

Finn's Story

My husband, Dutch, and I had been together for exactly 10 years on the day Finn was born. During that time we had gone to universities, built careers for ourselves, and traveled. We always planned to have children together, but we knew we wanted to wait until we were really ready. I loved being pregnant and never got to the point where I was fed up with it, particularly because Finn arrived 5 weeks early. Despite my apprehension about his early arrival, the labor and delivery were amazingly one of the most magical experiences of my life. We ended up needing to stay in the hospital for 6 additional days to deal with jaundice.



The nurses at the hospital did not seem well-acquainted with the hearing screening and I was so preoccupied with the jaundice that even after we failed the test (4 or 5 times), I still didn't believe it. Passing a hearing test was just one of many items on my new mommy to-do list. It wasn't until the second day of a follow-up ABR at Western Washington University that I finally understood. Finn couldn't hear at all- profoundly deaf on both sides.

Dutch had already figured out what was happening and had begun researching how the various tests work and what we might be facing. He had tried to talk to me about it, but I wasn't listening. I was sure that Finn could hear. I had sung and talked to my belly throughout pregnancy and he had kicked like crazy when we went to a Harry Potter movie. It just didn't seem possible, until the audiologists at the university told us. I felt like the whole world that Dutch and I had built for our family was crumbling. I remember that it was raining unusually hard that day when we left the university, which matched my mood perfectly. I cried and cried and cried.

I knew nothing about deafness. How is it possible that I had never met a deaf person? All I could think of was how funny sign language interpreters looked at concerts I had attended. I worried how Finn would possibly live a happy life without hearing music. I worried how Finn would ever have deep relationships with any of our family members. I remember feeling like my identity had been hijacked. Now, instead of being defined by my career accomplishments, I would be defined by being the mother of a disabled child. I remember thinking that I would have to break contact with all of the new moms I had met. How could I be friends with moms that have normal kids?

Making peace with the diagnosis has come through knowledge. Over the past six months, Dutch and I have read or watched everything about deafness that we could get our hands on. We have talked with people from many different parts of the deafness and hearing loss world- deaf adults, kids with mild, moderate, severe, and profound losses, kids with hearing aids, kids with cochlear implants, the parents of those kids. We have learned an unbelievable number of new acronyms and met many wonderful professionals who put those acronyms after their names. We have

driven long distances for countless appointments and have struggled with hearing aids that barely help Finn hear.

There have been lots of ups and lots of downs and there will no doubt be more, but I feel better. In fact, it is difficult to compare how I feel today with how I felt on the day of our diagnosis. In some ways, I feel like a different person. Despite all of the work and worry, Finn's deafness has not prevented me from absolutely loving motherhood- far from it. Each of his accomplishments are so amazing and so much fun. I feel that his deafness keeps me from taking them for granted. More importantly, I am confident that deafness will help shape Finn into a compassionate and fascinating individual.

Finn is having surgery soon for his first cochlear implant and I can't believe how quickly we've reached this point. I am certainly nervous about how things will be when Finn has access to sound and wonder how effective the implant will be. But overall, I feel more at ease about the future, no matter what it looks like. I sometimes stop and think about where I was a year ago- pregnant and busy planning each moment of my unborn baby's life. Today that seems like the distant past. Parenthood has been so much more challenging and so much more wonderful than I ever could have imagined. I am so thankful to have Finn in my life.

