

The Seventh International CODA Conference

CODA: Family of Origin/Family of Choice
By Elliott Aheroni, J.D.

New Orleans Airport Hilton
New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

July 16-19, 1992

In choosing the 1992 Keynote speaker, the New Orleans conference planning committee, after a no-show and some disappointments at some of the previous conferences, decided to look within. We chose an active CODA member as speaker. We were pleased to have Elliott Aheroni accept to be our speaker.

Elliott Aheroni has been a practicing lawyer in Los Angeles for over twenty years doing trial and appellate work for hearing and deaf people. He has published works in his field and is the attorney for CODA the author of our by-laws and has attended five previous CODA conferences.

Before I say another word, I want to thank Mariann Jacobson who so graciously honored me by saying, "Could I interpret for you?" Could you? Would you? I want to applaud her now before we get started.

Louise Fletcher couldn't be here today [Audience laughter] and I thought... [someone from the audience asks a question] "What did you say? Is she out with Ruth?" the man asks. She and Ruth are best friends.

I have been planning to come to New Orleans since I was in Chicago last year and I would have been here no matter who the speaker, like all of you would have been. The point of that is that I believe I'm the first keynote speaker to come to a CODA conference for a purpose other than being a keynote speaker. I would have come if nobody had asked me to be keynote speaker. I had no expectations. Every other keynote speaker we've had, from my recollection, came to their very first conference for the purpose of

delivering their talk. I am in a position to savor what a thrill and pleasure this is, and I have savored it.

Previous keynote speakers have been authors and actors. We might have had an actress, but she couldn't make it. People from academia significant people...one of whom is her, Stan Schuchman [audience applauds]. My published works are only found in Appellate books and if you're not a lawyer, you could probably couldn't care less. So I don't bring with me any fame that is known outside of my own house; and even there its not known [audience laughter]. I am one of five active lawyers in Los Angeles that are codas. Two of whom you've seen here before. Mark Brandt, who couldn't be here this year and Tom Baldridge. Two others, I'm working on, they'll be here...I spoke to my sister this week.

The degree to which I can attribute any success in my life to being a coda is, at this point in my life, truly unknown. I have some inklings. I don't know if it has anything to do with my being a lawyer and I'll talk about that. But I do consider myself very successful in taking from CODA, the organization, what there is to offer here. Love, acceptance, a place to rid myself of some of the demons in my soul. This is the place where I have no shame in utilizing everything there is to be had here and taking it. I don't mind taking from CODA everything I can get from it.

My talk is entitled, "The Agony and the Empathy" and I hope before I'm done you'll understand why. When I was first told that they would like for me to be the keynote speaker, I started to think about what I was going to do. I thought I would make it real nice and easy and be subdued, but then I got serious [audience laughter]. I sat down and started thinking and writing about what I was going to say today. The process of writing has made me extremely introspective – far more than I thought I was going to be. The process itself made me look into a lot of things that I thought I had successfully put away – very, very far away. In order to say what I could say as honestly as I could, I had to open up those doors and that caused me a great deal of anguish. Introspection is never pleasant or easy which is why we try to avoid it as much as we can. I'm not one who very easily shares his innermost thoughts, feelings, painful experiences, and those who know me realize how little I reveal when I don't have to.

I've not shared what I'm going to tell you with very many people until this year, and certainly not with anybody other than my wife and therapist. What

I'm going to share with you is 'trust', I hope. My wife has been teaching me that the greatest intimacy that we have with others is sharing. That true intimacy is to be able to give of yourself to somebody else and in the process that totally requires you to share. In my case, it requires sharing things that I least want to share...and that is vulnerability. I will share my vulnerabilities – I don't want to share them, but I will. That's because coming to CODA has made me invest and risk sharing those things.

Whether you've ever been to a CODA conference or not, and I know a great deal of you have never and a great deal of you have, it's very important that I stress what has already been said this morning, and that is nothing that I say her leave CODA. We are a much bigger world and a much smaller world than we think. No matter where you go, you can meet a coda. The odds are very great that their parents know your parents, or know somebody that knows your parents [audience laughter]. Or they know another coda who knows another coda and it will be very uncomfortable for me if some of what I say got to others who had shared it with some loved ones. We say this every year, and for the most part, it works. But every now and then something slips through the cracks and the results are not pleasant. And in order to trust and share one has to feel that it's staying with his/her brothers and sisters. That is what I'm asking.

Many of you will not be able to relate to what I'm going to talk about. Maybe because it's foreign to your experiences, and maybe because you can't recognize it as similar to your experiences and maybe it's not your experience, never has been or never will be. But it's mine. What I say is my experience and I don't necessarily think it is anybody else's experience.

I was always different than the other people I knew. I was always different than the other children I knew. I was different that my parents for the same reason you were different from your parents. Different not because they were parents and you were a child. Different because they were deaf and I was hearing. I was different than other children because my parents spoke a very unique, different, and to some people, strange language. I was the only child I knew beside my sister that spoke this interesting, different, unique and curious language.

I was different than ninety-nine percent of the kids in any of the organizations that I belonged to – the YMCA, the Boy Scouts, and schools because I was Jewish. I was different than the Jewish kids, of which there

were only three in my little town, because I spoke a very, very funny language. I was different than the other kids I knew because I was the only child I knew besides my sister, who parents' welfare and survival were our day-to-day concerns. Not by choice – not because I volunteered to have that concern, but because it required that I have that concern.

To compensate for these differences as a child, I did things that perhaps would make up for it. I did things to gain attention in school for reasons other than the curiosity in my parents' deafness. I wanted attention and I wanted to be singled out for special things, not for weird things, which is what it was in school – weird. Like most of you, neither my friends nor their parents had any relationship with my parents at all. Maybe an occasional shy nod and that was it and the parents sometimes would take pity on me and offer me a ride to the local YMCA or scouting event.

To compensate for these feelings of being different, I got involved with various activities. As a youngster, I came to reading, writing, spelling and math very quickly. And sometimes would terrorize teachers by appearing to be daydreaming while the teacher would be reading something. The teacher would call on me and ask for a response and I was sitting there waiting for her. Hearing out of one ear and looking the other way just waiting, tapping. Laying the groundwork for my future.

I was in school plays, musical programs, and anything at all that would put me on center stage. I learned to play the violin so poorly that if there had been a fifteenth violin out of twelve violins, I would have been fifteenth. But still, it got me in front of the crowd. One year, I was the “star” mouse in the annual Christmas play, played in the orchestra at the same time, then would leave that to do a skit where I played the ukulele. I was all over the place and I loved it. People were following me, not because my parents moved their fingers in a strange way, but because I was the star of the moment.

I was brought up in a house that was loaded with contradictions. Conflict filled our everyday existence. My mother was filled with tremendous pride of being deaf and being independent. She was and is the most dynamic person I know. When she married my father, she made him get a job for the first time in his twenty-eight years of life. He had been very content to be over-protected and my mother made him go out and get a job. When she was pregnant with my sister she told my father it was time for him to go and get some transportation to take her to the hospital. He didn't drive at the time.

When he returned with a bicycle my mother went absolutely ballistic. She marched over to my grandparents, who lived about a mile away, and returned with money to buy a vehicle and lessons for my father to learn how to drive.

She became a beautician at thirty-four years of age after attending a hearing beautician school. This was at a time when women did not change careers, did not gain careers or improve themselves – just waited for their husbands to bring home a bigger paycheck so they could be more reliant on their husbands. My mother, being the stronger of the two, took a lead in our household. And yet, my mother was never too proud to have my sister or me call our grandparents to ask for money for a series of expenditures – whether they were needed or not. Something was wanted – have the kids call Grandma or Grandpa to ask if they could send them money. They would ask, “How much” and we would tell them. “What for?” We would tell them. This is not something that is foreign to your ears. Not that it’s not alien, it’s alien because it’s not what you wanted to do.

My mother is a very attractive and stylish woman. She was always the best dressed of any of the mothers at my school. My mother came from a very vain and selfish family. Insecure people who needed to gain material things to show the rest of the world that they too had accomplished something. Her younger, very attractive sister and her younger brother were very, very valued by her parents. They were the promise of the future and my mother was “dummy” who had to leave school in the fifth grade to be a housekeeper so everybody could get on with their lives. I have learned only recently, that approximately ninety percent of all deaf people have been abused as children in one form or another. And my mother was certainly no exception.

Until the day my grandmother died, my mother’s mother, which was about four years ago, disclaimed any responsibility or connection to my mother’s deafness except for the fact that she was the biological mother. She could rattle off excuses that were far more inventive than one can imagine as to why my mother was deaf. It was poor Russian medical care, it was diphtheria, it was spinal meningitis, it was pneumonia. It was somebody punishing her for something that somebody did in four previous lives. Whatever it was it sure wasn’t my grandmother’s fault that my mother was deaf, and there was no way she was going to let you forget that. And my mother was taken on the proverbial plane trip hoping that deep dives would, all of a sudden, pop open the eardrums. I know some of your parents have

had the same experience. No jets, but maybe helicopters, dive-bombers whatever was necessary.

My mother's younger brother became a self-made millionaire. My mother's sister married a man who is today one of Canada's wealthiest men. A self-made captain of industry worth a lot more than you can imagine, I guarantee you. My mother always, always assumed that had she not been deaf that she, too, would have been able to achieve that success. She never, ever stopped resenting her lot in life for not being able to be as rich and gorgeous and respected and revered as her sister and brother. As well as I know my mother's family, there's no doubt in my mind that my mother was always the most talented person in that family. Had she been born in a different time and under different circumstances would have far overshadowed her brother and sister. No matter how rich or how pretty, my mother 'had it' and was just born at the wrong time and circumstances.

Although my mother had a good relationship with her family in her adulthood, the impact of her awful childhood was never lost on me or my sister's childhood. This lasted all the way into adulthood and wasn't until very recently that I really understood how my mother got to be who she was and is. It doesn't make it better, doesn't make it nicer, but it does make it understandable which makes a big, big difference. That leads to healing.

My childhood household was an extremely angry and violent home. It resembled the Wingo household of "The Prince of Tides." My father was not like the Wingo patriarch. My father was always and is a very gentle and sweet man. But the rest of the household 'moved' very much like the Wingo household. We had a regular routine. My sister and I would get up in the morning and go to school. Or, if there was no school, clean the house, run errands, make phone calls, interpret, do all those things that were necessary to keep our parents functioning. Get struck on a regular basis. Occasions would be conveniently forgotten or ignored – birthdays, Bar mitzvah. Anything that would cause any kind of difficulty and hard work, but would not bring esteem onto the family was given short shrift.

I recall, I think I was eleven years old, coming to a distinct conclusion that I was a stranger in this household. I must have been deposited by some external force. I would be here until I could leave, but I definitely was not one of 'them'. I was an alien or they were aliens, it made no difference. I was not part of this group of people and of society. When I was eighteen I

left, but came back every week to make phone calls, take care of business, and do those things that were required. Not because I wanted to, not because there was any reward, but because I was convinced that God would know that I had stopped doing what was necessary and somehow I would be punished if I hadn't already been. I was not going to be able to have peace as long as I was ignoring the needs of my parents. I left, but didn't leave. I just changed beds.

This conflict of guilt and duty and a hatred of these feelings both created tremendous anger within me. I developed at a very young age and continued until recently to possess a very well known temper. Quick, blunt, to the point. I tried compensating for a lot of these shortcomings I had as a result of my childhood.

I married before I was twenty-two, to the daughter of a Rabbi. It brought great admiration to my mother from her family. Being Jewish, if one of the offspring married a Rabbi, this gives them status. "Esther must have done well" for her boy to marry this one's daughter. The Rabbi was well known to my mother's family's community. I never heard of him, but they did. Whatever this tribute brought my mother, my father could care less...but whatever tribute it brought my mother lasted as long as I was married. So, she had eleven years of tribute. Gone overnight! And then she would get some sense of tribute when her friends would say, "I saw Elliott talking at this thing" or "Elliott represented a friend of mine." So there would be, what to you is recognizable, the wonderful pleasure that your parents would get from you bringing honor to them. Not so much pleasure in what you have done or who you are, but that you brought THEM the respect that THEY should get from as many people as possible. This is not a phenomenon known only to codas, but known very well to codas.

As a child I tried to compensate for this by being in school plays, I was a cheerleader, and I was on the debate team. Anything at all and I was doing it so that they would know that Elliott was somebody other than "the son of that deaf and dumb couple". As an adult, I compensated by becoming a lawyer, and as a therapist told me, more than once, that being a lawyer was perfect for my personality and aggression. A very healthy way of channeling, I've been told. I had a goal to become a lawyer and I achieved it, but what I had to put myself through in terms of agony in the guise of compensating for what I considered as shortcomings or a perception of shortcomings, and trying to accomplish getting through school was that I

ended up today still looking back at the adequacy of my education and saying not adequate enough. I got my law degree and I became a lawyer. I didn't go to the right schools; I didn't do well enough in school. Probably the best would have been if I had gone to Harvard or Yale, maybe to Oxford. I could run for President then because I would be a world scholar. I know I'm not alone in this quest and I've talked to other codas who are seeking the best possible whatever it is, so they can say, "See, I am as good as all of you hearing people, hearing children of hearing adults, people from functional families", whatever that may be.

Being a lawyer provided for me the perfect "out" for my anger. It's orchestrated anger. It's accepted and within the confines of what society says is good. You're supposed to go to court and be indignant. You're supposed to pound on tables. I took it to an art form. I became a lawyer and worked six months for a law firm and finally came the interview with the public defender's office. I always wanted to be a criminal lawyer so the public defender's office was the perfect way to start. I remember going on my interview and the panel of three lawyers asked, "Why do you want to be a public defender?" The first thing that popped into my head was, "My parents are deaf and I always wanted to work for the underdog." Which is true.

The first thing out of my mouth was a measure of my ability to use pity and compassion to get what I wanted. I was hired. I was going to take care of the underdog and defend the underdog I did. The guiltier, the more the underdog. I loved defending the guiltiest person I could find. The task of defending a guilty person is wonderful is you're doing defense work.

I became one of the busiest trial lawyers in the office. I worked a trial, week after week after week and loved it. Eventually, my supervisor got worried and transferred me to an easier courthouse for "R and R". Within the first week, I set six cases for trial just to show everybody that the new "fast-gun" in town was here. Most of my trials, but not all, were with juries. A judge could always tell me to stop talking and I would have to say, "Yes, sir, no sir," but I would do it. But a jury is a really captive audience. They could not turn their backs to me, they could not turn their heads, and they could not be my deaf parents and just walk away. They were stuck with me and I liked that. I could finish what I was saying and if I had more to say, I would say it. I was very quick and concise, but I would say what I wanted to and had the attention of each and every person on that jury.

As in my childhood when I would get into fistfights at the drop of a hat, especially with a big person just to show them I wasn't going to be pushed around, as a lawyer I went to trial, if for nothing else, that I was not going to be bullied by the police, the judge, the prosecution. They usually outnumbered me because I was there by myself. I was like Cyrano de Bergerac looking to right every perceived insecurity, shortcoming, slight. Like Cyrano, I loved a good fight. And like Cyrano de Bergerac the victory was never as important as the battle. It was good to win, but it was better to exhaust the opposition and let them know they had been embattled for life. Tenacity was its own reward.

I loved beating up judges who I didn't like with a deaf client. Like the black widow spider, I would sit there waiting for the judge to open his/her mouth about, "What are you doing here? How do you know that?" "Well, sir, my parents are deaf so I know how to speak sign language." "Your parents are deaf and dumb?" Or the clients were deaf and dumb. I never had a deaf and dumb client – lots of deaf and stupid clients.

I had one particular deaf client who was charged with prostitution. I'm serious. I love them because the whole thing revolves around what was said. Can you imagine spending hours in court arguing over whether a "fifty-fifty" is an ice cream or an act of sex? Or a "half and half"? What's a half and half? You'd go through all that to find out what a fifty-fifty is and what sex act is a fifty-fifty. What does it connote? All these things go on so this is great! The whole thing is what is meant. The police officer, and, with the wonderful backing of the police department gets up and says, "my experience – I've been out there working vice for eighteen years and this is what this means." A fifty-fifty is this and they go through all this. I couldn't wait to see what they had against my client. My client was very clever. Not only did she carry condoms and change, she had pen and paper. True!

I was always trying to be a person of accomplishment. I always wanted to prove something to myself to be sure. To my parents I'm sure, and I suppose it's a lifelong struggle to prove to yourself who you are – to look for who you are. I was always looking inside to see if there was a person in there. A person that valued me better...and I found that to some degree as a lawyer. At least, professionally, it gave me what I wanted, it gave me the kind of respect – of course – these days it becomes a mark of disrespect if you're a lawyer. The jokes, they never stop. To be a lawyer did a lot in terms of ego and self-esteem. It did not translate into my personal life. It just translated

into my professional life. Whatever problems I brought with me that caused me to become a lawyer or to enjoy the accomplishment of being a lawyer, did not translate at home. I didn't bring the office home with me, but your personality does not change after five o'clock. You may put it in different places and forms, but you are who you are.

I was always angry and frustrated. I brought it with me everywhere I went. There was always enough charm there to make it palatable, but it was there. I was too hard on my kids. I was too angry. I've put my wives through hell. I had no choice. So, that's why I came to CODA with a lot of anger. It must have been very apparent to others because after Rochester, I went to my next one and up comes Millie Brother, now Millie, "Mother" and she says, "I thought we'd never see you again. And I asked, "Why?" "You were so angry and I figured that was it," she said. "You came, you saw, you hated and you left." So, I sent Millie a copy of a note I wrote to myself right after I got back from Rochester and I'd like to read some of that.

"The night I arrived back in L.A. while driving home from the airport, my oldest daughter asked me a few questions about the conference. And then for the first time ever asked me if I knew before she was born that she would need hearing aids. Did the doctor say she was going to be deaf? Would her children be deaf? My two daughters have each worn hearing aids since each one of them was four years old. Other than complaining about having to wear them, and wanting smaller and smaller ones, they have not said too much about the reasons or long term ramifications of their impaired hearing. Was it coincidence? Well, it's a simple fact that I had gone to the conference. The conference was the single, most emotionally charged weekend I have ever experienced. Highs, lows, painful self-realizations, painful reassessment, disillusionment at discovering that much more introspection and self-examination was required for me to make peace."

I came away with some other observations of CODA. I now refer to all codas as "codas" and all codas that belong to CODA as "Codas". That's just me and that's how I distinguish it. For me, CODA is a bit of an enigma. It's a place where I can look forward to coming to every year and maybe six months before each CODA conference I enter into what I call, "Pre-CODA Syndrome" – known to many of you as PCS. I come to see old friends, to make new friends. The talent of so many codas – song signers, musicians, poets, actors, and very outrageous storytellers, entertains me. Much of what

reminds us of our parents and our childhoods. I also see myths and assumptions that are made about other codas.

There is a myth that's out there that all of us were raised in "signing" households. Therefore, codas ought to be able to sign and sign well and prefer signing. I don't think from what I see that enough thought is given to the reality or possibility that there are a number of people who are comfortable with sign language, but don't use it except with deaf people or in their work if that's what they do. I don't sign in my everyday life unless I have a deaf client which is not all that often. When I'm with my parents, I sign, otherwise, I talk to all other people in English. I admit when I'm in the car alone and I hear music, I sign to myself a little bit. I admit I sometimes talk to myself in sign. Not necessarily a whole sentence maybe two or three words when it comes to me. But there are a lot of people who come to CODA, and I think I'm one of them, for whom sign is a second language. And there are others for whom sign is just not a comfortable language or others for whom sign is comfortable when they are signing with those people to whom they normally sign.

A lot of codas, many more than are willing to admit, were raised in oral households. Many had other people in the house translate, meaning that older sisters translate. There are a number of codas here who have siblings that do not sign as well as they do. Some who, for any number of reasons, don't sign a lot, and there are a lot of us here that do sign, who are very intimidated by those who sign far better than we do. Therefore, we choose not to sign at all for fear that we're wrong, it's just easier. I think that most of the people who are not as comfortable with others people's signing accept it and understand in a number of situations here. When there is storytelling going on or sometimes in the middle of a breakout session the angst builds up and for some people the signing comes with the release. What some of us have a hard time with is some of the remarks that people who are very fluent in sign make to others who are not. "You don't sign? Why don't you sign?" Those things are very tough for people to take.

You also wouldn't think so by the amount of "shop talk" you hear going on around here, that a lot of codas do not work in the field of deafness. We're just not in tremendous abundance here. For some reason, CODA conferences bring out a lot of people who happen to work in the field of deafness. This assumption that if you are here, you must somehow work in the field of deafness, can take strange twists. A few years ago, I was asked to

sit on a “Tri-cultural” panel. My three cultures that my parents were deaf, that I was hearing and that I didn’t work in the field of deafness. It happened.

Another myth, one that touches me personally, is that about having children who are deaf or hearing-impaired. There seems to be a myth amongst some that if you have deaf parents it’s just fine to have children with impaired hearing. That those of us who would prefer to see our children have little or no problems in life, are somehow turning our backs on our deaf parents. I am not ashamed to say I would like to see my children go through life as easily as they can. If that means without hearing aides, I’d love to see it. If that means with hearing aide, that’s the way it is. But I do not take pleasure or comfort in my children’s hearing aids because my parents are deaf. I take no comfort in that at all.

Many of us come to CODA with much baggage. We come hoping to be accepted. We come hoping that we have finally found a place where we are not unusual, strange, or from another world. Instead some are met with exclusivity. Not intended, but it happens. Somebody said to me just two week ago, “I was a minority growing up, I come to CODA and I’m a minority at CODA.” This is not good. This should be a safe place. This should be a comfortable place. We come here with tremendous sensitivity as a result of being raised and viewed with no sensitivity by the outside world. Let’s share that sensitivity and let everybody feel as accepted as we want to feel. And not judge people the way some of our parents judged us on the ability of our sign language. I, for one, was raised with the notion that a good son or daughter meant good signer. I don’t want to hear the voice of my parents here. That’s why I’m here.

As I was writing this, I was thinking that my anger was not as unique as some people would have me believe. That if it was that unique, we wouldn’t have anger breakout groups – Fire and Ice. It’s there – it’s there, designed for those who want to express the anger to express it. It’s a safe place – it’s encouraged. Now I understand that not everybody is as comfortable with anger as I am, not as easily expressed as I can, not that your are used to it as I am, I understand that. I understand that I am perceived as a ‘one-person walking anger breakout’.

I’d like to share a few more thoughts from my first conference. These are notes I wrote to myself when I got home.

“As these last few days have passed I’ve recovered from the emotional and physical drain of the weekend. The ego has been restored and I’ve become a touch philosophical about my childhood background, parents, and sister. I realize that I am one of many with similar manifestations resulting from being a product of deaf culture. We are all slightly nuts. We are slightly or greatly angry. We are all tremendously touched by our upbringing and we are all survivors. I take solace in all of this and feel purged of some of the excess baggage. This baggage has been replaced by the realizations that there is more baggage underneath the old baggage. Not better or worse, maybe not all that different, just more. But, I realize the more I discard the better able I am equipped to handle the other baggage that I uncover. The people I met at the conference have a lot in common with each other, but we all possess as many differences as similarities. One common thread runs through all of us. If we didn’t care, if we didn’t love, we wouldn’t have risked.”

Since then I’ve seen examples of this. I see it in Stan Schuchman, Sherry Hicks, Sue Washington. Stan came here in 1988 to deliver a keynote talk. Like the academic person he is, he wrote his talk and was all prepared to give it, and like the realist Stan is tore it up and rewrote it. That takes a lot of courage and it takes a lot of risking. Sue Washington, last year, told us things that she had to have feared would bring judgment, perhaps derision, but risked talking about her childhood. Not as unique as we’d like to think, but hers and one which many of us, for sure me, have very comfortably been able to look down upon. Sherry Hicks gave us a powerful, one-woman performance, showing us the pain of her childhood and the pain of her motherhood.

CODA allowed these people to risk, to trust and share. The common belief that many people and many codas have is that we come here to complain and whine about our parents. That’s our main purpose, they think. Yeah, some of that goes on, we talk a little about this and complain a little about that. Like my grandmother would say, “kvetch”. But, we wouldn’t be here if we didn’t have a love for the deaf culture. We wouldn’t come here and risk if we didn’t have some admiration for what it is and what it produces.

I made a great many friends here. People I talk to long distance, people I’ve shared photographs with, and on occasion written to and received word from. I hug people here. I hug men here! For those of you who were fortunate enough to be at last year’s CODA conference I wish to announce

that I have not graduated, will never graduate. I fail to see how if you wish to continue growing and learning you can graduate. You can't close the door on developing. No matter how many book-signing talks you've given.

Last year I wrote my father a letter. While he is alive and well enough to understand what I had to say and told him how much I love and told him about some childhood memories that he and I shared, or at least that I remember which make me remember my love for him and continue my love. My parents now view CODA as involvement with the deaf! They see it as the most positive thing I've ever done connected with the deaf.

My wife told me last year that I'm on a mission to make peace with myself. And I am. I said that we are all ourselves before we are codas, and we are. Even if being CODAs is what we are. We are ourselves, we are individuals. I am happy to say that my family of origin is now my family of choice. I am my parents' son...I am "Elot".