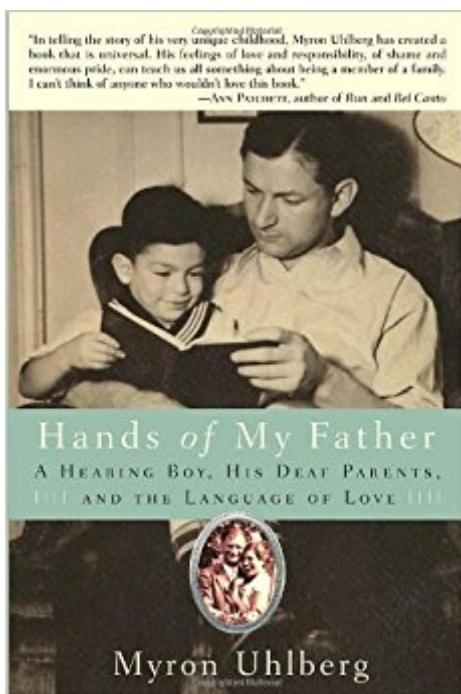


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# Hands Of My Father: A Hearing Boy, His Deaf Parents, And The Language Of Love



## Synopsis

By turns heart-tugging and hilarious, Myron Uhlberg's memoir tells the story of growing up as the hearing son of deaf parents—and his life in a world that he found unaccountably beautiful, even as he longed to escape it.“Does sound have rhythm?” my father asked. “Does it rise and fall like the ocean? Does it come and go like the wind?” Such were the kinds of questions that Myron Uhlberg's deaf father asked him from earliest childhood, in his eternal quest to decipher, and to understand, the elusive nature of sound. Quite a challenge for a young boy, and one of many he would face. Uhlberg's first language was American Sign Language, the first sign he learned: “I love you.” But his second language was spoken English—and no sooner did he learn it than he was called upon to act as his father's ears and mouth in the stores and streets of the neighborhood beyond their silent apartment in Brooklyn. Resentful as he sometimes was of the heavy burdens heaped on his small shoulders, he nonetheless adored his parents, who passed on to him their own passionate engagement with life. These two remarkable people married and had children at the absolute bottom of the Great Depression—an expression of extraordinary optimism, and typical of the joy and resilience they were able to summon at even the darkest of times. From the beaches of Coney Island to Ebbets Field, where he watches his father's hero Jackie Robinson play ball, from the branch library above the local Chinese restaurant where the odor of chow mein rose from the pages of the books he devoured to the hospital ward where he visits his polio-afflicted friend, this is a memoir filled with stories about growing up not just as the child of two deaf people but as a book-loving, mischief-making, tree-climbing kid during the remarkably eventful period that spanned the Depression, the War, and the early fifties.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Best of the Month, February 2009: With touching simplicity, author Myron Uhlberg recounts his complex childhood spent bridging the gap between sign language and the spoken word. As the hearing son of deaf parents, young Myron served as their emissary to the audible world while enduring the painful ignorance of a society that dismissed the hearing-impaired as "dummies." Yet eliciting pity is not the aim of this memoir. *Hands of My Father* is less about the challenges Uhlberg faced, and more about the love that bound his family together. Amid each tale of hardship, he describes moments so profoundly tender that you are immediately excused for the lump forming in the back of your throat. "All that I needed, in order to understand how much my father loved me," he explains, "was the feel of his arms around me." Though there may have been much to struggle against, Uhlberg's stories reveal that he had even more to be thankful for. - Dave Callanan

In this memoir about growing up the son of deaf parents in 1940s Brooklyn, Uhlberg recalls the time his uncle told him he saw his nephew as cleaved into two parts, half hearing, half deaf, forever joined together. These worlds come together in this work, his first for adults, as Uhlberg, who has written several children's books (including *Dad, Jackie, and Me*, which won a 2006 Patterson Prize) effortlessly weaves his way through a childhood of trying to interpret the speaking world for his parents while trying to learn the lessons of life from the richly executed Technicolor language of his father's hands. With the interconnection of two different worlds, there is bound to be humor, and Uhlberg is able to laugh at himself and his family's situation. He recounts unsuccessfully trying to reinterpret his teacher's constructive criticism for his parents and finding himself pressed into duty interpreting the Joe Louis prize fights for his dad. There are, of course, more poignant moments, as Uhlberg tries to explain the sound of waves for his curious father or when he finds himself in charge of caring for his epileptic baby brother because his parents can't hear the seizures. As Uhlberg grows up through the polio epidemic, WWII and Jackie Robinson's arrival in Brooklyn, he also grows out of his insecurities about his family and the way they are viewed as outsiders. Instead, looking back, he gives readers a well-crafted, heartwarming tale of family love and understanding. (Apr.)

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I just put my kindle down and all I can say is wow. The author does an incredible job of describing the descriptive nature of sign language. It makes me want to relearn the language I love so much. He describes in vivid detail the signs and the images they evoke. I am not one for memoirs, but this one was everything I could ask for in one. I can picture his father sitting at the table making paper hats from the New York Post every night and dancing with his Mother Sarah. I can picture Irwin sluggishly moving thru life and the feeling of your parents using you because they have no other option. The love in this book is nearly overwhelming - from the initial lack from their parents and then the author fills in the blanks from stories told so beautifully its as if you can see them playing before you in your own kitchen. I wish I could read more books that have a soul like this one. Read this one for the story, enjoy the sign language, and laugh and cry along the way!

This was a selection for our book group and I would never have picked it without that motivation. It is a great book. It is wonderful story alerting the hearing world to what a deaf person has to deal with--and we are not very accommodating. As a son, Myron, was a jewel and became the ears for his parents. The story is also heartwarming as the father/son relationship narrated here is unique in every way. The responsibility of Myron in this family was beyond imagination--he was the ears for his parents and the caretaker of his brother for many years. It was great to see the umbilical cord cut when he went off to college and experienced life on his own. A good read for everyone.

Having been a French teacher for forty years I really enjoyed the author's detailed description of how beautiful and more descriptive sign language is than spoken languages are. It was actually quite a moving book for me because at times I was jealous of the pure love he received from his parents and then at other times I felt sorry for his position as the translator for his parents at such a young age and the burden he carried because of them. Definitely a good read.

Awesome book. I am deaf myself, this book helped me understand better what my children has been through even though we live in different times. In 1960 we had no TTY, VP, iPhones and other phones similar to iphone, computers as we do now. In 1969 we have baby cry signals, door bells. In 1970's we have cc in our televisions. Technologies got better and better thus making our lives easier. The easier it got for us much easier on our children. There is no reason for deaf parents to depend on hearing children for everything. Beautiful story.

As an ASL II student I found this story well told and very emotional. A recommended read for

anyone with the desire to know about the Deaf world. I loved it!

What a joy is this memoir of honest, unequivocal, timeless familial love! This is a story told by a virtually unknown master with a mighty heart, as well as an ability to craft the truth with the precision ordinarily discounted by the very use of language. The chasm between words and feelings is somehow bridged by a communication gift which must have been developed as a result of the unusual circumstances into which Myron "Mike" Uhlberg was born. His first language involved no vibrations for his own functioning ears to translate. Events, facts, emotions and instructions were portrayed by the exquisite movements of his father's and his mother's loving hands in a language now referred to as ASL - American Sign Language. And so the perceptions of young Myron were grounded in a totally different milieu than any hearing child's in the world of hearing people. Life's mysteries which bewilder every kid, everywhere were a phantasmagoria of wonder to little Myron in his unique, peculiar setting. Difficulty gives value to the things that ease discounts. And this is a book that burnishes this theme with a brillance for the ages. A tale of a kid from Brooklyn, born during the darkest years of the Great Depression to a deaf Mom and Pop becomes a parable for the most universal, heartfelt yearnings, ambivalence and imaginings of which human consciousness is capable. I am absolutely stunned by this little gem with its mighty portrait of love and tenderness. As an infant born to two deaf parents the majesty of life, sound, linguistic nuance and sign language have been fused with a gifted story teller's mind to create one of the great surprises of my reading experience. I can't rave enough. Perhaps, if I could sign, my expression might match my admiration. My words can not do it.

To see the world through the eye's of a child of deaf parents is to see the world like no other. The book allows you to experience the world through another's perspective. I am surrounded by many deaf people while I myself am hearing. For the first time I could truly understand the difficulties these families go through on a daily basis. His father's fear was that he would not know how to relate his love to his son. His mother had it right, no spoken or silent language is needed to convey love. Surely he knew all of his life how much he was loved and even more so how much he loved his parents. I feel that this book could and should be required reading in schools to help our youths see that differences in people only make them more unique, not less lovable. If only we could all embrace the differences around us, this world would be a better place.

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