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Hooray for the Hearing Loss Nuts!

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Sometimes when I mention hearing loss to my family or friends, I hear something soft at the outer limits of my hearing that I'm sure is the sound of an inner groan.

"Oh no, here it comes again. The hearing loss thing."

It's not that my people don't care about my hearing challenges, or don't want to communicate with me. They have been doing it for years, mostly without complaint – although one friend will immediately repeat something she's said, to avoid hearing *pardon* one more time. But as accommodating as they are, I'm sure they wish that, just for once, I could go more than five minutes without working *hearing loss* into the conversation.

I can't help it – I love talking about it, whether it's mine, yours, or anyone and everyone in the whole wide world. My thoughts never stray too far or for too long from the topic. Hearing loss is my issue and its advocacy is how I earn a living and how I volunteer. With all this time invested, I've developed a special skill, which others may view as an irritating habit, at working the subject into almost any conversation. You name a topic – including the inevitable politics, weather, death and taxes – and I'll find the hearing loss angle.

For example, a friend mentions that she's finally getting a *feel* for the game of golf. I respond with my own golf-feeling story of when I was young and walking the course with my golfer parents. Suddenly, everyone hit the ground and before I could ask *why*, a golf ball slugged me in the back. I hadn't heard the FORE! but I sure felt it! (I had some serious words with my mother that night as she kept an ice pack on my spine.)

In a passionate discussion on the hockey game we'd gone to the night before. I added, "And what about that arena noise, eh? The roof almost blew off, and. I bet more than a few people left with ringing ears!" I can stop a political debate cold with, "You think *you're* paying a lot in taxes? Oh please, so you know what a hearing aid costs, not to mention all the batteries it chews up?"

Back to those inner groans. I've seen my Hearing Husband's eyes glaze over or roll completely back in his head when I bring up hearing loss yet again. Sometimes I resolve to bite my tongue no matter how well hearing loss fits into the current discussion about the lifespan of tarantulas. But it's tough – the words seem to form of their own free will. What am I supposed to do – clap my hand over my mouth? Fake a coughing fit? Should I duct-tape my mouth shut, trapping the words inside and endure the pain as they bang ferociously against my teeth, trying to spit out hearing loss, hearing loss, hearing loss?!

Nah. That wouldn't work and besides, why should I *not* talk about it? We need to talk *more* about hearing loss!

The population is getting older.
The world is getting louder.

Noise-induced hearing loss is booming.
Our collective hearing is under threat.
Hearing technology is exploding, but so are the prices.
And, there's a lot we can do about it.

Millions of Canadians live with a life-changing hearing loss that needs to be respected, addressed and supported. Let's talk more about it, remove the lingering stigma and make hearing health a standard part of our health care regime.

Encourage and help your clients to be more *out there* about their hearing loss. They can start with something simple (although not always easy) like telling others about their hearing loss. They can graduate to advocating at a town hall meeting for real-time captioning at public events, or writing a letter asking for better government support for hearing aids and cochlear implants. They can offer support to someone else coming to grips with their hearing loss by encouraging them to visit a hearing care professional, or attending a hearing loss support group, or connecting with an online social media hearing loss group.

Yes, it *is* that hearing loss thing again, so groan away, people! Call me a hearing loss nut if you like – sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me.

I, and people like me, am going to talk about hearing loss forever – or as long as there is someone who needs to hear our words.