

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.

Gretchen- Hi, Jess. Thanks so much for joining me today.

Jess- Thanks For having me.

Gretchen -I'm super happy you're here. Okay. I am just going to let you just take it away and share your story.

Jess- Okay. Part of my journey started when I got into the field of audiology. I originally Became an audiologist because I wanted to help people hear. That was my goal. I didn't plan to specialize in working with children. But after graduation I eventually honed in on my skills and realized I was probably best working with children. So that was kinda my passion. Then fast forward a little bit after graduation, I ended up having a baby boy.

We're super excited to have him. He's presented lots of different medical things for us in his short life so far. But originally. When he was born, he passed his newborn hearing screening. And as an audiologist, I was very excited about that. I'm like, oh great.

My child does normal hearing. Everything's great. Then fast forward. He has had a lot of, like I said, medical things, one of those being really chronic, severe allergies which led to. By his second birthday, he had already had three sets of ear tubes. Two of those, the permanent tubes that kept coming out. He had his tonsils removed, his adenoids removed twice.

People would ask me, is he sick? And I honestly never knew. He just was chronically draining out of his nose, his eyes, his ears. By two and two and a half, he had three sets of tubes, still had normal hearing at that point. And then when he was five, he had an unrelated non ear surgery.

That was upcoming and because his left ear tube had remained in for that period of time. The right one had fallen out. I'd asked him about his ENT. Could you just maybe take out the permanent tube? It's been two and a half years. He hasn't had an ear infection. He's five.

I don't want us to sedate him to have to remove this tube. And he's getting sedated for something else. At five years old, he had his surgery. And then our ENT went in and removed his ear tube. And that was in may. And of course the audiologists in me all summer were like

looking at his ear, we're going to kindergarten in the fall, making sure his hearing was going to be good and kept checking it out.

And I'm like, oh, I think this is closing because they had taken out the tube and kinda did a little patch on it. I was under the impression things were looking good. Then one day my husband and I were watching TV. It was August. It was right about the time school was starting. We're sitting on our sofa and he was in his bedroom and he's supposed to be going to bed and we're watching TV.

And all of a sudden I can hear this radio and it is just blaring. It's so loud. And I ran in his room and I said, what are you doing? And he says I am going to bed. And I was like, okay. Why is the radio so loud? And he said I'm lying on my good ear and said, what are you talking about your Goodyear?

He was like I don't really hear this one. And I'm like, thinking in my head, what are you talking about? And at that point I probably had looked in his ear in a few weeks. I don't know. So I go grab my otoscope. I look in his ear. There's half of an eardrum. Like it's just, it looked like a big mess.

And clearly something had happened in a few weeks time that I hadn't been looking and monitoring his ear which was really shocking and disappointing that we had gotten, though things were getting better. And then he had this big hole in his eardrum. So of course, then I have to take him to the clinic and get his hearing tested by one of my colleagues.

And of course he has moderate, conductive hearing loss because he's got a hole on his eardrum. This is all happening around the same time he's starting kindergarten and his school did kindergarten. Hearing screenings. And he got a note home that he passed in both years, which was so ironic that I literally had just diagnosed a hearing loss and his one ear.

And I got a note saying he passed. So I was really disappointed in the fact that he didn't actually pass. And I got a note saying he did. So then we reached out to ENT and, I mentioned that this has happened and. They were like, it's fine. He's got one. He's got one good ear.

I'm like, yeah, I know he does have one good ear, but as an audiologist, I knew that going into school, having one good ear, it was just not going to be good enough for my son. So it was October, it was Halloween. We fit him with a hearing aid on Halloween, it took a little while to get the hearing aid.

And I just remember, it's just a weird experience. This is what I had taught families, and this is what I had learned to teach people about bringing a hearing aid into your family and bringing this journey into your life and it was happening to us. And it was very interesting because I wasn't prepared for all the failures I was going to have as a mom of a child wearing a hearing aid that I had tried to talk to and prepare all the families I had worked with for so long

for their journeys. And so day two, we lose the hearing aid at a Halloween party. And boy did I feel like an epic mom failure on day two. And it happened to be one of my good friends. Who is also an audiologist. So not only was mom of the year losing a hearing aid on day two, but I was at my friend's house as an audiologist.

So of course she had to tease me quite a bit about that. But yeah, that was, that was a start at each five. That was one of his journeys started and now fast forward he's almost 13, and we have had. Oh, so many ups and downs in this world of having a hearing aid, for us, the listening and spoken language thing was a little bit of a different path because at five years old he had amazing speech and language skills.

He never had articulation errors prior and he had normal hearing until that fifth year of life.. However, over the years, I've definitely noticed many things that we teach our families about with kids, with unilateral hearing loss he misunderstands just jokes a lot within, without his hearing aid.

He has a hard time in a group? Hard times with sarcasm and just all those little things that I guess we take for granted that kids are just overhearing and learning is that, oh yeah, that idiot. He doesn't understand what we're talking about. And so for me, it's been a little bit different because we were never focused on articulation.

It was always on that bigger language component. And what was he missing? Because of the hearing loss related to that. And so we, had a few visits with SLPs over the years that I know and have had his language tested. He's got a math brain. He does not like reading.

And I kinda think maybe part of that has been due to, just maybe. Tiny bit of some language related things. He just never really found a love for that. And no matter how hard we've tried, he just, it's just not his thing. But we're supporting him in his, like his love for math. And I think that's been a great thing for him to find something at school that he does love.

And yeah, that's where we're at. With our journey so far, it's continuing

Gretchen - It's always a journey. And I really appreciate that. The vulnerable side of being a mom. I'm sure for your patients that empathy, that you've built by being on the other side, right?

Jess- Oh, for sure.

Gretchen-I'm sure the parents you deal with are appreciative because. We've all done those things, but like real humanizing to realize the audiologist.

Jess- So recently he left his hearing aid in a dirty stinky locker room hockey locker. And we had to call the rank to have somebody go find and look for a hearing aid in a dirty stinky. Men's locker room, which is really awful. I'm like, oh my gosh, you could not believe if you lost the hearing aid in a locker room,

Gretchen- Can he wear his hockey helmet when he plays?

Jess- No, he can't wear it when he plays hockey. Unfortunately he just sweats way too much. Luckily his coach, a pretty loud voice. And every coach has had since this happened soccer and hockey, you've always talked to him at the beginning of the season and said, Hey, just so you know, if he's across the ice from you across the field from you, he's not wearing a device.

He can't hear you? Yes. But at a distance you might have. Here you are right away, or you might need to have his teammates saying something. The nice thing about hockey is that it is visual as far as like, when kids leave the ice. If you're your teammate, your partner on, he plays defense, leaves, ice, he knows.

So watching and following soccer is a little bit harder because usually you're getting subbed off and it's like the game of stops and somebody is yelling your name. And so usually for that he's got a teammate. Shout out his name for him. If the coaches are too far. But yeah, we, unfortunately haven't figured out a solution for really sweaty kids wearing devices and playing sports.

Gretchen- Yeah. And that's real life too. I appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to chat with me and to share your story. I think all of our journeys are different, right? Like you probably never had a child and thought, okay, Be an audiologist and raise a child with hearing loss that probably wasn't on your radar.

And like you said, he passed his newborn screen and his kindergarten screen. And yet you can see the day-to-day repercussions of that. Single-sided hearing loss, which sometimes people think is no big deal. So I appreciate you sharing that, Jess. So thanks for joining me today. I really appreciate it.

Jess- Thanks. No problem. Thanks.