

Courage & Resilience

Humans of Hear
HEAR FOR THE HOLIDAYS EDITION



**GUESS
WHO?**

After graduating from Cegep, Vanessa Séfriu earned scholarships to pursue her higher education in the United States while representing her schools on the soccer field. After completing her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in business administration/marketing concentration, she spent one year in England where she helped a visually impaired lawyer. She then came back to her hometown because of Covid and pursued her interest for corporate social responsibility by joining Hear Entendre Québec under the Canada Summer Jobs program.



Coming to Canada

"Never judge a book by its cover" is an expression we often use to remind ourselves that everyone has a different story and to be mindful of those differences when interacting with each other. You never truly understand someone until you take the time to listen to their story with an open heart and an open mind. When you truly pay attention to the storyteller, you get to relive their experiences and their emotions with them. You become them for a brief moment. Today, you'll have the chance to place yourself in the shoes of a very courageous and resilient individual. Are you ready to explore the bottom of this person's iceberg? I think you are!

My parents never really suspected anything particular about me until one day when they found me sleeping in a really noisy environment. They found it odd so they took me to the doctor and that is when my journey began. I was 8 months old when my parents were informed for the first time that I was more than likely born deaf/hard of hearing. Doctors would normally find such a defect earlier in a baby's life based on a variety of specific cues, but since I was an overall healthy baby, my parents never felt the need to take me to the doctor before that day. It is thought that my deafness may have been caused by my mother contracting German measles when she was pregnant with me. This would have then led to my bilateral congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).

Apart from the fact that all I could hear/sense without any hearing support devices were vibrations, I was overall a typical child. I had parents that loved me enormously and spoiled me

just enough. My sister, who was three years younger than me, and I got along very well (if you do not count the times she stole my new toys...). My parents always told me that I was a really happy and playful kid. I apparently loved to talk. I only spoke my native language at the time. There is an expression in English to describe someone like me... a chatterbox! I also had a big heart and I always wanted to help others. I would continually show generosity towards those that seemed in a more difficult financial situation than me. So overall, I was privileged to have never lacked anything in my childhood. What else could I have asked for? Well, maybe there was one thing... my hearing.

You have to understand that I come from the small country of Bangladesh, which is nestled between India and Myanmar (Burma). When I was a child, resources for the hard of hearing community were scarce even in the big cities. I was lucky to live in the highly populated capital, Dhaka, so I did have some resources available to me, but they were limited and not really advanced technologically. My mom knew that she had a big decision to make, and like any mom, she made it in the best interest of her child. So at 5 years old, my mom announced to me that we were moving to Canada! Canada...this cold yet cool place where it snows all year long, where you get to interact with polar bears, and build your own igloo...at least that's what I thought. Let's say that where I come from, snow is as rare as sugar pies. Ya, right, it does not exist. It is way too hot for that.



Pathway to Accessibility

When I first arrived in Montreal, I had to split my time between two schools: a public school and the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf (MOSD). The MOSD helped me improve my listening and speaking skills while the public school taught me the usual subjects we all learn at that age. At the MOSD, I was soon retested by an audiologist and diagnosed as completely deaf in my right ear and deaf at around 98% in my left ear. Due to my results, I was fitted with two hearing aids. The principal at the MOSD, Martha Perusse, told my family and I that I had a huge task ahead of me. I had to learn English – remember, I only spoke Bengali when arriving in Canada – and adapt to my hearing loss. This is when I started to attend MOSD classes full-time.

My parents made sure I put in the work quite quickly. My mom was determined to make me learn this second language as fast as possible. “I spent hours daily after work going through the alphabet with my [little sweetheart], just trying to make sure [my dear] could pronounce the letters accurately,” she explained in her testimonial. “We [speaking of her husband and herself] also made sure to speak English in the household, rather than our native language, to ensure [the apple of our eyes] could be surrounded by English,” she pursued. I truly have to award some of my life achievements to her and her dedication. I would not be where I am today without her.

Unfortunately, even if my parents had wanted to do something more before coming to Canada, it would not have been possible. In Bangladesh, resources and technology in this particular medical field are scarce. Bangladeshis’ access to support for hearing loss, whether diagnosed at birth or acquired later in life, is not anywhere close to Canadians’. It should not be this way but it is a reality.

This lack of resources for people with hearing loss in Bangladesh was definitely one of the main reasons why my parents decided to move. My mom wanted to make sure that I would have a better life. “I wanted my child to be the best [they] could be, despite the fact that [my little pumpkin] was hearing-impaired, and I knew that we needed to move to a country that would support us in providing the best treatment for my [babu].” I will always be thankful to them for leaving behind everything they had to move across the globe for me.

In all honesty, I did have a sort of antique hearing aid machine back in Bangladesh. It was quite big... Okay no, it was enormous! It was this huge rectangular box attached to straps and I had to carry it around my neck everywhere I would go. Imagine your kid carrying his lunch box around his neck at all times. Well that was me. Not really practical when you are trying to play around, let me tell you!

"We changed the words inside of the brackets to preserve the anonymity of our surprise person until the big reveal!"



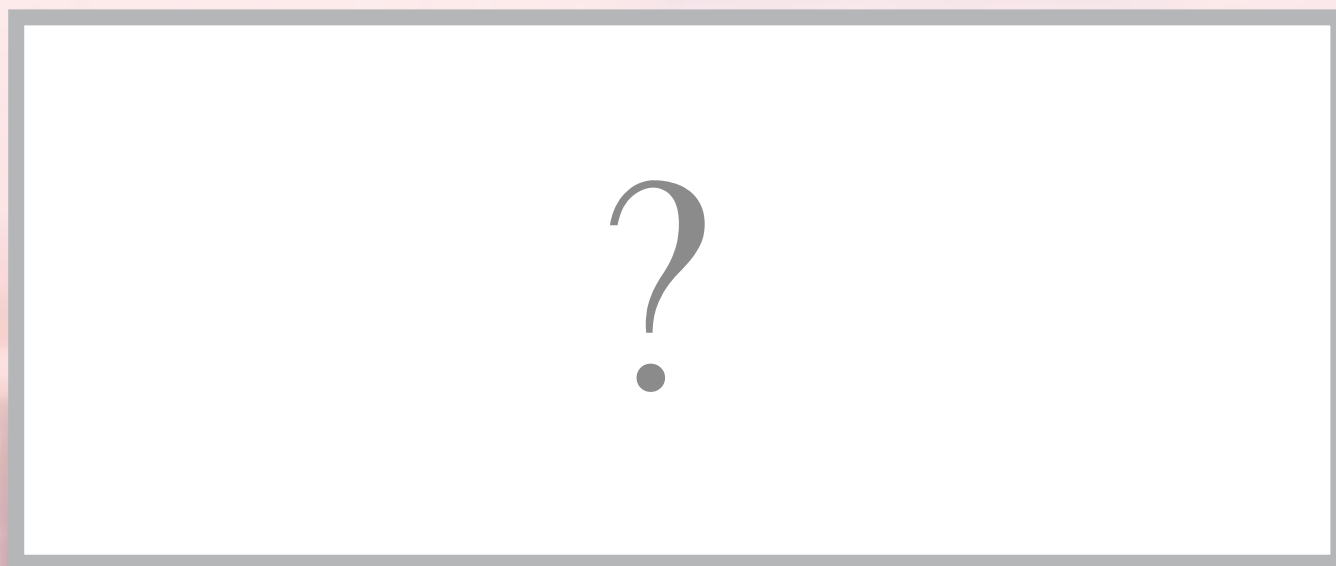
Where was I. Oh ya! So as I was saying earlier I got tested by an audiologist at the MOSD and was referred to get two new hearing aids. I was six years old at the time... Quite late, hey, I know! In fact, the first five years of any human being are critical to their development. Throwing some hard facts at you! Considering that I spent the first eight months of my life without my parents even knowing that I was basically deaf, and the next four years with limited help from an antique hearing machine, I most likely missed out on a lot. In all honesty, even the hearing aids I was provided with at six years old were not the greatest solution for me. It is not until I got a cochlear implant (CI) a couple of years later that I truly saw considerable improvements with my hearing capabilities.

I was ten years old when I was approved to get a cochlear implant for my right ear. A CI is surgically implanted behind the ear and directly stimulates the auditory nerve. For someone who has profound hearing loss like me, it is quite the right option. Once you recover from the surgery, it only leaves a small scar behind the ear. Nothing too complicated to understand in perspective, but at ten years old, it was a completely different story. At the time I did not understand the whole concept and I was very scared. Just the word "surgery" gave me chills. Nevertheless, my parents decided that it was what was best for me, so my dad and I drove to Quebec City and spent a total of two weeks there. My mom, on her end, stayed home as she continued working and looking after my sister while we were gone. Although I am grateful that my Dad was there, I missed the support and love from my close family and friends. Those two weeks were quite lonely.



When I returned to school, after my long recovery and rehabilitation, I was like the new kid on the block! It is not every day that a ten year old student becomes the hot topic of school. Everyone was asking me questions about my new equipment which made me feel important and smart. I even made a few of my classmates jealous. I have to admit that I was quite apprehensive about this new technological device at first, but once I started hearing better, I was quite hopeful for my future with all the improvements that the CI offered. I felt like nothing could stop me now, but then, like it is the case for most kids, high school hit me.

In high school, I started having difficulty following in class, even with the help of my CI I learned that the added technology for my hearing was not the only thing I needed to rely on in order to communicate and understand properly. I needed to use speechreading and other communication strategies. Moreover, as my high school educators were less sensitized to my communication needs, they did not always adapt their



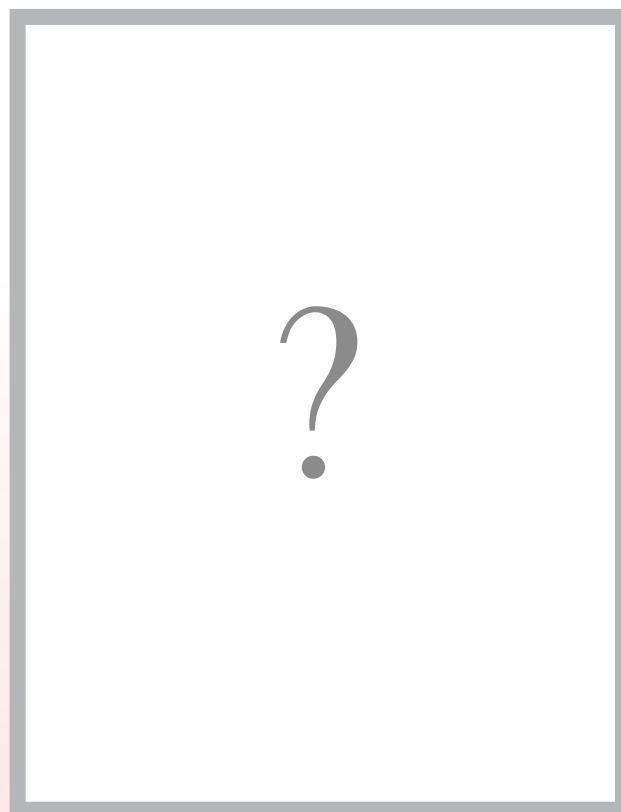
teaching style. Most of them spoke too fast and turned away while talking to me. Even if I made them wear my FM device, I could not follow them well. An FM device is a wireless assistive listening device that transmits sound from the person speaking to the listeners. This helps people with hearing loss, like me, to better hear a speaker from a distance and is especially useful in a noisy environment like a high school classroom! Oh, and that's the other thing! I had to carry my FM device from one class to the next because high school is not like in primary school. You have a different teacher for each subject rather than one for all of them. This added to my challenges. I had to adapt to each classroom's environment and each teacher's tone of voice. Not only that, but I was also the only one in my classes that had a hearing loss so I felt quite different.

This had an affect on my social life. Making friends and dating was not my cup of tea. I was quite shy and the fact that I had hearing loss did not help. It got quite lonely at times. Things eventually started getting better. I began to get support from a note taker and an oral interpreter* which helped me enormously in the classroom. I also joined the school's basketball team in Secondary 3, which is a sport I really enjoyed playing. The coach was really accommodating and made sure to speak slower for me and get my attention before speaking. I did not get to play in a lot of games due to my disability, which was disappointing, but when I did, I felt like a basketball superstar. I also grew to love participating in my drama classes as they allowed me to express emotions and act certain scenes without using too many words. I truly felt like I was part of the group during that class. By the end of my high school years I felt I belonged.

In 2010, I proudly graduated high school. Although I found my way, I was happy to have my tough high school journey behind me.

*Note taker: A note taker summarizes lectures in written (word) form.

*Oral interpreter: An oral interpreter helps to deliver a spoken message from someone who speaks to someone who is hard of hearing. The oral interpreter will repeat the message at a slower speed, use fewer words and clearly enunciate each word.



Dear reader

We hope that you are enjoying the story of one of our members. This is the second part of a five part series that will be released throughout the month of December. Our goal is to show the impacts of someone living and adapting to hearing loss, and how Hear Québec can support our members through this process.

Please make sure to follow, like, and subscribe to our social media pages to keep up with the rest of our Calendar of Hope. The story will also be featured on our blog, so as the parts are released you can reread them all in one place! With [your donation](#) we can continue to provide reliable and enhanced services, and support to those affected by hearing loss. Together we stand for accessibility... Together we can!