



Hearing Wellness Journey #3 Episode

Welcome to the Hearing Wellness Journey Podcast, an exploration of determination, hope, self discovery, and triumph. We'll share the personal experiences of those that are living with hearing loss and provide a haven for their stories to show others that they are not alone in this journey. Please welcome your hosts, Dr. Dawn Heiman and Lindsay Dougherty.

📍 Hi, Mandy. I'm so excited that you're here or I'm sorry, I should call you Dr. Norgaard.

Oh, no, it's okay.

You and I originally met virtually maybe a couple of years ago going on three years ago.

And then we actually met in person at a meeting in Minneapolis, which was really nice experience and since then though, I'm not really sure if I know your full story. I invited you on this podcast because as we're asking people to tell stories about hearing loss and their journey with it.

So can you tell us who you are, where you're from? Any details you want to add

about that? Sure. Dr. Norgaard, I am from Sioux falls, South Dakota. I have three siblings. One of them is my identical twin sister. She lives in Destin, Florida. She is a park ranger down there, and we were both diagnosed with hearing loss at a very early age, I think I would diagnosed at three years old and then she was diagnosed a few years later, just because one ear was normal.

One was not normal. So she fell through the cracks. And then we both have a younger brother he's a year and a half younger than me and then a younger sister and both of them live in Sioux falls, but neither one of them were born with hearing loss. My parents, my mom stayed at home and my dad was a truck driver and kind of grew up in a big city, South Dakota. So the biggest city in South Dakota is Sioux Falls, but yet small, it felt small town-ish but now it's booming. This town is growing so fast. So my parents go from a small town, but they brought us to the big city to raise our kids. And.

Kind of that's where the story starts. My mom said that I was watching TV when I was a toddler and she said my name and I was so focused on the TV and I wouldn't turn around and that's where she suspected when I was two years old that I had hearing problems. And I always had my twin sister next to me, and I feel like she always filled in the gaps for me because I said my first word, when I was supposed to, I walked.



I did all the things that you're supposed to do developmentally, but it's interesting. I don't know if I didn't have a twin sister and how that would have all panned out.

Yeah. Do you wonder if there had been a newborn hearing screening at that time, if you have been identified at birth or was this a progressive hearing loss?

No, it wasn't. And I actually have all of my audiograms from elementary school in a big packet. So there's not, there was a big dip, like in middle school, but it was, it's been that way my whole life. So that's interesting to see. I think that it just like flat out was that level at two years old and it hasn't changed.

Wow. Definitely. Twins are so amazing and where one might fail, the other one picks up and you just balance each other out.

Yeah, we still do!

Now. So if you, what, how old were you when you first got hearing aids? Three.

Okay. I was three. I was, so my mom was pregnant with my brother when I was two.

And she had a lot of medical problems with her pregnancy. So she put it off and I've never really asked her if she felt guilty about that, but she knew there was a problem at two, but put it off till I was three.

So you were three. Do you remember getting your first pair of hearing aids?

No, but she does. She said that the audiologist came to the house at that point and they, I don't even know how you program hearing. I know how you program them, but how do you even know they're not too loud, not, and she said, I walked over to the refrigerator and she stood in front of it because it was humming.

That was perfect. Yeah. Apparently. No, I don't remember

that.

Okay. So about a year and a half, two years later, your sister got a pair of hearing aids. Do you remember that?

No, actually she was eight years old when she got one and then you never wore it. She wore a little bit and then declined it. So for years she never had any hearing aid, not until we were in our thirties.



And she asked me to program a hearing aid for. Yeah.

Wow. Yeah, you might want to tell the the audience how are you able to program a hearing aid?
Dr. Norgaard?

Yes. I went to school for this.

What I meant, I don't think we, we said that fact yet though, that you are a Doctor of Audiology.

So what made you decide to be an audiologist?

When I was growing up with my hearing loss I had a lot of challenges, socially and academically. And it was almost, you just feel, you feel like an outcast because back then your hearing aids were ginormous. You couldn't hear. My sister would say, "Oh, made fun of you on the playground" , but I never heard it.

So she would hear it. And I remember one time she got into a shouting match with a kid. I said why are you yelling? And she was like, "they were making fun of you". And she was standing up for me. But those things, sports I, we're both, pretty good athletes, but it was always, I would always distracted because there'd be a feedback or like the helmet of the softball helmet would just be pressing on my hearing aids and they'd hurt or, you just couldn't focus. So there's always a distraction. I was always on an IEP because my grades were always not as good as they should have been. So I think initially I shied away from it and, I always felt like it was a negative reflection on me and I didn't want any attention drawn to it.

So I went, so when I did go to school actually I didn't even think about school. I just, I'm just going to get through high school and then decide what I want to do with my life, but I didn't really have a plan there either. So it was interesting. And middle school, my sister and I got involved in a sport called handball and down at the YMCA.

And our, there was a local teacher that started that and he introduced us to that game. While we were working at the Y and then went to Des Moines for a handball tournament, just some random go to Iowa and play in this tournament. And we get there and there's all these professional handball players in the middle of Iowa.

And there's this coach his name was Tommy Barnett. He was a coach for the handball team at Missouri State University. And at the time he had started the handball team probably 10 years prior. He's used to play football for the New York Jets back in 1969. So he had an NFL team and quit that went and got his doctorate at Texas A and M and then started this handballs program at Missouri state.



So he's got this team there and he's looking at my sister and I, and like you guys are such great athletes and that was one thing we did have going for us, we were athletes. We played volleyball, basketball, high school sports. We did all that, but this specific sport, for whatever reason, we met this guy who for the next two years was like, you're going to get a scholarship and you're going to come play for me. And so that was my next plan. Okay, you graduate in high school, get the scholarship, go down to Missouri. I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. So I ended up, we ended up playing, getting our undergrad degree, and I started bartending. To talk about struggling: to hear and bartend. I bartended through college and I would make an, enough money where I just, I I didn't want to even think about anything beyond that.

I was in my mid twenties when I was still bartending.

Yeah.

Hold on stop. Okay. I always say the number one job I could never do is bartend because I don't even know what I'm saying when it's super noisy. How did you bartend?

So it started out as a waitress. So I remember it was my senior year in college and I was watching TV and this local commercial comes on, and it was a billiard, so it was a bar and a pool hall

and they were looking for waitresses. And I always thought, I'm always a good multitasker. I can do this. And I went down for an interview. I had my big full shell hearing aids and my hair was short and the owner's daughter was doing interviews. And she said, I said, my only issue is hearing loss.

I don't know how well I'll do with background wise. And she said, "you can do anything you want to do". And she hired me. And, I think probably I'm the one that noticed my hearing aid more than anybody else. So I waitress my way through a year and learn, I kinda lied and met this other bar owner and this other club and told him I could bartend.

And because I'm such a visual person. I could remember drinks. I watched people for my, I knew what was in 'em and I started bartending. I went from waitress to a bartender and then, and my dad said I was 25 and said, Mandy, what are you going to do with the rest of your life? And I'm like this was fine.

You can't do this. So then my handball coach was, he's always been my mentor. He said, "there's a new program that the university is starting and I think you should try it. It's called communication, sciences and disorders with an emphasis in deaf education." And I said, "okay". So I graduated.



And then went back to finish a few other classes and got my undergrad, while bartending in Communication, Sciences and Disorders, and with an emphasis in Deaf Education. And then it was, "okay, I can't do this the rest of my life". So what do I, so where am I going from here? And I decided I didn't really want to be a teacher.

I know I could do it, but it wasn't really where I wanted to be, but I couldn't bartend the rest of my life either. So I did. I just decided I want to be an audiologist. So I went and applied for the master's program. And this is where it gets... you start to know all the choices you made before and how they affect you at that point.

The head of the department who is now working at ASHA, I won't say his name told me you're not smart enough to make it in the audiology program. And I went out to my car after that meeting with him and I bawled. I bawled and I called my mom. She was just like, you can do anything you want, you can, you want it? I said, okay.

So did you know that I was told that I will never be an audiologist? And I walked out of that advisor meeting crying. By the way, the person who walked out of the office before me came out crying. When I went in, this woman told me, "Oh, you should just be a teacher. You're never going to be an audiologist."

He had already made an appointment for me to go downstairs on the other level to talk to the advisor for the Deaf Ed program.

Yeah. I found in life, if anyone tells me I can't do something... Game on! I'm so going to prove them wrong. I love that former restaurant, the daughter of the owner of the restaurant and your mom both said, you can do anything you want.

Like that just gives me chills. And you're a strong athlete. Oh my goodness. So then what did you do?

So then I obviously was not going to get in that program. So I applied back at home at the University of South Dakota. I had the second talk. Actually, I got a letter. They declined my application at University of South Dakota.

And at that point I'm like I can't keep saying no. I can't keep hearing no. So I wrote a long letter to the Dean and he called me and said, We will take you under probation. And then I went in there for one year probation, got off probation, finished my masters. I was an older student at that time.

26, 27 years old was older, cause everybody seems to go to school and just keep going. And I didn't. And so then I decided I wanted to work .Like, okay, I want to work. And then I'll figure out the rest of the doctorate degree program. Because at that point, the master's was still an option.



They were phasing out the master's program, but I was already just ready to get my, get back into the workforce and do all that. So I went to Kansas city and took a job at an ENT office and then finished my doctorate at that point. So yes, bartending was gone... athletics. Okay. Trying to move on to the next phase of my life.

If you could go back and change anything, is there anything you would change?

I. I would change how I perceive myself. I always thought that having a hearing loss and big hearing aids was a negative reflection. That goes back to that whole deaf and dumb scenario back in the culture.

And I wish I had more drive at that point to maybe push myself harder. Cause I know what my, I know what I can do, what I'm capable of and had I not done that sooner, maybe I would have done something even more like maybe not an audiologist, maybe like a dermatologist or a PA or, and I could still do those things, but I do know that my purpose and my plan is to help others that can't hear.

Yeah. And I think you had some good, positive, at least female voices. You also had actually a great male mentor in that coach that they knew they believed in you, you just had to believe. And sometimes I think people figure out what their purposes in life later on. How many people start a new profession at the age of 55, 60 or something? Because suddenly they realize this is what I was meant to do. You were meant to advocate for people to help people who have a hearing loss.

If you could go back to grade school where your sister obviously, but standing up for you and those kids were not being very nice. And let's say they're bullying. Would you have changed anything like that or do you think it was just the way it needed to be?

It's just, the way it needed to be. The technology level of what I can pick up at that point, wasn't the best.

So it almost was a blessing to be in my own little world anyways. To not even. 'Cause now I hear everything like I, with the advances in technology, I can pick up so many things, but it, especially in today's world, sometimes it is nice to just black out the negativity. And I didn't even notice the negativity. More and more that negativity probably came from me internally than it did externally. Just being self-conscious and not having that confidence to do things.

Great our biggest, most negative voices are inside our heads. No one else hears it.

Yeah. And what's crazy is I think you and I are a lot alike. Like it doesn't stop here.



Like it doesn't stop. Okay. Now I'm an audiologist, yeah. I did. My job did my thing. And then what's the next purpose? What's the next step? I feel like I can do more. So then it's after nine years of federal service and the VA. It's let's start a business. They're just so much more there's so many goals and so much more that we can push ourselves to do.

It's true. Cause we just, you, you accomplish a goal and then once you do that, how long are you in this state of euphoria and happiness? I don't know, like hours, days, months? And then you go, okay, what's next?

Yup. Yup. What's the next step? What's the next plan. Yep. Yeah, because our world always changes and if you can't change with it or adapt to it, then you're always going to have that feeling of being stuck or this is it. And nobody wants to feel that way.

Yeah. So you've heard the hearing technology change. Was it hard for you to go from I'm assuming you went from analog to digital at one point.

Yeah, but it still is a struggle because I essentially I still program my own hearing aids as analog.

And that's neat that we can do that. We can choose the method and we can set targets to the way people like to hear.

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. So the way I program hearing aids, I would never do it unless it's a long-term hearing aid user. It's interesting how we know what to do on the computer and real ear and how patients perceive things.

And I totally. I totally get it. When they come in and they say, what they're, I don't like the sound or the sound. And then, but I, what about how you programmed? But like the way I program it, there's just no comparison.

There's the science of audiology. And then there's the art of first of all, listening to what your patients saying to you saying, I like it like this.

My personality is this. I think of us as like personal chefs. You can make a recipe and say, I'm going to be your personal chef. But if I present it to you and you go, why did you use so much salt and pepper? Or other people are going, Oh my goodness, you didn't make it spicy enough? Like we need to listen and let them hear the way they want to hear.

Exactly. Yeah. Nobody's prescriptions the same. Nope. Everybody's perception of the world is different.

We all have likes and dislikes. Some people like things really edgy and other people want it more comfortable and that's okay.



Great. Yeah. If you won't have to listen for my hearing aids, they would be like, Oh my gosh, I hear everything.

I want to hear everything

right? So some people say, Oh, I can get by no big deal. I don't feel like I need to hear everything. I'm sure you've heard that. And you're the opposite. You're like, no, I want to hear everything.

Yep.

Now you have digital hearing aids and they might be set. And for listeners, they might not understand, but there might be set as if they're analog, they're linear, linear output. But the digital is bringing you some really cool features though. That back in the day wasn't capable. Like just having smaller battery sources.

Yeah. Feedback is huge. My gosh. Lean against the wall and you're hearing any of the feedback, it was awful. Like now I can cover my hand, it's, that's the biggest thing.

The whistling was embarrassing and cause sometimes you don't even hear it, but other people are like, they're all looking around and you're like, what? So that's the biggest, nice thing about digital right now, for sure.

What other features or things have you find found that you're like, this is out of this world.

I'm totally using this.

I use streaming pretty much. Every time I work out, I love that I don't have to have the courts. I was a geek in college, running around with the radio headphones and the antennas sticking out, or the CD player shoved in a Fanny pack with the chords because you can't just get motivation, just not listening to something.

So that I think is awesome. The Bluetooth, the streaming, and just not having wires and. Hanging on your while you're trying to work out.

Yeah. Do you have you I'm thinking that you're like an athlete where they have multiple pairs of running shoes and multiple pairs of, court shoes and things like that.

How many pairs of hearing AIDS do you wear?



I have about three that I rotate with, depending on what I'm doing. Yeah. If I'm working or if I'm working out it just, yeah that's pretty, pretty cool. Yup. Yeah, thank God for my reps. They've let me try this stuff out. It's pretty nice to be able to listen to it and use it.

And at least you can tell your patients, this is what I think. And this is pros and cons of these new products.

What do your friends and family say to you when you try out a new product?

They don't really know. I don't think they, they notice, honestly, I don't think anybody noticed that I wear hearing aids anymore.

I think they forget about it. It's like in the back of everybody's mind,

I think it's a huge revelation for a lot of people to discover that they feel like everyone's staring at their ears, but no one really realizes that they're wearing hearing AIDS. Our insecurities seem enormous, but we don't realize that person we're looking at has their own insecurities, that they're worried that you're looking at

right.

So you get new hearing AIDS and you walk into the room and you're thinking everyone's going to notice maybe, and they don't life just moves

on. Yeah. And I think it's interesting when I get new patients in here and they say, Oh, I saw your website or whatever. And I'm starting to realize that not a lot of them are, they might see my website, but they're not reading the about me because then we get to the consult part of after the hearing test and.

They're like you wear hearing aids. Cause I'm like, you can do this or you could do this, like when I'm wearing, Oh, I didn't even know. They're not noticing like they did four years ago or 35 years ago. When I thought people were notice noticing. So it's almost like it's turned a corner.

Yes. It's turned a huge corner. It's very obvious that I have white cables in my ears. And I remember in 2001, I was in Manhattan and these people were walking around with white headphones and I thought, okay, that looks so stupid. Yeah. It's it's a thing where if it's the white headphones, it looks different than the black, it's Apple versus Samsung.

People are starting to wear more glitzy things on their ears. As a status symbol. Do you think the old deaf and dumb adage is still there?



I think it depends on the severity of the hearing loss, how much hearing loss Yeah, I do. I think it's when you can tell somebody has got a severe hearing loss and maybe their hearing AIDS are programmed appropriately, and they're not, I think that mentality can still be there.

And unfortunately, I almost see that in the older generation, like the older generation where they have that, those problems. Yeah.

I agree. Do you think in our generation we will see it go away. The negative stigma.

The world is so difficult right now. I don't know. I hope so.

We know if people hesitate to try something and they wait eight years, nine years, 10 years, 20 years, their brain starts to reorganize and maybe even shrink a little and.

They are not as quick to respond to questions. They don't understand what's being said. And then they finally get hearing AIDS and they think after 20 years I finally tried it. It should work right. And they have to understand it took you 20 years to get where you're at. Could it take 20 years to bring you back?

And how much of this is reversible it's, it's hard. So my purpose in doing this podcast is to truly try to eliminate the negative stigma with hearing loss. I want people to hear the positive stories. I want them to say, you know what, I heard this woman and look at how far she's come and she's amazing.

And she she goes after her dreams, especially when she's told she can't do it. And she, yeah, she has a hearing loss, but that doesn't make her any less smart. If anything, you are a superhero because you've overcome challenges like in a college classroom. Did you have accommodations in college?

Did you tell them you had a hearing

loss? Yeah, I would make sure I stood up front. I would do those things just on my own. Cause I knew I remember, and I was in sixth grade and I got a D and reading and the teacher called my mom and I heard my mom tell her she got that deed because she can't hear.

And when my mom got off the phone, I said, mom, I didn't get the D because I didn't hear, I did get the D cause I didn't care in that kind of an interest. Like at that point being 12 years old you're growing, those decision-making skills. But at, but even at 12 years old, that was still an excuse for my behavior.



Yeah. But yeah, I did. I have an interpreter. There was another girl in my class that was born a week before my sister and I were that she was profoundly deaf culture. She had an interpreter, so I almost had a free interpreter. So whatever classes we had, there was an interpreter.

So I could always go back and forth. And always catch stuff. So it would never, for me, and I never had an FM system probably should have none of those accommodations. I just don't know if those weren't available back then.

No note writer? You did. Did you get copies of anyone's notes?

Once in a while?

I would like in high school, but yeah, speech therapy was big. I was in speech therapy from elementary all the way til sophomore year in high school. Yeah. It's interesting. Looking back the lack of accommodations.

Yeah. And it's amazing how far you came. You probably used four times as much energy to understand what that professor was saying than the typical college student that was half awake.

Yeah.

Yeah. Did you take notes while you were in the lecture or were you visually just staring at their lips?

I did. I took notes. I compare notes, but by the time you're in college you're taking more responsibility. And so you're at you're making friends with your classmates and Hey, can we just compare notes?

Just to make sure I heard this right or whatnot.

So what advice would you give to someone who's listening right now that was born with a hearing loss, or they're younger and they just found out that they have a hearing loss, or they're struggling with who they are, and they don't want to wear their hearing aids?

What would you say to this person?

I would highly encourage that... do I wish I would born with normal hearing? Absolutely. But that's not how it is right now. So there, we just have to take responsibilities for trying to make ourselves exceed, meet, or exceed our own personal goals.

And if you're, if you don't want to correct something that, you think it's absolutely wrong. God has a plan, if you can be the best person you can be. And that requires wearing hearing aids



and you have a family or you have goals and that's what it takes. Then do it. There is no shame in wearing hearing aids.

Just like glasses. I have glasses too. I was the biggest geek in high school. I had braces, rubber bands. Headgear, glasses, and hearing aids all at the same time.

Some of those things go away

and growing up, is awkward.

Yes. Yeah. What is your goal? If your goal is to become a CEO of a company or you want to be a manager or a supervisor? Whatever it is, and you have a hearing loss, why not correct it? Why not cover all your bases and put forth the full potential?

And because you would be surprised at how much you can accomplish, if you can just take those steps, those extra steps, and they're not negative steps. And like you said, we're probably our biggest critics. So to us is just more negative thing, and to other people, they don't even notice. Yeah.

And you're so worth it.

Why deny yourself of something that just makes your life easier? And when you achieve your goals, you're happier,

right? Yeah. Yeah. There's more negativity in this world than there is positivity. And I think we need to take advantage of what can we do to make our stuff. We only have one life let's just live it

amen to that!

It's so true. And right. And if you can choose which path are you going to take? The one where you choose not to do what will be good for you because you're worried about what other people think. Those people that won't be around in five years, or you choose the path that those who love you say, we know this is good for you.

I would, yeah, it's hard though. When you're young, to listen to your family, you want to listen to the bullies who you think are so cool,

right? Yeah. It is. Even as adults, I'm sure. It's hard to the peer pressure. The other people are saying about you. It's hard. It's growing, being adult.

Stay away from the PTO. I know it's a high school all over again.



We have a sign in my, in our house and it, and I saw it. It's one of those farmhouse signs. And I saw it at a art show and I was like, I have to have that sign. It's a "Trust your crazy ideas." So anytime I'm getting down and I'm just, I'm looking for that.

Okay. What's the next goal? It's trust your crazy ideas. Who cares? What other people think? People thought I was crazy when I left the VA job that was paying a hundred and over a hundred thousand dollars a year. And I was there almost nine years and gave that up just to start a business because I felt, and I knew that my potential to help other people was going to be outside of that hospital of what my goals were.

So yeah, you have to trust your crazy ideas.

It's true. I just heard on a podcast this week where the question was why would someone want to become an entrepreneur? Now this was an entrepreneur podcast. It was like Russell Brunson. And he said The reason why you become an entrepreneur is because then you can do whatever your creative, crazy ideas let you do.

And you don't have to ask permission from a committee. You don't have to follow protocol. The VA is very strict with what you can and cannot do, and you don't have to ask anyone, Hey, do you, maybe we should do the golf show. Maybe we should do the such and such because I know there's a lot of people I could help there.

You don't have to ask anyone, but yourself.

Great. Yeah. Brilliant. Yep. And that's what I love about connecting with you because we can, we meet every other week and we have these virtual calls and we're all on that same path. We're all bouncing around ideas and they might be crazy. It may not be crazy, but it's awesome.

Be able to do that. It is

fun. We're going to put in the show notes how people can contact you and where you're at. But if you want to say right now for the listeners how can people reach you if they wanted to come to your office and have an evaluation?

So there are several ways you can call the office, which is (605) 306-3050.

There's also my website, which is www.drmandysf.com. And there's a, I actually have a chat feature on my website, so you can send me a chat. And if you have questions, some people get shy. They don't want to call right away. Or if you go to my contact us page, you can fill out the form, send an email, there's a Facebook business page.



You can send a message there. Yeah, the contact us so

four in the morning and someone doesn't want to forget to reach out to you right now. They can just send a chat. Yeah. I might

be off chat and four in the morning, but it will go to my email

in this world where we're like multitasking and we're like, Oh, I don't want to forget that.

Oh, I don't want to forget this. They could now reach out to you in Sioux falls and just say, Hey, when you get a chance, I'd like an appointment. Yep.

Yeah. Or if somebody use even just out of state and they just want to talk or they just have questions. I get calls like that all the time, so

you're so awesome.

That's why I love you. Yay. Thank you for sharing your story. I really appreciate it. I know you're going to help so many people by opening up. And if anyone's listening, this, isn't easy for people to tell their stories. And I appreciate everyone who does, if you want to be a part of our podcast, just reach out if you want to talk to Dr.

Mandy and ask her some questions, feel free to reach out. The purpose of this entire podcast is to allow people to tell their stories and let you hear. The good, the bad and the triumphant, but just like my little guy with his diabetes, I listened to a podcast where I know it's not gonna make the diabetes go away and it's not going to make the the devices stop failing on us or be challenging, but it does feel good to psychologically know I'm a part of a community.

I am a part of something bigger. Would you agree, Mandy? It feels good to be like a part of any kind of group, but especially people that are just like

you. Nobody wants to feel alone. They want to be heard if they can be heard and be helped and have resources for sure.

I'm going to say thank you.

And everyone who's listening. Reach out if you have any questions, but we'll see you next week.

Okay. Thanks Dawn. Thanks. Bye bye.

Hey there, this is Dr. Dawn and I want you to know this episode is brought to you by the Hearing Wellness Journey aural rehab program. It's the program I created for my patients to



give them tips, tricks, strategies, and listening exercises that will help them utilize their hearing instruments optimally. If you're wearing hearing instruments and wish you could hear better in difficult listening situations, I encourage you to check out the Hearing Wellness Journey aural rehab program. You can find it at hearingwellnessjourney.com

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