



Perspectives:

By *Kimberley Chan*
My Hearing Journey

It's been wonderful meeting many CHIP members over the past few months, particularly at the AGM this past May. It was an honor to be invited to talk about my challenging hearing journey. If you attended, I hope you enjoyed it! It's amazing how your life can change in just a few minutes.

A recap of my journey...

In June 2015, I was out celebrating my birthday, when I suddenly couldn't hear very well. At that time, I wore a hearing aid in my right ear, and thought it was broken. I left to run home to get my spare hearing aid. By the time I got home, I felt sick and couldn't even hear that well with my other hearing aid. I blamed it on food poisoning and went to bed.

The next day, I couldn't hear ANYTHING. I was diagnosed with an ear infection, but two

weeks later, the infection had cleared, and I still couldn't really hear. After an audiology exam, I was diagnosed with Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss (SSHL), aka sudden deafness. When this happens, your hearing drops more than 30 dB in a short amount of time.

As a child, I had lost all my hearing in my left ear and about half my hearing in my right ear, but I never really felt like I had a big hearing loss. The hearing aid allowed me to rely on my hearing and get through everything – elementary and high school, my university studies in journalism and communications, travels, working abroad, pursuing dance and theatre, and many other things.

With almost all the hearing in my better ear gone, I felt like I had a hearing loss for the first time. SSHL can sometimes be reversed with prednisone

injections and surgery; but one emergency surgery and two injections later, my hearing still hadn't improved. Some of it returned, but speech wasn't clear and everything sounded off.

Getting my hearing back

Hearing aids were now useless. The only solution was to get a cochlear implant; but I couldn't just get one. I had to apply and wait, and do many different kinds of tests to see if I was eligible for one. I traveled from Montreal to Quebec City twice for evaluations, because the only hospital in the province authorized to perform the CI surgery is there. I finally had my surgery 8 months after I lost my hearing.

Learning to cope

During those 8 months, the only thing I could do was wait. I could no longer live on my own, go out with friends, or even go to work. I had to learn to communicate and



understand what was going on around me without using my ears. This was frustrating! It made me realize how much I relied on my hearing and how I took it for granted.

I learned to “listen” without hearing much. I could hear sounds, but couldn’t understand speech. I would try to listen to people’s tones when they spoke, and watch their facial expressions and body language. I couldn’t make out words, but I’d sometimes be able to make out the dynamics and tell how many syllables a word had, and which vowel sounds were being used. It was a tough period, but I gained a new skill - now, I can sometimes understand people better than my hearing friends in loud environments—or even if someone has a very heavy accent!

Lessons we can all learn from my journey

As I mentioned during my presentation, having something like this happen completely changes your outlook on life. I learned a few important things:

Appreciate what you have

Do not take anything for granted, because it can disappear in minutes! I never, ever thought I could lose my hearing in a couple of minutes - this can happen to anyone (though mercifully it is rare)!

Perseverance is everything

Some hearing professionals told me that I would never hear as loudly and clearly as before. But I knew this was possible. I had to fight for my hearing the way a martial artist fights to get his black belt.

Do it now

Do the things you want to do NOW. Learn that skill you’ve always wanted to learn, spend time with your friends and family who live miles away, take that trip you’ve always wanted to take - do whatever makes you happy.



I've been writing about my journey in detail

- visit www.kimberleychan.ca to read more.