

The "America's
Got Talent"
Sensation



Kent Rautenstrauss

"I can't tell you why I experienced the loss I have or even why I'm able to do what I do. I certainly never wanted to be that girl everyone hears about and says, 'Wow, *that's* weird!' But I must admit: This road, while excruciatingly hard at times, has opened my eyes to truths and realities that a lifetime of study and lectures would never have taught me. The result is that, even minus my hearing, I am a more complete person than I have ever been. Not perfect ... but farther along the road toward my potential than I would have been without the challenges I have faced."

From "Sensing the Rhythm: Finding My Voice in a World Without Sound" by Mandy Harvey and Mark Atteberry

Always Try

When Harvey took the stage, she stole the judges' hearts and received the rare "golden buzzer" from hard-nosed Simon Cowell on "AGT."



This past summer, following Mandy Harvey's unforgettable performance on NBC's "America's Got Talent," an online video clip from the show of her strumming the ukulele and singing her original song "Try" went viral. The video clip shows the studio audience jumping to their feet and a stunned Simon Cowell telling Harvey, "This was one of the most amazing things I've ever seen and heard."

At first glance, 29-year-old Harvey looks and sounds like a fresh talent with tremendous musical gifts as a singer/songwriter. But then the more remarkable piece of this musician's story is revealed: the story of an invisible disability of overwhelming magnitude.

"I have a connective tissue disorder," she told the audience. "I got sick and my nerves deteriorated." Harvey elaborates further in a just-penned memoir, "Sensing the Rhythm: Finding My Voice in a World Without Sound," coauthored with Mark Atteberry, "I lost my hearing when I was 19. It happened over a period of a few months, leaving me profoundly deaf."

Harvey spent her childhood immersed in music, starting as a 4-year-old singing in the church choir. By the time she was in high school, she wanted to learn everything she could about music as a form of expression.

Why Would God Give Me Gifts and Then Take Them Away?

In 2006, Harvey enrolled at Colorado State University as a vocal music education major. "I was living the dream," she says. Within a month, however, she discovered a hearing problem that began with an ear infection. "I couldn't understand my professors," she says, "and kept moving closer and closer to hear them better. The doctor said I dropped 30 decibels of hearing, and then by Christmas, I was 50 to 60 decibels down. I was legally deaf."

Heading to class one day, she was struck by a biker who was shouting, "I'm on the left!" Harvey hadn't heard him at all. "He hit me and crushed one of my hearing aids," she recalls. In that moment, she admitted to herself for the first time, "This is real. This is a problem, and I don't know how to fix it. I lost myself that day. I had always been a musician; then the music stopped."

Harvey was ultimately dropped from the music program, and she moved back home. "It was hard to breathe," she says, "hard to get up

in the morning. I couldn't even look in the mirror. I had wrapped my life of being a musician into my identity. When it died, I died. I prayed, screamed, cried and cursed.

"Why would God give me gifts then take them away?"

A Healing Path Reveals Itself

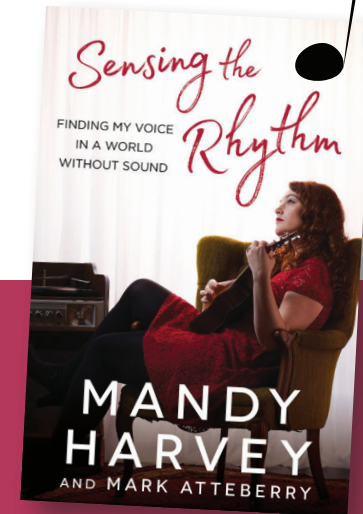
Harvey's parents, inspired by their faith and a deep love for their daughter, took on a divine assignment. "We tried to loan her some of our hope," her dad, Joe, says. "Our goal was to keep her going forward and not to let her become a victim."

Harvey began her healing journey by first accepting a new reality. She learned American Sign Language and lip reading. She avowed, "I am going to take a step forward even though I don't know how this world will work. I will find a different way."

Two years passed before Joe began gently coaxing his daughter to once again play music with him. "I was trying to help her keep music alive in her soul," he says. As improbable as this sounded in his own mind, his rationale was, "The gift of music was inside Mandy, not external. There is no reason it had to disappear."

With the help of a big-bodied acoustic guitar, an interesting thing happened. Harvey felt the vibration and rhythm of the guitar in her body, even though she couldn't hear it. She allowed herself to smile. With other encouragement, including an exceptional vocal coach, she began to explore creating music as a deaf

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FIND HER NEW MEMOIR ONLINE

person. She set a goal of trying to sing a favorite song, “Come Home.” She used an electronic tuner to visually display the accuracy of her vocals. When she saw a green light, she was on pitch. If not, she started over. Eight hours later, she made it through the song with all green lights.

This process taught her to use muscle memory to recall where a note is placed in her body to replicate its corresponding tone. She also learned that by taking off her shoes, she could feel the rhythm of the guitar better. The next breakthrough was to sing at a local bistro. Accompanied by jazz musicians, Harvey nervously began to sing “My Funny Valentine.” She locked into the band for visual cues and heightened her intuition to feel the music. When the song was over, Harvey couldn’t hear the eruption of applause, but she could see the standing ovation. She had come home — like the song — to music.

God Is Holding My Hand

Harvey now dedicates 40 to 70 hours a week on speech therapy and learning new music. She has written 249 songs and recorded three highly acclaimed CDs. She has appeared on radio and television shows nationwide. She sang on the stage of the prestigious Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The debut of her book and semifinal appearances on “America’s Got Talent” both occurred in September. “This is far out of my comfort zone,” she says. She believes through it all that “God is holding my hand every step of the way. It’s actually quite lonely onstage, but by singing, I can wrap my arms around others and give them hope.”

“Mandy walked right into the heart of America,” says Dr. Roger Teel, senior minister and spiritual director of Centers for Spiritual Living’s Mile Hi Church near Denver, who recently invited the artist to share with his congregation. “Her odyssey into deafness took her to the darkest depths. But rather than a complete collapse, Mandy discovered her ultimate capacity to choose ... to arise again and, with only Spirit’s Light to guide her, to step forward onto an unknown yet brilliant path.”

Atteberry, who spent a year helping Harvey write her memoir, says, “Mandy’s ability to be gracious, cheerful and patient with people is a wonderful type of grace.” Joe Harvey adds, “We don’t all have the same successes, but we all have at times a sense of pain, rejection, need to escape, even desperation. We can find a bit of connection in Mandy’s story.”

Through it all, Harvey remains focused, positive and grateful to evoke emotion through music. Off the stage, she renews at her home in St. Cloud, Florida, with her husband, Travis.

She derives great joy from being an ambassador with No Barriers USA, which helps people with challenges break through any kind of barrier and live a life of purpose. Along with its cofounder Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind climber to reach the summit of Mount Everest, she leads by her personal example, sharing and singing at No Barrier annual summits.

“There is something in her voice that is profound, mysterious and deeply spiritual,” Weihenmayer says. Some might think this the call of the soul. ✘

Visit MandyHarveyMusic.com for more on her music and new book. For more information about No Barriers USA, visit NoBarriersUSA.org.



Pocket Emma

Based on the teachings of Emma Curtis Hopkins, as found in the book, “Scientific Christian Mental



Practice”, this application allows the user to perform a daily spiritual practice of twelve lessons. Each lesson, or gate, unlocks a power within us.

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