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How Do We Explain Ourselves?

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People with hearing loss are unique. We occupy an awkward place in this world that spins on the sounds of people, nature, and machines that *most* other people can hear and understand. And it's not always easy to explain what it's like to be in that place.

We are set apart, defined—not by choice, not by faith, gender, color, political views or sexual persuasion—but by our inability to hear perfectly, or very well, or even *at all*. We don't communicate in the same way as *hearing people*.

Some of us embrace Deaf Culture. For some, our mild hearing loss is an irritant, a frustration to be endured. It cannot yet cured, but communication has been made *easier* with technology and other strategies, just as chronic pain may be helped with pain relievers and physical therapy. But whether mild, moderate or profound, hearing loss affects almost every area of our lives and we struggle to adapt.

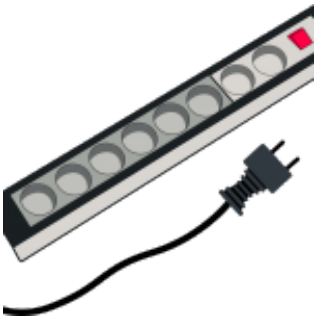
And sometimes we need to look at it, to describe it in a different way.

We Are Like the Filling in a Sloppily Made Sandwich



We keep falling out of the conversation. And a sandwich with no filling is just... *bread*. A conversation that keeps losing somebody is just as messy and incomplete. You can throw a bad sandwich in the garbage—which is what people with hearing loss sometimes feel like when sidelined in a group conversation.

We are a Human Power Bar



We're plugged in to hearing aids, cochlear implants, neckloops, remote controls. We draw power and understanding from magnetic fields, WiFi, Bluetooth, sound waves, FM. And this takes work—but hey, don't think we're not grateful! Especially if we can afford it—and as long as the batteries don't die, electrical outlets are always handy and we don't lose our charger cords. When these simple needs fail us, which at some point they always do, we've been known to throw hissy fits.

We Are the Night Watchman—On *Day* Duty

Every day, hour after hour, we are watching, our eyes trained on people's faces, looking for signage to fill in for the lips we can't see and words we don't understand. We look for captioning on TV, movies, anything. We are always on alert, visually drinking in actions of the sounds we

can’t understand clearly.

We Are the Human Echo Maker

“How are you? *What?* HOW ARE YOU?” We don’t like making echoes, but if we need to hear something a second (or third) time, we must ask. And you should repeat. Graciously, both of us.

Our Life is a Masked Ball



Can you tell by looking at us if we are getting what’s being said? You *think* you can, because we are smiling, nodding, perhaps throwing in the odd word or two. But are you sure this is the real us—and not just an invisible bluffing-mask that we wear any time we don’t have the nerve to admit we’re lost? Look closer. Ask.

We Don’t Hear Sounds When They Happen—Yet Hear Sounds That *Don’t*

This is the crazy-making stuff. If I’m not looking at my Hearing Husband when he clears his throat, I bite every time and say, *“Sorry, what?”* After 30 years, I haven’t figured out this throat thing yet? When we say *‘pardon’* to friends and family, we’re embarrassed when they reply, *“I didn’t say anything. It was the TV (or the cats or the fridge or whatever).”* Even worse is the dreaded response, *“I wasn’t speaking to you.”*

We are Stormy Weather



Inside our heads, thunder rolls, lightning flashes, electrical wires sizzle, gongs are gonged. This is tinnitus, known as Hell to those who have it badly. It may not show on our face, but it can change us. We avoid noise. We may be anxious or feel down. We don’t yet understand the reason for this bad brain-weather or, more importantly, why someone can’t make it stop. Umbrellas don’t work.

We Are Miracle Seekers

And we know miracles exist because we’ve seen the change in those who have received cochlear implants or new hearing aids. We have seen people straighten their spines when they meet and are rejuvenated by other people with hearing loss and empathetic hearing professionals. So miracles *can* happen and we are waiting for the next one to happen to us.

This is life with hearing loss, our constant companion.

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