

Episode 30: Lauren...Teacher of the deaf, adult with hearing loss who educates families to help their kids just have a much more empowered life.

[00:00:00] **Eliza:** Welcome to raising a child with hearing loss with host Gretchen Fors. Gretchen is a mother of five children, three of whom are hard of hearing. Listen as adults, teens, parents, and providers share their own personal journey with hearing loss Plus hear the stories of moms who have walked this journey alongside their child. This podcast is intended for families to share their own personal journeys without judgment. Please respect and honor each family's choices. All information presented is educational and should not be Misconstrued as personal medical advice.

[00:00:37] **Gretchen:** Hi, Lauren. I'm super excited to have you join me today. Why don't you introduce yourself and Yes, tell us a little bit

about yourself.

Okay. Well, thanks so much for having me. Okay, so I'm Lauren I am a teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Idaho. Goodness. How long have I been doing this now?

I think I've been working in this field professionally. 10 [00:01:00] years now, something like that. I started as an elementary ed, as an elementary teacher teaching first grade. Did that for three years before I went back and got my master's degree in depth education and started teaching kiddos with hearing loss in school.

So,

And what made you wanna go back and get that certificate? To teach kids with hearing loss in

school? And that was always my goal actually, when I went to college. So

[00:01:21] **Lauren:** when I started in my first year of college at CSI in Twin Falls I didn't know the severity of my own hearing loss at the time.

I knew I had something my mom had always had told me. Yeah. And I, I never used the phone on my left ear. I could hear, but I really couldn't understand in my left ear and always had a little bit of a lisp and did a little bit of speech therapy in school and didn't love it. So, but I just kind of always got passed over.

My mom's like, Yeah, you've got like a little bit over here. There's something with that one ear, but you're fine. You're completely fine. And by all [00:02:00] accounts, otherwise speak. I, I guess I technically was, I always did well in school and but I always felt a little bit kind of like something was off, something was missing, things were harder than they should have been.

My test scores were always high and. Looking back, is it, Executive functioning skills. Were all over the board. So anyway, I fast forward to college and I took an ASL class just on whim as my language credit. I took

French in high school and did, eh, okay. And they didn't have French at the college where I was going, so I didn't really wanna start all over in Spanish or German or something else.

I'm like, Ooh, sign language. That'll, sure, that'll check the box. Great. Then and I kind of fell in love with. And it was super accessible for me. And so fast forward, I went through two years at CSI moved away and I was working with that little bit of sign language knowledge at the school for the deaf in Virginia.

And I was just a teacher's aid helping kids get from point A to point B really. And I went with one of my [00:03:00] students who was, or one of the students I was working with was getting his hearing checked for his annual review and he was, he had autism, so he was afraid of the booth and wouldn't go in.

But the audiologist knew him really well and said, If you go in first and go through the motions, he'll see it safe and he'll go in. I said, Okay. So I went in and I put on the headphones and she did the beeps and she's like, There is something you need to see. So she referred me to, I was 20 at. So I went to an actual Audi to another audiologist who was the educational audiologist.

I went to a different audiologist. And sure enough I have mild, profound, mild sloping to profound hearing loss in my left ear. And mild to same in my right ear, but it's basically normal to those high frequencies and dropped off too profound. So essentially normal hearing in my right ear, mine was that really sharp drop to profound in the very, very high frequencies.

And I think that's what. Got me through. Was that normal hearing, [00:04:00] normal-ish hearing in my right ear? Yeah, so that was the beginning of me figuring out I was missing something a lot more than I realized. I was 20, I didn't have any money for a hearing aid or, and it wasn't covered under my insurance.

And so I didn't know, didn't really know what to do, and I thought, Well, I've been getting by so far, I guess I keep going. And my audiologist friend at Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind said, Well, we have loaners and donors and, and things here that you could try. And so this was in 2000, 2005. So it wasn't a great donor free hearing aid that I got.

But it was better than nothing, I guess. I don't know. I, I wouldn't call it better than nothing cause I didn't use it consistently because, Just, you know, it wasn't digital technology, it wasn't great. So it amplified the sound. Sure. But it was not, it was not great. But it was, it did at least give me a clue into how much I had been missing my entire life.

[00:05:00] So that was when I said, Okay, I'm, I loved working at the school for the deaf. I loved working with kids with hearing loss of all degrees, signing or not signing, and it was it was a strange connection to be in that environment already. It just, it for. I don't know, lack of a better word.

It really felt like divine intervention. I don't know if that's okay to say here.

[00:05:18] **Gretchen:** Oh, I think

that's fine. And I think that's, so, that's such an interesting story, right? Cuz you were 20. So I was 20. Yeah. So you had gone through all of junior high, all of high school. Do you feel like looking back you had like auditory fatigue or the school was much harder or, Yeah.

Like it's, And now with the prospective you have now, you can probably see back to some of the struggles you had in school. But at the time they just seemed. Struggles. So what do you think Oh, yeah. Would've been different had you had the opportunity to have high quality hearing aids as a, you know, school age child?

[00:05:50] **Lauren:** Yeah.

Gosh, everything would've been different. I think. I would've, you know, even at 20, it wasn't until, gosh, [00:06:00] 12 years later that I finally said, Yes, I will buy a hearing. And it was because I was working as a preschool teacher and I was working with kids with listening, listening spoken language, and I couldn't hear when they were leaving off ending sounds.

So doing a ling check with them was darn near impossible. And I said, Oh, this is just, I need, I have to have an assistant with me to do, No, this is, nope, , I need a hearing aid. So I finally sucked it up and got a good hearing aid, a really nice hearing aid and seriously just like. Changed everything.

But looking back I think access to technology would've been huge. And just that willingness to be able to talk about my own hearing loss would have changed the self confidence game for me. Tremendously. I was always so embarrassed of my speech. I was embarrassed of I got called Blonie a lot because I was just people were.

And really unclear why I could do well on a [00:07:00] test and appear to be an intelligent human, and then seem so disconnected and spacey sometimes. So, you know, I'd walk away and someone would call my name and they'd think I was being a snob. Or a teacher would say something and I would miss it, and they'd think I just wasn't paying attention.

And then as. As you hear that over and over again, you start to think, Well, that must be true. And then you start to behave in that way because it's just that self-fulfilling prophecy. Had I had access to things like early intervention, my mom would've been more comfortable, My mom would've been more confident in helping me become more comfortable and confident going into school.

And then it wouldn't have been the big, like scary elephant in the room that I didn't wanna talk. That had to be, once I acknowledged it it lost all its power, right? To kind of rule my life in that way, and I could just start to learn to function like a human again. So, yeah, I think school could have been very, [00:08:00] very different.

It could have been such a better experience Academically. I liked school, I liked socializing. I liked some of the classes that I took but it really wasn't. Grad school. My undergrad was, was great. My undergrad was actually a means to an end, so we didn't have an undergraduate program in the state of Idaho at the time for deaf education.

So the means to the end was undergrad in elementary ed, and then grad school in deaf education. So that was the route that I chose and it, I thought it would be a great opportunity to, to teach. Gen ed and mainstream setting, so I understand what that really looks like. Have all of that expertise background before I get into teaching deaf and hard of hearing kids in any setting.

And that did, that did prove to be really beneficial. But it wasn't until both of those programs, my undergrad and my graduate program that I really understood. How much I was missing and the level of auditory fatigue I

was experiencing. And I, I remember the day that I was [00:09:00] reading a textbook and read the term auditory fatigue and went, Oh, my , that's, that's me.

I went home and took naps, big ones after school and would have massive headaches on some days. Had dizziness issues and balance issues, and the weather always made me feel weird and I couldn't understand why. And so there were lots of, lots of things that I learned about in grad school that applied to me specifically.

And that was, it was almost hard to read at the time. Mm-hmm. and then go back and look at it retroactively and say, Oh, okay, this didn't have to be this way. It didn't have to be the kid who was constantly disorganized or turning in homework late or missing something that a, a peer said in the conversation just didn't have to be that way.

[00:09:52] **Gretchen:** That's a really interesting perspective, and I think it's interesting too, because sometimes people will say, Well it's not that bad. Right? [00:10:00] But the reality is any type of hearing loss creates a barrier. Right? It And I think that that's something like I, I remember being told. My oldest that, well, she only has one ear that has hearing loss, so you only need one good ear to hear.

And the reality of that situation is that's not true. Right. But that was the myth that had been perpetuated for a long time. Because, Because just like you, she's high functioning. She did so well in school. Right? And so all of a sudden it was like, well, she's doing fine. So why are you concerned ? And Right, right.

But you can really talk to that experience of like, it does make a difference. Mm-hmm. , and especially talking to parents. It's sometimes hard to explain to a parent, your child will do better with hearing aids when that curve doesn't look that bad on the audiogram. Right. Or it says it's mild or mild to moderate or, mm-hmm.

I mean, I know, and I learned to read an audiogram in nursing school, but I had no idea what it actually meant until it. Personal to me. Right before that I was like, Oh, dashes look pretty close to the what they

should, That should be [00:11:00] fine. Right. Not that big of a difference between 10 and 30. Right. . Yeah.

It's a really big difference. Yeah. And

so that, I think that's really powerful. I appreciate you sharing that for parents to know like it, like good high quality hearing aids do make a difference and they make it the ability for your child to access sound and you know, decrease some of these other problems.

Well I find it interesting now still that like we're still having this conversation about how hard it, like, okay. I find it interesting that why are glasses so universally accepted? Right? People wear glasses, right?

It's not a big deal. So like, I just ended up having to wear glasses this year. It's not a big deal. Sometimes I choose to wear my glasses. Sometimes I choose to wear my contacts, but. No one says to me, Oh my goodness, you got glasses? Like, how are you feeling? I'm so sorry for you. You got glasses. But somehow when you find out people have hearing loss, it's like, Oh, I'm so sorry.

And sorry for what? Right. Like if you just could normalize it, make it a normal thing, it just. Happens sometimes. And now we have high quality hearing aids and lots of good interventions, medical interventions.

So if we just normalize it, [00:12:00] naturalize it, and just move forward, it would help so many people, it would help our kids.

It would help Absolutely. What seniors? It would help so many people. And really hoping as a society we can get over that, that like, Oh, you were hearing aids, That's nice. That's interesting. Right. You know, versus, I'm so sorry your child has hearing loss like that must be hard or

[00:12:19] **Lauren:** Oh, 100%. And I think you know, thinking back to that first little analog hearing aid that I had I remember I was wearing it and I think had I, you know, tried it out a little longer, given a little bit more time or maybe gone back to a different, So I moved from Virginia back to Idaho about that time.

and I came home and my sister was there and she's like, What is a thing in your ear, ? And I'm like, just hearing aid oh, you work with deaf kids now, so you think you're deaf, right? No, not quite. That wasn't exactly it at all, but just being able to talk about it in a safe space. Right. like you're saying, normalize it so it's not such.[00:13:00]

Whew. And I feel like we're, we're getting closer now, right? This was early two thousands, and we're talking 20 years later. But man, we've got some ways to go. But I do think we've gotten a little bit a little bit closer to normalizing hearing loss and normalizing any other disability, anything, right?

Like mm-hmm. . So it's just, yeah, it's, it's definitely promising, but I think had that been the case for me, it would've. Story would've been a little different

[00:13:28] **Gretchen:** And I love that you've taken that story that was hard and turned around to something so powerful and helpful for the youth that are coming up, right?

Like, you could have just kept you know the story to yourself, but instead you decided to go back to school and serve these kids. And they are so lucky to have you. The kids on your caseload are lucky to have you cause I know you work hard for them. And and, and that's really the goal, right? To have everybody be able to reach their potential.

And enjoy school, not be so tired or frustrated or so much that it's not fun to go because you are missing [00:14:00] out on something or you don't know what's going on around you or things like that. Oh,

[00:14:02] **Lauren:** absolutely. I I think I was telling you earlier, I work with just babies now. Early interventions, so birth to three.

But for the last couple years I've just been working birth to three and then also school age children. And I see it all the time, just all the time. The kiddos who regardless of the degree of hearing loss, It just becomes such a struggle for them to interact with their peers, and it doesn't have to, certainly doesn't have to be that way.

And those kiddos who get. You know, that early education and the parent training and all of that, they have this team around them who understands their hearing loss and helps them understand their hearing loss so they can better talk about it and advocate for their own needs. They do well, you've got a bunch of them, so you , you know how they do, they end up doing so well.

It's not to say the challenge isn't still there, that the barrier isn't still there, but they know how to then work with that challenge, work with that barrier. Tell other people who can help what they need whether [00:15:00] that's captions or repeat or whatever it is. So yeah, it's really been fun to be able to be a part of educating families and teams and ways to help their kids just have a much more empowered life.

[00:15:12] **Gretchen:** I appreciate

that. Okay. As we end, I want you to tell your one biggest tip that you have now you work zero to three. So if you're trying to refer on that hearing screen, what's your biggest tip for that?

[00:15:23] **Lauren:** Oh goodness. I would say make sure you see a pediatric audiologist as soon as possible. They are going to be the expert here to to talk to and definitely reach out to, or if you get reached talk to other parents who've been through what you've been through. It may be that it's nothing or it may be that it's definitely something.

But try to, you know, talk to your other mom friends and see who, you know, that had a similar situation. Maybe got a referral in the hospital and things were fine, or maybe got a referral in the hospital and followed up and things were not fine. And then they were so other families and other [00:16:00] other professionals.

[00:16:00] **Gretchen:** Well, thank you so much for taking time today to chat with me. Thank you Lauren. So thank you.

[00:16:06] **Lauren:** Thank you, Gretchen.

[00:16:07] **Gretchen:** Thank you so much for joining us for today's episode of the hearing mamas tribe podcast. I'm so appreciative for those who are willing to share their stories. And I hope as we share and listen to these stories that our hearts can be uplifted and we can find joy in this journey together. I welcome you into our tribe.

If you're a parent, a mom, a dad, or a professional who serves these children. And we'd love to share their story. Please check out the show notes for how to get in touch. Please like subscribe, share this with your friends and leave us a review. That way more people will find this podcast. Thanks for being part of this journey.