

The Heumann Perspective Podcast
"Deaf Utopia" with Nyle DiMarco
Transcript

Kylie Miller

Welcome to The Heumann Perspective, a podcast with the internationally recognized, bad-ass, disability rights activist, Judy Heumann.

This episode, Judy interviews Nyle DiMarco. Nyle is a model, actor, producer and advocate. He's won both America's Next Top Model and Dancing with the Stars. He also produces the Netflix show Deaf U and the Oscar nominated short documentary Audible. Judy and Nyle chat about other various projects he's working on and the recent release of his memoir, Deaf Utopia. This interview is also available [on YouTube with ASL interpretation](#). You can find the link in the description of this episode.

The Heumann Perspective is produced by me, Kylie Miller, and Judy Heumann. So let's roll up, lay down, dance around, whatever makes you feel best. And let's meet this episode's guest.

Judy Heumann

Everyone, I'd like to welcome you back to The Heumann Perspective. I want to start out by saying, I always say the person that we're interviewing is a great person, someone that I really admire and someone that I believe the audience can learn from. And so it's really wonderful, Nyle, that you're here today. Nyle DiMarco. And I think we're going to have a great interview.

Nyle DiMarco

Thank you so much for having me. I'm really looking forward to chatting with you today. Today my voice is brought to you by my interpreter because I am Deaf myself. So I'm thrilled to be here. Grey is his name by the way.

Judy Heumann

Great. Nyle I'd like for the audience to get to know you a little bit better and let me start out by saying Nyle's book called Deaf Utopia has just been released. And I think it's a very informative book and as you'll learn, Nyle has a very broad background. He's done many things in his life that I bet his mother and family did not anticipate he would be doing and probably that he wouldn't anticipate doing. And so I think it's a great example of how when we move through life, we need to do so allowing opportunities to be something we can take advantage of. So Nyle, can you tell us a little bit about your growing up?

Nyle DiMarco

Absolutely. I was born in a Deaf family, born completely Deaf myself. I'm the fourth generation in a very large Deaf Italian family with two brothers, my parents, my

grandparents, and my great grandparents even being Deaf. I grew up going to deaf schools to deaf universities. Really I had the ultimate goal of becoming a math teacher and going right back to those deaf schools to teach. I was in a grad program studying Deaf Education, really getting ready to become a teacher when Tyra Bank's team reached out and my career totally changed. And I ended up in the modeling world and really the rest has been left to history, and Hollywood, and TV and movies. As a truncated version.

Judy Heumann

Let's spend a little bit of time-- I love in the book, the way you explain how you're a twin and the discussion between the doctor and your parents. This expectation that your parents who were Deaf, and as you said fourth generation, would want to have a hearing child. So, want to talk a little bit about what it means to be raised in a family that has four generations of Deaf people?

Nyle DiMarco

Certainly. My book's title, I think really does speak for itself in the sense of my childhood was utopian. I call it a utopia because it felt like a perfect world and in many ways I couldn't have imagined a better life. But I think a lot of people are interested to learn that growing up, my experience was very different than 90% of the deaf kids in the world. It's incredibly rare for a deaf person to be born into a Deaf family, certainly with that many generations preceding them. And so many hearing people that I've talked with over the years have often assumed that because I come from a large Deaf family with multiple generations behind me, that I must have had a really unfortunate experience. And they tend to expect the worst. When in fact it couldn't be more opposite. That is often the case for deaf kids who are born to hearing parents. I had access to education, to language and to communication. I think a lot of people don't realize that my first language was already being spoken at home, which was one of the biggest reasons why I felt this book was needed.

Judy Heumann

Yeah, I'd like to talk a little bit more about this. I think people don't recognize the importance of language. And when you talk about ASL as your first language, what was it like to begin to learn English?

Nyle DiMarco

Obviously ASL being my first language, it was incredibly accessible to me. When I was born, obviously I don't remember really learning English in the very early beginnings, but I know that my mom was reading books to us. Even as babies before we could read, she would sign things in ASL with the book facing me and she would essentially break down the signs on the pages as she would show us. So from one to three, she would pull out words specifically and concepts that made sense to me in sign that would then be mapped to the things that I was seeing on the pages. And in stories she would, make sure that we knew what the words were and she would translate it back and forth. She would ask me specifically words and asked me to point them out. And that's really the

beginning of my literacy. When I got into deaf schools and into kindergarten, I already knew words and I could read sentences.

Judy Heumann

So you were essentially bilingual at a very young age.

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah. Bilingual from the very start, which was great. I'm incredibly thankful to my mother for that.

Judy Heumann

Let's talk for a minute about your family. Are you close with your family?

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah. I'm very close with my family. I'm very much a family person. My mom, of course, and I are incredibly close as well as me and my brothers. We have a group chat over text that we never miss a day in. I would say that I'm most close with my mom probably, everyone on my mom's side for sure but nobody really on my dad's side. In the book I talk about sort of how we've lost touch since I was nine due to domestic violence and a lot of other messy issues involving his drug use. I'm really just close to my mom's side of the family.

Judy Heumann

Is your brother like you?

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah. We're definitely really similar, but he's more of the comedian in the family. He's the funny guy. He's like me, but a lot funnier.

Judy Heumann

You're pretty funny so we have to meet him. What type of an influence do you believe you are in the broader society, but also particularly with deaf individuals who likely have grown up in families where other family members don't know sign language?

Nyle DiMarco

I think for the hearing parents of deaf kids. My biggest influence, my biggest advice certainly will always be that there's no one option to stick to and try forever. I think that having more resources on the table is better than less. I think what's important is the language access. Hearing parents of deaf kids often just want their kid to be capable. They just want their kid to be just like them and I get that. That's every parent out there and their natural inclination. Of course if your dream is for your child to speak, it makes sense. But I think what's more important is monitoring their benchmarks yearly and making sure that the access that they do have to language is working. If your child is failing speech every single year, maybe it's time to try a different method, but you might

not know about it. I mean, kids absorb language like sponges. But at the age of five you have, what's called the Critical Language Acquisition Period in mind, which then closes and you run the risk of brain damage afterwards. For me, ASL was a guarantee. I knew that as a Deaf kid and I know other Deaf kids have a guarantee of being able to pick up a foundation if it's visual.

Judy Heumann

I know you didn't stay in the field of being a math teacher, but I'd like just to spend a moment on... Many people are afraid of math. I never would, for example, think of being a math teacher so when I was learning about you more in depth and saw that you were interested in being a math teacher... When did that interest start growing?

Nyle DiMarco

Oh jeez. It's funny actually growing up, all of my math teachers were hearing and I always thought, "They just suck." I mean, math teachers generally are very dry and I was learning it in ASL, that wasn't really the best. And then in eighth grade, one of my biggest role models was a math teacher and taught me a lot about just life. And I finally had a really clear and concise understanding of arithmetic and that really thrilled me. The class was all going to Gallaudet, we all made it in as math majors, which is really great. So I think had it not been for that person and not for those classmates, I probably never would've pursued it. I probably would've gone into something else, but I really loved math and I wanted to study with my peers that I liked so much. But obviously now looking back, I think if I could do college over again, would I pick math? Hell no. Absolutely not.

Judy Heumann

I love it. So, what high school did you go to?

Nyle DiMarco

In high school, I went to Maryland School for the Deaf. Which is very close to DC, it's about an hour away, I'd say. But I actually went to three different schools growing up. I went to one in New York City, and then to Texas School for the Deaf for four years, and then we moved to Maryland and really the whole goal was to find the best deaf education possible for me. And when we moved out of New York City, it was really driven by the fact that it was a strong emphasis at the school that I was going to on oral education, which was a huge waste of the valuable time that I had in the classroom. So after much advocacy and much rebellion and protests there on the campus, we decided that if nothing was going to change we were.

Judy Heumann

Well, the Maryland School for the Deaf is an amazing school. I visited a couple of times and I was so impressed with that school and the leadership at that time. You were going to be a math teacher and I presume you were thinking about working in schools for the

deaf and teaching deaf students, math. And then there was this major change in your life and you went into modeling. Could you explain to us how that came about?

Nyle DiMarco

Certainly. I was in grad school at the time and I was planning on math. I had a few more courses before I was going to complete my master's. And like I said, my focus was on Deaf Education. I already had internship experience at a deaf school, I was ready to go, I was ready to teach. And then randomly on Instagram, I got a DM from Tyra Bank's team, from the casting director over at America's Next Top Model and they said, "Hey, we think you've got a great look. Why don't you try and audition for Top Model?" And I was like, "Obviously that's a scam." Right? Thought there was no way. But I did a little bit of research after they kept pestering me and finally found out that it was legit. And I said, look, "I'm Deaf. Are you ready for a Deaf contestant on the show?" And they didn't know. They hadn't realized that I was Deaf, all they had seen were photos. And so they said "You know what, it doesn't matter. Just see what happens." And really the rest is history.

I got into America's Next Top Model and really in the beginning I thought that, well, when the show was over, I'd probably just go back to teaching math. It'd be fun and I would give one TV show a try. I love a little competition. But after the show, my platform just blew up and the impact was incredible. Overnight I ended up on Dancing with the Stars. And that was really when I started to come to terms with the fact that there was no way for me to go back. I couldn't just return to teaching math. I had to really move forward into Hollywood and plan my next steps, which is why I started my production company and the rest is history.

Judy Heumann

What barriers and what opportunities and what issues did you have to deal with within the industry? Both when you first went into modeling, and then Dancing with the Stars, and now where you are today. What have some of those barriers been? What have you done to address them?

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah, I think it's a good question. The industry generally, after Dancing with the Stars, was something that I thought was doable and should be fairly easy. I had this really large platform, I had a really nice fan base, I had a really big following. I felt that people in Hollywood were starting to get to know me. And I was taking meetings with writers, directors, and producers. They were working me into the content they were making, they were writing storylines about it, which felt really great. But the problem was that with all of those meetings, there was a fear in the air if Deaf people could sell a movie, no matter how well it was written. And in the writing, it was clear that they didn't know anything about Deaf culture. They had no awareness of our community or any real experience with another Deaf person. And so the writing felt inauthentic.

At that time, it was almost no one else. It was pretty much me and Marlee. Well, we had Shoshannah Stern as well and a couple others, but it was pretty lonesome. And so in that process, I realized that obviously they had nowhere to pull from. They just had a lack of opportunities to meet those people. And it certainly wasn't their fault, but I think the lack of exposure was something that I could change and focus on. And so I established my production company to empower Deaf and disabled people to tell their stories. Not only that but my goal really was to groom the next generation in Hollywood. I wanted to find Deaf and disabled writers and producers and directors to come into Hollywood and find their space in writer's rooms and to find their director's chairs. So I wanted to create prototypes.

I started pitching and immediately with Netflix, we pitched Deaf U and we got the green light. We got incredible support, not just for pushing representation on the screen, but taking it a step further and bringing them behind the camera. We were able to bring diversity and inclusion to the entire crew, making up almost 50% of us, which was incredible. And that was the first that it's ever been done in Hollywood. So now I'm really excited. I think the road that we've started to pave is beautiful and I'm thrilled to see more people and more commitment from the major players starting to change things. I think in 10 years, we're going to see much more Deaf people who are able to create and develop their own content and certainly get it pushed out to the public. We're excited to see what's coming.

Judy Heumann

I was re-looking some of your pieces from Dancing with the Stars. If you could speak about that for a few minutes, and then we'll get back to talking about the production company, What kind of accommodations, if any, did you have with Dancing with the Stars? Did they have interpreters available? Did you know how to dance before you got there? How did you learn all these amazing different dances?

Nyle DiMarco

Can I dance? No, I don't really think so. To be honest with you, unless you count clubs, I had zero dancing experience. I had never done ballroom, it's completely different than grinding at three o'clock in the morning. I was nervous, but I thought I could try. I did ask for an interpreter for the entire time, which was great. Dancing with the Stars was 100% behind it and they were really great at getting that set up. I had the same interpreter, which was a very different experience than I had with America's Next Top Model. It couldn't have been more different. I had an interpreter with me through all of the rehearsals, through all of the filming days, through all of the press, which was really nice. But that was really the only accommodation that I needed.

There's a funny story, actually. With Peta, it was a few weeks in. We had been sort of developing our cue system where like there was a tap on the shoulder, or like a squeeze of the hands, which meant that like a move would change, we were going to switch form or turn in a line. An eye wink meant, go ahead and start. A scratch meant I was late. So we had a tactile cueing system that was tactile and visual, which was great. But Peta actually brought me to a small studio that we were training in, in New York. And for the first time there was these two huge stereo speakers on the floor.

Something you would see it outdoor concert. And they had music blaring and now all of the time leading up to this, we had been using a cuing system and I had been counting and relying on the math of dance. But in this training studio, we got started and every single time we moved through the routine, I just kept falling off of timing. Finally, I walked over to the stereo and I turned it off and we tried it one more time because it just was driving me insane. We get ready, we move through the routine, and it was perfectly in time. And I think it's really interesting because even after working with Peta all this time, there was this sort of hearing instinct to still try to fix me. And I'm like, I'm not broken.

Judy Heumann

I love that. Yeah because you really learned so many different dances and obviously you won, so did a great job. Do you dance now?

Nyle DiMarco

No. Not at all.

Judy Heumann

Zero. Oh my god.

Nyle DiMarco

I've left my dancing days on set. I'm not a big dancer. It's not something that I've ever really enjoyed. And I definitely have a fear of it I think. But my twin brother ironically loves it. He's a DJ and a dancer, super passionate about it. So I leave all the dance moves to him.

Judy Heumann

What does he do?

Nyle DiMarco

He works actually for the IRS in DC and he DJs on the side. Does a lot of weddings, does a lot of larger venues.

Judy Heumann

That's great. Ok, let's get back to your new direction. What made you decide that you wanted to really move into setting up your own production company and what were some of the substantive stories that you wanted to start producing?

Nyle DiMarco

Really the biggest reason why I wanted to establish my production company was just because I was tired of the wait. I was tired of waiting for hearing people to write me in, and to develop roles that would make sense, and for TV to sort of develop to a place where it was ready for me. I kind of had to look at what I was doing and say, "I can't do this for the next 30 years of my life." I have a platform that I'm able to use to develop TV

shows and content, which was really huge to me. And Dancing with the Stars was really, really, really hot, I felt like I could really ride that momentum that had. But also I wanted to develop things like Audible and Deaf U. Those were big major steps and we were able to get them to Netflix and also an Oscar Nomination, which was more than my wildest dreams.

Really right now, what we're looking forward to making, we have a project coming up called Deaf President Now, which focuses on the huge Gallaudet protest 1988, that happened in Washington DC. That protest in and of itself led to the passage of the ADA and so many other major changes. We had been dealing with 124 years of hearing paternalist administrations and we just felt that it was time to change things. It gave rise to a lot of dialogue and a lot of narrative, specifically around the passage of the ADA, which is why I always have to say hats off to you for all of the work that you did. It feels like a much larger conversation there and I'm thrilled to tell that story and it feels very timely at the same time.

Another one is Deaf Punk that we're working on, which is about a club in San Francisco. We're partnering up with Morgan Freeman's production company to essentially highlight this Deaf club that happened in San Francisco when punk bands were really trying as a genre to find spaces to play and venues were turning them down. Our Deaf clubs are mostly like self-help centers, resource centers, things like that. A lot of them have bars and games and things like that to keep the community alive. But the Deaf club in San Francisco essentially became an incubator for punk clubs to really get their start and have a place to play. It was well known at that time, where celebrities from New York and LA were flying in just to see these shows. So we're thrilled to see that. I'm hoping to lead in it. And yeah, we've got a couple other projects. Thrilled.

Judy Heumann

You know, what I like about you, Nyle, is your chutzpah and your confidence. And you may not feel internally always confident, but given the major leaps that you make in your career, I feel that you feel very self-assured. You're not afraid of going into totally different areas like modeling, like Dancing with the Stars, like setting up your own production company. You're very clear about your vision. Where do you think that came from?

Nyle DiMarco

To be honest with you, I think the resiliency that I have definitely comes from my own mother. Growing up I would watch the immense advocacy that she did in the community surrounding access to education and to sign language. And it was one of the biggest reasons why I ended up at three different deaf schools. I started in Lexington in New York, which was so focused on oralism and really relied on the need to hear. And I saw a lot of my mom's work and a lot of what she was doing to fight an administration and to make things really available and accessible to kids in that school. But her persistence and her determination, I think really influenced so much of my work that I'm doing today. But I know that I can do these things because I've seen my mother create from nothing. I know that I can make the content it's just a matter of time.

Judy Heumann

Are you a quick learner?

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah. I think I am. I think I adapt fast. I think that's really key. It's a really important trait, certainly in this industry. I think that's why I won two shows because I can adapt really fast. I can take feedback, I can pivot quickly.

Judy Heumann

Yeah. Because being able to produce Deaf U and Audible where you are basically, I assume, learning as you were going, I think shows a lot of strengths.

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah, definitely. I definitely learned on the job in so many ways, and that was one of the hardest things. Sometimes it would be a little overwhelming and embarrassing because I didn't always know what was coming next and I sort of had to follow what other people were doing and really follow their lead. But it was really great to be able to work with some hearing veterans who'd been in the industry for so long and have a chance to really learn their ways and sort of emulate what they were looking for. But it definitely wasn't easy. I still very much feel like a newbie around here.

Judy Heumann

Yeah. So why did you want to produce Deaf U?

Nyle DiMarco

It really goes back to my own experience of meeting with writers and directors and producers. They just didn't have any idea of how to write in a Deaf character. And certainly in a way that was more than just 2D. In watching all of the content that was made about Deaf people over the years, they were always this one dimensional singular layer, limited character that is really boxed into their deafness. That was sort of their entire identity. I knew that we are so much more, having lived this experience and known this community my whole life. The development of Deaf U was really something that I wanted to use as a way to highlight Deaf people from all around the U.S. and of course the world and show that we are incredibly nuanced and maybe spark some new ideas for characters in Hollywood.

But I'll tell you a funny story. While I was at Gallaudet University, I lived in the dorms and it was incredible. My roommates and I put our couch on Couchsurfing.com. If you don't know the website, it's where people from all over the world, backpackers, can rent out your couch and stay there for the night for free. They can use your place to crash. But we didn't tell them where we were and we didn't tell them that we were Deaf. So they would get to the university, they would come in and everyone's signing, and nobody's speaking, and they would crash with a bunch of Deaf people in their room. And the funny thing is that most of the time, people staying would extend their stay. They'd say, "We want to stay and party with you even longer, this is incredible." They loved it and

the coolest thing about it was we were just like foreigners to them. It was like showing up in another country. The biggest difference was that we were just a linguistic community. And I think in so many ways, I'm trying to feed that same sort of value into our stories that we tell, especially like in reality shows. It was something that I thought about all those years ago when we were doing all sorts of shenanigans.

Judy Heumann

Yeah. I've seen a few of Deaf U and I like them. They're funny and they definitely allow people to get a different perspective on who their students are, the differences in the students, their areas of interest. It's a good reality show. Now, Audible. I watched Audible recently and I want to know what was it like for you to be at the Oscars this year when CODA was up and deafness was definitely a big buzz? What was it like?

Nyle DiMarco

To be honest with you, I think that the Oscars was just slapped with Deaf people. Slapped. But watching all of those Deaf people take to the red carpet, it was amazing. It's something that I think I'll remember forever. It's been 35 years since another Deaf community member took to the Oscar stage and to see us all being able to chat in our own language and really just arrive to that point together was thrilling. And we know that it's not going to take another 35 years, which is great. It very much feels like it's our time now. And that there's more coming. This feels like title waves of Deaf stories just ready to burst down the doors. Troy Kotsur's win, especially, just thrills me and I think everyone else in the community,

Judy Heumann

What did you wear?

Nyle DiMarco

What was I wearing for the Oscars?

Judy Heumann

Yes.

Nyle DiMarco

Oh. I was like, now? I don't know, a black t-shirt. For the Oscars, I was in Armani head to toe. Honestly, I always use Armani. It's been five years of working with them and they're fantastic. It's a very chic look, they never disappoint. I did a double breasted, really nice velvet tux.

Judy Heumann

What color?

Nyle DiMarco

It was black on black on black. And it was a really dark, like a midnight black with velvet shoes. It almost had like a purple sheen to it. It was really sleek.

Judy Heumann

I love it. I want to spend a little time talking about the book. Why did you decide that you wanted to write the book? How long did it take you? Did you do it by yourself? Did you work with anyone else?

Nyle DiMarco

I want to say maybe five years ago, a little bit more than five years ago, my team told me that I should write a book and I was like, "I don't really have a story that I think is worth writing a book about." I'm very much by any definition, a normal average boy, but growing up I didn't really see much that was different about me. But throughout my adult life and my journey, I've met a lot of other people who have really reminded me of the uniqueness of being born into a Deaf family and how rare that is. I thought maybe this is the right time to write a book.

And ASL being my most comfortable language and my first language, of course-- Not that I'm not comfortable in English, don't get me wrong, but I'm just not as comfortable and I thought it would probably be smartest to hire a ghost writer, my best friend growing up, to essentially ghost write the book from my own dictation. And so the process was really interesting. Over the last five years, I've signed every story, every bit of the book in ASL and he makes the translations and really gives it the zhoosh in English, which is great. Before writing this book I actually read through a few other memoirs because I wanted to look at some different options of formatting. And the one that I really connected with the most was Trevor Noah's *Born A Crime*, which outlines essentially the Apartheid and him being born in it. And just the way that he formatted it, I thought was really beautiful, which is how this book got its look.

Judy Heumann

It's a great book. I really like his book also. What are some of the more notable parts in the book for you? Your book?

Nyle DiMarco

Well, there's a few things that I touch on that are really interesting. Access to language obviously is great. I love the baseball story that I was able to put in there about my dad and being on a hearing team and sort of struggling to be able to just make a connection to the ball because I didn't have access to language. The coaching that everyone was being given wasn't something that was really given to me as well. And so swinging the bat was something that my dad had to really teach me in ASL. And so of course I love that.

I talk a lot about my sexuality as well and my journey growing up and sort of how I've navigated it and how it's impacted me. You know, how I didn't really know myself until I was 26 and I spent a lot of time questioning because the Deaf community is very small, but can also be incredibly insular. I think it was much more difficult for me to essentially

find and identify those opportunities for me to explore without outing myself. So the Deaf community didn't really know until I would feel comfortable enough, but it was kind of a catch 22 at the same time. And my journey through Hollywood, I think really getting the behind the scenes of what that looked like is a lot of fun.

Judy Heumann

One aspect of what I think is really important about you is that you're not just out there for you. The book itself is really, I think very important, not only for your story, but how you use ASL and English to allow people to begin to understand some of the variations in the language. And also the way you talk about your production company and how you're really using it as an opportunity to create opportunities for other people. When you look at the production company, not everybody is like that.

Nyle DiMarco

Definitely. No, I think it's interesting because growing up, things looked a little bit different. For 25 years of my life I was really in a Deaf family, I was in a Deaf community, in deaf schools at Gallaudet University. It was a very utopian world until I entered Hollywood. And suddenly I was alone and that was tough. It wasn't easy, I felt really sort of isolated on my journey a lot of times. And I wasn't even sure that it was something that I wanted to pursue sometimes because I was the only other person aside from Marlee really out here in those meetings. And for a lot of the projects that I was doing, I realized that I just wanted to utopianize them. I wanted Deaf people involved and I wanted to really reinvent the world that I had come from, but also bring it to Hollywood.

Judy Heumann

I appreciate very much that you've shared this feeling of being alone. And what do you do to keep your vision going? Even when there are times when you still feel alone?

Nyle DiMarco

My team especially, I have a really great team. They're incredible and they're definitely the reason why I have Deaf U and why I have Audible. I could have never done it alone. I think really creating an incredible team and assembling a tribe around you is really important. But the results you see in Deaf U are because of the involvement of incredible Deaf creatives. Those Deaf creatives now have studio experience. Audible being nominated for an Oscar and being able to provide a whole new platform, those are things that I think essentially give me, I would say more hope for the future because I see the actual results for longevity in the industry. And I definitely do not feel like I'm alone anymore. Right now when we have Lauren Ridloff out there as the first Deaf superhero, and Alaqua Cox, it's just incredible. We have Troy Kotsur's Oscar win and the entire CODA Ensemble. This is a new age, we have more coming. I would say you really can start to see the light at the end of the tunnel and it's Deaf people coming with flashlights.

Judy Heumann

That's great. I like that. Well, I think this is all really very exciting. And one of the things I like to ask my guests is could you share something about yourself that many people don't know?

Nyle DiMarco

That's a really good question. Let's see, I guess everybody knows that I was in the math now. Yeah, that I watch Manga. I do, I love Manga. A lot of people don't realize, but I do. I like it.

Judy Heumann

I have to watch it. I've not watched Manga.

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah. Oh man. I'm a big, big fan of Manga. There's a lot of good out there, I can't help it. Pronouncing this one is a little tough, but I actually love one called Haikyuu, H-A-I-K-Y-U-U. It's actually a TV show about volleyball and it's really impressive. I definitely love to watch it. You always think of volleyball TV show, especially in Anime, can't be good, but it's great. I don't know, Grey, what else? I don't know. A lot of people don't realize actually— that's a good one— that my old last name was Thompson. That's a pretty good factoid. I changed my last name before school, I was 21. And it was my last name because I really felt like a DiMarco, it was a legacy I wanted to pass on and keep.

Judy Heumann

And whose name is that? That on your mother's side?

Nyle DiMarco

Yes. That's on my mother's side. My mom's last name is DiMarco.

Judy Heumann

Ah, okay. Well that's something people definitely didn't know. Very interesting.

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah, I know. Definitely not. It's funny, I can't actually imagine Nyle Thompson. Still to this day, I'm like, Ugh, I hear that and sounds like scratches on a record, ugh.

Judy Heumann

You're absolutely right. From the theatrical perspective, DiMarco is definitely a better name and it's a real name.

Nyle DiMarco

Sure. It's a stage name.

Judy Heumann

Exactly. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with the audience? Words of wisdom you'd like to give?

Nyle DiMarco

This interview has been pretty robust. Words of wisdom, I would have to say something I always live by is be yourself. It's a little cliché, but to me identity is everything. It's so critical to your success. And I think you really have to live your identity. You have to be who you are in the most robust way. It's really what leads you.

Judy Heumann

Those are beautiful words. And I should have thought about them from the very beginning because you have been yourself throughout your life.

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah, very much so. Beautiful. B-E-Y-O-U-tiful.

Judy Heumann

Well, I'd like to thank you so much Nyle for this. And I really want to encourage people to please go out and buy this book. I think you will find it a great read and one that you'll want to share with your friends. I also think that we're seeing more and more people wanting to learn sign language, more universities that are teaching sign language, high schools that are teaching sign language as a language. So, great opportunity to look at ways that you too can learn another language.

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah. Or there's a really great app called The ASL App. Definitely. It's built by Deaf people. It's a fantastic app. Get it, download it. It's just The ASL App. It's great.

Judy Heumann

And you think it's good?

Nyle DiMarco

Oh, I think it's fantastic. Honestly, it was built by Deaf people so the signs you're being taught are authentic. Everything there is accurate. Unfortunately, a lot of YouTube videos out there, a lot of the sign language teachers quote unquote, are hearing and don't really have experience in the language. And so people for example, will come up to me in the store and say, "Hey, I learned this on YouTube and they'll be signing to me." And I'm like, "I have no idea what that is." And then they'll show me who they learn from and they're totally made up, it's ridiculous.

Judy Heumann

Well, thank you so much for sharing your time with us. And I look forward to seeing and hearing great things about you in the future. Thank you.

Nyle DiMarco

Yeah, my pleasure. Thanks, Judy.

Kylie Miller

Now it's time for Ask Judy, a segment where Judy answers questions sent in by listeners.

Judy Heumann

I really appreciated that Nyle took time to have a discussion with us today about not only his book, obviously his book, but also about Nyle the man.

Kylie Miller

Yeah.

Judy Heumann

And I think that's very important.

Kylie Miller

Yeah, there's a lot to learn about him. Especially in his new memoir.

Judy Heumann

Yeah. I mean, he has so many accolades. As a model, as a dancer, now as a writer and also a producer. So he's really using media more and more, not just to advance himself, but I think in a very important way, looking at training other Deaf and disabled people to be able to work behind and in front of the camera.

Kylie Miller

Mhm. And now that he's added author to his resume, I thought a really appropriate question for this episode is about writing. So this question comes from Dakota Rose. He says, "I'm teaching a writing course through a disability studies lens and would love to be able to play a clip from The Heumann Perspective as I'm teaching my writing class through a disability studies lens. What would you say beginning writers should be wary of when first reporting on/writing about disability?"

Judy Heumann

Thank you. First of all, Dakota, for the question. And what I'm going to say really is not just for beginning writers, but for writers in general. I think it's always important that someone without a disability is not representing themselves as a disabled person, and that one is in touch with other disabled people on themes that you're looking at writing about. And also reading about issues that you're concerned about, so that you are presenting information which can be informative from a non-disability perspective and isn't going to have most disabled people upset that you're speaking on behalf of us with disabilities. So I think it's when looking at writing about diversity overall, disability not specific and only, but you know, what are some of the things that one needs to be thoughtful about when writing an essay.

Kylie Miller

Great. Thank you, Judy. And thank you, Dakota, for incorporating The Heumann Perspective in your classroom. And I encourage others to do so, too.

Judy Heumann

Thank you all.

Kylie Miller

If you're listening and you have a question you'd like to hear Judy answer, please send it to media@judithheumann.com or DM Judy's accounts on Twitter and Instagram.

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