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The Roadmap

**By Paul W. Ogden, Professor Emeritus
California State University, Fresno**

The father of public education, Horace Mann, once said, “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.” This quote has always meant a lot to me. As a Deaf person who came of age during a profound period of societal change, activism is in my blood. I grew up in a home filled with civil rights leaders, with a father who made difficult choices in the name of what was right—not what was easy. And so year after year, when decisions needed to be made or challenges presented themselves, I carefully discerned how my actions could become victories for those around me—and then I pursued those roads.

Just as you all have been privileged to attend such an enlightened and revolutionary university, back when I was a young adult, I attended Antioch College, which was dedicated to social justice. There I learned how I could become an agent of change, someone who could help shape the world into what it should be—what it *could* be. Even though society was evolving before my very eyes, when I looked around, I still saw a plethora of problems that needed to be addressed. Countless areas to be improved—especially for Deaf and hard of hearing people.

My university experience taught me that there are many ways to change the world. You can invent new technologies, elect new leaders, improve existing systems—the options are endless! I started critically observing the people around me as well as the systems in which they lived. Rather than simply identifying the parts of my community that were wrong, I would dig deeper and figure out where gaps existed so I could identify what was missing. Providing these things—the missing pieces—would be my way to change the world. It would be my victory for humanity.

I decided to center my professional goals around service and community improvement. I became an educator. When I first arrived at California State University, Fresno, and started working with families of deaf and hard of hearing children and professionals serving the Deaf community, the thing that struck me most was the lack of resources for parents who were unfamiliar with the Deaf world. I was the child of hearing parents, and I knew firsthand the importance of communication. Yet hearing parents were floundering when it came to making communication choices for their Deaf children! They were inundated with technical information from every kind of professional but no one was telling them *how* to use all this

information. Similarly, no one was offering these parents a balanced view of Deafness—sharing with them the possibilities and opportunities that awaited their child as well as their family. Fear was the prevalent emotion.

I saw this information gap and was determined to fill it. I would meet this need by designing a resource specifically developed to provide comfort, information, and inspiration to parents reeling from the fact that their child was born Deaf. It was in this space that The Silent Garden was born.

At first, *The Silent Garden* was just a book. As a young and determined professor, I based my book on my own communication experiences. When it was first published, it was one of the few resources available to parents of Deaf children. The book stressed the importance of communication—in whatever form that worked best for the family unit. *The Silent Garden* served as a roadmap to normalizing parents' experiences and feelings. It encouraged exploration and joy—yes, joy—for parents with Deaf children.

As my journey continued and evolved and new gaps became apparent, The Silent Garden grew to fill them. I grew to fill them. First, it was an endowment for a Deaf Education Chair to ensure Deaf Studies would be taught forever at Fresno State. Then came endowed scholarships for students who wanted to make Deaf Education their life's work. Next, it was a Chair for Visiting Professionals to provide a connection between the university and our community. Then interpreting scholarships, workshops, and more. Before I knew it, The Silent Garden had become a series of educational programs and endowments providing critical information, education, and resources to deaf and hard of hearing children and adults, as well as families and practitioners in the Central California region—all free of charge!

Thanks to an anonymous gift, we even have the Scarlett's Park annual conference. This unique event is centered on providing specialized resources to Deaf and hard of hearing children with special needs. No other conference like this exists in the United States, and it was the identification of this gap that propelled us into action.

Now when someone asks me to describe The Silent Garden, sometimes I do not know how to respond. Is it a book? An organization? A community? To me, it is all of these things and more. Each year The Silent Garden continues to grow. In fact, it has grown so much that we are currently seeking funding for a Master Gardener who will oversee it all. Before my very eyes, my work has blossomed into so much more than I could have ever dreamed possible as a new graduate, all those years ago.

So, as you sit here, full of your own ideas and dreams, ready to set out and make a difference in this world, my advice to you is to watch carefully. Take note. Be in tune with your community and the challenges it faces. What is missing? What needs to change? What issues demand your time and attention? *Actively seek to discover these gaps and then do everything in your power to fill them. Go beyond yourself to do what is right, not what is easy, to find your fulfillment.*

In life, you are given the choice to create or consume. When you sign these concepts, the idea of consumption can be expressed like “consume” or “take,” whereas “create” expresses giving something

from your mind, or made by your hands, into the world. For me, it has always been more meaningful to create—it is also a lot more fun! The more I see my work making a positive impact, the more inspired I am to continue creating. I am willing to bet you will experience the same thing.

Think about the college degree you just earned. Reflect on the hard work and dedication you put toward it, and then use this same determination and focus to meet your next challenge. This is what your life as a change agent, a difference-maker, a world-improver, will be like. This new way of looking at things will keep you motivated as you continue to observe your world and find your way.

These years you have spent at Gallaudet are unlike any other time in your life. This precious opportunity to be surrounded by such bright minds and powerful Deaf leaders has prepared you to be the next generation of change. Every single one of you is capable of using your talents and education to find gaps no one else even knew existed. Fill these gaps. Fill them so marginalized, oppressed, and underserved communities have an equal opportunity to lead meaningful and prosperous lives. Fill them for the next generation of Deaf leaders. In doing so you will effect change in the lives of your families, friends, and communities. And the world will slowly, surely, and steadily become a better place for Deaf people—for all people—to live.

My parting thoughts . . . some Deaf readers of the original *Silent Garden* objected to the word “silent” in the title. They suggested it misrepresented the life of Deaf people to those who needed most crucially to understand it—the parents of deaf children. I chose to keep the word “silent” in the title, even in the face of disagreement, not because of its descriptive quality so much as its poetic and evocative meaning for me.

I am profoundly deaf; I don't hear a single sound. Instead, I experience the world through vision. When I think of a silent garden, I think of my version of paradise, which means perfect communication: no more breakdowns, misunderstandings, confusion—no more floundering for words. In my imagination, I can see the place where this smooth interaction takes place. It is located on top of a hill with breathtaking views of the ocean close by and snowcapped mountains in the distance.

I don't hear the waves crashing—I feel the spray of water on my face. I don't hear the wind—I feel the breeze in my hair. I don't hear the sunrises and sunsets—I catch the spectacular blend of orange, pink, and gray over the horizon. I don't hear the stars—I see tiny, piercing lights shining in the night sky. I don't hear the wildlife—I enjoy the places where they live. I don't hear a friend call my name—I feel his touch on my shoulder or see her wave of greeting.

Welcome to The Silent Garden, a world of color and movement so beautiful, so engaging, so rich in information and meaning that we are completely engrossed in the life of it all. Enjoy your journey. And don't forget to stop once in a while to linger among the various flowers that provide our lives with beauty and fill our souls with joy.

Congratulations to each and every one of you on your greatest accomplishment to date. Now go out and discover new ones and achieve victory for humanity!

Dr. Paul Ogden

The Graduate Awards and Hooding Ceremony

Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.

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