

## 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.