



A Man Without Words

By Susan Schaller

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For more than a quarter of a century, Ildefonso, a Mexican Indian, lived in total isolation, set apart from the rest of the world. He wasn't a political prisoner or a social recluse, he was simply born deaf and had never been taught even the most basic language. Susan Schaller, then a twenty-four-year-old graduate student, encountered him in a class for the deaf where she had been sent as an interpreter and where he sat isolated, since he knew no sign language. She found him obviously intelligent and sharply observant but unable to communicate, and she felt compelled to bring him to a comprehension of words.

A Man without Words vividly conveys the challenge, the frustrations, and the exhilaration of opening the mind of a congenitally deaf person to the concept of language.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Teacher Schaller's astonishing case history of a deaf, languageless adult student touches on linguistic, philosophic and educational matters.

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From School Library Journal

YA-- Schaller was neither a teacher of the deaf nor a linguist, but she had learned American Sign Language (ASL) and enjoyed interpreting for the deaf. Still, nothing had prepared her for Ildefonso, a languageless adult, born deaf and lacking instruction in even the simplest communication. With infinite patience and determination, Schaller taught this intense, lonely, but apparently intelligent man to grasp not just signs, but ideas and words. Their breakthrough to language is most spectacular, reminiscent of Keller's experience with "water." Schaller's frustrations were similar to Ildefonso's as she struggled to bring language to him; they were equals as they achieved the impossible. YAs will relate to this appealing story, full of care, concern, and curiosity as it taps basic emotions regarding "words" that people share, especially while overcoming handicaps. --Mary T. Gerrity, Queen Anne School, Upper Marlboro, MD

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From Library Journal

"What would life be like," wonders Oliver Sacks in his foreword to this intriguing story, "for a languageless man," a human being "deprived of what all the rest of us take for granted, deprived of the essentially human birthright of language?" When she took a temporary job as an interpreter for the deaf for a southern California community college class, Schaller met such a person. "Ildefonso" (as she calls him here)--27 years old, bright, deaf, and an illegal alien from Mexico--had never been exposed to proper sign language and was unaware of the myriad possibilities of language. The story of how Schaller patiently and painstakingly worked with him to bring him to the point of grasping, for the first time, the meaning of a sign and of recognizing a single signed word is truly inspiring. Recommended for most library collections.

- Marcia G. Fuchs, *Guilford Free Lib., Ct.*

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