life so that some of our deaf children can have a life of their own, write to us—applications for volunteers are now being taken. Write to the SAID:

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