

By Raymond Luczak



Spotlight On... Carole L. Glickfeld

More than 20 years ago I came across Carole L. Glickfeld's short story collection *Useful Gifts*, which had won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. The book featured growing up with deaf parents. Then I'd learned that the collection was recently brought back into print.

SIGNews: Can you tell us a bit about your background growing up?

Carole L. Glickfeld: I am a CODA. I do not remember learning sign language (as if it were my first language). I grew up in New York with my deaf parents. Summers we would go to Coney Island on Tuesdays to the part of the beach (Brightton 8th Street) where there was a gathering of deaf people. My father occasionally took me to the Union League of the Deaf Club in downtown New York. My mother met with her deaf

friends in Fort Tryon park (northern Manhattan), and they sat on the benches shaped like a horseshoe around the kiddies' sandbox.

SIGNews: What led you into writing? Did you think you'd be writing about your parents at all?

Glickfeld: In the fifth grade, my teacher put me in the back of the room one day for talking to my neighbor across the aisle (which was uncharacteristic behavior on my part). Unprompted, I wrote a story about a boy and a dog, two subjects which I knew nothing about. That told me I was destined to be a fiction writer. I wrote a great deal but never showed anyone any of my writing.

Late in life, a friend took me to a writers' conference in Tacoma, Wash. Then I attended a short workshop or two in Seattle where I met other writers. A

group of us formed a writers group, meeting monthly. I wrote stories on many subjects, including a teacher on sabbatical in Africa (anthologized in *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*). One day, one of the writers in the group who knew that my parents were deaf asked me if I'd ever written about that world. I said, Why would I? I'm a fiction writer. A year later, I started writing the stories that became *Useful Gifts*.

SIGNews: Just how did that book come about? Why did you choose that title?

Glickfeld: One day I was sitting in my living room and a line came to me, "Joey Frattinato, standing on the sidewalk, screams up to his ma." This was a startling line because I knew of a Joey Frattinato who lived with his Italian family across the street from us in Manhattan. But I had never spoken to Joey and certainly never played with him. I knew his name because my sister went to high school with his sister. I began writing the story and realized that Joey (who became Frankie in the published version) was being observed by a little girl (Ruthie) and her deaf mother from a fourth floor apartment window across the street. I took the story to a workshop with the writer Marilynne Robinson. She loved

the story and told me to write more about those people, and I did. The collection became *Useful Gifts*, titled after a story in the book.

SIGNews: When your book was published, were you then aware of the CODA movement? How is it different for you now?

Glickfeld: No, I didn't know about CODA till years afterwards. Subsequently, I went to a big CODA meeting in New Orleans. I was not enamored of the 12-step model (is that the right term?). I did not need therapy. Being a writer, I am quite introspective and had worked out the particularities of a relationship with deaf parents.

SIGNews: What are you doing these days? What's your next project?

Glickfeld: I write fiction. I have a story ... in *Common Knowledge*, a literary journal produced by Duke University. My day job is working with people on their manuscripts, evaluating, coaching, editing. Occasionally I teach a creative writing class. My passion is travel. In September [2010] I was in northern Spain, and this spring I'll be going to Asia [travelling with a group of deaf and hard-of-hearing couples as a quasi-interpreter].

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