

Birth of a Mentor at the National Center on Deafness

by Maryanne Huber

August 15, 1991. Not a very famous or infamous day, perhaps, but one I had looked forward to for a long time. This was the day I would attend a workshop on how to be a Mentor at NCOD. I must admit, this had been something I had always wanted to do...well, ever since my two experiences with being mentored!

I showed up at Jeanne Chisholm Hall primed and ready to go. The first thing I needed to learn was to calm down!!! Most of these people had been mentors for years (a couple of them were my bosses or previously my teachers), so being cool was a must. I don't think I succeeded very well. But I had done the reading and had taken notes on every article (I told you I needed to calm down!) and thought here we go: Poof, I'm a mentor.

Well, it wasn't that easy. One of the many things for me to learn at this workshop was how to watch a videotape with a critical-but not judgemental-eye. Then, of course, was the need to change my speech patterns. I learned just how careful I needed to be to not seem attacking or harsh. There was learning a new buzz word, "Collegiality." To quote an article we read on the issue,

"Collegiality is not coziness or groupiness or everyone thinking the same thing. It is a professional identity based on seeing one another as potential sharers of ideas and goals to excellence."

Added to this was a refresher course on communication, linguistics, grammar and interpreting models. And, lest we get too enamored with the theoretical, we need to continually

get back to the reality that we are working with PEOPLE, and although we are not assessing people, their feelings do get involved and we need to stay neutral.

Whew! Do you all have a headache yet? I will spare you any more gory details. I just wanted to give you a bit of the taste of how much care goes into preparing a mentor at NCOD. I have attended workshops on taking notes, speaking neutrally, have been mentored, and have mentored others in Sign to Voice since that first workshop. I have a long way to go to be as proficient as those who worked with me. But I will never again be cavalier about my mentor's time or knowledge. Too much time and effort is involved...if they have the time, I sure do! □