

# BOOK NOOK

REVIEW BY LARRY HERBERT

## *Sounds of the Heart: A Story of a HearStrong Champion Persisting Against All Odds*

A memoir by Latisha Porter-Vaughn

In the spring 2022 issue of *Hearing Life* magazine, Latisha Porter-Vaughn, Ph.D., shared her inspiring hearing loss journey. Her self-published book, *"Sounds of the Heart: A Story of a HearStrong Champion Persisting Against All Odds,"* expands on her evolving experience of understanding and coming to terms with her lifelong hearing loss.

Latisha wonderfully depicts her large and loving African American family. She never knew her mother, who died when she was an infant. Her father and grandmother—both with hearing loss—raised her and six siblings. As a child, Latisha struggled to understand cartoons on television. She listened to songs on a record player with her ear up against the speaker to understand the lyrics. Family members and friends often had to repeat things and she “fluffed and bluffed” constantly. It’s puzzling that, despite a family prevalence of severe hearing loss, somehow Latisha remained undiagnosed until age 19, when she finally was fitted with hearing aids.

Quite possibly, Latisha functioned well enough in her family and at school that any hearing loss was presumed to be mild—an issue for the future. Her father’s hearing loss was attributed to being around loud munitions during his military service, though she now believes there was a hereditary component. No explanation for her grandmother’s hearing loss was given, but it might have been presumed to be age-related.

Although bright, Latisha’s poor academic record was another missed clue to her hearing loss. The only accommodation she received in school was sitting in front of the classroom, where lipreading was of limited effectiveness whenever the teacher turned to write on the blackboard. While her book chronicles a series of institutional failures in both the education and health care systems, she might have investigated this further to explain how she fell through the cracks for so long.

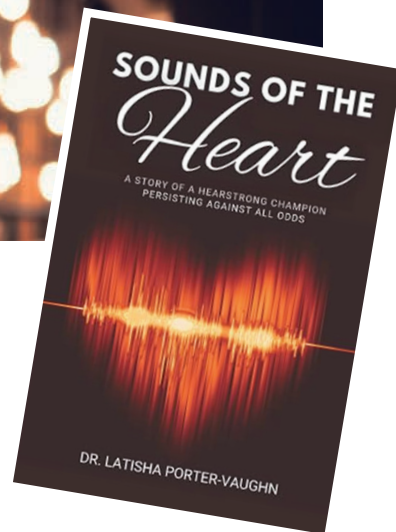
After graduating from high school, Latisha moved in with an older sister in New Jersey, who soon recog-

nized her hearing loss and marched her to an audiologist’s office. In the workplace, she quickly learned the limitations of hearing aids during secretarial jobs that involved answering phone calls. Her supervisors had no sensitivity to accommodating an employee with hearing loss and gave her poor performance reviews. Latisha’s self-confidence plummeted. Nevertheless, she eventually married and had children.

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, people with hearing loss and other disabilities became more vocal about their needs. Latisha learned to advocate for herself, and to educate her co-workers, bosses and institutions about providing reasonable accommodations. With renewed confidence, extraordinary persistence and encouragement from friends, she took on more responsible jobs and pursued higher education, earning an undergraduate degree, then a master’s and doctorate.

Discovering HLAA, Latisha started a chapter in Essex, New Jersey, and is now president of the HLAA New Jersey State Association. The HearStrong Foundation in New Jersey, which recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the hearing loss community, honored her as a “Champion” in 2017.

Latisha’s personal journey largely mirrors the evolving world of hearing loss diagnosis and treatment. It’s also the story of her determination to come to terms with her long-unrecognized hearing loss and become an outspoken advocate for HLAA’s nationwide community of support. **HL**



Larry Herbert is retired and lives in Richmond, Virginia. A member of the HLAA Greater Richmond Chapter, he currently leads efforts to promote hearing loops in the community. His interest in assistive listening technology was initially sparked when he helped his father communicate via text and email. He is a graduate of the University of Virginia and can be reached at [lawrence.herbert@gmail.com](mailto:lawrence.herbert@gmail.com).