

## **An Afternoon with Hearing Loss**

**SEPTEMBER 19, 2015**

**Panel Moderator: Michele Michaels**

**Cynthia Amerman:** This is Michele Michaels. She is our moderator for today. She is the Hard of Hearing Specialist for the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing (ACDHH), and her territory is the whole state of Arizona. The ACDHH does a great job of advocating for late-deafened people. I would be here all afternoon if I told you what they do, but Michele has been very helpful to me personally, to my organizations ALOHA and to ALDA. She put ALDAcon on the ACDHH site time and time again, and sent out the announcements. And I would like to thank Michele very much for that. Michele has arranged a unique program for us today, I'm going to turn the microphone over to her right away and let her tell you about it.

**Michele Michaels:** This discussion is called an "An Afternoon With Hearing Loss" and I want to point out the person whose idea it was, Marta Watson. Marta used to live in Arizona and she is a long-time member of the Association of Late-Deafened Adults. She has been part of the Planning Committee for this conference. She asked, "why don't we get some people with normal hearing fitted with ear molds, and have them go through a day being deaf or hard of hearing?" ALDA brought that idea to us at the ACDHH and we ran with it, and so thank you Marta for having a great idea! This has never been done before in the United States. No conference has ever had a plenary like this. So, again, Arizona and ALDA are leading the way.

I do have hearing loss myself. I like to point that out so that people understand that I know what it's like. Over 1 million Arizonans are hard of hearing or deaf. And 47 million other Americans are hard of hearing or deaf. We are the largest disability group in the world, in the country, and in each and every state. A lot of people don't know that. This plenary will help bring awareness to others about hearing loss and its effects on people. We have some members of the public who came today. We are very happy about that, and we appreciate everyone being here.

The idea for having this plenary was simple: Ask some high-profile individuals with normal hearing to experience what it's like to be deaf or hard of hearing for a day. But these videos and this panel would not have been made possible without partnerships that ACDHH has developed over the years.

One of our partnerships is with Nanette Bowles O'Dell. She is the ADA coordinator for Talking Stick Arena, home of the Phoenix Suns and for the WNBA Mercury and Chase

Field, home of the Arizona Diamondbacks. Luis Gonzalez (Gonzo), J.J. Putz of the Arizona Diamondbacks, and Alvan Adams of the Phoenix Suns agreed to be deaf for a day, and we are proud to call Nanette a friend and a colleague.

Also, HMA Public Relations, with whom ACDHH has a contract--but it's also a friendship and relationship—HMA put their talents to the test and wrangled some people to be deaf for a day and to be here today. ACDHH is so excited about this! Rachel, our PR person from HMA, also decided to “walk a mile in our moccasins.” I'm looking forward, panelists, to hearing what you have to share with us.

First, we are going to have videos of Gonzo, J.J., Alvan and Priscilla from Mix 96. Priscilla is not here because she's at her baby shower but she was on TV this morning with me. Dr. Ray and Dr. Venkatesh donated the ear molds that our panelists wore, and we greatly appreciate that. Let's get started. Reid (Blondell of NTID, ALDA's AV provider), we are going to have videos of Gonzo and then J.J., Alvan and Priscilla, and we'll watch those for a few minutes.

*Speaking on video will appear in italic.*

**Luis Gonzales (Gonzo):** *Well, it's definitely different. It's frustrating because there's some things like when there is a conversation going on, you're not in it. And sometimes when you're standing in a different group you can't hear what people are saying.*

*I relate it to when I first started -- I woke up one morning and I couldn't see my phone, like my eyes started going bad and now I need readers to read. And I could see the same frustration of losing your hearing. I was frustrated the same way because now all of a sudden, I had plugs in my ears and I couldn't hear everything that was going on. I could hear a little bit but it seems like everything was turned down, like the volume was turned down.*

*So it's definitely a lot different, and I could see how people sometimes can get frustrated because they are talking to you and if you're not watching their lips or what they are saying it's pretty hard.... what I'm doing while you're interviewing me is looking at your lips. I usually look at people's eyes when they are talking to me, but after going through this for the hour, I'm focused in on your mouth, watching you talk.... So definitely in the short period of time, I find myself looking down now instead of looking into your eyes....*

*It's harder for people with hearing loss because of today's society. Everybody is very impatient, and we are always moving at a fast pace. And I could see how it would be frustrating for a deaf person to go around and you know, somebody not want to*

*communicate with them and move on, but I think after going through this today, I have a better sense of what goes on.*

**Brooke Mitchell, Executive Assistant to the President & CEO:** *You know it's interesting because Gonzo is such a dynamic personality and he is always in front of the camera and he's used to interacting with large crowds. You saw him go into a shell. He was very introverted when normally he is very extroverted. Interesting to see his personality change, and he would not talk to a lot of people. He was just looking around more, and the whole process was interesting.*

*I noticed we were walking around and I said to someone we were with, people are calling his name and he doesn't notice that, and that would bother him. And he was walking and I thought, oh my God, that is going to bother him. And I asked: Are you okay?*

**Gonzo:** *Some time down the road once I get the regular ear molds in, I would like to try this again and spend the day being deaf outside of the ballpark.*

**Michele Michaels:** *Gonzo wants to do this for a whole day at the ballpark and have a bunch of deaf and hard-of-hearing people join him. He is a really cool guy. We're going to have J.J. next with the Arizona Diamondbacks.*

*From video again*

**J.J. Putz:** *When several people were talking, I just homed in on one person.*

**Audience Member:** *It sounds like a blend, doesn't it?*

**J.J. Putz:** *It was very strange and very difficult. You know you take for granted little things that you hear on a daily basis, being around a group of people. It was next to impossible to decipher which voice to lock in on and try to understand what they were saying.*

*Listening to the music on the field, you could hear the music but you didn't know what the music was exactly. It was strange, a little unnerving. I felt like I was yelling or trying not to yell too loud, but I had zero chance of understanding how loud or soft I was talking.*

*Just the constant strain -- maybe not even thinking about locking in on someone's lips but just trying to focus, to grasp any sense of sound I could use to decipher what people were saying was very tiring.*

**Nicole Adair, Executive Office Administrative Assistant:** *He was a lot more cautious as he walked around the ballpark. He was surveying the environment a little bit more. He wasn't emotive as he is with people and his voice was quiet. I don't know if it was*

*because he couldn't tell how loud he was or he was being careful because he didn't know what he was saying but he was definitely a little more quiet.*

**Michele Michaels:** He took me out to the ballpark, and I actually had dirt on my shoes from the field. And I didn't want to wash them at all. And now we'll have Alvan from the Phoenix Suns.

*(On video)*

**Alvan Adams:** *If you concentrate too hard when someone gets too far away or turns away and you can't see their lip--because it helps a lot to see their lips and their expressions--you lose it.*

*Nanette that is when I could see the frustration could set in.*

**Alvin Adams:** *When you're in charge of a building, you do listen to the sounds of the building, whether it's the fans or if you hear something scraping or something grinding. I know the guys are working on replacing the terrazzo names for the Talking Stick Arena and right now I can't hear any of that. It's such an important sense.*

*As I walked from my office up the interconnected stairwell with a couple other folks, I was being very careful because I've almost lost 100% of one of my most important senses. And, yes, when I came up the stairwell, the sun shone through and I could see fine but now we are in a dark area and we can't see quite as well. So the vision has been impaired by 50% and the hearing by 80 or 90% and I'm just a little more careful.*

**Nanette O'Dell:** *Alvan is such a detail-oriented person and he watches and listens to everything, and to see him go through that experience even for a short period of time, it was obstructed and it was really interesting and you could see he was not very comfortable.*

**Alvan Adam:** *One of the things I've learned today is there are over 1 million Arizonans who are hard of hearing and I've only been hard of hearing for now 10 or 15 minutes, I can't imagine going through a whole day--trying to work, trying to get a meal, trying to interact with fellow workers, trying to maneuver around a dark space in a building. I have just found a new appreciation for those who are hard of hearing.*

**Videographer:** *What is the next step?*

**Alvan Adams:** *I would like to take the ear molds out. It's kind of unsettling.*

**Michele Michaels:** And now we have Priscilla from MIX 96.6 FM

**Priscilla Ornelas:** *I'm co-host on The Morning Show, and I am so happy that I was able to participate in Deaf For A Day with the disk jockey at the station. I want to tell you a little bit about my experience and how it went for me.*

*I showed up and picked up my ear molds and I put them in immediately. I felt like I was a little underwater you might say, things muffled, and I could still hear the bass but couldn't understand people.*

*I left the office with the ear molds in and started driving. And I got a little panicky and couldn't hear the surrounding traffic and immediately took out my ear molds. I got sad because I realized not everyone has that luxury, to take out their ear molds when they can't hear the surrounding traffic.*

*Something else I was not able to do was multitask. I was not able to cook dinner in the kitchen and hear if my daughter was doing well in the bathtub. I had to do one thing at a time: Get her out of the tub and then cook dinner and then focus on the laundry.*

*People were getting frustrated with me when I was speaking a little more loudly than normal and I was also getting frustrated when I couldn't hear people properly. I noticed that my patience level was not as high as it normally is.*

*Something else, I felt a little claustrophobic, like I was confined in my own brain, in my own head, and not able to experience the world around me fully as I normally do.*

*Overall it did help me appreciate my hearing a lot more. It made me more aware of the issues that occur when someone is hearing impaired and it made me grateful that I was able to participate.*

**Michele Michaels:** We really appreciate the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Phoenix Suns and Mix 96.9 FM for doing these videos. I think our partnerships with the D'backs and the Suns are going to continue, and Nanette wanted me to make sure to tell everyone that their facilities are accessible. They have captioning and assistive devices and they really make an effort to go out and reach the disability community.

I think that Gonzo is going to have a "Deaf For A Day" event. He is one of the nicest men, who really cares about the fans. When he was walking through the concourse, people were calling his name and he didn't respond. How many of us have had that happen, right? When he got on the elevator, his staff said, "You didn't reply." "Oh, no!" he said. "They are going to think I'm stuck up when I'm not. If fans call my name, I go over to them. I said, "Welcome to our world." I think the high profile people here today will continue to spread the news and the information about hearing loss.

Now I want to get to the real live people here today on our panel. I want to introduce to you the Phoenix Fire Department's Public Information Officer, Captain Ardell Deliz, on my left. Thanks for being here. Next is the Arizona Republic newspaper reporter, **Dianna Nañez**. That is Arizona's major newspaper for those who don't know Arizona. We are very lucky to have Dianna here. Further on my left is "Lunchbox" Ben Murphy with KMLE, 107.9 FM in Chandler. He is one of the sweetest guys. If you know about ALDAnS, ALDAnS hug each other all the time and so get your hugs from Ben. And then we have Rachel Brockway, from HMA Public Relations.

I have a written up few questions that you all have in front of you. "Who are you, and why did you become deaf for a day?" We'll start with **Ardell**.

**Ardell Deliz:** I'm a captain-paramedic with the Phoenix Fire Department. Very often we go on calls and we meet people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or a lot like us, undiagnosed hard of hearing which many firefighters are. When this opportunity came up, I thought about it. I couldn't do it on the job as a firefighter or as a captain on the truck because I need to have from all of my senses. Then, I thought this would be a great opportunity to not only meet all of you but also to experience a completely new adventure--to be hard of hearing. Everybody else just takes it for granted.

That is probably the big lesson that I learned--how much more of an awareness I had for my surroundings and how much more important every noise I heard was, because I had to actually identify it and not only for the safety of my dogs or the environment around me but, more than that, for my own safety, my own well-being. If I heard a noise inside my house I was like, wait a second, what is that? Is that something I need to be aware for my own safety because I'm home alone, or was that just my dog in the other room getting comfortable? I had little experiences like that.

This has been a wonderful opportunity. I learned a lot, and I can't wait to share with you everything that I learned.

**Michele Michaels:** Thank you, Ardell. Dianna, do you want to tell us who you are and why you did this?

**Dianna Nañez:** We cover a lot of inspirational stories on the Arizona Republic, the real superheroes of our community, and I am so grateful that you guys, first of all, put this on. I hope it continues forever. I think it's an important experience and thank you for inviting me.

I wanted to be deaf for a day because I feel that one of the most important things as a human that I can bring to the table is empathy. Empathy is an important part of what I think journalism and reporting should be about--to be in someone's footsteps, and to feel that person's emotions and to know their stories and how they build our world. Being deaf for a day was very much an example of that. Let me experience in some small way what people in our community live with every day....

One thing I will say is I very much agree with Captain Ardell. From the second I put the ear molds on and drove to work, I was immediately aware of a sense of loss. I was scared. I couldn't experience the world in the way I was used to, I couldn't hear as well and it felt like everything was subdued and muted--not just my hearing--because I think I was trying to overcompensate. And because I was trying to overcompensate, I felt as if I didn't have enough of a way to see everything. I definitely wanted to drive with them in and I'm glad I did do that.

**Michele Michaels:** Thank you. And over here to my right is huggable "Lunchbox" Ben. Ben, who are you and why did you do this?

**Ben Murphy:** As Michele said, my name is "Lunchbox" Ben Murphy. I'm a morning show producer and co-host for KMLE 107.9. The main reason I wanted to do this is

because my father is hard of hearing. He lost hearing in his right ear three or four years ago and now has a hearing aid. I wanted to not only see what he has to go through when he doesn't have a hearing aid in but also see what over 1 million local Arizonans have to deal with on a daily basis.

Being on the radio and being involved with the community drastically affects your daily life as I found out wearing ear molds and using headphones to daily dialogue with listeners. It was an eye-opening experience and I'm looking forward to sharing everything we learned together.

**Michele Michaels:** And Rachel.

**Rachel Brockway:** When Michele suggested, "Why don't you experience this?" I thought, I'm not the person up front; I'm behind the scenes and the coordinator person. She said, "I think you should."

I've been working with the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing for three years now, so I said yes and decided to do it because we travel all around the state and I talk to the media constantly about ACDHH. I felt that to be able to experience for a day what I'm talking about on a daily basis was not only really important for my understanding, but also would help me when I am talking about it to the media as well.

**Michele Michaels:** Okay, so let's get into a little bit more meat of the real-life experience. I gave the panelists questions:

Did you try to hear on the phone?

Did you listen to the TV?

Did you turn on captions?

Did you listen to the radio?

Did you order food from a drive-through?

Did you try to hear others at a table in a restaurant?

All of those things we do on a daily basis. So let's go back to Ardell and share some of those real-life experiences.

**Ardell Deliz:** My day began with the ear molds. I was there with Rachel when we got our ear molds from Dr. Venkatesh. And these tiny things made a huge difference in my life that afternoon and the very next day. I don't know if any of you have been there before, but I would have never thought of this -- I would have never put another second of thought to my experience coming into Dr. Venkatesh's office; however, as I was closing the door behind me to come inside, I heard the jingle or what I thought were keys and thought maybe somebody has left their keys in the doorknob. But when I looked, it was a bunch of little bells to alert the staff that somebody was coming into the office. I looked at it and I closed the door and I thought, oh, that is cute, and I didn't think anything of it.

Then we had our molds put in and tested them out. At first we didn't really hear that much difference because Dr. Venkatesh is obviously aware of the hearing loss people

are going to experience and she began to speak a lot louder when we had the ear molds on. When I exited her office, I grabbed on to that doorknob I felt it but I didn't hear the little bells and immediately I had to look to see what it was that I was feeling in my hand. And I was like, wow, I would have never thought that I actually lost that much hearing coming from her office and just going out her door.

I'm already an introspective person. As a woman, as a firefighter for 13 years, you have to know who you are and how it is that you are going to respond and take care of people and take care of your crew. From that, I became that much more introspective. Walking across the parking lot, I was very aware of how I was walking, who was around me, and what noises were around me. I had parked a good 50 yards from the office. So I had a different awareness. It wasn't good or bad. It was just a completely different awareness of what my surroundings were. I was in awe, because when I was a child in third grade I experienced hearing loss. My grandmother came to my bedroom one day and said, "Don't you hear your mother calling you from the other side of the house?" And I said, "No." So they figured out there was a problem. I had a lot of water in my middle ear and, if not for tonsil surgery, I could have been deaf back then in 1984. I had that surgery done and never thought that experience would come back to be so vivid as it was that day when I experienced what it was like to leave Dr. Venkatesh's office.

My experience with another human being was with my neighbor. Around the house I noticed a few things. I couldn't hear my dog's paws on the tile, and when they barked, it was as if they were in trouble. I was looking for them, making sure they were okay. Then, as my dogs and I were walking in the neighborhood, my neighbor pulled up in his car. I never heard him coming. And as soon as he started talking to me I took one of my ear molds off. I was completely embarrassed when he said, "What is that?" And, I mean, these things are big in your ear, and he is like, "What is that?" And I said, "you know what? I'm supposed to be hard of hearing for the day, and I just made my first mistake." (laughter) He started laughing and so I put it back on and I told him to please speak up and to speak louder, and I made a promise to myself that I wouldn't take them off for the rest of the day.

Then I spoke on the phone, and right away every single person that I talked to -- first of all, I missed a lot of phone calls, which was great! [laughter]. I went ahead and changed my phone to vibrate, just so I didn't have that excuse for very long, and every time I answered, right away I said, Hey, listen, I am hard of hearing for the day. I need you to speak up or I'm not going to hear a word that you are saying. And then I would give them a couple of seconds ... I can't hear you. Okay, I can hear you. And then we would go on with our conversation.

So the experience to me, it was a different awareness. I couldn't say that it was good or that it was bad. It was being more aware of the people who are around me that might be hard of hearing that this might not be visible in their ear, but you don't know.

Everybody struggles with something and this might be the biggest struggle of the person we encounter. As first responders, we often see people who are hard of

hearing, either diagnosed or undiagnosed -- means they don't recognize it -- it's a denial thing. Firefighters are the worst. We can't hear and then we deny that we can't hear. "Oh, yeah, I heard you fine," but sometimes we can't hear a thing. Enunciating, speaking slowly and articulating, moving my lips for people, this is something I wanted people to do for me, and I learned a lot from the experience. I am so glad it happened on my shift because when a phone call came on my shift, I learned what you know, and I really appreciate the experience.

**Michele Michaels:** Thank you, Captain Ardell. I'm really lucky living in the City of Phoenix because if anyone calls 9-1-1 for me I want you to say get Captain Ardell for me because she will understand! Thank you so much.

Dianna, you want to share your experiences?

**Dianna Nañez:** As I mentioned before, I put the ear molds on right when I got in the car. Started up the car and I was shocked at how much sound was blocked. Dr. Venkatesh told us how much sound would be blocked, too. But it's one thing to be told, and that is what is so important about this experience. You have to actually experience it.

I started up the car and I drove out -- I live in Tempe, and drove out on Interstate 10. As we knew, there were already enough issues with Route 10 (Ed. note: refers to a shooter who was targeting cars from overpasses on Route 10, and who still had not been apprehended at this time). I had to force myself to focus on the road instead of wanting to look to my sides since as I said, immediately I could feel that I couldn't hear the cars around me well. I couldn't hear sounds as well and so I just told myself, focus on the road and, you know, don't be distracted by trying to turn and see things--your peripheral senses are still there. So it was a shift in the way I was thinking about driving. And from that very second, I think the first thing I thought of was what it would be like to start noticing that you are experiencing hearing loss.

I have spoken with a couple of friends who said not hearing well was weird and I didn't realize this until I couldn't hear the bells on the door or the car and I thought this is like a progression, and these things are popping up. It would be the little things I would notice and then I would think, gosh, why did I used to be able to hear the TV at level 10 and now I can't? So I'm really glad that I chose to drive.

I parked our car, went into work and from the second I was in our newsroom -- our cubicles are relatively close -- I still couldn't hear anybody around me. Normal co-worker talk. I told them immediately, just like Captain Ardell said, "I'm experiencing hearing loss for a day. I can hear you a little bit and I apologize if I'm yelling because I can't tell what level my voice is at right now."

I walked around. There were a lot of jokes and humor and I had that thought, gosh, it's not very funny. This is not a funny thing. I felt really sad that I would miss jokes like that because I thinking that I'm doing this just for a day. I get to take these out. That is not the experience that everyone else in this room has.

I didn't want to get up and stand like in someone's space to hear them. It felt weird. After about the first hour I just went to my cubicle and I stopped talking to people for the rest of the day, unless they came over to me, like, "Hey, Dianna." Then I would explain to them, have that conversation, but otherwise, I stopped seeking socialization with others because I didn't want to go and be close to them when that is not normal for me to kind of stand in their cubicle and yell, probably, and ask them to speak up.

So I thought about that and I remember Michele told me when I was getting the fitting that that happens a lot. And sometimes people won't even tell you at work that they have a hearing loss, and sometimes they won't feel comfortable sharing or whatever it may be. And they start to isolate. And sometimes, she said, they think I'm stuck-up, like I was listening to Luis, and I thought I don't want them to think I'm stuck up.

I was thinking about the fact that, gosh, I wish if anybody was experiencing that, they would tell me, and I know I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable or share something when they are not ready, but if just for the seven hours I was there and I stopped talking with people, it kind of broke my heart to think someone else would be doing that every day, because it's important to socialize. The way you get through your day is joking with coworkers and talking and stuff like that.

The phone -- obviously I'm a journalist, and I do a lot of interviews over the phone and I go out, and I decided I was not going to do anything different. And if I got sent out for something, I was going to do it, or if I got phone calls I was going to explain and adapted accordingly to have it be as real-life as it could be.

The calls I got I immediately said I have ear molds in and I'm experiencing hearing loss for a day and if I'm yelling, I'm sorry. Please speak up. The funny thing is people didn't speak up. They just kept on doing what they were doing and I don't think they did it on purpose. I just think they didn't really understand the ability to change their behavior right then and there. Yeah, I'm seeing a lot of heads shaking here, and so this must be something that happens. They don't really speak up. I pushed the phone so close to my ear that it hurt. But what I noticed in that moment was that I didn't have the assertiveness to continue to tell them: Speak up. Please, speak up. Please. And so I just kept pushing it closer and closer even though it hurt and I wasn't catching everything.

So for me, if the ear molds were something that I couldn't take out at the end of the day, I would probably have to change my personality and become more assertive because I'm not like that. I like to make people feel comfortable, and most of us do, and I think I would have to change. This is not only hearing loss itself, but also it's an emotional and personal thing. It would affect my personality, and that was really eye-opening.

At about 4:30 I took the ear molds off. Once I took them off, I felt this huge sense of relief and I felt like I wanted to cry because I knew that you all can't take them off if this is a condition you have. I was also shocked at how loud everything sounded. It made

me think that if I were to get a hearing aid, I might have to adapt to the A/C roaring! I have never heard it that loud in my life! And people's voices were so loud. And a sense of gratitude was there, but if I had to talk about the take-away from this experience, it would be a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety. And I really wasn't expecting that. So I-- I'm really thankful for this. I'm really glad that I was able to become deaf for a day, to know what it is like. And so, thank you. [applause]

**Michele Michaels:** When you see those hands raised out there with fingers waving-- this is how deaf people clap. It's very visual and so lots of clapping there. Thank you so much for telling us about your experience. It's very poignant, and you all can tell she is a good writer. She made a couple of important points.

When you're a coworker and you have hearing loss, one of the things we know through national research is that when people with hearing loss don't do anything about it, they can earn up to \$12,000 less a year than their peer who doesn't have hearing loss. That is why it's so important that we do something about our hearing and not withdraw and become isolated and stay in our cubicles. If we do that, our coworkers think we are not team players, supervisors think we are not following directions and we are not social, and so we don't get rewarded as often. And so employment is truly an issue, and I thank you for sharing that experience.

Thank goodness we have organizations like the Association of Late-Deafened Adults and the Hearing Loss Association of America to reach out and give these folks a lifeline. Thank you so much for that.

I want to turn the mic over to Lunchbox Ben, because I know that, as a disc jockey, he has a lot of great insights for us.

**Ben Murphy:** I will start from the beginning of the process. When I went to Dr. Venkatesh's office, I experienced the bells on the door. When they began to fit the pink goo in my ear, this is a very surreal experience for a person who relies on hearing on a daily basis. They did it ear by ear and I likened it to going underwater first and getting water in one ear and then getting water in both my ears. Obviously this is not the full experience of being completely deaf, but it's like being hard of hearing. When they took the ear molds out, right away I knew how it would progress.

I waited a week and a half, then picked up the ear molds and I was going to make a joke that I'm glad J.J. and Gonzo are not here, because these are Chicago Cubs colors. They are my baseball team. I'm from Chicago. And the Cubs are having a good season, by the way.

Right when I got them, I talked to Dr. Venkatesh about the seriousness and different levels of hearing loss, ranging from the decibel levels that you can actually reach and things of that nature and how prevalent hearing loss is amongst so many people. I had to get used to putting these in, because I couldn't figure it out at first. Both ends looked

alike to me, and I spent the first couple of days after I picked them up getting used to putting them in my ear and learning how to take them out properly.

On my drive into work, I always listen to music. That was my wake-up call. It's how I get to work--I start singing along with the songs. And with these in my ears, it wasn't easy. I couldn't even hear what song was actually on, and I found myself listening to a new CD and the only way I knew what the song was by looking at the CD song listing.

I go to work at 5:00 in the morning, so at first there is not as much of an office atmosphere, and I'm by myself for the first 15 to 20 minutes, but I'm used to walking into a radio studio where the music is blasting and you can hear everything, and when I got to work it was extremely quiet. Like Captain Ardell said, I could hear the bass. And Priscilla said she could hear the bass sounds. But I couldn't make out what was going on. I went and looked at the screen and put some things together, and then my coworkers came in and I didn't even see them come in. I usually hear the door open and they say, "Hey, Lunchy! Hey, Bengie!" I felt a hand on my shoulder—hearing loss makes your other senses seem so much more important, like Gonzo was saying. You find yourself looking at lips a lot more. I try to make the eye contact, too, and make sure I'm looking eye-to-eye and paying attention. I found myself really paying attention to lips to piece together what everyone was saying.

During the show -- outside of the communication and hearing -- I have headphones and I have a volume control going into the headphones and that made it easier to fix the sound level. The sound was muffled but I was able to control that.

Talking on the phone is a major part of my job. Like Dianna was saying, you have to press the phone up to your ear an incredible amount. I have to let people know their tickets are ready and get their address and have a little small talk with them. I noticed I had to cut back on the small talk because I could not fully make out what they were saying. I just have to make sure they know where to come and pick up their tickets.

That is The Morning Show aspect of my day. Then I go into the promotions department (that is when the building gets crowded) and it's full of salespeople, promotions people and other programming people. I found myself noticing that coworkers -- and in a nutshell, the general public -- are very unaware. That is one of the more disconcerting things I realized. I was lucky enough to have a pin that said "Please face me when you talk to me. I'm hard of hearing." A lot of my coworkers couldn't even pay attention to this pin, much less the bright colored ear molds, and so the daily dialogue I had with coworkers drastically changed.

My back is to the door in my office and I'm used to being acknowledged and having that ability to know who's there. People surprised me or tapped me on my shoulder. I could see some things in my peripheral vision but not that someone was there. I heard a lot of stuff going on around me. I tried to focus in on the individual I was talking to and holding one conversation at a time and doing one thing at a time, like Priscilla said, but it got to

the point where I had to say, "Okay, I can't hear you. I'm going to go back to what I was doing." So that was my work day.

On the ride home, I made sure to stop and go to a drive-through, because I wanted to experience the speaker that they talk through and see how that was like for me. The music thing was happening on the way home too and I couldn't really hear it, and I pulled up and found myself sitting there waiting for them to say something and acknowledge me, and I didn't hear it. And I was like, what is taking so long? Are they not going to take my order?! What is happening? And finally I leaned out and said, Are you there? Sure enough, I heard "Yeah, what would you like?" Five minutes later.

So the thing I'm taking away from this is an appreciation and the knowledge that everybody does have something. You know? Unfortunately for a lot of people and the numbers seem to be growing, being hard of hearing is one of those things.

Everything was loud when I took the ear molds out. I had an appreciation for my daily life and what I have to do and how much my life is based on sound, and that it has been a choice I made, because music brings me a lot of joy and peace. If I lost that, it would be a very insane experience. And I did lose it for a day. I realized how different my life would be, though not in a negative way. It would just be very different without sound. There are little appreciations of hearing birds in the morning. I hear the same rooster when I come out of my house every morning, and if I didn't hear that it would not be the same morning.

It was a surreal experience and thank you to all of you for attending this conference. Thank you to ALDAcon 2015 and to the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing.

I'm going to take these ear molds to a concert we have coming up and I'm going to see how it is to interact with listeners, because they are out there in the hundreds. It was a unique experience—we appreciate you all coming out here. [applause]

**Michele Michaels:** W-O-W! Wow! These folks are just experiencing this for a day. It's having a profound effect for them, for the rest of their lives, on what they do. And we are so appreciative of you doing this for us!

Hey, Rachel! You've been representing the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing for five years and so how does it feel to be like us?

**Rachel Brockway:** Before I was deaf for a day, I showed my eight-year old the ear molds and explained to him what I was doing. I said, "I'm going to put these in tomorrow morning -- and just know I may not be able to hear you." I talked to him, and he is aware of what I do. We did a walk-for-hearing a few years ago together and he is very aware of hearing loss.

That morning, I took a shower and put the ear molds in. It was really hard for me, because normally I can hear him throughout the house. I'm in my bedroom or bathroom getting ready and I can hear him in his room, and I know when he transitions to the kitchen and is starting to get his breakfast ready. But I couldn't hear that, and I had to

keep leaving my room and bathroom. Okay, is the bus coming? What is going on? We have to get you to the bus stop. That was so weird.

Another thing while in my house during my normal daily routine--I didn't realize how loud things were. I had my earplugs in while I was blow drying my hair and it was so loud! We need to put the decibel meter up to a blow dryer and see how loud it is. Why make them so loud, I have no idea. They don't need to be that loud.

I had to drive my son to the bus stop, and I had an internal struggle because I didn't know if I wanted to drive with him in the car with my ear molds in. It was the safety aspect versus am I going to really experience this? I debated about it until we left the house and I decided I was not going to wear them with him in the car. I didn't want to drive and risk that safety aspect, and so that was really hard for me, because a deaf person doesn't have that option. You don't have the option to say, my son is going to be in the car with me. I'm going to take my ear molds out now. What if I couldn't hear a police car or a fire truck? And so that was really difficult for me.

I'm usually the first one into the office, and where my office is, I can't see the front door to our offices, but typically I can hear people entering. I had my ear molds in, and when I got into the office I couldn't hear anyone coming into the office when they came in. Then I would see them and it was just this really uncanny experience. It was --I don't know-- really eerie to me. I felt really out of my comfort zone and I didn't realize how much I relied on my hearing when I couldn't see.

So there were a lot of the same things others have noticed. I usually listen to talk radio all day or I have the radio on. I did turn it on but I had no idea what they were saying. I tried talk radio and then music on my computer and could hear neither one of them. I just didn't know what they were saying and I couldn't make everything out, so I ended up turning it off.

The phone calls were the most difficult. I was trying to lift up on my ear to – like, how can I hear better here?

I had worn the ear molds for most of the day and there were a few things I noticed. We are a very interactive office. We talk about ideas and collaborate. A couple of the gals were having lunch but they hadn't asked me to have lunch with them. But when we are having lunch in the office, we usually eat lunch together. I don't know if they had asked me if I wanted to each lunch with them. I hadn't heard them, and they probably thought, is she ignoring us? I felt isolated.

When it was around 3:30 in the afternoon, the ear mold in my left ear starting hurting. It was almost like wearing a new shoe that rubs. So I took them out and put them back in. That made me think, what if I had to wear these every day? Or if I had just gotten fitted for hearing aids and I was trying them out when they became uncomfortable. I would be like, well, I'm not going to wear these. They hurt me. How frustrating that must be if you're trying to do something helpful but it hurts. At that point, I ended up taking them out.

My biggest take-away--my colleagues with hearing loss and I talk about this all the time when we travel--once you damage your hearing, it doesn't come back. Recognizing that, not only for me but for my son as well, I wonder how loud is it when we are in the car and listening to music? How loud is the television? What measures can we take to make sure that we are protecting our hearing? Because once it's gone, it's gone.

**Michele Michaels:** Wonderful, thank you Rachel! [applause] Thank you so much. Most of us will lose our hearing progressively, over our lifetimes and so it gets worse and worse. Some of us are born with hearing loss and some acquire it early on, but the majority of people acquire it over time due to noise exposure or other causes. Hearing loss -- it creeps up on them and people don't realize how much hearing they've lost. There's still a lot of stigma and denial out there. All of us ALDAnS here in this room are trying to share the good news of hope and make a difference in the world. We really appreciate all of your insights and inspiration today.

Now I want to open this discussion up to questions from the audience.

**Audience Member:** Do we have any idea quantitatively how deaf the people wearing ear-molds got?

**Michele Michaels:** Yes. Quantitatively, these silicon ear-molds create about a 40-decibel across-the-board hearing loss.

**Audience Member:** The one question that I have is when you have your ear-molds in, you can still hear yourself? (Panel members nodding)

**Audience Member:** I have to zero my question in on Ben. I've been wearing a hearing aid for over 52 years, and a lot of my coping skills depend on the other person being on my right side and facing me. However, it seems that people are not really that trainable. I mean, I can get cooperation for a few minutes but then the speaker forgets. It gets very frustrating. I was wondering if your experience, Ben, will affect how you interact with your father?

**Ben Murphy:** That is a very good question, and yes, it will. I remember when he first came home and said that he was hard of hearing, my brother and I gave him a hard time at first. We had always razzed and joked around with each other and were very sarcastic, but when my father got very serious about his hearing loss, we realized it was a big issue. I like to think that once my brother and I realized how serious it was for him and how different it was for him, we were trainable. But I think you are correct in that the general public is not. They will be trainable one-on-one but 15 minutes later, the training might be forgotten. People give up pretty quickly. As far as my experience with my father goes, I had to make that change. I absolutely did.

**Audience Member:** What would you think or feel if you had to live the rest of your life as a hard-of-hearing person? Knowing what I know now and how noisy life is all around me, and knowing how quiet it can be with ear molds, but also how aware I have to be of everything that I do, not only for myself but for other people who want to engage with me, I think that I am going to be thankful for the lack of noise. It's important to be more introspective and really think about the things other people might be thinking and feeling and, at the same time, not really care too much, because you have to be okay with

yourself, too. You have to understand that your struggle might be this hearing loss, but somebody else's struggle might be short-man's syndrome, which we have a lot of at the fire department.

I have to wear these molds. I think Dr. Venkatesh may get some clients because when I posted on Facebook that I was doing this and my noise level was going to go down 40 decibels, a couple of guys on the job called. They wanted to know where they could get a pair of these ear molds. So when we check out the truck, it's not so loud or when we check out the saws maybe we won't lose some hearing. I'm definitely going to promote wearing ear molds with the fire department and have other first responders come out and do this as often as you guys do it.

Just like everyone else, I am super thankful to be here today and that you have given me this opportunity to experience what you experience. I look up to you guys. Thank you so much. [applause]

**Michele Michaels:** Thank you, Captain. It's such an honor to have a first responder here, a public safety officer. You know, when we at ACDHH go out into the community, we've found people who are deaf or hard of hearing say they have real problems communicating with public safety and in health care. The ACDHH has created both a public-safety curriculum and a health-care curriculum that we deliver free of charge throughout the state, and we want to see all of your states do this kind of thing as well.

I mentioned to Ardell that we have the workshops for the public and I'm hoping we will be able to train some of the other firefighters or paramedics about what it's like to be deaf or hard of hearing and how to communicate with us in crucial situations. We really appreciate you taking this message home with you to your fellow firefighters or paramedics.

Other questions?

**Audience Member:** Going through everything you went through, what advice do you have for hearing people who are going through this?

**Dianna Nañez:** You know that is a great question and it is part of what I was saying. It's not just a physical issue; it's an emotional issue and a personality issue. Also, know what it feels like to lose of being able to hear your own sound and the sound of your own voice.

The advice I would give is be aware. We need to be aware that this is happening and then we need to change our behavior, because, yes, if you have a hearing loss and I'm telling someone to speak up and they are not doing it, obviously, I'm going to have to ask them again. And I think someone mentioned his hearing is better if people speaking are on his right side but people forget. They are not very trainable. Well, my advice would be that you need to be trainable. This is a partnership and we are in this world together. I don't know if you have had this situation before. You are in the grocery store line and you hear someone being really rude to the clerk, and you are just like that clerk and can't say anything. Sometimes I would say, "You could be a little bit nicer," or

“You could say thank you.” Observing such scenes, I would want to be the one who says, “She asked you to go on her right side and you have moved to her left side.” Or, “He asked you to speak slower. Speak a little slower.” And I would do that in the moment because it's good or easy, or I might do it outside and say, “Hey, I notice when you're talking, and I don't know if you have experienced this--I did Hearing Loss for a Day and we are the ones who also need to change our behaviors.”

**Audience Member:** Captain, you mentioned not wanting to wear the ear molds while at work because of safety concerns. I want to say that hard of hearing and late-deafened people can be emergency responders but honestly how would you feel if you were in the hiring process, interviewing a candidate that was hard of hearing for an EMT job? After your experience with hearing loss, would it make you more understanding and want to hire them or more uncomfortable because you understand the loss better and how it affected you?

**Ardell Deliz:** We have pretty strict standards for what levels of hearing and sight and all are required. I guess those are the two main senses that we do consider. We do have men and women on the job who have hearing aids and they are very helpful. Unfortunately if a firefighter is completely deaf and hearing aids are not a solution for them, s/he wouldn't be able to participate.

I went to high school with an amazing softball player who is a very good friend of mine. She was deaf but she had a little bit of hearing through hearing aids. The sound was very muffled and she couldn't understand people and she was actually still learning to communicate through speaking. We hung out together a lot because of my accent and what she was trying to accomplish were kind of the same thing. We were trying to be understood. She was the most aware, and if there was anybody on the softball or volleyball team who was most aware of her surroundings, it was her.

Unfortunately in our jobs, we do depend on hearing above us or what the fire is actually burning. Are the rafters about to come down on us? Or is an A/C unit threatening to come through the roof? Unfortunately those are things that no matter how aware you are, when you don't have vision and you don't have hearing, you don't have any way to actually feel what is about to happen., Without every sense, it's very hard to have this kind of job. We still lose firefighters every year who have all of their senses.

I really appreciate the question because knowing Diane, an amazing softball and volleyball player. If somebody would have been more aware for everybody's safety, she would have been a great captain on the job. But my accent doesn't keep my crew from fighting fires. I can yell at them louder. I can push and point and tell them exactly what I need them to do, but the sense of hearing is so important. Again, that is why I'm so thankful to be here and be a part of this.

**Michele Michaels:** Thank you so much, everyone.

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(<http://www.acdhh.org/hard-of-hearing/hard-of-hearing-resources/aldacon> is the link with all the videos

**Michele Michaels** is the Hard of Hearing Specialist from the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Her territory is the whole state of Arizona.