

The Heart of Hearing

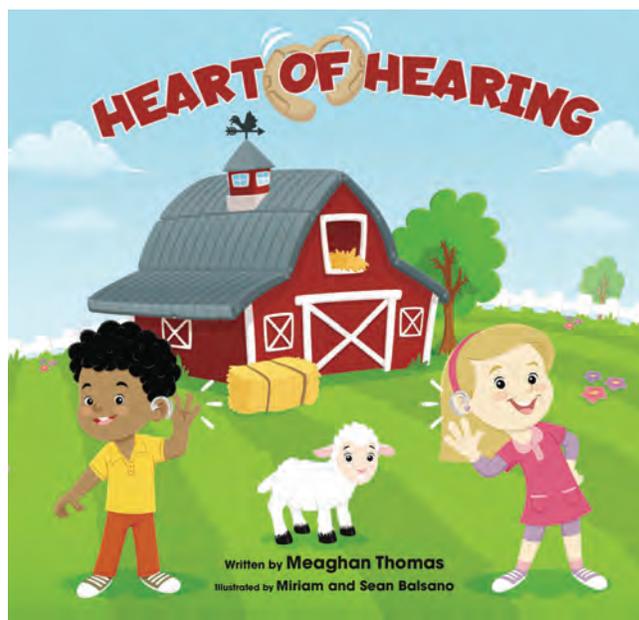
BY MEAGHAN THOMAS

Everyone's hearing journey is unique. Mine is no exception. For many years my hearing loss went unnoticed which is surprising since my father has worn hearing aids for years because he has profound hearing loss in both ears. During my youth, I managed in school by predominantly lipreading since I had tools at home which made hearing easier e.g., headphones for the TV and my mother normally spoke quite loud for my father to hear. Entering college and attending class in a large auditorium, I realized I could no longer clearly see the professor's face, much less his mouth. When the sound began echoing through the room, I realized how much I utilized lipreading. However, at this point, I still did nothing to improve my hearing since I associated hearing loss and hearing aids with the 'older' generation.

Moving forward beyond college and graduate school to my first job in television, my station required the meteorologist position, which I held, be fitted for an IFB (interruptible foldback) device we use to hear the directors and producers. It was during that IFB fitting appointment a co-worker pointed out the technicians had addressed me a number of times while molding my earpiece, yet I never responded. I mentioned to my co-worker I did not hear well, but that I had been able to manage up to this point. My audiologist suggested I have my ears examined. Upon administering the hearing tests, it was discovered I have profound hearing loss in my left ear and severe loss in my right. At this point, I knew it was time to acquire hearing assistance. Unfortunately, as many of you may know, currently hearing aids are considered cosmetic, thus not covered under insurance. As a young professional, I did not have the funds to buy a pair of hearing aids. Thankfully, my parents were able to intercede and purchase one for my left ear.

As time moved on, my audiologist suggested I start aiding my right ear because my issues were not improving. I really needed the additional hearing assistance. This is when I acquired my own first pair of aids. WOW! What a difference it made. It's amazing how many wonderful sounds I had missed such as birds chirping, car blinkers and leaves rustling when it's windy! What a wonderful experience!

At the beginning of each year, I now select a word to embody all that I want to do within that year. In 2021,



Heart of Hearing is an animated and entertaining story for children that encourages them to wear their hearing aids. It highlights aspects of the world around us that would be missed if not wearing hearing aids and helps hearing children understand why hearing aids for some should be worn. A portion of the proceeds go directly to the nonprofit, the Heart of Hearing, Inc., created by the author, Meaghan Thomas.

my word was BOLD. One day at work I took a picture of myself with my hearing aids then posted the picture on social media. This was my attempt at being bold and trying to embrace a part of me that I typically kept hidden. Oh, did I underestimate the power of the internet. The post went viral overnight. The positive comments and support I received in response to my posts, from everyone, has led to one of the most exciting years of my life!

I am a 30-something, broadcast meteorologist who wears bilateral hearing aids and I am proud of it! Shortly after my post went viral, I had national news outlets, hearing aid companies, hearing loss organizations and parents of children with hearing loss reach out to me in response. Reading the words of the parents truly touched my heart. They mentioned how my actions had helped their children with their reality, but little did they know just how much they had enriched mine. I finally felt comfortable in my own skin, if you will, and that

sense of loneliness I often experienced as a young woman with hearing loss disappeared.

HLAA is a wonderful organization I have been afforded the opportunity to interact with. Upon sharing their powerful mission with me, I was asked to be an honorary walker for the Walk4Hearing in 2021. My response was an immediate ‘Yes!’ This past year the event was virtual in the spring, but the outcome was still impactful. Listening to the presenters and connecting with those who also have hearing loss made it so memorable. I am excited to share that Walk4Hearing raised more than \$1 million in 2021 to provide people the tools and resources to live well with hearing loss.

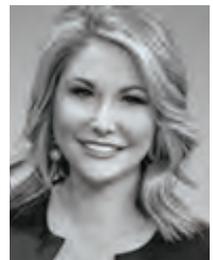
Upon speaking to a few news outlets and organizations, I felt the need to complete my children’s book. The title of the book was coincidentally selected because I misheard someone saying, ‘hard of hearing.’ I understood it to be, Heart of Hearing. My book *Heart of Hearing* is a true passion project focusing on young children with hearing loss. The book encourages them to wear their hearing aids in an effort to assist in hearing the sweet sounds the world has to offer. It reinforces how special they are, just as they are. It is also a great resource for hearing children broadening their awareness and understanding of those who do wear hearing aids. Inclusivity is very important to me and the world we live in today. While in the process of completing my book, I decided to create a nonprofit. The Heart of Hearing is an official 501(c)(3) entity whose goal is simple: to raise awareness and reduce the stigma associated with hearing loss. With our organization’s mission always in mind, we strive to provide hearing aids for those who cannot afford them by hosting events and fundraisers. The Heart of Hearing

team is dedicated to making a positive impact each day to the hearing loss community thus changing lives while making the process of getting hearing tested and aids fitted as seamless as possible.

HLAA and the Heart of Hearing are fighting the same fight. Promote awareness, acceptance and raise money to support those with hearing loss. To find out more about the Heart of Hearing or buy a book, visit: theheartofhearing.org

Mark Twain said it best, “Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” And don’t forget, always cheers to your ears! **HL**

Meaghan Thomas is an award-winning broadcast meteorologist in Nashville, Tennessee. She earned her bachelor’s degree in Broadcast News & Geography from the University of Alabama then completed her master’s degree in Broadcast Meteorology from Mississippi State University. Along with meteorology, Meaghan’s passions involve bringing awareness to the community of people with hearing loss! She proudly wears bilateral hearing aids and wants to encourage others that being different makes you special. She created the nonprofit, The Heart of Hearing, Inc. and wrote Heart of Hearing, a children’s book, to raise funding for those who cannot afford hearing aids. Email Meaghan at contact.theheartofhearing@gmail.com.



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GET IN THE HEARING LOOP

It’s Time to Get in the Hearing Loop

Many people aren’t yet aware of hearing loops or other technologies that can improve communication access and public engagement, or how they can enrich the lives of people with hearing loss, their families, friends, colleagues and even communities. The Get in the Hearing Loop program is changing that—one loop, one advocate, one ADA request at a time.

Get in the Hearing Loop, a communication access program of HLAA, is dedicated to providing and promoting community education, advocacy on behalf of people with hearing loss and consultation services to help venues of all kinds successfully implement hearing loop technology.

We dream of a world where people with hearing loss can thrive each day with communication access, full inclusion and equal participation in all aspects of life, everywhere they go.

For more information about hearing loops and the Get in the Hearing Loop program, visit hearingloss.org/GITHL or email GITHLinfo@hearingloss.org.