



## ROAD TRIP TO TAHOE

This year's National Hands & Voices Leadership Conference was held at the Northstar Resort near Lake Tahoe, California (barely across the Nevada line, and hosted by Nevada Hands & Voices.) With help from the Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH), Idaho Infant-Toddler, National Hands & Voices and some carpooling, we were able to get five of us to the conference. Lorna Irwin, Shanille Moosman and Emily Ricks shared one ride, and Renee and Doug Higbee drove in early enough for Renee to attend a pre-session on advanced educational advocacy. Steven Snow, executive director of the CDHH, flew in for the conference as well. The five of us were easily able to "divide and conquer" when it came to the many break-out sessions offered, and compare notes over dinner in the evening. I intend to get lots of material for future newsletters from these folks once their hectic summers are over! For now, here's a word from our newest Parent Consultant, who will be helping Ciela Burwell cover the very busy Region 3 in the southwest corner of the state:

I am Emily Ricks and I live with my husband and four daughters in Nampa, ID. My two oldest children are both profoundly deaf and were recently adopted from Ethiopia. We have chosen to use American Sign Language in our family and our girls attend an elementary school that has a wonderful program for the deaf. I am really looking forward to being involved with Hands and Voices, meeting many of you and learning your stories.

You know the feelings . . . fear, uncertainty, longing to be accepted, wondering if you made the right choice. What were these people going to think? Would I be judged again for my decisions for my family? Would I be told that I am not giving my children what they need or deserve? Would they really listen to hear my side of the story before jumping to conclusions?

These feelings all arose again as I was preparing to attend the National Hands and Voices Conference in Lake Tahoe. I knew what Hands and Voices motto was. I knew that they claimed to be unbiased, but were they really? Would they truly accept my family as we were and not try to change our minds or "fix" our situation?

I had no need to worry. From the moment I walked in there was unity, love, enthusiasm and excitement flowing throughout the whole room. People there didn't care about what communication method I chose for my family. They didn't care if my child had cochlear implants, hearing aids, or neither. They cared about me. They cared about giving me the tools I need to continue to make informed decisions in MY situation for MY family. They shared wonderful resources, quotes and articles in very non-biased ways. I felt accepted. I felt appreciated. I felt peace that I had made the right decision for my family at this time.

Most of all, I learned that Hands and Voices really is a non-biased family support group. They really are here to help my family on our journey through deafness. I look forward to meeting again with Hands and Voices members from around the country. Next time I won't feel any fear, uncertainty or longing to be accepted. Instead, I will feel excitement, confidence and love.



The highlight of the conference for me (Lorna) was the keynote address by Susan Elliot, a deaf teacher who works at a public high school in Colorado. Susan was chosen Colorado Teacher of the Year for 2009, and was runner-up for national teacher of the year. She shared with us the reasons why teaching facts to students, whether they be hearing, hard of hearing or deaf, is no longer enough. The students of today will be participating in a global marketplace, in a climate of extremely rapid technological change. A video illustrating exactly how rapid this change is can be found at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com); search for Did You Know 3.0—it's subtitled "2008 Latest Edition, from a meeting in Rome this year." While our heads were reeling

from the implications of this short video, she pointed out that we are now preparing (or failing to prepare) students for jobs which do not exist today, using technology which does not exist, to solve problems of which we are not yet aware. Tomorrow's adults will need to be flexible learners who can work together to creatively solve problems. In her words, "they need not only knowledge and skills, but the ability to synthesize and apply learnings to see the bigger picture and solve real world problems. Students must be guided to become critical thinkers, skilled researchers, talented communicators and team players.... My philosophy simply stated is that an outstanding teacher must begin with student needs and create an environment of shared ownership for learning." To read more about Susan Elliot and the way she approaches teaching, go to [www.ccsso.org/content/PDFs/2009COTOYFINAPP.pdf](http://www.ccsso.org/content/PDFs/2009COTOYFINAPP.pdf) for her application for Teacher of the Year. I've often expressed the opinion that all parents who are involved in their children's education are to some extent "home-schoolers," and parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing more so than most, and I believe many parent/teachers will find her perspective inspiring!

A much more difficult session for me, and I expect most parents, was that dealing with child abuse. Hands & Voices is launching a project called O. U. R. Children's Safety. The initials stand for "Observe, Understand, and Respond." Because this is an uncomfortable topic, it tends to be neglected. Children with disabilities are at a higher risk for neglect and physical, sexual and emotional abuse (31% will experience one or more of these, as opposed to 9% of children without disabilities; and it is believed that abuse of children with disabilities is underreported to a greater extent.) Why are children who are deaf or hard of hearing at risk? Some reasons that have been suggested are they may lack the language skills needed to understand what abuse is or to report it; that they may be naïve about norms of sexual behavior; that they may be conditioned to comply with authority figures. All of these point to ways in which parents can help protect their children. Other things parents can do: know your child and his/her behavior; pay attention to any changes in behavior; know your child's friends, teachers, and caregivers and make sure they know you; be visible in your child's life; know your child's routine, where they go and what they do; observe how your child's caregiver interacts with him/her.

This session did more than describe the problem and how to decrease the chances of your child being affected; it gave parents some tools for coping with suspected abuse. One of these that I think would be especially helpful is the National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453.) If you know of or suspect child abuse but are not sure what to do, or are in a panic and can't remember what to do, or scared about the whole situation, the counselors at this number can help you. They will not report the abuse for you, but will help you find out who to call, and even set up a three-way connection with the appropriate local agency. They are also available to counsel victims, survivors and those who are abusing or worried that they might abuse a child. Thanks to their new liaison with Hands & Voices, they are working to make their services more accessible to callers who are deaf or hard of hearing. I also have access to a PowerPoint presentation with much more detail than I can cram into these pages, which I will send to anyone who would like to see the whole thing.

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Just discovered: TumbleBooks. Several libraries in Idaho have subscribed to this service for kids, and have a link to it on their website (if your local library doesn't have it yet, you can probably access it on the site of the library in a neighboring town.) It is a large on-line selection of kids' books read aloud, with some simple animation added to the book's original illustrations. Words or sentences are often highlighted as they are being read. My 28 year old daughter is a fairly new cochlear implant user, and has found them to be more useable and enjoyable than any other "listening practice" she's tried. It occurred to me that TumbleBooks could be used as listening practice for kids who know how to read, or reading practice for those who have listening down pretty well, or just a place to go read books with or without a parent. Best of all, it's free!

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

**Magic Valley Hands & Voices** is meeting July 15 at noon for lunch at Dierke's Lake near Twin Falls. There are lifeguards, with swimming for older kids and a wading/sand castle-building beach for younger kids; Lorna will bring kayaks and lifejackets (provided jury duty doesn't get her first.) August 22 we'll have our usual potluck picnic at Story Book Park in Burley from 4:00 until 6:00 or whenever we get tired enough to break up the party...bring a side dish to share and we'll bring the chicken, beverages and tableware. Please RSVP to Lorna at 324-7544 or Beth at 934-4346, especially for the August event (so we get enough chicken and bring enough plates.)

**Interpreted Theater Performances** continue in the Treasure Valley:

- *Comedy of Errors*, Tuesday, July 14 at 8 pm (Idaho Shakespeare Festival)
- *Twelfth Night*, Tuesday, August 25 at 8 pm (Idaho Shakespeare Festival)
- *Tuna Christmas*, Wednesday, September 23 at 7:30 pm (Idaho Shakespeare Festival)
- *Beauty and the Beast*, Saturday, October 24 at 1:30 pm (Music Theater of Idaho)
- *Annie*, Friday, December 11 at 7:30 pm (Music Theater of Idaho)

Music Theater of Idaho performances are at the Nampa Civic Center. Get tickets on line at [www.mtionline.org](http://www.mtionline.org) or call 208 468-2385. Idaho Shakespeare Festival performances are at the Festival Amphitheater on Warm Springs Avenue in Boise. Get tickets on line at [www.idahoshakespeare.org](http://www.idahoshakespeare.org) or call 208 336-9221. For the best view of the interpreters, be sure to mention that your party needs to sit in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing section. Assistive listening devices are also available at all performances.

**ISDB Family Weekend** is scheduled for September 25-26 at the Gooding Campus. Contact ISDB at 934-4457 for more details.

**ASL Movie Event** at the Fine Arts Auditorium at the College of Southern Idaho September 26. Two films will be shown, "The Legend of the Mountain Man" at 1:00 pm, and "Gerald" at 6:00 pm. Tickets are \$11 each and available only by advance purchase (deadline September 19) by contacting Janice Finch at [spudguaa@gmail.com](mailto:spudguaa@gmail.com); net proceeds will benefit the Spud Chapter of the Gallaudet Alumni Association and the ISDB Foundation Scholarship Fund. For more information and a sneak preview, go to [www.spudguaa.com/events.html](http://www.spudguaa.com/events.html).

(Note: it's no accident that Family Weekend and the movie event are scheduled for the same weekend. Arrangements are apparently being made for families to take advantage of both—but everyone seems to be on vacation this week and I haven't been able to get more information.)

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We've just learned that Mary Dunne is retiring as superintendent of ISDB at the end of this month. She's had a long career of teaching deaf children and supporting their parents, and she will be missed. Happy retirement, Mary, you've earned it!

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Do you have news of interest to other families? Have you read a useful book? Have you discovered a new trick for keeping hearing aids or CI processor in place? Has your kid done something utterly cute, funny or wonderful? Share it here! Send it to Lorna Irwin, 76 West 100 North, Jerome ID 83338 or [niwri2@msn.com](mailto:niwri2@msn.com). The next "Wavelengths" will come out in early September. And Renee, Doug and Shanille, we want to hear about what you brought home from the leadership conference!