



My Hearing Loss Journey

I am a 25-year-old Canadian/Middle Eastern nursing student with hearing loss. Outside of academics, I worked as a barista and shift lead while also balancing my studies. I enjoy going to the gym, staying fit and traveling. I'm passionate about sports, especially soccer.

I didn't recognize my initially mild hearing loss—those around me noticed before I did. That's the nature of an invisible disability: lurking surreptitiously until it suddenly “defines” your life. The stigma surrounding hearing loss can be discouraging, but advancements in technology have helped me navigate life with greater resilience.

I started my education in a French school but later transitioned to an English one, with the help of the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf (MOSD). Before my diagnosis, school was a struggle, impelling my parents and teachers to investigate the reason why. Multiple assessments prompted an audiology test confirming what would shape my future in ways barely expected.

Navigating Challenges & Building Confidence

For years, my hearing aids represented a neon sign announcing my “deficiency” to the world - an embarrassingly conspicuous crutch, magnifying that “incompleteness” spectrum. I resented anything that implied entitlement to special treatment from a society whose mundane and innocuous interactions I craved. Fiercely independent, I clung to the idea that I could

adequately interface with minimal social normalcy and presumed physical autonomy.

As my hearing loss progressed, I was compelled to accept my hearing aids. Still, insecurities lingered. While never short on friends, I subconsciously subdued self-expression, convinced that hearing loss somehow mutes personality. Over time, I recognized that most people are too preoccupied with their

own lives to judge me.

The Role of Lip Reading

Lip reading became my lifeline. In noisy settings, it bridges gaps in conversations, connecting dots to puzzle through missed words. As a barista, lip reading was indispensable to understanding coffee orders. But lip reading has limits, as the COVID-19 pandemic glaringly accentuated. Masks conceal mouths, cutting off my vital lifeline to socialize and follow conversations. Lack of clarity reinforces how small accommodations—clear speech, an unobstructed view—makes a difference for the people with hearing loss.

Hearing Aids & Their Limitations

Hearing aids aren't magic. Unlike glasses, which restore perfect vision, they amplify all sounds

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indiscriminately. In crowded cafés or bustling malls, conversations diffuse together in a frustrating jumble. Adjusting to new hearing aids takes time, sometimes months. No device fully replicates natural hearing. This can be alienating and engenders “exclusion” stigmas. However, I’ve learned to manage, adapt, and connect in sub-optimal environments.

Embracing My Identity & Educating Others

I no longer bemoan my ‘condition’. It’s integral to my identity. Being transparent about it was transformative. The more I advocate for myself, the easier it becomes to navigate workplaces and classrooms. Educating segments of the abled populace is vital, as misunderstandings erect barriers while awareness fosters empathy. I’m humbled and astonished by how charitable people can be.

I share my story to dispel the toxic loneliness hearing loss can foster. People with hearing loss are often acquainted with isolation, oblivious to an empowering community out there that can produce positive experiences.

Everyday Struggles & Adjustments

Hearing loss means constantly adjusting. From changing batteries to dealing with sweaty malfunctions during workouts, small obstacles accumulate. Hearing aids aren’t waterproof, so swimming—my coveted pastime—is “negotiated”. But I’ve found workarounds, like investing in a digital stethoscope that connects to my hearing aids, allowing me to fulfill my nursing duties without missing critical auditory indicators.

My nursing experiences have cross-nourished my empathy. I understand acutely the nuances of communication hurdles, particularly when working with geriatric patients who benefit from lower-pitched vocalizations, patience, and clarity. Practical immersion cultivates insight. Subsequently, my work nurtures perspective.

Gratitude & Perspective

I’m incredibly grateful. I have family, safety, opportunity—myriad blessings and privileges upon which I’ve long deliberated. Many, including those in my ancestral homeland, face persistent adversities and hardships, lacking these same blessings.

My struggles starkly pale in comparison to persistent adversities and dire afflictions under which others languish. Everyone handles struggles differently—what one deems a trifle, another finds monumental.

Still I nurse—no pun intended—an enduring hope. Advances in science may one day offer a cure (regenerating inner-ear sensory hair cells), just as vision correction has evolved (LASIK).

Until then, I’ll push forward. If sharing my journey can help others pilot theirs, then I’m confident my compass invariably points True North.

