

# Breaking Silence

Twin sophomores speak about their lives as children of parents who are deaf

Maggie Rossiter

Kayla and Kara Chapman climb into their queen-sized bed, crawl under their floral print covers and quietly anticipate tonight's bedtime story. Their house is full of books, so tonight's story will be another untold magical adventure. Their mom opens the book and begins to read, but there is no sound. Their mom is not moving her lips. Instead, she signs.

Kayla and Kara, twin sophomores, are the children of two deaf parents. "My dad is an engineer, and my mom helps out at the same office. We're not really sure what she does," Kayla said while Kara laughed. "The first time I realized I was 'different' was probably in second grade, when we went to parent teacher conferences and would be the only people signing. Everyone would stare at us," Kayla and Kara said, as they finished each other's sentences. "When we were little I was kind of uncomfortable about it; I

was kind of embarrassed," Kara admitted. Kayla and Kara describe their life as complicated; they have moved around many times and haven't always lived with their parents. "We used to live in Chicago but my mom and step-dad decided to get a divorce, so they separated. My mom moved to Omaha, and my dad went to California. My sister and I came with my mom, and my little brother and sister stayed with my step-dad." At that time the twins had already started school at St. Robert's and they didn't want to leave their friends.

The girls live with their grandparents now and are only able to see their parents once or twice a year, but they are still able to communicate with them often. The separation was very hard for them at first, but as time has gone on, the split has become easier to cope with. "We have a videophone. It's this thing where you can talk on your TV and we can just sign to them," source said. "It's kind of like web-camming, but it is specifically made for deaf people," Kayla added.

They had to grow up fast and learn the meaning of responsibility, especially when it came to their school work. "In school, when we were learning how to pronounce words, and even today, we have a hard time pronouncing them. When I was little, I would ask my parents how to say a big word, and they obviously couldn't help me. We had to teach ourselves a lot," Kayla said.

As they grew up, they noticed more differences between their family and other families. "You know when your mom wants to talk to your friend's parents? Well, it would be kind of annoying because she would want us to say 'you have a very nice daughter', or 'she is really pretty,'

and we would always be like 'Mom, no!' That happened all the time and we would always just leave it out," Kayla and Kara said, laughing.

"Family dinners were quiet. My friends said that dinner time was really awkward and quiet, but we never really noticed it until then. I remember when we first moved in with our grandparents, they would talk all the time and Kayla and I would get annoyed," Kara said.

As twins, it is nice to have each other around to talk to when their situation gets frustrating. The two find themselves breaking into sign language mid-sentence.

One of the hardest things for Kayla to face is the fact that her mom will never hear her voice. "When I was little I used to love to sing, and you know, she [her mom] could never hear me sing," Kayla said.

"They can never hear our voices; they will never know what we sound like," Kara said. Their mom asks the girls frequently to describe their voices to her, whether they are high or low.

The twins and their mom are very close, which makes the separation even harder to cope with. "She is one of those cool moms. We tell her everything. We can talk to her about boys," Kayla said with a proud smile.

What really frustrates the twins is the stereotypes people make about deaf people when they think that deaf people cannot do certain things. "Deaf people can do everything that regular people can do. The only thing they can't do is hear." In fact, their step-dad can talk, pretty well. "Half of my friends don't think that he is deaf. No one would know my step-dad was deaf unless they saw him signing because he is so good at speaking, but you can tell when my mom talks," Kayla said.

Speaking comes so naturally to their step-dad, that their friends ask to "prove" that he is truly deaf.

"You could scream right behind him and he wouldn't know. He doesn't even turn around."

Kayla and Kara believe that people who are deaf seem to be more in tune with other people's body language. They don't focus on material details of a person. Instead, they study emotion. "Deaf people notice more of your smile, and this sounds really weird but they notice your hands. A lot of deaf people get their nails done," Kayla and Kara added together.

"The coolest thing about having deaf parents is knowing sign language. It's cool being able to talk to all these different deaf people because I can understand what they are saying."

The most important lesson they have learned from their experience is not to judge others. "No matter the disability, everyone is still the same. They just have less advantages," Kara and Kayla concluded together.

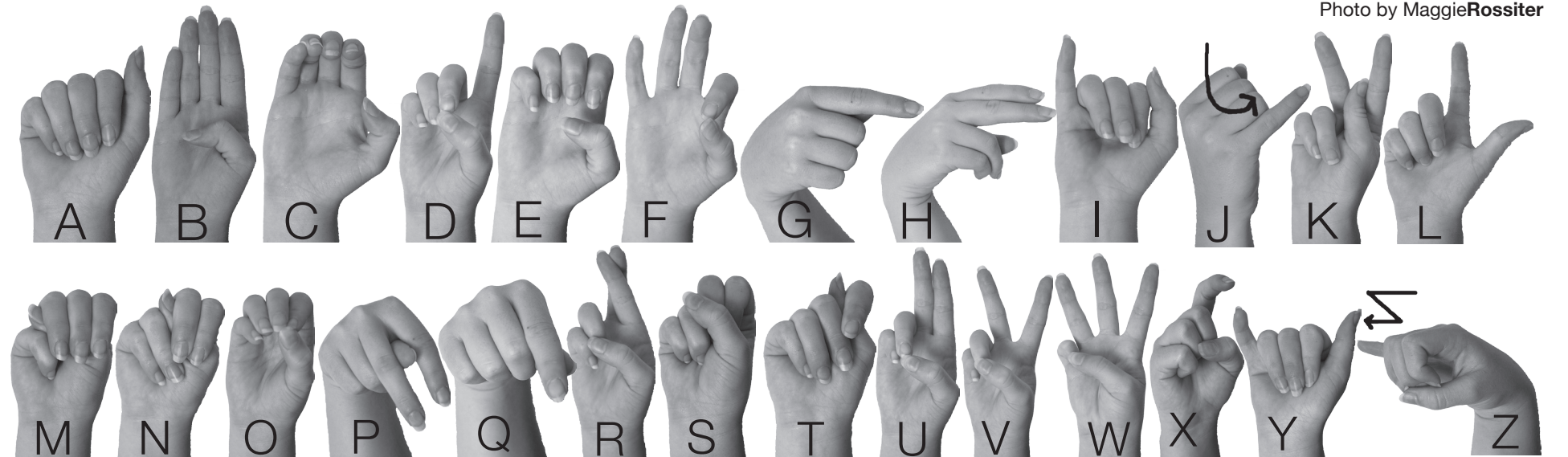


Kara Chapman



Kayla Chapman

Photo by Maggie Rossiter



Graphic by Allison Dethlefs

**KAYLA CHAPMAN**  
what else you need to know



**FAVORITE FOOD:** spaghetti  
**FAVORITE WORD/PHRASE TO SIGN:** happy birthday  
**FAVORITE MOVIE:** a walk to remember  
**FAVORITE QUOTE:** "don't worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing is gonna be alright." -bob marley  
**WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR TWIN:** we help each other out and are always there for each other  
**WHAT ANNOYS YOU ABOUT HAVING A TWIN:** we always fight over clothes and boys.

**KARA CHAPMAN**  
what else you need to know



**FAVORITE FOOD:** pizza  
**FAVORITE WORD/PHRASE TO SIGN:** i love you  
**FAVORITE MOVIE:** disturbia  
**FAVORITE QUOTE:** "wherever you go, no matter what the weather, always bring your own sunshine." -anthony j. d'angelo  
**WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR TWIN:** she can always be there for me, any time any day.  
**WHAT ANNOYS YOU ABOUT HAVING A TWIN:** we're always together and sometimes you want your own space.

Graphics by Maggie Rossiter  
Photos by Maggie Rossiter

## LANGUAGE

### LEARN THE



Graphic by Alex Eilers and Lexi Walz

September Network

# A Long Way From Home



Graphic by AnnieDovali

AnnieDovali

“Sometimes I feel bad because I feel like I can’t do it, but she [my mom] keeps telling me that I can and that the first part is just going to be difficult and then it will get easier,” says foreign exchange sophomore from Venezuela, Barbara Pereira. Being 2,755 miles from her home, her family and her friends is a struggle. She seems calm on the outside, but naturally she’s homesick. I remember when I first sat down to talk to Barbara. She set her things down, and sighed. It had been a rough day. After hitting up the vending machine, and generously buying me a snack to eat, she finally sat down.

I could see the distress on her face. But she quickly let it pass. While we talked, she beamed. With her beautifully tanned skin, dark brown hair pulled back, disheveled bangs framing her face, and a pair of brown eyes hidden behind rimmed glasses, Barbara talks to me and begins to open up. She helps me understand what its like to be in a new country, a new school, and take on a whole new life from the one she knew in Venezuela.

When she arrived in Omaha on May 11 she especially had a hard time. “It was really hard emotionally. I always felt like I want to go back [to Venezuela], and I didn’t want to go to Marian but my mom and dad told me that it would be really fun and that it would be a good idea.” She specifically misses spending afternoons with her parents. “I miss finishing early in school and being able to eat lunch with my mom and my dad, which I did every day.”

It’s not only her family that she’s missing. Going to school at Marian also meant leaving all her old school friends behind and venturing out to make new ones. Barbara particularly misses her best friend, Sabrina. “I’ve known her for three years, and we met in school in seventh grade. She understands me a lot and she has a lot of the same thoughts as me.”

Keeping in daily contact with her family and friends is making it easier. Her favorite pass time? The computer. “Because I want to talk with my mom and feel like I’m with my friends,” she says.

And for Barbara, her mother, who she is extremely close to, is one of her friends. “I

feel happy but I also feel sad too sometimes because I want to be here, but I also want to be with my mom. I’m so close to my mom. I’m the baby of the family and I think that we are really good friends. I tell everything to my mom, even the most stupid things. She understands me a lot.”

On those days when she is really having a hard time being here, she has her brother to turn to, who also lives here in Omaha. One day, as I sat down with Barbara to talk, her phone rang. She answered and began speaking Spanish; I guessed it was her mother. “Sorry, that was my brother, he calls me every

day after school,” she told me.

Her brother is not only her support here, but also her inspiration here. “He inspires me because he was in the same situation that I am in. He came over for college, and he was here by himself. He didn’t have any family, nobody he knew, nothing.”

Even with her old life constantly on her mind, she continues to have an open mind about being here. Thinking about her future gave her



**Discuss.** Along with her classmates in Mrs. Spanbauer’s Block E Church class, Barbara Pereira participates in a class discussion. Photo taken by AnnieDovali.

the courage to come here. “It’s a good opportunity for me and for my future.”

As far as her future goes, she’s still deciding what she wants. She will eventually have to decide if she would like to continue

her schooling at Marian for the next two years. “I think that it’s a possibility because I like Marian so much and I feel really comfortable here, but it is so difficult for me to stay away from my family and my friends. I think that I’m not going to make that decision now. I will enjoy this year at Marian and in May I will make that decision.”

**“[My biggest struggle] here is just being here by myself, and trying to convince my mind that this is better for me. This is [what’s] best for me.”**  
-Barbara Pereira, sophomore

Barbara is torn. Torn between what she truly wants, which is to be with her family, and what she knows is best for her.

I suggest taking the time to get to know Barbara, and I’m not just talking to her fellow sophomores. I mean everyone. We can all learn something from her. Barbara can teach you something about courage, about stepping outside your comfort zone, realizing what’s best for you, and then doing it.

“[My biggest struggle] here is just being here by myself, and trying to convince my mind that this is better for me. This is [what’s] best for me. It’s hard because I want to be in Venezuela because I want my old life, but I’m trying to understand that this is what I need and this is what I have to do.”



## Fast Facts

ABOUT BARBARA PEREIRA

**Favoite Color:**  
Pink

**Favorite Song:**  
Billionaire by Travie McCoy ft. Bruno Mars

**Favorite Food:**  
Sushi

**Favorite American Restaurant :**  
Applebee’s

**First person you met at Marian:**  
Señor Bauer. He’s funny and he knows a lot of the Spanish things that I like.

**Hardest English Words:**  
Schedule and journalism. I always want to pronounce sign as sing.

Graphic by Abbey Furlow  
Photo by Allison Dethlefs