

Communication Story for Morse code

This is a true story, that happened to Shawn Steele, the webmaster at terra.org.

Read this to the students.

For a number of years Shawn taught skiing, through a program at Winter Park, Colorado. This program worked with disabled skiers. This is the story of Shawn and a young woman, age 13.

When Sarah was five, the car she was riding in was hit by a drunk driver. She had just removed her seat belt to reach something in the back seat, when they were struck. Since that day, Sarah has not been able to walk, talk, or even eat on her own.

Sarah's parents brought her to the place that Shawn was teaching so she could learn to ski. It is not what you and I might call skiing, but to Sarah the chance to sit in a sled and go down a long hill was great fun. You see, when someone can't walk or move their arms they can still sit ski. This is when they sit in a sled and learn to lean from side to side to control it. Sarah had been many times before, but no one ever talked to her. People found it hard to talk to a young person who couldn't answer back.

Actually, Sarah could answer, but not in words. She could shake her head, a little, and grunt. The day that Shawn got to ski with Sarah for the first time was special to both of them. Shawn would ask Sarah where she wanted to go, and Sarah would tell him. The conversation usually went something like this:

Shawn - Would you like to do that run again?

Sarah - Shakes her head (which means no).

Shawn - How about the run with bumps on it?

Sarah - Shakes her head and grunts (which means yes)

Shawn, sounding confused - You want to do the bump run, but not all of it?

Sarah - grunts

Shawn - Oh, you want to go through the trees again?

Sarah, excited - grunts several times.

Sarah and her parents were very excited because Shawn treated Sarah like she was a real person and actually talked WITH her, not at her. The next several times that Sarah's parents took her skiing they asked for Shawn. He skied with Sarah each time. They both had a lot of fun.

Shawn and Sarah always talked about skiing, until one day. Sarah was excited about something and wanted to tell Shawn about it. Shawn tried to ask all the normal questions to find out what had her so excited, but he was getting a lot of head shakes with questions about skiing. He finally started asking questions about her family. After three lift rides, two runs, and about an hour, Shawn had the answer. Sarah was a new aunt. Her brother had just had a baby. (Shawn hadn't even known she had a brother.) They were both relieved to have finally communicated the idea.

What kind of language did they use to communicate?

Why might someone not want to try to do what Shawn did?

Do you think that it was just as frustrating for Sarah as it was for Shawn?