



# Hands & Voices New Mexico

Fall 2016

*“What works for your child is what makes the choice right.”*

## One Mom’s Evolution

### Hearing Impaired? Hard of Hearing? Deaf?

By Marjorie Madsen Keilers

“Oh, your daughter is **deaf**,” says a woman who walks up to me in a fabric store, gesturing with her hands while speaking. I scoop up my 18-month old baby, hearing aids flapping against her ears. “Oh no,” I replied. “She’s not deaf—she’s **hearing impaired**.”

**Hearing impaired** is how the audiologist described my daughter’s hearing. I desperately wanted my daughter to only be **hearing impaired** and not **deaf**. **Deaf** implied a whole new can of worms—one that I was not ready to open.

I think back to that day occasionally, and realize that the woman was trying to be kind, and was in fact signing to my daughter and me. At the time of this incident, my daughter had only been wearing hearing aids for about two weeks and my family had only been living with her diagnoses for about two months.

We clung to the **hearing impaired** label like a life preserver in a turbulent storm. We started aggressive speech therapy, for at that point, we did not know whether her hearing was

deteriorating, or whether she was born with the hearing she had. “Do you want me to sign with her?” asked the speech therapist. “No,” I say. Part of my rationale was to jam as much auditory stimulation in her ears, should her loss be progressive. The other part niggling at the back of my mind, was that signing would tip the scales from **hearing impaired** to **Deaf**.

We continued on this semantic journey, while literally moving from one state to another, then another, all before my daughter was four. Luckily, we had fabulous early interventionists, who connected us from state to state.

Four years later, when the time came to transition from home to school, from IFSP to IEP, we were fairly confident in our choices. We continued to get outreach from NMSD and speech therapists. We learned that **hearing impaired** as a descriptor had fallen out of favor in the **Deaf** community. The term “impaired” implied something damaged or in need of repair. **Hard of hearing** was now considered politically correct and we began to use that phrase.

Thus we began our next journey into learning more about **Deaf** culture with our **hard of hearing** daughter. While we opted for a mainstream education, we actively engaged in the **Deaf** community in our state. We started to learn ASL. We went to ASL immersion camps. We sent our daughter to camps designed for **deaf** and **hard of hearing children**, so she could see she was not alone, even though she often felt alone in our small community.

As we got better at explaining our daughter’s hearing situation to friends, family, and teachers, we came across many who, upon learning that our daughter was **hard of hearing** replied, “oh yeah, I don’t hear well out of my left ear either.” Hmm... not really the same thing. There’s a big difference between someone who gradually loses hearing over time to someone who has never heard certain sounds. **Hard of hearing** just didn’t seem to adequately convey the severity of the communication challenges my daughter faced everyday.

*Continued on back*

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# Get ready for HVNM Back2School!

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## Each One! Reach One! Teach One!

by Carmen Armenta

My daughter, who is hard of hearing and wears hearing aids, just finished 1<sup>st</sup> grade at Hodgin Elementary School in Albuquerque, NM. One of the most important situations arose when one of her classmates approached us and asked a very important question. She asked me, “Is she deaf?” I was caught off guard for a moment by the question because up until that day no child had asked me directly if my daughter was deaf or not.

I tried to think carefully how to answer that question, when I realized, “hey, wait a minute--my daughter is standing right here beside me.” The question was an important question, but not as important as whom should have been asked that question. I quickly realized that the question is not one I should answer.

I informed the inquisitive young girl that what she asked was a really good question but told her that she needed to ask my daughter directly—I can’t talk for my daughter. Some questions are hers to answer.

This was a great opportunity to teach something to a young child in this situation. I am grateful to her because I also learned a valuable lesson myself. That lesson was to recognize an opportunity to let my hard of hearing child become a stronger, more confident young lady by answering questions about her own hearing.

***Shout out to Lina for advocating for herself with classmates about her hearing!***

### *One Mom's Evolution Continued*

So we started to use the term **deaf**, hesitantly at first. Were we exaggerating her condition? She did have some hearing in some frequencies after all. Her audiogram looks like a steep ski hill—a bilateral sloping high frequency hearing loss. Her hearing results range from relatively normal in the low frequencies to profound loss in the highs, covering mild, moderate and severe losses across various frequencies. This explains why her first word was “uh oh,” a low frequency word, and why she still struggles with “s” today, even with hearing aids.

We did not want to offend others in the **Deaf** community, so we checked in with audiologists and **Deaf** adults we know. The consensus was using **deaf**, i.e. lower case “d” which describes an audiological condition was fine. We do not use **Deaf** with a capital “D” as that implies being part of the **Deaf** culture and primarily using American Sign Language (ASL). Using the term **deaf**, seems to help put my daughter’s hearing in context.

From **hearing impaired** to **hard of hearing** to **deaf**... Any way you describe it my daughter is fabulous! I would love to run into the woman from the fabric store today, 18 years later. “Oh your daughter is **deaf**?” says she. “Why, yes. Yes she is!” I say while signing back my answer.

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**Hands & Voices NM Chapter**  
**PO Box 90804**  
**Albuquerque, NM 87199**

[www.hvnm.org](http://www.hvnm.org)  
[parentgroup@hvnm.org](mailto:parentgroup@hvnm.org)