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Help! We Hate Hearing Tests!

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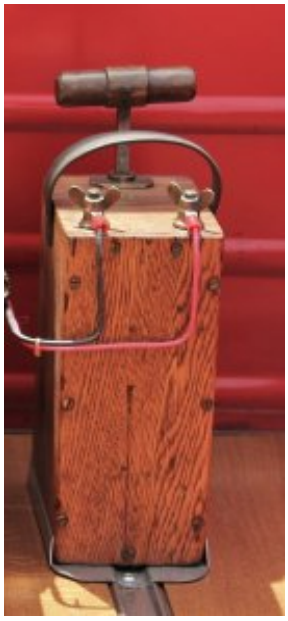
Gael Hannan



I was recently scheduled for a hearing test and I wasn't particularly looking forward to it.

I didn't actually *dread* it, like I would a root canal. But neither was I counting the days, the way I would before a massage appointment.

You'd think that a veteran of hearing tests – 60 so far and counting – would no longer feel uneasy about it. It's not that I don't like the audiologists who conduct the test. I really do appreciate and admire them – except when I'm inside the booth and they're on the outside. That's when they turn into the enemy interrogator. And they're trained to keep their face impassive, to not show any emotion at the disaster that's playing out just a few feet away.



And it's not that hearing tests hurt me *physically*, although a head of raging tinnitus is akin to pain. What's the worse that could happen in that dark sound booth, headphones glued to my head and a detonator in my hand?

I could *fail*.

I could miss most of the actual sounds and instead push the button for the phantom beeps of tinnitus. As the test progresses with a fine sheen of sweat on my brow, I realize I'm not doing "well" and that makes it worse. The absolute best I can hope for is that my hearing remains steady because, let's face it, my unassisted hearing is never going to go *up*. I used to dream that, just for once, halfway through the procedure, the audie would jump up and come rushing into the sound booth with joy, *"OMG, Gael, your hearing has improved!"* In real life, I'd settle for *"it's no worse than it was."*

The pure tone test kicks off the torture. From where I sit, the only variation is in how quickly the beeps can ignite my tinnitus. When all the sounds run together; I'm not sure what's real and what's not, but I push the damn button anyway – maybe I'll press at the right time for the right beeps. And then, oh no, here comes the word recognition test which shouldn't be too hard to ace, because I have it on good authority that they haven't changed the words much in the last 40 years. I give it a go:

Say the word 'sidewalk'. *"Fly ball"*
Say the word 'keep'. *"Sheet*"
Say the word 'maybe'. *"Fading?"*

Say the words 'hot dog'. *"Oh, jeez…hot sauce?"*

Say the word 'feeling'. *"Beady, healing, peeling…take your pick, Ms. Audie!"*

Say the word 'much'. *"I wanna go home."*

I consider cheating – but I'm not quite sure how to do that. An elderly lady I know with borderline diabetes doesn't want a positive diagnosis as it would affect her out-of-country travel insurance. Just before she enters the doctor's office for a checkup, she takes a few quick jaunts around the block, which seems to do the trick. What's the hearing test equivalent? And even if I *could* cheat, what would that get me?

There's no merit in trying to make your hearing do what it *simply can't*; even if you *were* successful in scamming your audiologist, which is highly unlikely, the result would be an inaccurate audiogram leading to inadequate technology recommendations. I get it that poor communication due to hearing loss causes far more stress than an hour in the hearing testing booth, and this is a crucial step towards better hearing and a better life.

But, dear audiologists, so many people feel anxiety before and during their hearing evaluations. What can you do to make us enter the booth in a calmer state? Perhaps a few words to remind us that this is a tool that will help you help us hear better. There's no win or lose, just *reality*. Remind us of the big picture of hearing loss – that hearing can change along the way, but hey! Technology is improving by the minute and *that* excitement is worth a few minutes of hearing testing.

Remind us that you're with us every step of the way, applauding our progress.