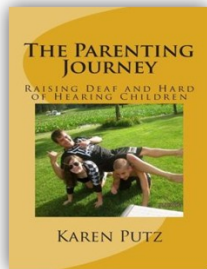




## A Recap from 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Family Conference for Families of Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

By: Shanida Mathieu

Being a part of the first annual family conference for La. Hands & Voices was an awesome experience. The presentation by Karen Putz, a mom who is deaf with three children who are deaf or hard of hearing was empowering and uplifting. She shared the “Twists and Turns” she has experienced on her parenting journey. Most parents of children with special needs other than deafness or hard of hearing, would agree that their journey has been and continues to be more challenging and at times cry out in frustration. Karen shared her story of losing her hearing as a teenager while barefooting. Her hearing loss was due in part to a rare genetic defect extending back five generations in her family. Karen, her mother and four siblings were all born with normal hearing, but all lost it at varying ages as a result of a fall or other trauma. Karen had experienced hearing loss as a child, but still had some residual hearing prior to the crash. She returned to barefooting some decades later with the support of her husband and friend. She nearly mastered a staring technique and began barefooting backwards. She shared leaving from there with the realization of 'Holy cow, if I can do that, I can do anything!' I started applying what I learned in barefooting to other areas of my life,"



Karen Putz has published chapters in three books, writes for the Chicago Tribune Local, and has two blogs of her own: *A Deaf Mom Shares Her World and Deaf and Hard of Hearing People at Work*.

The conference also included an open discussion with many panelist that knew first hand what it was like to live with a hearing impairment or deafness. This included parents of children with hearing impairments or deafness and individuals with hearing impairments or deafness which included teens. Conference participants were encouraged to ask panelist any questions. The responses from the teens were so touching as they shared their thoughts and feelings of being deaf or hard of hearing. There were barely any dry eyes in the room.

In addition, the teens presented a topic on “Silence is not an option: Bullying...What would you do if?” This included a demonstration on bullying made them feel.

In addition to being a participant to this wonderful event, I was asked to present on “Understanding the IEP”.

As a participant, it was enlightening to listen and learn from other parents as they share some of the same concerns you have as a parent yourself of a child with special needs.