

Wendy Kupfer

Author



Almigal.com



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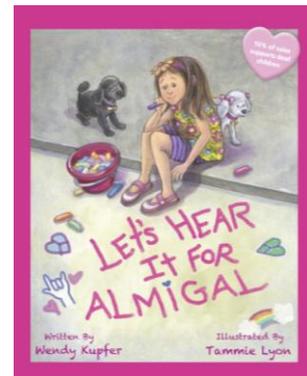


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Q&A with Wendy Kupfer



author of



***Let's Hear it for Almigal* is such an upbeat and motivational book for children, and it's obvious that hearing loss is an issue near and dear to you. Can you give us the story behind the book?**

My daughter Ali is my inspiration for the book. When we found out she had a profound hearing loss as a baby, it turned our world upside down. But as I look at her today – she has a Masters Degree in Social Work, a job with the Jewish Social Services Agency in Rockville, MD as an Employment Support Specialist for deaf and disabled clients, and is married to a wonderful man who adores her – it's hard to even remember how difficult things were so many years ago.

It would have meant so much to me when Ali was younger, if I could have met someone like her. It would have been so encouraging. And that's why I wrote this story. Almigal is that inspiration for young kids with hearing loss, but also for any child that feels different. She's spunky, optimistic and full of life!

How much of Almigal's story is based on your own daughter Ali's?

Almigal truly is my daughter! Her spirit and personality – and even the little stories are based in fact.

Ali really did jump into the swimming pool ... one time and one time only ... without removing her hearing aids. And I really did “save the day” with my hairdryer. It was something we will never forget – and you'll see that story in the book.

Ali, like Almigal, was also a ballerina. She and her best friend Jaime – who I based the character in the book with the “teeny tiny voice” – danced hours and hours each week. We were always so happy that Ali could hear the music. She couldn't necessarily make out the words, but I would write them out for her so she could sing along.

And most like Almigal in the book – Ali has never wanted to miss a thing!

How did it feel when you first learned your daughter couldn't hear?

The thought of my daughter being “profoundly” deaf was devastating, but after numerous doctor appointments and learning about all the other problems she could have been dealt, this was so much more hopeful.

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Ali – an adult now - knows how to sign, but only because she learned it in foreign language classes. Why didn't you use this as she was growing up?

Sign language is a beautiful language, but deciding what approach is best for your child and your family is a very complicated decision, at a time when this is all completely overwhelming. There is no right or wrong answer. My goal was to give my child every opportunity to develop into a happy and productive adult. Ali was not quite a year old when her hearing loss was diagnosed and we felt we had time on our side. The oral approach (listening and spoken language) made the most sense to us, knowing that if Ali wasn't successful, we could revisit that decision.

Did you ever want to just give up?

That thought never entered my mind!

We all worked hard, but mostly Ali worked hard. What I always told Ali is that “you can do anything you put your mind to.” I believe that parents need to have expectations for their children, including children with special needs. All children need to develop a positive self image. There are many bumps along the way, as with all children, but with working with their teachers, along with lots of love and support from family and close friends, you can get through it.

What is the most important lesson that you learned, that you would like to pass on to other parents of children with hearing loss?

As a mom, I was so intent on Ali keeping up with her hearing peers, that I neglected to think about how nice it would be for her to have friends that were just like her...friends with hearing loss. My advice to parents would be to be sure to provide opportunities for their children to meet other kids that are just like them. They need this for their self-esteem. Ali and I recently attended the AG Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Conference and it was incredible to see the children bonding with each other. I would imagine that some of them will be lifelong friends because of this special connection.

Are cochlear implants the best option for children with hearing loss?

Once the doctors determine that the child is a candidate for implants, the parents need to research and evaluate this decision carefully for their child. Personally, I am in total awe over the children I meet that are implanted. Their hearing ability, along with their speech and social skills are on par with their hearing peers. When the family is focused on the auditory verbal therapy, the outcome is remarkable.

You are at an age when most people want to retire, yet you have jumped into a new venture. Why now?

I think that many women of my generation would prefer to “reinvent” themselves rather than retire. It is really exciting to find a passion at any age, and when you love what you're doing, it doesn't feel at all like work. I also think that our life experiences, both personal and

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professional, offer us a level of confidence that we might not have had as younger women. Additionally, I think that as women get older, often we are more willing to just jump in and take a few risks. I often receive emails from parents of children with hearing loss, thanking me for writing this book and sharing their child's reaction to Almigal – that is the most rewarding experience at any age!

You mention that 5% of sales from your book will support deaf children. Can you elaborate on that?

I was raised by parents that taught us by example the value of giving back. There are so many incredible programs and organizations around the country that support children with hearing loss and their families. There are foundations devoted to deaf research...there are even organizations that train dogs for the deaf...the list is endless. I feel privileged to be able to bring light to the subject of hearing loss and, at the same time, make my own humble contribution financially as well.

What's next for Almigal? Any more stories or books you are working on?

We are already accumulating some interesting ideas for future Almigal adventures. This is the stage of writing that is really the most fun. We also hope to introduce Almigal and Penelope dolls for cuddling. Stay tuned.

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