Have You Ever?  John Cromshow M-P July 2, 2015

“No Words to Speak”

Across the street from my high school in New York was St. Joseph’s School for the Deaf and Dumb. Both bordered Flushing Meadows at a marshy tip of the Bronx. We never saw the deaf students although I remember some classmates occasionally making cruel references to their school. There are those teenage boys who have fun at the expense of others. They thought “Deaf and Dumb” meant, “retardard.” Funny as a rubber crutch. Today all those terms are politically incorrect but that doesn’t mean the underlying cruelty has disappeared. When we read A Separate Peace in my English class at St. Helena’s I could imagine the shocking coming of age story taking place on our large campus.

The Tribe, “Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy’s violent new film is set in a deaf school – and completely signed.” ([guardian.com](http://guardian.com/)). Last weekend the Ukrainian writer-director and a principal actress spoke to a sold out audience at the Cinefamily Silent Movie Theatre in the Fairfax district. On Monday evening I was able to see the silent movie, courtesy of the KPFK Film Club. It has no dialogue, no voice-overs and no subtitles. The small theater was packed. Folding chairs were added to accommodate the overflow crowd.

The opening scenes cleverly set the stage. A noisy bus stop across the street. Clearly, a young man is asking for directions, but we can’t hear a word. We follow him up stone stairs to the courtyard. A woman sweeping the floor inside a glassed-in room won’t let him in. As he walks around we survey the scene through glass doors. A woman is addressing the assembled group. We can’t hear anything but the ringing of a bell. Students filter into the room, exchange greetings, present flowers and go on their way. Everybody is gone by the time the young man arrives. He looks around and finally turns in the right direction.

Clean-cut criminals take over the young man’s world. At first he seems reluctant to become a part of it. Then, in an oft-repeated theme, he gets fully entrenched when he falls in love with a young woman student. She plays her own role in the criminal enterprise. The message comes through loud and clear. Some members of the audience were left speechless, however. That's another story.

Have you ever been in a situation when you have no words to speak? Please e-mail me jcromshow @ [yahoo.com](http://yahoo.com/).