

May 18, 1987

## **Transcript of Marlee Matlin receiving honorary degree at Gallaudet's 118th Commencement ceremony:**

PROVOST CATHERINE INGOLD: Will Ms. Marlee Matlin, Dr. Lauren Glass, and Dr. Harvey Corson please come forward?

INGOLD (cont.): She is only the fourth actress in history to win an Academy Award for her first film performance. That film performance was itself the result of her first professional adult performance as Lydia, in a 1985 Chicago production of the play, *Children of a Lesser God*. A videotape of the Chicago production was sent to Paramount Studios. They were considering the lead actress for their film version of Mark Medoff's Tony-Award-winning play, but it was the actress in the background playing Lydia who caught their eye. Her acting career, which began at the age of eight with the Children's Theatre of the Deaf, suddenly blossomed, as she won the lead role of Sarah Norman in the film version of the play and subsequently the Oscar for Best Actress at this year's Academy Award presentations. Hearing impaired from measles at the age of 18 months, educated in the Chicago-area public schools, and a criminal justice major at William Rainey Harper College, she has, as her goal, "Fighting for the rights of deaf people."

INGOLD (cont.): In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare uses the device of a play within a play to change the course of the action. "The play's the thing," says the unhappy prince, "wherein we'll catch the conscience of the king." Gallaudet University recognizes that *Children of a Lesser God*--both as a play and as a film--has caught the conscience of the hearing audiences who have seen it, opening their eyes and their minds to the world of deaf people, the beauty of sign language, and the issues the drama presents. Now released in over 57 other countries, the film is reaching people around the world with its message.

INGOLD (looking toward Ms. Matlin on her left): Your role, as Sarah Norman, has advanced the cause of deaf people in a major way, bringing to the attention of the nation and now the world, the abilities of deaf persons and the problems of being deaf in a "hearing world." Your success is a culmination of the work of the many deaf actors and actresses who have gone before you. It is also a foundation on which other deaf persons, in the field of entertainment and in other professions, can build. For sharing the message that deaf persons are individuals who have pride in themselves, their accomplishments, and their deafness, Gallaudet University is proud to recognize your achievements and excellence by conferring on you the degree of doctor of humane letters.

[Applause]

INGOLD (cont.) [Continuing applause throughout...] Mr. President, I request that

you confer upon Ms. Marlee Matlin the degree of doctor of humane letters, honoris causa.

PRESIDENT JERRY C. LEE: [Continuing applause throughout...] By the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Gallaudet University, I confer upon you the degree of doctor of humane letters, with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities thereto appertaining.

[Dr. Lee kisses Ms. Matlin on her left cheek and hands her the degree enclosed in a black folder--Ms. Matlin, wearing black graduation cap with yellow tassel, black graduation gown with white hood, large blue "V" design at the bottom of the hood, maroon-colored plastic-rimmed eyeglasses with long wavy brown hair, accepts the black folder.]

[Applause continues throughout...]

MARLEE MATLIN (signing to audience, no interpreter): Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. A-OK. [nods, turns to sit down].