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## THE ETERNAL OPTIMIST – A STORY OF MY LIFE

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**Angshu Jajodia**

Many years ago, while browsing through the Classics section of the library at my school, I came across this quote by Plutarch, the ancient Greek philosopher: “What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.” This quote epitomizes everything I have based my life’s ideals and values on.

I was born deaf. But I am lucky to be born of two very special parents who had a dream that their child would be able to talk and play as any other child despite having a hearing problem. As I gather, when they first came to know the implications of my disability, they were numb with shock – which I guess is only natural – as they were told that the deaf could never learn to speak and would be resigned to communicating in sign language.

**“What we achieve inwardly  
will change outer reality.”  
- Plutarch**



**Figure 53.1 Angshu Jajodia with his Family**

Every time I tell people that I am deaf and was not supposed to speak, I experience an epiphany of sorts, because talking has seemed to be the most natural thing in the world for me. I realize that what seems natural now is the result of immense self-belief that my parents had in those dark times when no one was there to tell them that it was possible for a deaf child to speak.

Those days of uncertainty were definitely not easy. Everywhere my parents went in India, they asked only one question: "Will my child talk?" And everywhere they were met with a response in the negative. People even had the audacity to suggest to my mother to go for a second child to fulfil parental ambitions. But as they say, seekers will be finders and finders will be keepers! In the same way, my parents found guidance, encouragement and knowledge in their search for a meaningful rehabilitation programme for me. As a result, I started talking.

Two decades have gone by since then. I have had a truly fulfilling childhood. I was always made to be comfortable with my deafness and have perceived it to be a great blessing instead of a curse. For me, being deaf is the way I am - much as the short or tall person feels about himself. Truly, it is the journey that makes life worth it. No worries if your child does not come first, second or third. No big shakes if your child does come first, second, third or even last. Life is not a race.



**Figure 53.2** Angshu meeting the President of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam in 2005

My parents did exactly that. They did not have any plan for me to come first in life. They just took things as they came, revelling in the beautiful journey of teaching their child to talk and talk more. They did not compete with anyone nor did they push me to compete. I ambled along at my own pace, going from strength to strength as I moved up the classes. I was never a good student in school. In fact my class reports had begun to worry my

teachers who were sensitive of their school's reputation. So, when I got through my boards in the 1st Division, they were elated. I have never looked back since then! I went through and creditably completed my higher education through one of the best institutes in the country. After a brief stint in the corporate sector, I have now chosen to join the social sector and am also preparing for my Ph.D. Without the solid base in language that was prepared for me early in life, I am sure I would not have been able to make my own choices in life so naturally. So, though my parents didn't plan for me to come first in life, things fell into place and worked out in the end.

**"Disability cannot be an excuse for mediocrity."**

**- Angshu Jajodia**

My parents tell me that they have had a very blessed life in mentoring me and watching me grow. Life with deafness has been challenging no doubt, but it has given me unforgettable moments and helped me to appreciate the little joys of human existence. Certainly a child with

a disability is not a blessing one would pray for, but nevertheless ours has been a very interesting life.



**Figure 53.3 Angshu receiving the M.A. degree from Mr S Ramadorai at the convocation ceremony of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai in May 2012**

I'd like to use this platform as an opportunity to share a few thoughts of mine on disability. To persons with disabilities I want to say this: disability cannot be an excuse for mediocrity. We are aiming to reach for the stars and we can certainly reach them in the pursuit of excellence. People who pursue excellence will pursue excellence anyway, whether they are disabled or not. Disability only adds a renewed perspective to the differences that are existent in all of us.

The bumblebee is aerodynamically not supposed to fly, but it doesn't know that and therefore it keeps on flying. Similarly we should not allow our limitations to hold us back.

The focus should be on what we can do rather than what we cannot. Temple Grandin, Stephen Hawking, Sachin Tendulkar and Nobel Laureate Vernon Smith have shown us the way. Who can stop us?

**I cannot change the way I look, but I can definitely change the way the world looks at me...**

## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

The author is a post-graduate in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and is currently working with an organization that focuses on empowering parents to teach their pre-lingual deaf children to talk. He also holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work from Visva-Bharati University. He is now pursuing his Ph.D at Visva-Bharati University in the field of social sciences.