

Text by JACK CHIANG

**T**HOSE OF US with normal hearing take it for granted. Visiting a school for the deaf will deal a blow to such an attitude. I spent a day recently at the Sir James Whitney School for the Hearing Handicapped in Belleville and realized for the first time just how difficult it would be to live without hearing.

I felt as if I were in a foreign country. The children were very animated, excitedly pointing at my cameras, gesticulating enthusiastically, talking a language with their hands I did not know.

Watching them, I began to think of the obstacles these children must face in the "outside" world. They cannot hear car horns, or the kettle boiling, or the ringing of the telephone, or fire alarms, or door bells.

Not only must they deal with the handicap itself, which is a profound one, they are often treated in a patronizing way by people who can hear. As Catherine Michalski, superintendent of the school, observes: "People tend to think that those who do not know the English language well must be intellectually deficient."

The school prepares students for life in the outside world and teaches them how to cope with the problems they will face. Students are taught how to cross the street safely, and to watch video-display terminals at airports or bus terminals. Career days are organized so the students can talk to successful adults who are deaf. Whenever the need arises, classes are organized for parents who want to learn sign language to enable them to communicate with their children.

The school, which is run by the Ontario Ministry of Education, was established in 1870. It has



Top: Jason Lalonde  
Far right: Brenda Lussier  
Right: Chris Dafoe  
and Robbie Bathurst