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Baltimorean Jodi Michelle Cutler's Book Adapted into Film Starring Judd Hirsch

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Amy Smart and Judd Hirsch star in the upcoming film "Rally Caps." (Cruz Visuals)

Baltimore native Jodi Michelle Cutler has made it her mission in life to help families with children impacted by hearing loss.

With her father, Stephen J. Cutler, she co-authored the baseball-themed, coming-of-age novel "Rally Caps." "Rally Caps," which came out in 2007, received praise from no less than former Orioles greats Brooks Robinson and Cal Ripken Jr.

Over the past year, "Rally Caps" was adapted into a film starring Academy Award nominee Judd Hirsch, Amy Smart and Carson Minniear. Two roles in the film are played by Cutler's sibling, Nicky Cutler, a trans actor and social media manager who lives in Los Angeles.

Lee Cipolla is the film's screenwriter and director. The movie is produced by Katherine Borda, Amy Williams, William Garcia, Stephen Cutler, Curtis Pride, Jodi Cutler, Eileen Jones, Terry Lacore, David Kenaith, Aaron Magnani, Gary Sales and Orien Richman.



Authors Stephen J. Cutler and Jodi Michelle Cutler (Provided photo)

Jmore recently caught up with Cutler, who now lives in the Italian city of Grosseto, to talk about the film and her advocacy for the hearing loss community.

***Jmore:* First of all, how did you wind up living in Italy for the past 25 years?**

Cutler: As a Pikesville High senior, I met my ex-husband in Tuscany during an exchange program. We fell in love and went back and forth for seven years. After we got married, I moved to Tuscany to experience the world

outside of Pikesville, thinking I could always return and believing that teaching English would always be an option in Italy.

How did you become involved in the hearing loss community?

My son, Jordan, was diagnosed with bilateral sensorineural profound hearing loss at 10 months old by our pediatrician in Italy. Back in 1996, there was no newborn hearing screening in Sinai Hospital, where he was born.

Thanks to family-centered early intervention programs, children are now diagnosed with hearing loss as early as four months of age.

What prompted you to share your story?

I will never forget the first time I took Jordan to the park wearing his hearing aids. Three young children came up to the stroller and asked, 'What does he have in his ears?'

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. I could not explain that my child was deaf. I don't know why the words didn't come. It was like an emotional block. I felt ashamed by my silence, and I was unfamiliar with that emotion. How could my son learn to explain his hearing loss if I did not model that voice for him?

For five days straight, I practiced in front of the mirror saying in Italian, 'Those are hearing aids. They help my son hear because his ears don't work very well. Kind of like my glasses help me see, because my eyes don't see very well without them.'

I was never caught unprepared again.

How did this impact your life and career?

After teaching English and working in social media, I became a consultant to Cochlear Europe, Middle East and Africa, and created a Facebook forum to assist families living journeys in deafness in Italy that currently assists 15,000 families.

I also collaborate with the Federation of Italian Pediatricians to promote newborn hearing screening and provide sensitivity training to medical professionals regarding a family's journey in deafness.

Additionally, I am involved in various research projects including The Effect of Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants on Tinnitus, and am a founding member of the Global Coalition of Parents of Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

How did the “Rally Caps” come about?

My father had written a short story about breaking his nose during a Little League tryout. I thought it was cute and could be developed into a book. He urged me to write it, but I was struggling to teach Jordan to speak a language that was not my own and tending to my newborn daughter, Sofia.

Years later, Jordan received a cochlear implant and became happier, less frustrated and more independent. His newfound energy to take on the world gave me the desire to write the book about someone that my son could identify with, a strong deaf character who represented the ability in disability.

My dad and I went back and forth via email and finished the book together during one of my trips home.

How did the movie come about?

Everyone who read the book said it would make a great movie, so my dad started hunting for someone who could direct it. Fifteen years later, we're in post-production thanks to our amazing director, Lee Cipolla! There's no release date yet.

What message do you want to convey?

I hope that we will avoid the pain caused by ignorance due to a lack of visibility and conversations about hearing loss, especially regarding children. The only way to reduce stigma is to raise awareness that today children born with severe-to-profound hearing loss can have access to listening and spoken language.

How are the Orioles helping to spread the word?

As a buildup to the movie, we are partnering with Major League Baseball teams to host “Rally Caps Hearing Loss Awareness Days” at eight stadiums. May 5th is our date with the Orioles, and we hope everyone will come out to the ballgame!

Bilateral cochlear implant recipient Elena Pearlstein will perform the national anthem, and Dr. Alan Oshinsky of the Hearing Wellness Center will provide free hearing screenings to anyone age 10 and above.

And I'll be there with audiologists from Johns Hopkins and GBMC to answer questions.

Five dollars from every ticket sold will benefit Jacob's Ride for Hearing, an Annapolis-based nonprofit organization that provides financial assistance to cochlear implant recipients.

For information, [click here](#).

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based public relations consultant and freelance writer.