

Hard of Hearing^{HOHSF:} Single Folk

Dating With a Hearing Loss

Truly, I was ecstatic when I was assigned this article. Finally! I get to share my wealth of dating experience with others besides friends and family. Then, the more I thought about it, the more my reaction shocked me. When did I appoint myself as an expert on the topic? Should all the hearing loss singles gather around in a kumbaya circle for me to reveal the mysteries of the dating world?

Let me preface: I am a 29-year-old single woman, emphasis on the single, with no signs of changing. So perhaps, technically, I have no right to tell people what works best. However, what I do have is a unique approach to dating with hearing loss, and I would like to share it with you.

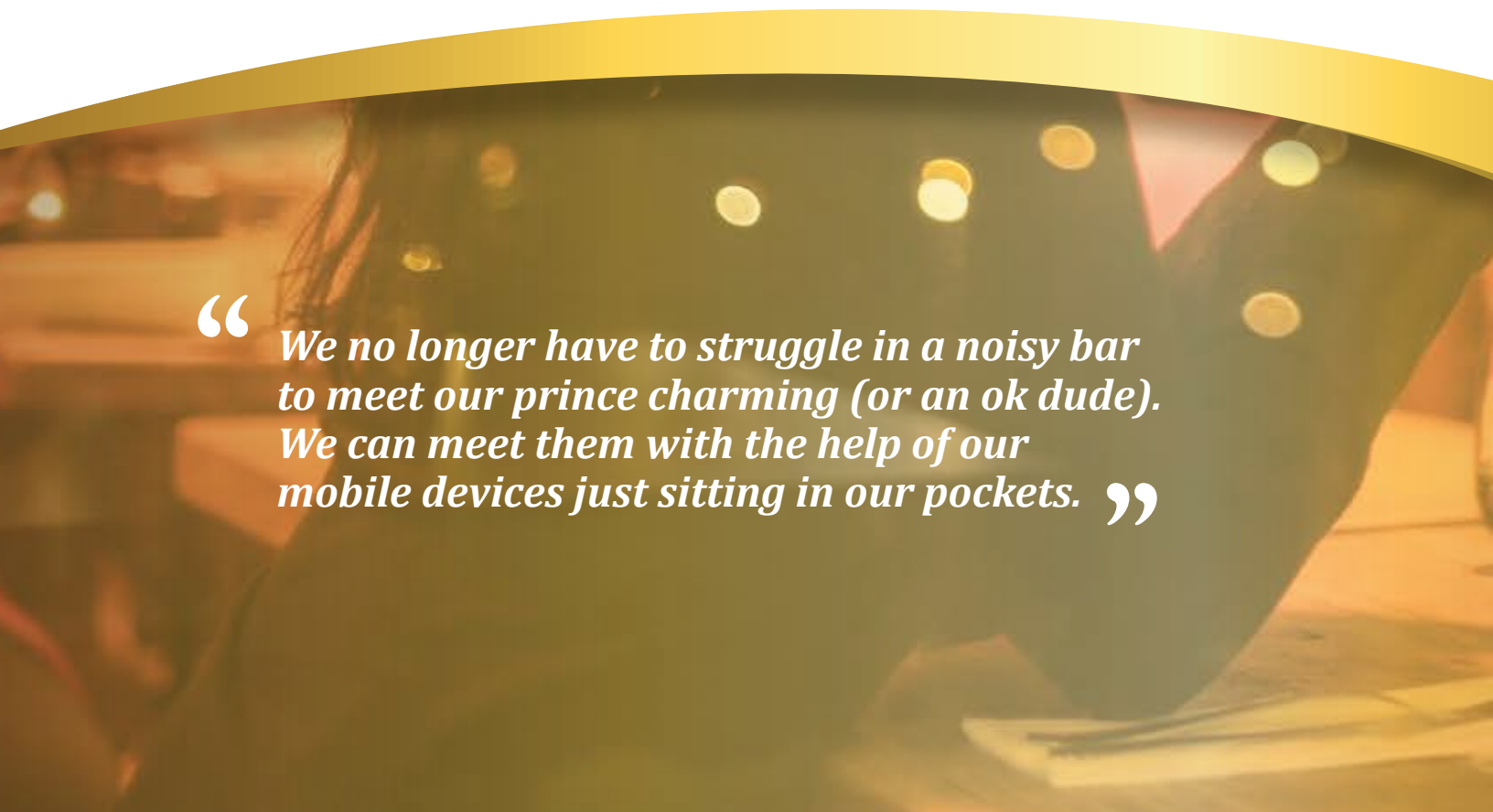
Like most home remedies and unwarranted advice, I would advise to take it with a pinch of salt or paprika, if you are into that. If any aspects seems unreasonable to you, then by all means, ignore them. Otherwise, let's get right into it.

Dating and hearing loss share one thing in common: they both make us feel vulnerable. I think with dating, as with hearing loss, we all find our own way of approaching it, a way that makes us the most comfortable.

First, luckily for us hearing loss singles (HLS), we have great online apps and websites we can use to meet people. Even better, they have become the norm. We no longer have to struggle in a noisy bar to meet our prince charming (or an ok dude). We can meet them with the help of our mobile devices just sitting in our pockets. With a swipe of a finger, we are on an amazing date (or an ok one), having the time of our life (or an ok time).

I can't even imagine trying to meet someone the old-fashioned way. How would it play out when you see a tall drink from across the room, the two of you lock eyes in sparks of live wire, and he comes over and whispers "you are beautiful". Of course, you do not hear him because of the amplified shouting of a million people compensating for the loud music. Not ideal #hearingaidproblems.

This brings me to my next point: location, location, and, dare I say, location. The online platforms we use to "meet" a potential love interest allow planning. They give us, the hard of hearing single folk (HOHSF - yeah, that's better), the opportunity to orchestrate where to meet for the first time.



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Of course, we want an accessible place for us to hear clearly. We want to hear if the person is as charming in person as they are via text. Bars are not ideal, but I have found pubs that have speakeasies are an excellent compromise. For those not familiar with speakeasies, they are parts of a pub that do not have music on in the background and, as the name explains, you can speak to one another without having to holler. I also try to meet the person during times I know are not peak hours. For example, drinks around 6 pm work way better than, say 8 or 9 pm.

Lately, my go-to spots are cafés. I prefer cafés over restaurants because there's nothing worse than having a meal without chemistry. One medium caramel latte with soy milk to go, please. They are also better suited for my hearing. A café that isn't too crowded in the evening, or at least one where I can put my back against the wall to hear better, works best. If you do prefer restaurants (you brave soul), there are hard-of-hearing-friendly restaurants. For a list of those, I would like to direct you to Debra Fisher's article in the Fall 2018 issue of *HEARHEAR Magazine*. For the speechreading HOHSF, in my experience, cafés tend to have better lighting than bars and restaurants mainly because people are using those places as their own personal travelling office. They also tend to have smaller tables, which makes it easier to speechread and to hear.

Finally, full disclosure, when do you bring up the hearing loss? When I started dating with my hearing loss I struggled with this. I was young then (still am), and wearing hearing aids is uncommon for my age group. How do you go about it? Should I casually drop it in a fourth or fifth text message? "Hey, how was your day? Oh, by the way, I have a moderate hearing loss." Perhaps I could be more mysterious: let them notice my hearing aids glinting behind my ears, much like a lighthouse on a foggy night.

I have experimented with both of these methods. Ultimately, I try to get it out of the way quickly. I do not want it to seem like I am ashamed of it, because quite honestly, I am not. It may sound strange but I kind of enjoy that I'm unique.

No one I have dated has had a problem with my hearing loss. I once asked a partner what he thought about me having hearing loss, and he very honestly put it, "It's annoying at times, but I like you, and there are worse things". I appreciated his honesty, because quite frankly, if I had to describe dating with hearing loss in one sentence my response would be "It's annoying at times, but I like dating, and there are worse things".



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