Overcoming challenges is nothing new for Noelle Payton. The 25-year-old will graduate from West Virginia State University this December. She's proud of what she has accomplished so far.

Payton lost her hearing when she was 7 years old. The doctor did not believe in sign language. He told her parents that she needed to learn to lip-read. The result was that she was not able to communicate with her family. It caused a separation that continues today. No one in her family knows how to sign.

Payton attended elementary school at Shoals Elementary School in Charleston. For high school, her father insisted that she attend the Maryland Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD). She started there but did not like it. “I felt left out at MSSD. I couldn't fit in,” she said.

Payton returned home, against her father’s wishes. She wanted to go to the West Virginia School for the Deaf (WVSD) in Romney but her father refused to support her. She did end up going to WVSD and “it changed my life tremendously.”

“I loved Romney,” she said. “Everybody was so understanding. I met people who know how hard it is to be deaf.”

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She was accepted at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC but she was really nervous about going there. Once she arrived she realized that it was not the place for her. “Everybody was into Deaf Pride. I’m not really into that. I wanted to leave after the first semester but Kara Russell convinced me to stay one more semester.”

It didn’t get any better so she returned to Charleston. She worked at the Charleston Civic Center as a custodian for a few months but did not like that either.

Ready To Take On The World
Sign Language Classes

West Virginia Rehabilitation Center, Institute, West Virginia

The following sign language classes will be offered this winter. All classes are free to the public. To register, call (304) 766-4884.

Beginning I, Mondays and Thursdays, January 14-March 27, 1-2 p.m.
Beginning II, Tuesdays, January 15-March 18, 4-6 p.m.
Intermediate, Thursdays, January 17-March 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Intro. To Interpreting, Mondays, January 15-March 31, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Deaf Club Events Around the State

January 4, Deaf Chat Coffee, 5-10 p.m., Rendezvous House of Coffee, 7 Liberty Square, Teays Valley. Deaf and hearing are invited for a fun get-together. For more information, contact Diana Ramsey at iamaslsigner@verizon.net.

January 5, Charleston Association of the Deaf New Year’s Party, 5 p.m. to midnight, St. Albans City Hall, 1499 MacCorkle Avenue, St. Albans. Join us for dinner and prizes. No one under 16 years old allowed. For more information contact Jimmy Harrison at JHarrison5@aol.com.

January 12, Romney Association for the Deaf. Doors open at 1 p.m., games begin at 3 p.m. Admission—$10; New members—$5. VFW Legion Hall, Romney. For more information, visit www.geocities.com/rad_club_26757/WELCOME_RAD.

January 12, Fairmont Deaf Club, 4-10 p.m., Winfield Community Center, Fairmont. For more information, visit www.geocities.com/fmtdeaf.

January 18, Beckley Deaf Coffee Chat, 6-8 p.m., Starbucks, 308 Galleria Plaza, Beckley. Deaf and hearing are invited to come and socialize. For more information, contact Charlene Polk at (304) 763-4623 or Ken and Cindi Turner at (304) 252-6559.

February 1, Deaf Chat Coffee, 5-10 p.m., Rendezvous House of Coffee, 7 Liberty Square, Teays Valley.
February 9, Romney Association for the Deaf, 1 p.m., games begin at 3 p.m., VFW Legion Hall, Romney.
February 9, Fairmont Deaf Club, 4-10 p.m., Winfield Community Center, Fairmont.
February 15, Beckley Deaf Coffee Chat, 6-8 p.m., Starbucks, 308 Galleria Plaza, Beckley.
Cochlear Implants Are Not An Option for All

By Ruby and Michael Losh

When we learned that we were expecting a baby, the topic of whether the baby would be deaf or hearing never came up. When Ruby was seven months along her doctor discovered that the baby had a left pelvic kidney, one of the causes of deafness. Also, there is a long history of deafness on Ruby’s mother’s side of the family.

We decided that a cochlear implant was not an option for our daughter. Our deaf friends with cochlear implants struggle to identify themselves. Their parents made their decisions because audiologists and medical professionals encouraged them. Often these professionals did not provide sufficient information about other options such as learning sign language or using a digital hearing aid.

When our daughter Maddie was born, she failed the hearing test twice before she was released from the hospital. When Maddie was six weeks old we took her to an ear, nose and throat clinic at West Virginia University in Morgantown. At our first appointment we told the audiologist that if Maddie’s hearing loss was profound we had already decided that we did not want to provide her any amplification. We would use American Sign Language to communicate with her. Maddie is deaf, and the audiologist respected our decision to use ASL. The audiologist wanted us to bring Maddie back when she turned two-months-old for an Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) test to validate results from the first hearing test.

The results of the ABR showed that Maddie’s right ear is profoundly deaf and her left ear has a moderate hearing loss. In her left ear Maddie is classified as deaf when pitches are low. Again, the audiologist respected our decision not to use cochlear implants. She wanted Maddie to come back at seven-months-old for a behavioral test.

When we returned for the behavioral test we saw a different audiologist. He asked us why Maddie did not wear hearing aids in order to improve her speech skills. We explained to him our decision and that we were raising her as a deaf child. We were teaching her ASL before the spoken language. Since she is classified as deaf wearing hearing aids would not improve her speech.

The audiologist did the test requiring the interpreter to sit out of Maddie’s sight so that she could focus and react to the sounds. Maddie did not respond to any sounds. The audiologist told us that Maddie failed the test and strongly recommended we consider a cochlear implant because it would make her equal to a hearing child. We argued with him explaining it was a myth that she would be equal. She MIGHT be the same as a hearing child but there is no guarantee. The audiologist did not talk about other options that are available for deaf children, including ASL and resources available at deaf schools, insisting that we get the cochlear implant.

We believe that cochlear implants are good for those who already have their language and culture before losing their hearing. Some medical professionals believe that the cochlear implant will “fix” the child. It is different with a child born deaf.

We strongly encourage other parents to research what the best option is for their child before simply taking the word of a medical professional. There are other options.
Finally, Payton decided to attend West Virginia State University. She started out as an English major but changed to Criminal Justice.

“I love criminal justice,” Payton said. “I’ve visited prisons and I met a deaf man who works for the FBI.”

Last summer she had the opportunity to do an internship with Kanawha County Magistrate Kim Aaron.

“I loved the whole court process. I especially like being part of everything that goes on behind the scenes,” Payton said.

Payton enjoyed going to school but still felt something was missing in her life. Some friends invited her to their church and it has made a big difference. “My faith affects what I do now, the decisions that I make.”

Payton hopes that she can be a role model for other deaf people. “I want more deaf people to know that they can do new things and fit in with the hearing world. If someone like me can go to work, go to college and get involved at church, then they can too.”

She is comfortable working and socializing with hearing people but she would like to see more deaf people tell others about deaf culture and what it is like to be deaf. She especially likes to see hearing parents signing with their children because communication is so important.

She is not sure what the future will bring after she graduates on December 16.

“I don’t want to live on SSI for the rest of my life or depend on other people to give me money. Having a job makes me feel proud because I am earning my own money,” she said.

Payton looks forward to new challenges and new experiences.