

## The Renaissance of RAD-KC Kansas City's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Gay Group is Reborn



by Bradley Osborn May 2007

In July 1997, the Kansas City chapter of the Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf (KCRAD) hosted the national conference of its parent organization. The Hyatt Regency Crown Center was the venue, and "Your Well-Being" was the theme. Shortly after that convention, local membership declined, and KCRAD ceased to exist. Now a decade later, RAD-KC is back with around 40 deaf and hard of hearing gay and lesbian residents identified in the bi-state metropolitan area.

There are actually two groups in the metro: 1) Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf-Kansas City (RAD-KC), an affiliate of RAD, meets on the second Saturday of each month, and is open to lesbians and gays who are deaf or hard of hearing and to those who know American Sign Language (ASL). 2) The Kansas City Deaf and Hard of Hearing Gay Social Group meets on the third or fourth Saturday of each month, and is open to men only.

Deaf culture is unfamiliar to most hearing persons, but the hearing impaired community is just as diverse as any other. Being gay and hard of hearing or deaf is but another aspect of one's humanity. The new PBS documentary *Through Deaf Eyes* documents, in exceptional fashion, 200 years American deaf culture. The film is narrated by Stockard Channing, and is peppered with short films giving it an intermittent first person point of view.

About 90% of deaf people have parents who can hear, and most deaf parents gave hearing children. There are about 35 million Americans who are hard of hearing to some degree with around 300,000 of that group being profoundly deaf. Using the 10 % Kinsey guideline, that puts the number of hard of hearing gay people and deaf gays in the United States at 3.5 million and 30,000, respectively (23,333 and 200 in the Greater Kansas City area).

Through the years, the education of deaf and hard of hearing persons has evolved. Some educators have embraced the oralist approach, choosing to teach speech rather than sign language. To others who opt for purely visual language, this oralism is abominable. After periods of segregation or concentrations on various pedagogical methods through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, today roughly 85% of deaf children are enrolled in regular primary and secondary schools. A milestone of self-possession and student-led protest occurred in 1988 at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., when the "Deaf President Now" movement forced out a newly hired hearing university president in favor of a deaf president for the nation's flagship advanced educational institution for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Technology has played a part in the field of deaf and hard of hearing communication for some time. TTY (teletypewriter) or TDD (telecommunications device for the deaf) translate typed words into sound and back again. Available since the 1980s, cochlear implants bypass the ear, sending electrical impulses directly to the auditory nerve. These devices do not truly replicate the complexities of normal hearing, but they are another option available for those who choose to enhance their non-visual language options. And, of course, the Internet has brought us all a fresh medium for use in global discourse.

Many readers will have grown up seeing things such as sermons or concerts broadcast with an inset of an ASL interpreter. With the advent of ubiquitous closed captioning, one sees less of this, with the exception of live events. Although based on U.S. English and borrowed from a French prototype, American Sign Language is not simply the visual equivalent of the vernacular. It is a language unto itself, with complexities and nuances that belie references that aim to label it as simple or uncomplicated. One needs only to observe the interpretation of a familiar poem or song to witness the ineffable beauty of ASL. The hearing world has a great deal to learn both about and from its deaf and hard of hearing brothers and sisters like those in RAD-KC.

RAD-KC members have been involved in or plan to be involved in metro area LGBT events such as *AIDS Walk*, *Gay Pride* and *Out in Westport*. Other organizational calendar items could include holiday-themed social events and ASL classes as a means of reaching out to the larger gay community. Some RAD-KC members hope to attend the 2009 biennial *Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf Conference* in Chicago. In the meantime, they'll be growing their chapter, educating, and socializing.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, or if you know ASL, you are encouraged to join RAD-KC. If you know someone who might like to be a member, spread the word.

National Association of the Deaf | [anad.org](http://anad.org)

DeafGay.com | [deafgay.com](http://deafgay.com)

Deaf Queer Resource Center | [deafqueer.org](http://deafqueer.org)

Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf | [rad.org](http://rad.org)

Kansas City Deaf and Hard of Hearing Gay Social Group | [groups.yahoo.com/group/kcdeaf-hhgay](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kcdeaf-hhgay)

St. Louis Metro Rainbow of the Deaf | [groups.yahoo.com/group/stlmrd](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stlmrd)

For Hearing People Only | [forhearingpeopleonly.com](http://forhearingpeopleonly.com)

Deaf Life | [deaflife.com](http://deaflife.com)



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