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Hands of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, and the Language of Love

By Myron Uhlberg



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Hands of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, and the Language of Love By Myron Uhlberg

By turns heart-tugging and hilarious, Myron Uhlberg's memoir tells the story of growing up as the hearing son of deaf parents—and his life in a world that he found unaccountably beautiful, even as he longed to escape it.

“Does sound have rhythm?” my father asked. “Does it rise and fall like the ocean? Does it come and go like the wind?”

Such were the kinds of questions that Myron Uhlberg's deaf father asked him from earliest childhood, in his eternal quest to decipher, and to understand, the elusive nature of sound. Quite a challenge for a young boy, and one of many he would face.

Uhlberg's first language was American Sign Language, the first sign he learned: “I love you.” But his second language was spoken English—and no sooner did he learn it than he was called upon to act as his father's ears and mouth in the stores and streets of the neighborhood beyond their silent apartment in Brooklyn.

Resentful as he sometimes was of the heavy burdens heaped on his small shoulders, he nonetheless adored his parents, who passed on to him their own passionate engagement with life. These two remarkable people married and had children at the absolute bottom of the Great Depression—an expression of extraordinary optimism, and typical of the joy and resilience they were able to summon at even the darkest of times.

From the beaches of Coney Island to Ebbets Field, where he watches his father's hero Jackie Robinson play ball, from the branch library above the local Chinese restaurant where the odor of chow mein rose from the pages of the books he devoured to the hospital ward where he visits his polio-afflicted friend, this is a memoir filled with stories about growing up not just as the child of two deaf people but as a book-loving, mischief-making, tree-climbing kid during the remarkably eventful period that spanned the Depression, the War, and the early fifties.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best of the Month, February 2009: With touching simplicity, author Myron Uhlberg recounts his complex childhood spent bridging the gap between sign language and the spoken word. As the hearing son of deaf parents, young Myron served as their emissary to the audible world while enduring the painful ignorance of a society that dismissed the hearing-impaired as "dummies." Yet eliciting pity is not the aim of this memoir. *Hands of My Father* is less about the challenges Uhlberg faced, and more about the love that bound his family together. Amid each tale of hardship, he describes moments so profoundly tender that you are immediately excused for the lump forming in the back of your throat. "All that I needed, in order to understand how much my father loved me," he explains, "was the feel of his arms around me." Though there may have been much to struggle against, Uhlberg's stories reveal that he had even more to be thankful for. - *Dave Callanan*

From Publishers Weekly

In this memoir about growing up the son of deaf parents in 1940s Brooklyn, Uhlberg recalls the time his uncle told him he saw his nephew as cleaved into two parts, half hearing, half deaf, forever joined together. These worlds come together in this work, his first for adults, as Uhlberg, who has written several children's books (including *Dad, Jackie, and Me*, which won a 2006 Patterson Prize) effortlessly weaves his way through a childhood of trying to interpret the speaking world for his parents while trying to learn the lessons of life from the richly executed Technicolor language of his father's hands. With the interconnection of two different worlds, there is bound to be humor, and Uhlberg is able to laugh at himself and his family's situation. He recounts unsuccessfully trying to reinterpret his teacher's constructive criticism for his parents and finding himself pressed into duty interpreting the Joe Louis prize fights for his dad. There are, of course, more poignant moments, as Uhlberg tries to explain the sound of waves for his curious father or when he finds himself in charge of caring for his epileptic baby brother because his parents can't hear the seizures. As Uhlberg grows up through the polio epidemic, WWII and Jackie Robinson's arrival in Brooklyn, he also grows out of his insecurities about his family and the way they are viewed as outsiders. Instead, looking back, he gives readers a well-crafted, heartwarming tale of family love and understanding. (*Apr.*)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Uhlberg fondly recounts stories of Brooklyn during the Great Depression and World War II in this memoir of his childhood. He grew up with the beautiful, expressive signs of his father and the equally beautiful spoken language of the hearing world. At a young age, the active, mischievous boy gained the responsibility of acting as translator for his father and sometimes as shield from the often-cruel hearing adults in a less politically correct time. In addition, his younger brother was diagnosed with epilepsy, a misunderstood disease at that time. Uhlberg's emotions toward his family, and especially his father, run the gamut from embarrassment to anger to a deep and abiding love. Sections titled "Memorabilia" pepper the narrative, and many black-and-white photographs are scattered throughout this rich, textured portrait of the deaf community on Coney Island at a turbulent time in U.S. history. Teens who enjoy history, historical fiction, memoirs, or books about people who are differently abled should all enjoy this.—*Charli Osborne, Oxford Public Library, MI*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gary Lopez:

Now a day people that Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by connect with the internet and the resources inside it can be true or not need people to be aware of each facts they get. How a lot more to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the answer is reading a book. Reading a book can help individuals out of this uncertainty Information particularly this Hands of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, and the Language of Love book since this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Linda Henderson:

This Hands of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, and the Language of Love are reliable for you who want to be a successful person, why. The reason of this Hands of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, and the Language of Love can be one of several great books you must have is definitely giving you more than just simple reading food but feed you with information that possibly will shock your previous knowledge. This book is usually handy, you can bring it all over the place and whenever your conditions throughout the e-book and printed types. Beside that this Hands of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, and the Language of Love giving you an enormous of experience such as rich vocabulary, giving you demo of critical thinking that we know it useful in your day action. So , let's have it and revel in reading.

Robert Alcock:

The actual book Hands of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, and the Language of Love has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of benefit. The book was authored by the very famous author. Mcdougal makes some research previous to write this book. This specific book very easy to read you may get the point easily after reading this book.

Teresa Burns:

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