

A mother's tenacity drives siblings' successes

(Two Pictures) Far left, children in back row from left to right. Ann, Larry, Susan, Jeanne, Jill, Sally, Paul, held by his father, Ralph Roesler; front row: Stephen and Ralph. Immediate left: Alice and Jill at the St. Louis Zoo in 1952

"I think the main reason they've been so successful is because they were encouraged to build their lives around their strengths."

- Alice (Roesler) Wheat

Alice (Roesler) Wheat and Ralph Roesler together raised nine children, four of whom were born with the inability to hear. All of those siblings (Jill, Jeanne, Ralph and Stephen) attended CID at various times between 1956 and 1978.

Alice dove into the challenges of helping Jill (her firstborn) learn to speak after her hearing loss was diagnosed at age three. She was committed to giving her daughter the skills necessary to thrive in a hearing world - a journey that led her to CID after participating in correspondence courses from the John Tracy Clinic. Thanks in large part to their mother's tenacity, all four children (whose hearing loss is related to the same recessive gene in both parents) went on to fulfill Alice's hopes for them. They now lead successful lives in various parts of the county.

Jill (Roesler) Wheat was five when she became a student in the CID school. Once fit with hearing devices at age six, she found her new world absolutely fascinating - right down to the sound of flushing water. Her teachers told her she was a sponge when it came to learning to talk. In her early years she even modeled spoken language for then CID director Dr. S Richard Silverman's visiting colleagues.

Jill spent six years learning to listen and talk at CID. After graduating, she became an avid spokesperson, playing high basketball, volleyball and field hockey. She then traveled New York to attend Rochester Institute for Technology (RIT), where she earned a bachelor's degree in biology. Throughout her life, she has continued to challenge other people's misconceptions about her capabilities.

Jeanne (Roesler) Pease (the fifth born sibling) was diagnosed with hearing loss at 18 months in 1959. With the CID connection established, she and her mom had access to CID's newly started parent-infant program until she enrolled in the school at age three. Like her siblings, Jeanne had a progressive hearing loss, though she mainstreamed successfully and excelled in school alongside her peers with typical hearing.

After graduating from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, Jeanne worked as a teacher of the deaf in rural Missouri and other states. Later, she moved to Oklahoma, where she found spoken language instruction minimal or nonexistent. There, she discovered her calling to help bring about change in deaf education within the state.

Jeanne earned a doctorate in educational leadership from Oral Roberts University in 2008. In Oklahoma, she has made it her mission to introduce listening and spoken language as an educational option for students with hearing loss. She has started several successful programs in that state.

After his early education at CID, **Ralph Roesler** (seventh born) mainstreamed into a local elementary school in second grade. Like his siblings, he loved sports. He found his niche playing water polo in high school. He said the coach “took one look at my long arms and deafness and made me goalkeeper.”

Ralph loved the sport so much he stuck with it in college and eventually made his way to the World Games for the Deaf, or Deaf Olympics. As a member of the USA water polo team, he earned a Bronze medal in Los Angeles in 1985 and a Gold medal in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1993.

Ralph is a registered Professional Engineer (PE). He earned his bachelor's and master's degree in petroleum engineering from the University of Missouri-Rolla (now Missouri University S&T), and he has worked in the field for 35 years.

To date, Ralph is the only Roesler sibling to have received a cochlear implant after his declining hearing led to complications at work. He said he was astounded by the difference the surgery made, not only restoring hearing he'd lost in recent years, but also helping him hear high frequency sounds he was previously unable to hear and giving him the ability to easily participate in phone conversations.

Stephen Roesler, the eighth-born sibling (and fourth with hearing loss), was born a little over a year after Ralph. They were close friends growing up. Stephen's deafness was the most profound of his siblings'. Despite wearing hearing aids, he had the least amount of consistent access to sound, so mainstreaming was a greater challenge for him.

Initially, Stephen attended his neighborhood public grade school, then returned to CID for several years to take advantage of the smaller classrooms and individual instruction. Later, he attended Mercy High School in University City. He is comfortable using both spoken language and sign language.