

How I Hear It

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Congratulations to the Canadian Academy of Audiology on the publication of *Canadian Audiologist*! I'm honoured at being asked to offer a consumer voice in the editorial lineup.

In "The Way I Hear It," I'll be talking about hearing loss issues from the perspective of one who *has* it. While I don't dare claim to speak for every hard of hearing or deaf person, I *have* had a lifetime of hearing loss experience, with innumerable life hours spent in the client chair, and more than a few intolerable hours in the torture chamber/testing booth. My views on living with hearing loss and hearing health care may differ from those of other people, including your clients. But if anyone complains, you can just tell them to get their *own* column in a hearing health publication.

And, what *is* the way I hear it? If someone asks, "How good is your hearing?" I answer that, without technology, it's not so good.

If someone asks *how* do I hear, I can explain various communication strategies, including bilateral hearing aids, speechreading, print interpretation, and assertiveness in having my needs met. I can even give you a simple explanation of how a sound wave makes it from the air to my brain, rather like a 'hearing' version of Twister: *the sound wave knocks the ear drum, the ear drum rams the ossicles, the ossicles vibrates the whatever*, and so on. But if someone asks how assistive technology works, I'm stumped. I should just tell them the truth – *it's magic*.

Because I don't understand how hearing aids work. I'm baffled by the concepts behind FM and infrared and looping. I'm dumfounded by the new assistive-hearing apps such as Bluetooth and Wi-Fi. (Although I *may* be wrong the Wi-Fi; it just seems that my fellow consumer advocates have amazing hearing aids that can do anything, even pick up the Internet in the Free Wi-Fi zone at Tim Hortons.) But this ignorance is nothing new; I've never understood how I see the picture on television or how voices come out of the radio. My family wasn't particularly science oriented. If I'd asked my mom how a radio works, she would have given the same answer as humorist David Sedaris's mother, who snapped, "Just turn it on and pull out the damn antenna!"

But I really don't need all the technical details, because I've already got the big picture – it's *magic*, which is described as "the power of apparently influencing events by using mysterious forces." Perfect! To me, things with wires and digital coding are completely *mysterious*.

My job is to *find* the magicians – the ones who make the magic happen. That would be the audiologists, the hearing instrument specialists, and even other knowledgeable persons with hearing loss. Unseen forces bring me together with a professional who creates something out of nothing – hearing out of deafness. I am connected to a small, non-organic lump of plastic and metal bits which, with the flick of a switch, transforms into a powerful hearing aid and POW, KABAM – I CAN HEAR!

How magical is that?

If this were 1814, not 2014, my life with hearing loss would be very different. I might be considered unintelligent and inarticulate, relegated to a lonely existence in the corner by the fire, performing the most menial chores. But if I were lucky, my family might have progressive ideas about people with disabilities and they may even buy me one of those new metal ear trumpets – warning me not to use it outside during an electrical storm.

So, no matter what way I hear it, it's magic. People with hearing loss are grateful for the centuries of inquisitive minds that relentlessly research how hearing works and how to “treat” hearing loss with instrumentation. We are thankful for the visionaries who have created new methods of communication, for the advocates who stubbornly work to eliminate destructive attitudes towards deaf and hard of hearing people, and for hearing professionals who work magic with new generations of people with hearing loss.

The mysteries of hearing loss are not yet solved – there's a lot of magic yet to be discovered. Congratulations, CAA, on helping to push boundaries with the introduction of *Canadian Audiologist*.