

S2 Ep4

Katie Colella [00:00:00] You're listening to *Amplified* presented by Lurie Children's. Transcripts of this and all episodes can be found at LurieChildren.org/Amplified.

Katie Farnsworth [00:00:12] Due to childhood hearing loss being a relatively low incidence in the general population, many schools do not always have the resources or understanding of what it takes to provide proper access in the classroom. Last season, my dad shared one story about an individualized education program, or IEP meeting, when I was in elementary school, when administrators suggested cutting some of my services. That was quickly squashed. What was this administrator's justification? I was doing well in school, so why did I still need that support? Besides this incident, my access to school-based services was relatively seamless. Maria would not be so lucky.

Maria Venalanzo [00:00:48] When we enrolled Eduardo in the school and Esteban for Esteban, when it was more easy because we were ---. And then, like Eduardo, I feel we struggle more because we finding like, new things that we don't know. Be honest with you, like the schools they use there to teach. You leave your kid there. So it's going to be there. But if you feel like, "Oh, this is not what I want, not what I asking for." So you had to work. You had to do that work and you had to ask for it. And then sometimes I feel like, "Oh, I had to fight with the CPS all the time." I remember when they, Eduardo got transferred to the school because the school there wasn't when, they were having through communication, but it was the when they said we were not going to leave behind the other kids because of Eduardo. And he's not doing a good job over here because he needs this program. And I want to let you have it over here. So I'm like, okay. So they transferred. I went to the transfer him. They state to me it was a through communication. And then I say, okay, is through communication okay? But he was more signing then speaking. So I was like, okay. So when I went to drop off my son and I remember that day like yesterday, and it was like the classroom, it was more kids with different disabilities and he was the only one would making more sounds. So I was like, "Why my son is in this classroom?" So I went right away to their office and talked to their caseworker. And when I when I talked to her and I said, "Why my son is in the classroom?" And they they state on me "oh because this that one they we chose that he can be a perfect fit." And I was like, "But it's not what I want." So and then she's says "Ma'am, you signed up for this one mean, not too long ago." And I was like, "My bad. I didn't know what to do. I mean, I thought it was going to be different how I like, but I don't want that program for my son." He was in at that time, he was working for the second implant. I went "I am sorry, but it's not what I want." So they told me, "Oh, boy, you sign up for it" And what? "Yeah, but I can always change my mind." "And then. And then she say, oh, and then she told me, I say, "You know what? I need that phone number for, for the director." And then so she was like, kind of like, cool down. And then she'd say, "Ma'am, do you know how much work is to put all the team together?" I was like, "Yeah, I know. Probably like, I'm not in your place, but I'm in the right place that my son is not work is not going to be a beneficiary from this program. Maybe you don't know, but I'm working for the second implant, so it's not what I want. And so sorry, but you have to find the right program for my son." And then she told me, "Just wait for my call." So I got explained to her like I was gonna go through in order that she understood me. And she helped me a lot. So again, we did the meeting. So. And then she told me, "Oh, I found the right program for your son." I was like, "Okay." I said, "That's three schools that he can only go." And I was like, "Okay." So he went, she told me when it was like close to airport O'Hare and the other one, it was like all over Northside. And the third one, it was in Hyde Park. And I was like, okay, so. And I this I him I decide to to send him to Hyde Park and then we're like, okay so he goes to William Ray Elementary School. That's the school. And

it's a great school, a beautiful school. And I was like, okay. So I felt like he was in the right place. Yeah, but they didn't tell me they up the third grade is a start sharing class. They were like, third and fourth grade. So I was like, "Oh, no." So they, they told me, well, this is the problem. And then Eduardo at the time he was getting so confused and he saw was good in his grades. So he dropped his grades really badly. So were like, "Oh, what's going on?" So he was bringing home like homework from fourth grade. So what was going on? He say "I don't know is what I copied from the that board." And I was like no but this is fourth grade. So he was like, "Oh." I was like, what's going on? So I went to the school and I talked to them and I said what's going on? And they told oh up to third grade we sharing classrooms, is third in fourth grade. I was like, They never told me these one. So I was like oh no. So I had to start looking for another school. So is when Staci told me about and Beth, told me about Children of Peace. So and then I was like, okay, so I don't have that much money. Yeah. So like, so they told me, "Oh, this always helps." So and they were like, okay. So I went to I went to work in this one. So when I talked to my husband, he was like, "Oh no, it's too much money." Like what is going to be good to where maybe we can work a little bit more. He says more? I am like "Oh, like, come on. So we we got these, we got these." And he was like, "You always say this when we struggling." And I was like, "So what I going to do?" So at that time I quit my job because I was like, it was too much for therapy, doctors and all this that. So and then they were give me a hard time in my job. I was like, I had to quit. So I'd like to know where. I'm sorry, but you know, "They you could be working here for many years." I say, "Yeah, but I need something else." And I start working at my job right now. I even got an -- so I had more money, so more time for my family. What I did with transfer, Eduardo and Esteban at the same time, to Children of Peace. But again, that's only through communication. It was a small classroom. There was like, good for them. So Eduardo graduated from Children of Peace and the pandemic come. It wasn't a lot of support for for for them. They were, like, struggling with hearing. And then I like what are we going to do now? So when they were having a class through zoom, it was good. Everybody was good. But when they went back in in, you know, they the issue, when you get infected, you have to quarantine. So it was it was so hard for Esteban and not for Eduardo, but because the peers like came like they went back later. But he was for Esteban. So when the teacher was in front of the the monitor, he was going to be able to hear well. But when the teacher was walking away, it was hard for him to like to hear. So were like, "Oh, no, so what are we gonna do?" So I explained it to the teacher, explained it to the principal, and then they told me, "Well, this is the situation that we have." And I was like, "Yeah, but I don't want to have a kid in the home. Frustrating. Go to bed early." And then I. So I was like, "No, I don't. I mean, what are they going to do? What is the support for them?" She was like, "There's nothing. We really don't have nothing. This is the pandemic that we got, you know, we got to everybody." And I was like, so.

Katie Colella [00:09:05] Did the boys struggle with masks and hearing people with masks.

Maria Venalanzo [00:09:09] Yes.

Katie Colella [00:09:10] That must be hard to watch as a mother.

Maria Venalanzo [00:09:13] Yeah. So I like okay, so what I did is it was crazy. It was really crazy. So I like I talk to I involve myself in that church in the beginning of the pandemic when they start opening because we already got COVID and the beginning. So I was like, okay, so I'm good for this one. So I got it. Like I had to help. And then I met a lot of interesting people there. So one of the it was a the, the coordinator for the school. And then so I talked to her at the time and then I explained it how was my my situation with my kid. So and she told me "Why you don't you brought your kid in the school? Is my

neighborhood school. So why you don't brought your kid over here?" I was like, "I don't know. I'm so scared because you guys don't have the program. I always I always wanted my kids to go to the school, but you guys don't have that program." And she were like, "But give the chance, you know, like, maybe like, I don't know. You. You feel like he's not doing good. We sent him back." And I'm like, "Are you sure?" Well, they think its the right thing. They said, "Well, try it. You know, you you don't lose nothing. Just try." And I was like, "I don't know. I don't know." But I, well, I, once I always look in my son like, so frustrated. And the other side was like, you know, this is my option. So I did. So I enroll him, I transfer him. And it was the beginning of the year, so it was nothing like to lose. So he was more happy but he struggled a lot with his, his grades because he say, "Oh I'm not understanding the teacher at all." So the speech therapist came through through the through the zoom and then I saw I mentioned to Beth and then so she she activate the microphone.

Katie Farnsworth [00:11:03] Maria is referring to remote microphone technology, an option and where the teacher wears a microphone that transmits their voice directly to a child's hearing aid or cochlear implant via a receiver. This helps amplify the teacher's voice above all the surrounding background noise. I used one all through elementary and middle school.

Maria Venalanzo [00:11:21] So it was a lot of support for him. So I was like, "Okay, Esteban you got this one, I know you're so smart and you're going to get this one." And then like, "Tell me what I need to help you with and then whatever, you struggle just tell me and then I'll help you." And then he said "my grades." I was like, "What do you need?" He said, "I don't know." So I spoke with every single teacher. And then because he was the only kid with cochlear implant teachers willing to spend 30 minutes with him a day. Just to him to pick up his grade. And then because I told him "If he don't pick up his grade, I had to transfer him back to the to to the program."

Katie Colella [00:12:00] And what's which school is this you're talking about. Right now?

Maria Venalanzo [00:12:02] St. Agnes of Bohemia. And then, so they, they support him as much as they can. So he's he got a good grade, up there like three or four months, he picked up his grades. And this happened with all the support and it was a regular program. Not, special program. He still got the speech because I never, never let my kids without speech therapy. And I always ask, "Oh, this is going to be a speech therapy with them." And then I and then I say, "Okay, so." They support him and he's got a good grades. He graduate with good grades and graduate from that school St Agnes of Bohemia. And then he went to he he was he went for the placement tests for private schools and he went for placement test for CPS. He passed both. So now he was having options. And I was like, okay, Esteban, you got this. He graduated with two scholarship and then he went from ?? high school. And then like they don't have the program, but they had a support accommodation and he's doing really good. And this is one of the things, I don't say that Eduardo is my smart boy, now he's in college, he's 18, 18 years old. I don't say it's has been easy for him, but I hear he's very smart and they're like, I feel like he's provoking him to it because he is always "I am a smart boy." And he my other kids always told him, "Oh, you are the one going to take it us from the struggle Eduardo, so you better keep it up." And then so Esteban is really good at school. And in between he was getting bullied, Esteban. I never cared about Eduardo. And maybe cause he always went in a program with the hearing loss. In the hard of hearing program. But I know Esteban, Esteban be more exposed in regular programs. It that I say I never treat my kids like that you are special they're they're normal kids from I always told them that so when he told me that he was getting bullied, I told him, "You got this, you got this. I give you a week to talk to

somebody in your school. If you don't do this I gonna show up and I going to talk to them." And he was like, "But they gonna call me chicken. All these names." I don't care. "They don't feed you, they don't pay you school, they don't buy you clothes today." they said no. Okay, you got this, better go and do it. He did. He opened it with two teachers I think one of them. But they got fire then the following week so and then I said oh.

Katie Colella [00:14:59] Oh no.

Maria Venalanzo [00:15:00] So I like so what are you gonna do now? He said, "Okay, so you want me to talk to the principal?" Because the principal of St. Agnes of Bohemia, she was a principal, she was assistant and now. As principal, but it was principal assistant, but she was a principal in the, his previous school so he, she knows him since he was little. So and then so I told her, but go and talk to her and then she wanna know how well I practice what she's going to say. I will like you'll find out. But I tell you already. You don't go, I go. He was like, "Okay, Mom." So he went and talked to her and then he come home he got a smile. I said, "What happened? I talked to (principal)." So what happened? "So she say not to listen to those kids. They're so jealous of me because I'm the best player in the team and I'm the best in the school." I was like, "I told you, I told thats good." He said, "Well, I feel so sorry for those kids. They're so jealous of me." As I said, "I told you."

Katie Colella [00:16:08] It's fortunate Esteban's bullying situation was resolved amicably. According to stopbully.gov, contacting the school is the first step. However, if your child or someone else you know is in need of immediate support due to feelings of hopelessness, due to bullying or any reason, call or text. 988. For deaf and hard of hearing individuals who use a relay service dial 711 then 988. Support is available 24/7.

Maria Venalanzo [00:16:40] But the thing is like you kid always going to be in some situation but is depend of us. How you going to manage those things? And I told him you are not special. You are the same kids. So I always try to make I know inside of my heart I alway feel so painful because I feel like I push him too much. But otherwise that I don't want my kids feel weak. I don't want my feel, feel like all they are better than me. I don't want my kids to feel like they they they're not going to get and I've got not gonna confront any situation that they're going to have. I want them to be strong and then as strong as the other ones, no matter what, like with struggling once type of life. And then I will just have to keep going, you know, like shake it out. Keep going. But that's that's part of my story with my kids. And I like having them being there, I feel like I always got to look up them me because they always had the right people. And when I have that, that's or I feel like I know that I can do it, I know I can do because having support is like, like you count on them. Even, you know, But even the words they use that we talk to other I feel like okay they give you power not to to be stronger and then like the you that you're smart, that you are strong and you can do it. But when we don't share, we're not supporting those people, like when we aren't like with time. So I feel like is when like with now having that right decision.

Katie Farnsworth [00:18:28] I think this is so beautiful to hear just how you really taught the boys to have faith in themselves. Because I think one thing I'm noticing is, you know, talking about your journey, even from the identification of the hearing loss, you had doubts, but you really believed in yourself and believed you knew that something was wrong. And I think that is so brave of you to feel that you could, you know, trust yourself enough to seek out answers. And I think those boys now learning to trust themselves and had confidence in themselves, that is only going to make them more successful in the future. And to look at all of their successes right now. Like you mentioned, Eduardo is in college and Esteban is doing so well and he's in sports. And, you know, and that is all possible because of all of

those things you have done for them. Maria's tenacity allowed her boys to get the services they needed to thrive in school and foster their own identities. We were excited to interview both Venalanzo brothers, starting with Esteban. Okay, so, Esteban, it's really nice to meet you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:19:51] Uh, I played basketball for like 2 years and playing baseball for, like, eight or nine years. I went to --- high school and used to go to --- school since pre-K. In seventh grade I switched school. It's like, two years ago.

Katie Colella [00:20:16] So you switched schools a lot?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:20:17] Yes.

Katie Colella [00:20:18] Do you, how how was that? Did you find that it was hard to switch schools? What was that like?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:20:25] I don't know. I just switch because my old school is just like, took a while, like COVID or something. And when I switched my old principal, just tell us like to come to other school.

Katie Colella [00:20:41] Which school has been your favorite?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:20:43] Uh, St. Agnes?

Katie Colella [00:20:45] St Agnes. Mm hmm.

Katie Colella [00:20:46] What was it like during COVID when you were at home trying to learn on a computer?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:20:52] Difficult, because it's like I was like, online it is like my first time and, like doing assignment online and turning and hard time to hear on Zoom or meeting.

Katie Colella [00:21:08] When you played baseball, what was your favorite position?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:11] Oh, pitcher and third base.

Katie Colella [00:21:13] Do you still play?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:14] Yes.

Katie Farnsworth [00:21:15] Okay. Will you try out for the high school team?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:17] Oh, yes.

Katie Farnsworth [00:21:18] Okay. Good luck.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:19] Thank you.

Katie Colella [00:21:21] Awesome.

Katie Farnsworth [00:21:22] And how is basketball going?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:24] Good.

Katie Farnsworth [00:21:25] How do your two teammates communicate with you and your coach? Communicate with you?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:30] Just trying we talk to each other and use our brain like your mind to communicate.

Katie Colella [00:21:38] So do you feel like you ever struggle to hear when you're playing sports?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:43] No.

Katie Colella [00:21:44] That's great.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:45] Yeah.

Katie Colella [00:21:46] What has it been like having a hearing loss and being in high school?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:21:51] Hmm. Not be able to deal with me because it's just like I'm being myself. Like, I don't care about how I look like.

Katie Colella [00:22:01] Your mom shared a story that at one point you were being bullied, I believe, was at St. Agnes.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:22:07] Yes.

Katie Colella [00:22:07] And she told us that she wanted you to go talk to somebody at the school. But we love to hear your version of that story. So what happened?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:22:18] They just bullying while me for my implants. Well, I just talked to the principal and our teacher about what happened, why they wanted me for. I talked to the principal and then they want to just talk to them. I mean, bullying or something.

Katie Colella [00:22:39] Did you ever talk to this bully again after that?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:22:43] No. No.

Katie Colella [00:22:44] Just kept your distance.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:22:45] Yes.

Katie Farnsworth [00:22:47] What was it like growing up with an older brother who also had hearing loss?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:22:51] Mm hmm. Fun. It's like, okay, have him, because I feel like I the only son that have hearing aid. But my mom gave the birth, and I, like, see my brother with a hearing, and I feel like we the best friend or something.

Katie Colella [00:23:14] How how do you and Eddie communicate? Do you sign more or talk more together?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:23:19] Talk more? Well, sometimes sign language when we go to sleep or something.

Katie Farnsworth [00:23:25] Your mom mentioned how smart you guys are.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:23:27] Yeah.

Katie Farnsworth [00:23:27] Do you have any idea what you want to do after high school.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:23:31] And just going to college and join team like a sport?

Katie Colella [00:23:39] Oh, that'd be great. Would for baseball or basketball?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:23:42] Both.

Katie Colella [00:23:42] Both. Awesome.

Katie Farnsworth [00:23:44] Do you. Do you know what you would like to do for passion for a profession? Yet you know what you want to study in college?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:23:51] Mm hmm. Just only on science stuff.

Katie Colella [00:23:56] Okay.

Katie Farnsworth [00:23:58] And so you have worked with Beth your audiologist?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:24:02] Yes.

Katie Farnsworth [00:24:02] For a long time.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:24:03] Yes.

Katie Farnsworth [00:24:04] Do you remember? Do you have any fond memories of her?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:24:09] Mm hmm. The first one she gave me two implants. I feel I can hear everything. She trained me to have sign language. Yeah, I can understand what she's saying.

Katie Farnsworth [00:24:24] That's awesome. So you, you remember getting your implants?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:24:27] Yes.

Katie Farnsworth [00:24:28] That's great. What do you remember about it?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:24:31] The since, like 18 month I think. I cannot I hear nothing. And then, like, two or three years old, if I know that I can not I hear when I take it off with implants. And then my old school just tells me, teach me more sign language. And I know

this the most. So of implants and hearing. And I just feel like I'm proud and happy that others are influencing hearing.

Katie Farnsworth [00:25:08] Do you feel like is there ever anything you remember about getting new equipment? What was it like when you would get new equipment or a new upgrade? Because you guys have gone through a few different sets of equipment. Had there been when you really like what? What was that like? Was that hard for you?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:25:24] Sometimes, like to hear what's the difference on the sound and to hear something fixed or something that's like, something wrong.

Katie Farnsworth [00:25:39] What was it like during COVID when you had to wear a mask everywhere you went? How was that a challenge to understand people?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:25:48] Difficult because like with the ones with the mask on, to hear what they're saying, to see their lips or something and to hear difficult from this far.

Katie Colella [00:26:03] What did you do to adapt? Would you ask people to repeat themselves or talk louder?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:26:09] Well, oh, both. And just like, be closer you know, just to hear.

Katie Colella [00:26:16] Your mom talked about that sometimes you and Eduardo go to Mexico, but neither one of you speak. You speak some Spanish, but not as much Spanish. What's it like when you visit Mexico? Not speaking as much Spanish.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:26:32] Kind of difficult because my mom just told my family me about saying like, transferring or something. She, she very helpful and my and can take her daughter she can understand English. And I'm trying, you know, transfer something.

Katie Colella [00:26:59] Is that something you ever want to learn more of, more Spanish?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:27:03] Yes.

Katie Colella [00:27:05] And your mom says you and Eduardo argue about who speaks better Spanish. Who do you think speaks better Spanish?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:27:13] Me!

Katie Colella [00:27:17] Yeah. You got a great mom.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:27:19] Yeah.

Katie Colella [00:27:20] Yeah. She really fights for you, too. Yeah.

Katie Farnsworth [00:27:24] How do you guys usually communicate with your dad?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:27:27] Sometimes English and sometimes Spanish. Like some, I don't know Spanish and some I do like to talk. And my mom just telling, like my dad, well, started to do.

Katie Farnsworth [00:27:43] Is there ever a time where we were in a situation where it was hard to hear and you had to adapt or speak up for yourself?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:27:53] Oh, yes. Because, because my mom and my, uh, my dad cannot hear well like my voice. Well, from my school year, because I just, like, speak kind of low because my voice, like, kind of changed since, like, two years ago, I think.

Katie Farnsworth [00:28:18] So your dad, you're saying that your dad had trouble hearing your voice when it changed.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:28:23] Yeah.

Katie Farnsworth [00:28:24] How did you work through that?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:28:25] I just kind of screamed like, I just repeat a word like three times.

Katie Farnsworth [00:28:31] Does your dad wear hearing aids?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:28:33] Oh, no. He just cannot hear. Left, I think.

Katie Farnsworth [00:28:37] Oh, gotcha. Yeah.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:28:38] He loss in years.

Katie Farnsworth [00:28:40] Okay. Do you think you'll get a job?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:28:44] Maybe.

Katie Farnsworth [00:28:44] Once you're, I know you're not quite old enough yet. Where would you like to work? While you're in high school?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:28:50] Work in a store with Nike shoes.

Katie Farnsworth [00:28:54] To get a discount?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:28:55] Yeah.

Katie Colella [00:28:58] I like that. What else do you want to share about growing up with hearing loss? So did you know kick ups or did you also know that Katie grew up with hearing loss as well?

Esteban Venalanzo [00:29:08] No.

Katie Farnsworth [00:29:09] Yeah. So I am actually, my family is from the first season of Amplified. And so I, I was diagnosed with a hearing loss when I was two and then I've worn hearing aids. And now I have an implant, too. And I think it's really cool to meet other people who also have cochlear implants or hearing loss because I think every person story is so different. And my story is obviously different than your story, which is even different than your brother's story.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:29:39] Mm hmm.

Katie Farnsworth [00:29:40] So I'd love to hear, like, if there is something, maybe, you know, that you just really remember about growing up, even if it doesn't really relate to your implants. Like, is there a favorite memory you have of your family? What do you and your family what did you and your family like to do together when you were growing up.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:29:58] To hang out? To have like -- restaurant. We used to going on like, fun, like go to the beach or a fun fair or something. One of my best memory is was like haunted house, like two weeks ago when my brothers and my sister-in-law and I was like kind of afraid. But my brother got me like follow me or something. Yeah.

Katie Colella [00:30:33] Yeah. I think family is just such an important thing, right? And I'm so glad to hear that you feel close with your family because they think you guys have been through a lot together.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:30:43] Mm hmm.

Katie Farnsworth [00:30:44] I think a lot, the general public does not understand hearing loss at all of how complicated and abstract it is. What do you wish the general public understood more about hearing loss or hearing aids or cochlear implants?.

Esteban Venalanzo [00:31:03] To tell them the how the implants are. And how can you hear a lot and to not hear without them. Just yourself with the implants don't care about what people are saying like bullying you or or something like to be embarrassing like to show them like why you wear implants or something. And why I used to be embarrassing since second grade because no me like high school or my other school like after school when it's very I used to embarrassing like well showing about implants and then someone told me that just like yourself. Just own it, don't care what they're looking at you and I just like feel --- something like covered I just like. Just feeling so ---.

Katie Colella [00:32:21] Here we are again. Two for two. Two Katie's, two questions. But we since we were all making this up as we go along, decided that for this episode, we wanted to make it two Katie's, two observations about how we felt about these interviews. Because I think it just left us with a lot of good reflection. I enjoy really re-listening to our conversation with Esteban because he's just such a sweet teenage boy. I have to laugh because if this, we've talked about, if this was a sports podcast, I don't think he would have ever stop talking. That is that is really what he wants to talk about. He does not want to talk about this. And I don't know how much this is, I mean, I guess this question is a bit rhetorical, but like, it just it is so great that Maria kind of allowed him to like mold, you know, Maria allowed him to find himself and his identity, and he's just like this sports loving dreamer that he's not just walking around, only identifying with his hearing loss. He's got all these other things about him, which is, you know what we talked a lot about with you and you and your parents talked about last season. That if they were to name the top three, five qualities about you, you're hearing losses isn't on there and it's not on his or anyone's. So there's not really question there. But I just thought so. But that's I think that's what I love so much about Esteban's interview. Don't you think? Yeah.

Katie Farnsworth [00:34:00] Yes, I totally agree. And I think if you didn't know him and you heard him talking, I don't know if you would have picked out that he had a hearing loss right off the bat.

Katie Colella [00:34:12] No, no.

Katie Farnsworth [00:34:14] I think it's not because he's made it a point to not disclose his hearing loss. But I also think that he has grown up so comfortable in his own skin. He's grown up in an environment that's allowed him to really just be a kid and develop friendships, develop a love for sports, you know, and because of his early implantation, you know, he had access to language. He's he is just thriving, really. And I think that just paints a beautiful picture of what the potential can be for these kids and how so much of their identity is... Identity is is a is a big puzzle. Right. And there's so many pieces that come together with that. And I think over time, you know, maybe he'll consider his hearing loss more of a forefront of his personality or his identity. I think as I have grown up, there have been different instances where my hearing loss was more significant than other times. And I think being able to kind of have the ebb and flow is beautiful.

Katie Colella [00:35:19] Yeah, that's awesome.

Katie Farnsworth [00:35:21] I think one thing that seemed to be like a defining event, particularly in Maria's mind, was when she was discussing Esteban having been bullied at school. And I felt that you could kind of you could kind of feel the hurt for her, right as she was discussing this. And as a parent, just watching her knowing that this is happening to your child. But on the flip side, it seemed like it was two totally different situations. Right? Because then when we asked Esteban about it, he just very just easily shrugged.

Katie Colella [00:36:04] Nonchalant.

Katie Farnsworth [00:36:04] Yeah. And didn't seem fazed by it in the slightest. Which I.

Katie Colella [00:36:09] Yeah.

Katie Colella [00:36:10] Which I also thought was really cool because he seems so comfortable in his own skin.

Katie Colella [00:36:15] And I think, to Maria's credit, how she dealt with it as well as she taught him to advocate. That was amazing.

Katie Farnsworth [00:36:25] Yeah. And, you know, it reminded me of a time where it wasn't necessarily a bullying instance, but in junior high, I had had a previous friend who she and I had grown up together. We had been in the same class together. Both had a hearing loss. And I think once we went to junior high, we kind of, you know, very naturally went our own ways, you know, parted ways. Where we were just interested in different things. And I felt that my hearing loss was not something that really defined me at all. And I think it was maybe a little more important to her. And so, again, just kind of seeing how that identity kind of just unfolds and what, what is important to one person might not be important to another person.

Katie Colella [00:37:24] Yeah, sure. I mean, when people drift, right? You have your you have friends that you may make when you're young and then you do you grow apart. And you definitely are not required to stay friends with someone just because you have a similar diagnosis or experience.

Katie Farnsworth [00:37:45] Right. And I think it was really the first time that we both felt independent enough to make that decision.

Katie Colella [00:37:50] Oh, interesting. Okay.

Katie Farnsworth [00:37:52] And I think that when we were younger, it was just it was it made the most sense, right? It was obvious. Let's you know, we were the only two girls in our elementary school that had a hearing loss. We were, our birthdays were five days apart. We were in the same classroom. We both used the FM system. You know, I think on paper, it made a lot of sense to have us being.

Katie Colella [00:38:14] Together, paired.

Katie Farnsworth [00:38:16] And of course, we developed a relationship based on that. But I think also as we got older and our interests changed, you know, the natural separation happened and that's so okay. But I remember in sixth grade, you know, when we were starting to separate and I was sad about that because I think at the time I didn't really recognize why it was happening. But now looking back, you know, it was it was just a natural progression.

Katie Colella [00:38:41] Yeah. Well, thanks for sharing and always thanks for listening everyone.

Katie Farnsworth [00:38:48]*Amplified*, presented by Lurie Children's, is co-hosted by Katie Colella and myself, Katie Farnsworth. Written and edited by Katie Colella. Tech and Website Support by Katie Fanella Artwork by Katrina Garagiola. Special thanks to the Venalanzo family for sharing their story along with Beth Ternus, Dr. Nancy Young, Tatum Fritz and Marijo Fiacchino. We are grateful for the continued support from the Department of Audiology. Follow us and amplify the story. One word, no spaces. Transcripts are available at LurieChildren's.org/Amplified. If you need resources regarding childhood hearing loss, visit LurieChildrens.org/Audiology-Resources.