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The Way I Hear It

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When The Travel People Get Hearing Loss Right!

A woman will put up with a lot to spend a few glorious days with her Besties at a cottage on a beautiful lake. For me, this meant taking two long flights and bracing myself for the inevitable communication barriers built into the travel-with-hearing-loss experience.

Being asked if I would like a wheelchair or a Braille card.

Airport announcements, unintelligible and hard on the ears.

Inflight announcements, also unintelligible, are often just updates on our flying altitude or weather at destination, neither of which I care about. But they could also be calls to strap in for turbulence – and *this* I care about, especially if I'm drinking hot coffee.

Yet, hallelujah, this trip didn't offer a single irritating, inaccessible moment, largely due to my following my own golden rule for getting communication access: *I ask for it*.

So instead of my usual complaints about lack of access, I'd like to acknowledge some *standout* travel and hospitality professionals who helped create a stress-free and joyous week.

The Brisk Flight Attendant Who Didn't Handle Me With Kid Gloves



I was the first person on the plane. (Why they often send me, the deaf girl, down the ramp ahead of people in wheelchairs and families with babies, I don't know… but I like it.) On board, I gave the flight attendant my usual pitch. *I have profound hearing loss, and I don't understand overhead announcements.* She asked briskly what I needed, such as a personal safety demonstration (I did not), confirmed her understanding of my needs, and sent me down the aisle. I felt heard and seen.

The Nervous Flight Attendant Who Didn't Forget About Me

Shortly before takeoff on this same flight, a young attendant stopped by. He started to talk to me, then stopped, looking at his hands as if he'd never seen them before and then tried talking again. Smiling, I stopped him, *I don't sign – I read lips and can hear you.* He was visibly relieved and asked again if I needed a safety demo. *No thank you.* During the flight, he came by to repeat an announcement about upcoming turbulence. My new favorite flight attendant!

The Restaurant Hostess Who Got It Mostly Right

Going out to dinner with my friend, her husband, and her 95-year-old mother, I asked for a quiet table because of hearing loss. I apparently wasn't quite clear, because once we were seated, the server faced my friend's mother, speaking intentionally and clearly but not exaggeratedly – in fact, just perfectly. I said, *I'm the one with hearing loss.*

The Deaf Uber Driver



I ordered an Uber to the airport for my flight home. As I waited, I noticed on the app that my ride's information, such as type of car, license, and driver's name, also included "Deaf". Perfect, that made two of us. Using occasional thumbs-ups to communicate, it was a smooth and quiet ride.

The Nice Guy At The Other End

The Hearing Husband was waiting in his usual spot, with his usual big smile and easy-to-understand deep voice. The perfect ending to a fabulous trip.

My Simple Steps to Communication Accessibility While Traveling

Share these with your patients!

1. I state my needs clearly, nicely, and without apology.
2. The staff person listens to me. Acknowledges my needs. Asks questions. Then, *provides what I need.*
3. I say thank you (even to the Hearing Husband).
4. The above steps may have to be repeated.