

**Describe a time in your life that has shaped and molded who you are as a person. Detail how this event will inspire and motivate you as you go forward in your life: 500-750**

Born to a Deaf mom and a hearing Dad, I've forever used the term "in-between" to describe my rather peculiar existence. From my earliest memories on the playground to chaotic birthday parties and parent-teacher conferences I quickly became aware of my family's atypicality—of my family's blend of the hearing and the Deaf. I also became aware that, unlike many of my peers, I exist in two worlds: by deviation in design or perhaps by luck, my scrawny self draws breath with a foot in both the Deaf and hearing communities.

But, like a fault line, my heart has always felt split into pieces, pledging its allegiance to two communities, divided not on purpose but by chance. Throughout some of my most formative years, the dichotomy growing within myself weighed heavy on my soul; in my perverted understanding of the world, I felt that I did not belong to either of the communities I so strongly adored.

There was within me a feeling of constant inadequacy. I struggled to keep up with my mom and her Deaf friends in conversation since I spent the majority of my time speaking to my dad and siblings. Simultaneously, I failed to find common ground with my friends and their hearing families—I discovered that few people in my bubble could relate to having a Deaf parent in a world that prioritizes the hearing. Over time, I found that the intricacies of my home life were "unrelatable" and "odd" to some of the peers in my community. I had yet to connect with any other Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) and so I began to subconsciously resent my mother's deafness—I didn't want to nor did I mean to, it simply became the product of years spent in confusion on where I belonged—years spent feeling like the odd one out.

But, after entering high school, I discovered others like myself, other CODAs. Though they only existed in my pixelated computer screen, they existed! I learned that my "odd" experiences were not odd at all but rather ordinary to those with a Deaf parent—suddenly, I was no longer alone. Suddenly, I couldn't help but feel frustrated with myself that I had ever wished my mom was more like my dad.

Without hesitation, I began to feel proud of my “unrelatable” family dynamic and of my Deaf mom—wishing I had always been.

Starting my sophomore year of high school I became president of the American Sign Language Club. It provided me a place to share my stories and experiences with other students about life as a CODA. The club also placed precious pavers on my road to better connect with and understand my mom; I started to make a greater effort to sign, even when she wasn't in the room, I started to gain more confidence in my skills and my life in the “in-between.”

Today, as a wide-eyed and opinionated teenager on the brink of real adulthood, I can confidently say that I am a CODA not by a fault in design but by good fortune. I consider myself lucky to have been born with a foot in both the Deaf and hearing communities and I wouldn't dare change it for the world.

And, though I often look back on the time in my life when I resented the part I now love most about my mom, I also acknowledge the power my darker moments hold in having shaped the person I am today: they have made me a human with a proclivity for seeking out solace in the unconventional and beauty in variation. I am proud of all that is unorthodox, and I strive to look for the “unrelatable” and the “odd” in every part of my day, in every person I meet—because both are assets and never liabilities.

I certainly have many formative years ahead of me but, regardless, I will always hold onto hope for better days, I will always hold onto a passion for loving what cannot be changed, and I will always appreciate what society deems as “atypical”; if my younger self has taught me anything it's that grieving the life you never had and resenting the one you live will never give you the power to make a difference.