

# BOOK NOOK

REVIEW BY LARRY HERBERT

## The Lip Reader

A semi-autobiographical novel written by Michael Thal

You might find love at a Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) meeting. Author Michael Thal did. Anxious about his future after losing much of his hearing in his late 40s, he met his soulmate serendipitously at an HLAA Los Angeles Chapter holiday social. An Iranian Jew who was deaf, she had fled her native country along with her family, after Islamic radicals seized power and escalated the persecution of Jews.

Thal penned *The Lip Reader* as a poignant, semi-fictional memoir based on his relationship with the love of his life.

Narrated by protagonist Zhila Shirazi, the story is largely true, although Thal changed names and took literary license to embellish some events. After losing her hearing as a child from meningitis, Zhila learned to lipread proficiently in Farsi and later, English. Her parents refused her pleas for hearing aids—Iranian culture then, and even now, often considers a disability as shameful, so the Shirazi family kept Zhila's hearing loss quiet. The cost of hearing aids was daunting to them as well.

As Zhila recounts her life story, it is replete with descriptions of the nuances and difficulties of communication issues she faced in darkly lit restaurants, conversing with passengers in cars, in classrooms and even simply walking beside someone. One college professor misinterpreted her front row seat and riveted attention as flirtatiousness—until she disillusioned him by vehemently disclosing her deafness. An anti-Semitic primary school teacher physically attacked her for not responding to a directive to solve a problem in front of the class, when in fact, she didn't hear the instructions.

Zhila's resilience helps her endure Iranian society despite her disability and rampant anti-Semitism. When her father is mugged at his pharmacy and tortured while being held captive by Islamic fascists, the family makes the decision to leave Iran. In the U.S., Zhila has difficulty finding work in her field of geology and takes a nurse caretaker position so she can remain close to her family. She endures an abusive first husband and survives a miscarriage.

Having given up on relationships, she meets

Mickey Daniels—a fellow Jew who recently experienced sudden deafness—at the age of 49. They practice ASL together and watch foreign movies with subtitles at home, since neither could hear in a theater. Although the couple bonds for life and becomes engaged, Zhila demurs on marriage, eventually sharing with him her bouts of depression and need for separate space. While she feels guilty about keeping these feelings from him, it is reflective of her Iranian culture and upbringing.

When Zhila faces a serious medical challenge, Mickey becomes her caregiver

This is an emotional book, weaving sadness and joy into a powerful, uplifting saga of hardship and resilience. At the same time, it immerses the reader into the nuances of deaf/Deaf, Jewish and Iranian culture. Hope and love emerged when these two souls with hearing loss met...and yes, you might really find love at an HLAA meeting.

*Michael Thal is a freelance writer and author in Los Angeles, California. Michael began his career in public education, but due to a severe hearing loss, he left his tenured sixth grade teaching assignment to learn the writing craft. Michael has written more than 80 articles for magazines like Highlights for Children, Fun for Kidz, Writer's Digest and San Diego Family Magazine. His novels include Goodbye Tchaikovsky, The Legend of Koolura and The Abduction of Joshua Bloom, among others. The Lip Reader won first place in the 2022 Next Generation Indie Book Awards. 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.*



# Great Back-to-School Reads on Hearing Loss

## *Peyton's Magical Hearing Aid*

By Niki Halwani

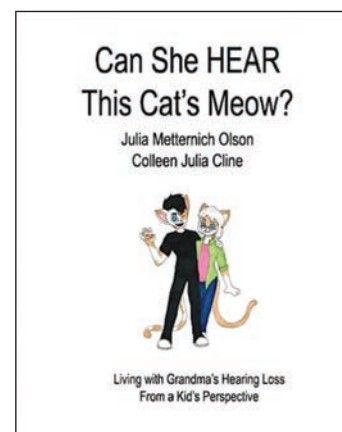
*Peyton's Magical Hearing Aid* follows a young girl on her first day of kindergarten. Everyone asks her, "what's that in your ear?" She explains to her classmates why she needs a hearing aid, the process of getting one and how it helps her to hear better. This book promotes inclusivity and acceptance among children of all backgrounds and is a positive support for both teachers and parents.



## *Can She HEAR This Cat's Meow? Living with Grandma's Hearing Loss from a Kid's Perspective*

By Julia Metternich Olson and Colleen Julia Cline

Julia, a longtime HLAA member, tells the true story of her granddaughter Colleen's journey to adapt to her grandmother's hearing loss and forge a beautiful relationship. It will empower children through knowledge and offer them techniques to support others. Sharing experiences with other people who have hearing loss, rather than hiding or denying it, leads to answers that will take you on the road to acceptance and independence. Their story is told with wonderful illustrations by Colleen and offers an engaging narrative for readers of all ages.



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