



Silence and Light: A Mother's Journey of Self-Discovery Through Advocacy

Lanya McKittrick

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A moving memoir that details the ups and downs of parenting disabled children, Silence and Light argues that there's a need for greater awareness around deafblindness.

Lanya McKittrick's powerful memoir of crisis, hope, and motherhood, *Silence and Light*, is about raising two children with Usher syndrome, the leading genetic cause of deafblindness.

Before her life changed forever, McKittrick was well on her way to building a successful career in finance. Married to a loving man, she was overjoyed to discover she was pregnant. She prepared to build a loving and secure life for her new baby. However, a few months after Connor was born, the once happy and healthy baby began to miss infant milestones and show signs of hearing loss. Concerned, McKittrick and her husband Todd took Connor to an audiologist. The test results revealed a startling diagnosis: Connor was profoundly deaf.

Though McKittrick feared that this disability would prevent Connor from living a full life, the family soon found solace in the deaf community. In addition to enrolling Connor in a specialized school, McKittrick and Todd had their son fitted for cochlear implants. Then Connor began to experience issues with his vision and was diagnosed with Usher syndrome, a rare condition that would also lead to blindness. The following years were marked by an array of complications, fears, and joys. In time, Dalton, another of McKittrick's children, was also diagnosed with Usher syndrome.

Drawing on these experiences, as well as those with founding the nonprofit organization Hear See Hope, McKittrick's book is vulnerable and unflinching. It details her work to create a stable life for her children and to empower them. It touches on a range of issues in the process, including complex trauma, ableism in education, and the use of adaptive technology. The nuances of deafblindness receive space, as do the experiences of parents who advocate for their children. And in detailing the ups and downs of parenting disabled children, McKittrick argues that there's a need for greater support for and awareness of deafblindness. Her experiences with acting as a determined, resilient advocate for her sons are used as an illustration for other parents.

The prose is accessible and warm. But in its focus on speaking to the needs of parents of disabled people, it sometimes obscures certain political and personal aspects of disability. Further, although it touches on the importance of disabled people having a voice in their care and futures, it features little commentary from disabled people themselves. Its universal claims may not all apply to deafblind or otherwise disabled people outside of McKittrick's family.

Silence and Light is a moving, intimate memoir that encourages parents in the care of their disabled children.

BELLA MOSES (October 24, 2024)

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