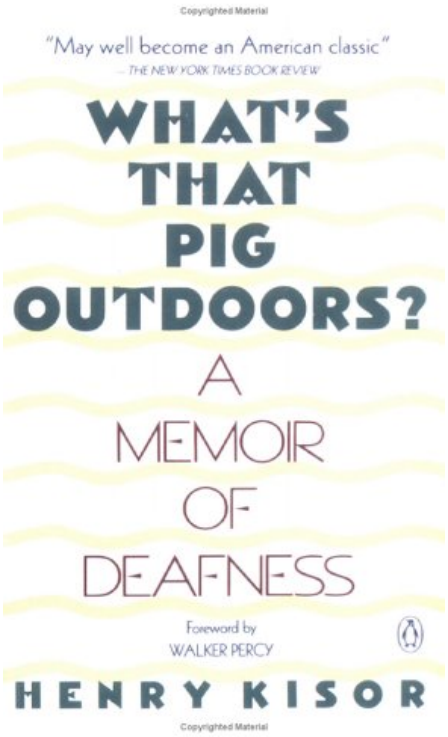

What's That Pig Outdoors?: A Memoir of Deafness

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Henry Kisor, a veteran journalist, twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, lost his hearing at age three. He recounts the story of his life as a deaf person in a hearing culture in this engaging memoir, which offers a fascinating perspective on both worlds. "A first-rate memoir, notable for its candor, charm, and sensitivity".--The Boston Globe. "Henry Kisor's book may well become an American classic"...--The New York Times Book Review.

What's That Pig Outdoors?: A Memoir of Deafness Details

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From Reader Review What's That Pig Outdoors?: A Memoir of Deafness for online ebook

Karen says

Henry Kisor had 3-1/2 years of immersion in spoken language before he became deaf due to a childhood bout of meningitis/encephalitis. This occurred during the mid-1940s -- still the boom of oralism in deaf education -- and he was home-taught using a method that introduced reading first. (Oralism also includes lip-reading/speechreading and drills for pronunciation and speaking.) His hearing parents were diligent in the instruction, Henry was a bright kid, and the memoir is an account of his challenges and (predominantly) his successes in becoming a journalist, marrying, and raising a family.

This book was first published in 1990 when Kisor was in his 40s; it was re-released in 2010 with an epilogue reflecting changes in both his life and attitudes over the intervening 20 years. I felt somewhat better about Kisor after reading the epilogue. Up until that point, the bulk of the 1990 edition made me sometimes uncomfortable. Kisor, despite the fact that he was profoundly deaf, viewed himself culturally as a member of the hearing world. He was at times disparaging of the "cultural eccentricities" of the deaf, and it was clear that he felt he had nothing in common with them. Even in the epilogue, he determines that it's not worth the time and effort to learn sign language, figuring he'd use it only for communicating with the deaf pilots group that he attends for just a few days every year.

Mr. Kisor is certainly a man of persistence and conviction. One cannot deny that he achieved a lot during his life, sometimes bucking great odds. And thankfully his attitudes about the deaf are less prickly in the epilogue. Even though his account of success is interesting, I suspect it was probably not always the rule for most deaf people of his generation. I read *Deaf Like Me* by Thomas S. Spradley when I was almost done with Kisor's book, and I think Spradley provides a more representative (and, therefore, more helpful) account of hearing parents raising a deaf child. Of course, they were parenting during a fertile time: the resurgence of sign language in the late 1960s, after over half a century of suppression.

The origin of this memoir's odd title? His young son's comment, "What's that big loud noise?" The author's mistaken lip-reading of that question perhaps ironically emphasizes the difficulty and unreliability of lip-reading and oralism.

Doug says

This book was recommended by a deaf friend. I found it to be an interesting and enlightening read. Henry Kisor lost his hearing at the age of three as a result of a bout with meningitis. He was blessed to have parents who were ahead of their time in terms of dealing with his disability. Rather than institutionalizing him, they chose to mainstream him, before the term became popular. He has lived his life in the "hearing" world, which has been somewhat of a double edged sword. To some degree, he has had to live between two different worlds - the hearing world, and the deaf world, without being fully accepted by either. He went on to become quite an accomplished journalist.

Kisor does a good job of helping the reader to understand some of the challenges he has faced. At no point does he come across as a victim, or as one looking for a handout. The reader gets a rare insight into life as a disabled person. Granted, this book was first released in 1991, so many of the challenges he faced no longer

exist.

I found the most interesting part of the book to be the daily encounters with learning about the methods he has used to compensate. Along the way, he reveals many characteristics (and stereotypes) surrounding the deaf community in the U.S. The epilogue was particularly enlightening as it reveals tensions even within the deaf community.

I found the early part of the book to be a bit slow, particularly as he delves into the techniques that various instructors used to teach him oral skills. in fact, I almost abandoned the book, but am glad I stuck with it. I also found him to be a bit harsh toward his deaf brothers and sisters who may have followed different paths, or who have to. Gave the same level of support as him.

One classics example of this is when he speaks about the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires businesses to accommodate hearing impaired individuals - even if there is a reasonable cost for e accommodation. He seems to believe that to accept these accommodations is to admit weakness and to become a burden on the hearing community. Ironically, he has had the benefit of many of these accommodations throughout his life (rough his wife, his children, etc), yet he doesn't believe that society has an obligation to those who might not have access to that eleven of support.

Overall, a good read!

Auderoy Lin says

FAV QUOTES:

In fact, I thought *everybody* read lips. When I talked to people, I'd grasp their faces and turn them toward me so that they could see mine. Evidently I assumed everyone was deaf like me. Eventually I did learn that they weren't, but by then I'd decided, with all the off-center wisdom of a small child, that deafness was a minor, if interesting, human characteristic, like freckles, blond hair, double-jointedness, or the ability to teeter along the top of a board fence.

Then I entered adolescence, that inescapable and implacable condition that tests the confidence of every youngster on earth.

Let others believe what they chose. How I defined myself was more important.

Jen says

I expected a lot more from this book, it was kind of boring. Sorry, author man.
Planet of the Blind by Stephen Kuusisto is a really good memoir about being blind.

Andrew Kline says

I found the subtitle "Memoir of Deafness" to be somewhat deceiving: while he is completely deaf, he talks

extensively about growing up in the hearing community and actively avoiding the deaf community. He tended to downplay the difficulties with his deafness, mostly presenting them as inconveniences that were easily overcome. Also, with a few exceptions, his major life events weren't all that extraordinary. After getting about 1/2 way through, I skimmed for another chapter or so before completely losing interest.

This may hold some significance for someone who is hearing-impaired, but aside from a handful of passages, I found it to be completely forgettable.

Kristin says

I'd not read an autobiography of a deaf individual before, and I found his perspective to be interesting, as it is one I have no frame of reference or relevant experience to compare it to. Specifically, when I previously thought about deaf people communicating in the hearing world, it was primarily through sign language or closed captioning. Kisor however, relies almost entirely through lipreading and speaking regular conversational English, and knows absolutely no sign language, nor does he care to. He experiences frustration as he feels deafness divides people into 3 groups, the hearing, the lipreading, and the signing, and that each group can be mutually exclusive of one another. The hearing often don't know any sign language and Kisor finds that some people are impossible to lipread or use inferences in their voices to mean things that he cannot pick up, having absolutely no residual hearing. Likewise his lack of those vocal inferences and inability to perceive how his voice sounds makes him difficult to understand to the untrained ear, and group conversation with a lipreader is often impossible. Between the two deaf groups, sign language uses a sentence structure that doesn't conform to conversational English, and Kisor finds that those who both sign and speak are difficult to lipread because they are often speaking the words in the order they sign them.
We learn about Kisor's life as a deaf man, and a little bit about the time before he lost his hearing, which occurred at age 3 and those early recollections are primarily things his parents told him about, rather than actual memories Kisor has about being able to hear. His parents found a teacher through an ad in the newspaper, a woman who felt that the key to ensuring Henry's survival in the world was to teach him to read, a philosophy his parents wholly subscribed to, making every effort to keep him in the mainstream hearing world. Kisor grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, so there wasn't a lot available in terms of special education of the deaf, which Kisor retrospectively feels was a positive factor in his success, as it forced him to make every effort to keep up with his hearing peers. Eventually, his teacher was able to bring back his speech, and while he's never been a perfectly clear speaker, it has helped him to function well in addition to his lipreading abilities.
Overall though, the written word is Kisor's forte. Because much of his language skills were built upon the readings he did with his teacher, he read at a higher level as a child than most of his peers and focused more on writing styles and the points the authors were trying to get across than simply reading the book for the sake of reading a book. This reading and writing prowess proved useful when making inroads as one of the first deaf columnists in a national newspaper, primarily doing book reviews, because most other reporting would have required him to use a telephone, an impossible task for most of his life. He got much of his material from reading the book and doing face-to-face interviews with the authors, some of whom he could lipread, others he had to rely on a transcript of the interview typed by his wife from the tape recorder he always used during the interview.
I would be curious how this whole story would be different if Kisor were my age, born in the 1980s instead of the 1940s. This book was published in 1990, when the TTY phone was pretty much the only telecommunications device for any hearing impaired individual, and even that technology was in its infancy. Kisor marvels about this new thing called a 'message board' where he could connect his computer to another computer someone dedicated to running this messaging service, and he could write a note, either public or

private to other users of the service. However, he found it cost prohibitive at $10 an hour to connect to this computer through a telephone line, so if someone could reign in the costs, perhaps something like this would be a useful tool for deaf people to be able to communicate with deaf and hearing people alike more effectively than with a letter or TTY phone (relay service with typists who could serve as the bridge between TTYs and hearing people speaking on the phone were just emerging in large cities). Kisor would clearly be in his late 60s/early 70s now but I imagine that he has probably fully embraced e-mail, text messaging, the internet, and other technologies that the majority of us take for granted, but for the hearing-impaired could be the key to enabling them to feel comfortable in society as a whole.

Rebecca McNutt says

Interesting and honest memoir that not only tells about the world from the perspective of a deaf man, but it also takes readers on a journey through the world of journalism.

Erin Lynch says

I've been doing a lot of reading around deaf culture lately. This book presents a very different perspective than what you'll see in a lot of other books written by or about deaf folks. At the very least, it was certainly thought provoking.

One weakness is that the book is pretty dated in terms of technology. In the second half of the book, Kisor discusses a lot of technological "advances" that made communication easier for deaf folks, circa 1990. There is an updated epilogue that talks about more recent communication advances (texting, cell phones, chat rooms, video conferencing).

Another thing to watch out for is Kisor's discussion of the ADA. It has just been introduced as the book was going to press for its first edition and he was fairly negative about it, which was quite shocking and upsetting to me. I felt that his update about the ADA in the epilogue was more nuanced.

All in all a very worthwhile read.

Sarah Rigg says

Kisor illuminates a part of deaf/disabled history in the U.S. that I wasn't that familiar with, even though I've read other memoirs by disabled/deaf authors ("When the Phone Rings, My Bed Shakes" by Philip Zazove covers some similar territory).

Kisor loses his hearing at age 3, and his parents are adamant about mainstreaming him. He learns lip-reading rather than sign language, and his parents do their darndest to make him feel like any other kid. He goes to mainstream schools and figures out accommodations for himself in college and later on the job as a copy editor at newspapers and magazines, well before the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Kisor is a liberal, but he's NOT PC in his take on many things, from gender relations to disability rights to race. He is somewhat controversial in the deaf community and sometimes pegged as a deaf man who refuses

to "accept" that he's deaf because he doesn't know sign and interacts mostly with the hearing community. I found this really fascinating because his life was so different from other deaf writers I've experienced and because he was involved in journalism for several decades. The book ends in the mid-90s and feels a bit dated by this point, but I still found it fascinating. It unfortunately leaves off before Kisor goes on to write detective/thriller novels, so I do wonder if the reissue from 2011 adds something about that part of his life.

If you're interested in either the history of journalism or of deaf rights in America, you may enjoy this book. You've got to love that the title of this book comes from a Kisor family story that involves a fart joke!

Reading says

Read as research for a film I'm preparing for and found out to be very informative and also pleasant to read. Certainly one of the better books that deals with deaf culture and the dramatic changes of the past forty years. I appreciated his balanced perspective on the many opinions regarding ASL vs normalization, etc.

Fishface says

The story of an ordinary man's life, made unusual by the fact of his total deafness. Talks about the many, many challenging situations he faced growing up and still faces today.

Janine says

I found a kindred soul in Kisor through this witty and pleasantly well-written memoir. Though I'm not deaf, I am significantly hearing impaired (50%). And like Kisor, I was diagnosed at a young age. Many of his experiences of participating in the hearing world as a hearing-challenged individual mirror my own.

I am astonished and inspired that Kisor was a newspaperman despite the fact that he doesn't have any residual hearing and he lipreads. (Like me, Kisor doesn't use or even know American Sign Language.) I also very much admire Kisor's goodwill and humor in dealing with the complicated scenarios that result from bungled lip reads and other such miscommunication. I enjoyed reading about his accidental theft of change from a gas station (he couldn't hear the attendant tell him she had given him too much money back and had a policeman knock on his door afterwards), his adventures in dealing with customs agents in foreign countries, and his interviews of authors including William Styron, Edward Abbey and Edward Hoagland. And it's not all just funny stories -- Kisor spends a fair amount of time grappling with some important questions about the Disability Act, accommodations, and special education.

This memoir captures my experience of being hearing impaired, something I previously thought no memoir could do. And on top of that, it's a good read.

Jatzyri says

What’s that pig outdoors is a book all about deaf culture and the struggles that follow it, along with the

beauty and experiences of being a deaf child. The author, Henry Kisor himself is deaf since the age of three and is a primary source to give hearing a generalized look into the eyes of the deaf. In this memoir Henry teaches us about the obstacles he went through as he was growing up. As he tells us about not limiting himself and being able to succeed in the hearing world (sometimes better than the hearing) he teaches his young readers that because you may have a disadvantage in your life doesn't mean you have to underestimate yourself in what you're willing to do.

The book was at first slow and difficult to read but as Henry grew up his story got more interesting. I completely believe Kisor when he tells his readers that he's happy. I'm not going to say he had an easy life but from what he tells us I feel that it could've been worse. I say this because he always had friends to talk to and he didn't feel out of place until he understood he was deaf (which came a little later in his life). His mom helped him greatly and his father supported him through everything. Although the memoir was mostly cheery, there were some small stories Henry told that made me think about my perspective on deaf people. They're absolutely normal people and shouldn't be treated differently at all. This book yells that out to the audience when Henry talks about his emotions and thoughts, they're just like everyone else's. If you find yourself with a hand full of free time I definitely recommend this book, it will give you a new perspective on the deaf community.

Emily Flood says

This was a very interesting and different perspective of the deaf community, the author is an oralist who didn't believe in the use of sign language, because he became deaf post lingually. He is a newspaper journalist and talks about all the obstacles he had to over come to do a quality job working in an industry that relies heavily on hearing and phone work. Also about how he did make a successful name for himself in the industry.

This book came out around the time the that Gallaudet students were uprising for their right to have a Deaf president and also the time when the ADA was pushing through congress and about to become federal law. He has some very interesting arguments on these topics, being that he is in the workforce at the time and successful in his job with minimal accommodations.

Just a very interesting book for me to pick up being that I believe in the Deaf culture in a strong way, based on my education, even though I am not deaf or hearing impaired myself.

Joanne says

Kisor is a journalist who is deaf but can speak. The first part of the book, which describes his childhood and his schooling, interested me, particularly because it outlines the controversies around the "best" way to teach non-hearing children. Kisor's mother was a bit of a pioneer and a very strong advocate and home schooled him using a curriculum developed by a lone teacher of the deaf who had no credentials and was scorned by the educational establishment. Kisor ended up being far beyond his peers in reading and written language. He says he had a fairly normal childhood, though, from swim meets to camping, because his parents assumed he could do anything he wanted until he failed and most of the rest of the world went along with them.

I lost interest after he took his first job. Not sure why.
