

THE SOUND BARRIER

ALEXIS KASHAR, LAWYER



Kashar, 34, a mother of two, practices disability and special-education law in Sherman Oaks, Calif. She relies on a relay service, in which operators act as go-

betweens for hearing and deaf people with TTY phones. Also invaluable is her portable voice carryover (pictured), invented by her mother, also deaf, which allows Kashar to speak with her own voice from any phone. A vibrating pager that can receive e-mail and convert voice mail into e-mail never leaves her desk. "It allows me to do what every mom does with her cell phone," Kashar says.

used so many different methods for conducting interviews. Naturally, I communicated using American Sign Language. But I also used e-mail, faxes and TTY (telephones with text). At times, I spoke by phone with a deaf person at the other end who used a sign-language interpreter to receive my words but was speaking for himself. During one conversation, the other person used an amplifying device hooked into a cochlear implant (a device that places electrodes directly into the cochlea, where sound waves are absorbed and interpreted by the auditory nerve).

One of the first innovations to give deaf people wider access to the general culture was television captioning, introduced in 1972. "Television captioning exposed me to the world as a teenager," says Alexis Ander Kashar, a lawyer who is deaf. She recalls

I saw my parents, who are deaf, zipping over to the computer to check the news and their e-mail. My father smiled. "My life is better than before," he said.

how the entire deaf world came to a standstill when *Dynasty* was broadcast with captions in 1983. Now, all TVs 13

inches or larger made or sold in the U.S. must come with a closed-captioning chip; by 2006, virtually all new programs on major TV networks will be captioned.

Today, some movie theaters in major metropolitan areas offer "open" captioning—where a film is shown with captions for the deaf. Other theaters offer Assistive Listening Devices, based on infrared (using light waves) or FM (using radio waves) technologies. There is also the "rear-view system," in which theatergoers place a clear Plexiglas device in front of them that allows the captions to appear. (Nevertheless, only limited theaters provide the captioning and then only at some showings. The rear-view system is used even more rarely, which makes going to the movies a sore subject to some deaf people.)

GREGORY HLIBOK, STOCKBROKER



Hlibok, 33, is a financial adviser with Merrill Lynch in Columbia, Md. He works with his brother, Stephen, who also is deaf. About 80% of their clients are deaf, and nearly a third reside out of state. But deafness and remoteness have little impact on their work, as the Hliboks can readily e-mail research reports and fax financial statements. "My career choice came from my desire to work with people," says Hlibok. "Technology makes it easier to stay in touch with them."

how technology had affected him. "My English has improved," he said. "With e-mails and faxes, I write and keep in touch with deaf people much more." And then he smiled. "My life is better than before."

Last summer, the Republican National Convention

CAROLYN STERN, DOCTOR



Dr. Stern, 36, and her partner, Dr. Timothy Malia (who is hearing), maintain a family practice in Rochester, N.Y. They deliver babies and tend to patients of all ages. Nearly a third of their patients are hard-of-hearing or deaf. The doctors flash a light rather than knock before entering an examination room to let patients know they're coming in. They communicate with patients by TTY phones, e-mail and fax machines and by sending messages to pagers. For hard-of-hearing patients, they use a Telex amplifier. An engineer designed Dr. Stern's stethoscope (pictured) to fit into her cochlear-implant speech processor, so she can hear a patient's heartbeat.

Deaf people now are able to be more plugged in to politics and other events than ever before. When I was home recently, I noticed my mother and father constantly zipping over to the computer to check the news. Not only did they receive regular updates on happenings in the deaf world around the country, but there also were local deaf news bulletins being placed constantly. I asked my dad

provided sign-language interpreters, captioning screens in the bars and convention hall, and FM systems that attached to special FM Assistive Listening Devices for improved hearing. At least one delegate to the Democratic National Convention was profoundly deaf.

The only downside of all this progress may be that it is splintering deaf culture. Dr. I. King Jordan—the first deaf president of Gallaudet University, the leading school for the deaf, in Washington, D.C.—noted that, before televised captioning, deaf people would meet regularly at deaf clubs to watch movies captioned by the U.S. Department of Education. Before TTYs, faxes and e-mails, they often

would get together just to talk. These societies have seen a decline in membership.

Still, Dr. Jordan has an obvious appreciation of technology. His special vibrating pager is "terrific instant communication," he says. Indeed, it vibrates frequently, as he gets several hundred e-mails a day. "I rarely use the telephone anymore," he adds. "I can sit at my keyboard and talk to people all over the world!"

EASY PHONE ACCESS

The FCC has mandated that 711 Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS) be available nationwide by October 2001. That means, in all 50 states, you'll be able to dial "711" and be hooked up to an operator who can relay calls between hearing and deaf people.

TO FIND OUT if 711 is already accessible in your state, check the TDI Web site at www.tdi-online.org or use your CueCat reader to swipe the following cue:

