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(Memoir)

WORDS UNCAGED

HANDS CAN TALK

As I was jogging around the track, I noticed my friend Wayne by the fence gate. I stopped for a quick chat. He was waiting for his American Sign Language group. He showed me a few words via, hand signals. I was impressed. Within a month, I was sitting next to him in the classroom.

The California State Prison in Lancaster's "A-yard" offers dozens of programs to grow both spiritually and academically.

We started out learning the letters of the alphabet, with hand signs. I practiced "signing" my name. It was fun. We worked on numbers, days of the week and months. Short phrases were more difficult. The instructor (Reese), has a lot of patience and a wonderful sense of humor. He keeps the class interesting.

I tried to learn Spanish, but found it too hard. The pronunciations and spellings frustrated me. While studying sign language all you need to know are English words. "Signing" is a special and a skilled way to communicate. Just about everyone knows a deaf person. Can you picture their expression, when you use hand signs? Reese personally had an instance when it came in handy. He was in the prison visiting room, when a woman was having a difficult time with the officers at the desk. He saw the commotion from a distance and realized she was deaf and needed help. He stepped in and explained to the officers her questions and concerns. She was waiting for a "behind the glass" visit with her son. The look of relief on her face was noticed by many people. If not for him, the situation would have been tense and confusing.

I've seen many important events in which someone is talking and there is a person near them "signing." I never really paid attention to them or even looked in their direction; until I started learning how to "sign." Thanks to this class, I can now use hand signs and be understood clear across the yard. It sure beats yelling! I truly recommend you give "signing" a try. The class meets every Tuesday afternoon at two. It is a golden opportunity to help the deaf community and could possibly land you an interesting along with a high paying job!

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