

The Young Faces of Hearing Loss

By Bill Barkeley

Bill Barkeley knows no barriers. As a person with both hearing and vision loss, he shares his talents, his philosophy and the love of the outdoors with young people with hearing loss.

This past August, I had the privilege of spending six days rafting down the Colorado River. But I wasn't alone. As part of Hear the World's Sound Academy expedition, I was joined by 17 students of varying hearing abilities from across North America. Our goal? Gather sound data for the National Parks Service and learn about ways that we, as Hear the World ambassadors, can educate others about hearing loss.

Knowing that one in every five teens today experiences some form of hearing loss also underlined the importance of the trip. And spending time with this exceptionally bright group of students in this natural wonder reminded me of something else, too. The faces and intricacies of hearing loss are as varied as the topography of the Grand Canyon itself.

On the *Hear the World: Amplifying the Grand Canyon Expedition*—through white water rapids and cascading waterfalls to echoing side canyons and Native American

ruins—I was struck by the sheer talent and passion of each student. No matter their background, each has embraced their hearing loss. They see it as a part of their identity and are true leaders in trying to preserve and build on it as they transition to the larger world over time.

Working with our expedition partners from Global Explorers and Grand Canyon Youth, we learned about the need to preserve natural sounds in national parks by studying the effects of noise pollution on local habitats. This fall, in partnership with Hear the World, the students unveiled a larger campaign to educate the public about hearing loss and preserving natural sounds in the Grand Canyon.

It was my honor to spend even just one week with such a talented group of young adults. As we left the Colorado River, we launched 17 new rafts into a much larger body of water. The students shared with me their hopes and dreams to become everything from an engineer and an advocacy lawyer to a congresswoman and an architect. I've no doubt each will achieve their goals.

I said I wasn't alone in this experience. But more importantly, neither were they. Getting the chance to spend a week with other peers who have hearing loss helped

each student build a community of support throughout the experience.

Here are the personal stories from four of our Sound Academy participants this year. To be honest, I'm not sure who got more out of this expedition—I or they.

But I can say I will never forget all that they taught me about living a life with no barriers.



Mandi Feinberg, 18 **Moderate hearing loss** **Mt. Airy, Maryland**

Imagine sleeping under the stars surrounded by the walls of the Grand Canyon with the sounds of the rapids and cicadas filling the air. Now imagine that same experience alongside 16 of the most amazing, inspiring teens your own age who have been through some of the same ups and downs that you have in life. This is exactly what I experienced this summer on Hear the World's Sound Academy trip to the Grand Canyon.

I found out about the opportunity through my audiologist, Roy Bordenick, who nominated and sponsored me. I will admit that I was apprehensive at first because I had never been camping or rafting before, partially because I had always worried about what I would do with my hearing aids. But knowing that I'd experience this new adventure not only in one of the seven natural wonders of the world, but also with other individuals who wear hearing aids, made me that much more willing to give it a shot.

After finding out that I was accepted for the trip, I was beyond excited because



Seventeen students with varying hearing abilities joined Bill Barkeley on the *Hear the World: Amplifying the Grand Canyon Expedition*.

for the first time in my life, I would be around kids just like me! The experience turned out to be all I imagined and more. From the preparatory Skype sessions that were rarely on topic, to water gun fights, a moustache party and painting the guys' toenails; to looking at the stars as we fell asleep, seeing everyone's faces light up when we listened to the underwater microphone, learning sign language, sitting under the refreshing water of Travertine Falls and floating down the river without a care in the world, it was hands-down the most incredible week of my life.

From this experience I learned so much about myself, too. Like how strong I am as a person and how much I really can do if I set my mind to it. I also formed friendships that will last a lifetime. But even now that the trip is over, the adventure doesn't stop. This year's Sound Academy team is going to be working on a campaign to spread the word about hearing loss and educate the world about how having hearing loss doesn't necessarily mean someone is mentally or physically challenged. In fact, sometimes it's just the opposite—especially when we get to do things lots of hearing people could only dream—such as camping in the middle of the Grand Canyon.



David Hoover, 16
Severe hearing loss
Bend, Oregon

My name is David Hoover and I'm a 16-year-old sophomore who has severe to profound hearing loss. I found out about the Hear the World Sound Academy through a friend who works at my school. He suggested that I take part in their trip to the Grand Canyon, so I applied

and was accepted. Once I knew I had been accepted, I got pumped up for the trip. I couldn't wait to go rafting down the Colorado River and hang out with a bunch of kids just like me. I also received a scholarship thanks to Mary Beth Flint from the Bassett Medical Center!

Going on the trip was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and it held a lot of 'firsts' for me. It was my first time on a plane, my first time to the Grand Canyon, and my first time truly interacting with a group of kids with hearing loss. Having all of these 'firsts' helped me learn a lot about myself. I learned that I am a lot more capable than I thought and that there are other kids out there who are just like I am—capable and hard of hearing.

I also learned that noise pollution is a highly misunderstood and underestimated form of pollution that is becoming a problem in today's world. My favorite memory from the trip was when it got dark and you could see a ton of stars. It was unbelievable. I'd stay awake at night sometimes just to look at them.

Another favorite memory of the trip was all the times we had water gun fights on the rafts. Everyone was yelling, pushing each other into the water and having a great time.

During my trip in the Grand Canyon, I realized that other people, hearing or not, should realize that even though hearing loss is categorized as a disability, the people with hearing loss are not actually disabled in any way and should not be treated as if they are.



Kellynnette Gomez, 17
Severe hearing loss
Lawrence, Massachusetts

After receiving an e-mail about the Hear the World Sound Academy, I was immediately interested because of its mission to



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promote awareness about hearing loss and educate others about the impact that sounds have on the environment. I was also glad that this was a program that included students of mixed hearing abilities and I was excited at the idea of meeting other teens who understood the many challenges that come with being deaf in a predominantly hearing world.

When I found out I was accepted, I was thrilled! This would be the first time I would ever fly out to the western part of the United States and I was looking forward to experiencing a different side of the country. Thanks to a generous donation from Mary Beth Flint, at Bassett Medical Center, I was able to participate in this incredible experience.

Once at the Grand Canyon, I woke up every day to the sounds of pure silence and the beauty of the Canyon around me. Crews would work together to set up or take down the groover (bathroom), make meals or collect audio and visual recordings. Some of the methods we used to collect sound data were specialized watches that recorded how many times we woke up at night. That data would be cross-referenced against all-night sound recordings to determine if any near awakenings correlated with sounds that occurred at that particular moment.

At one campsite we were actually able to hear and record underwater sounds, like splashing or a paddle rowing in the water. The expressions on my

continued on page 30

Young Faces *from page 29*

friends' faces were priceless—the sheer joy of hearing underwater sounds for the first time ever!

Through each sound collecting project, we reminded each other of the importance of preventing hearing loss and how we could change the world together. I made a lasting connection with many members of the group and felt accepted and appreciated by all. I learned the skills of a leader, I gained a better understanding of a culture I thought I already knew, and I took part in an awesome experience collecting sound data for the National Park Service.

Sound is not something that you or I should take for granted and this experience confirmed a great deal of why we, as a community, should work hard to prevent hearing loss.



Tayanita Bob, 15 **Moderate hearing loss** **Salem, Oregon**

As part of the Hear the World Sound Academy program, I spent a week traveling with 16 other students from across the country, most of who are affected by hearing loss like I am. I was nominated by my teacher Teresa Tolzmann, and got a scholarship from Jones Audiology (thank you both so much!)

During the Hear the World Sound Academy program, we learned about natural sound, what it meant to be an ambassador for hearing loss and how to educate others about it, plus we did all sorts of fun outdoor activities. But most of all, it was incredible to meet so many other young people who have gone through so much of what I have gone through.

A lot of what we did on the trip was gather sound data (all in preparation for

continued on page 41

2011 Walk4Hearing Surpasses \$1.2 Million Fundraising Goal



More than 7,000 people stepped up for people with hearing loss and created awareness in cities across the country this year. Congratulations to all 23 Walk4Hearing sites! Thank you to all national and local sponsors, volunteers, team captains, walkers, donors and alliance groups for your continuous support and dedication. We hope that you will be back walking with us again next year. For more information about the Walk4Hearing visit www.walk4hearing.org, or contact Ronnie Adler, national Walk4Hearing manager, at radler@hearingloss.org.

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The Artinian Family at the Chicago Walk4Hearing, from left: Nicholas, Emily, Chris (CEO and president of Morton's the Steakhouse), Mari, Joey, Christopher and Peter. Photo © Anna Guziak