

Book Review

Title: *The Unheard: A Memoir of Deafness and Africa*

Author: Josh Swiller

Publisher: New York: Henry Holt, 2007

Paperback, ISBN: 0-8050-8210-7, 288 pages

Cost: \$14.00 USD

Reviewer: Stephen Laracuent

This is an excellent book for the average person to read. It has something for everyone and it includes something rarely, if ever, included in books – a look into the mind of a Deaf person. This story is told from the perspective of a person who is Deaf and trying to make sense of what he sees, rather than what he hears. This perspective turns out to be as human as any one of us who is fortunate to pick up this book and read it. One important theme that runs through this book is we are all brothers. We need to communicate well, so we can understand each other better in terms of needs, wants and dreams. If we do this, we can care for each other better and the world will be a better place. The Deaf perspective is totally and brutally honest. Nothing is held back, covered up or glossed over. What you see is what you get. The author also shows hearing folks how they perceive the Deaf. Josh Swiller describes how he is treated by hearing people and how other Deaf are treated and perceived – in Africa, of all places.

In a desperate attempt to find himself and his place in the world, Swiller decides to join the Peace Corps. He finds peace and beauty, but he also finds extreme violence, despair and frustration. Swiller opens his heart, mind and soul with this book and allows the reader an intimate look at his thoughts and emotions as he attempts to negotiate the journey of his life, in Africa, as a person who is Deaf.

The story was compelling and this reviewer, who normally cannot sit still long enough to read a book, let alone stay awake, had difficulty putting the book down. Very little is known about Deaf people and very little research has been done or books written that include information about the Deaf. This very personal, specific account provides valuable insight into the mind, heart and soul of a Deaf person who grew up speaking, lipreading and using a hearing aid. Contrary to popular myth, there are not many Deaf people like Josh Swiller, or the reviewer of this book, who can speak, lipread and use the hearing aid (also read and write) well enough to fool hearing people. The majority of Deaf people depend on a sign language to communicate thoughts, ideas and feelings.

This reviewer was able to identify completely with all of the experiences related with growing up Deaf and dealing with a hearing world as a Deaf person. If you are curious what it feels like to be Deaf and deal with beauty and peaceful bliss, as well as traumatic, horrific and

shocking situations (and still persevere), read this book. If you just want to read a good book guaranteed not to put you to sleep, read this book.