



Finding Zoe: A Deaf Woman's Story of Identity, Love, and Adoption

Brandi Rarus

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At just a few months old, Zoe was gradually losing her hearing. Her adoptive parents loved her—yet agonized—feeling they couldn't handle raising a Deaf child. Would Zoe go back into the welfare system and spend her childhood hoping to find parents willing to adopt her? Or, would she be the long-sought answer to a mother's prayers?

Brandi Rarus was just 6 when spinal meningitis took away her hearing. Because she spoke well and easily adjusted to lip reading, she was mainstreamed in school and socialized primarily in the hearing community. Brandi was a popular, happy teen, but being fully part of every conversation was an ongoing struggle. She felt caught between two worlds—the Deaf and the hearing.

In college, Brandi embraced Deaf Culture along with the joys of complete and effortless communication with her peers. Brandi went on to become Miss Deaf America in 1988 and served as a spokesperson for her community. It was during her tenure as Miss Deaf America that Brandi met Tim, a leader of the Gallaudet Uprising in support of selecting the university's first Deaf president. The two went on to marry and had three hearing boys—the first non-deaf children born in Tim's family in 125 years.

Brandi was incredibly grateful to have her three wonderful sons, but couldn't shake the feeling something was missing. She didn't know that Zoe, a six-month-old Deaf baby girl caught in the foster care system, was desperately in need of a family unafraid of her different needs. Brandi found the answer to her prayers when fate brought her new adopted daughter into her life.

Set against the backdrop of Deaf America, *Finding Zoe* is an uplifting story of hope, adoption, and everyday miracles.

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Travis Pope:

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