Canadian Audiologist
The Official Publication of the Canadian Academy of Audiology

The Way I Hear It

Published April 8th, 2026

Gael Hannan



When Hearing Loss Becomes a Way of Living

This week, I gave what has become an annual presentation to the first-year audiology students at UBC. Talking to future audiology professionals is one of my favorite things to do; it's my kick at the can for helping them distill a passion for a person-centered care approach with their future clients. (One of which could very well be me; it's happened before.)

This is my chance to explain that while we are grateful for our hearing aids and cochlear implants, technology is not the only fuel that drives our success in living with hearing loss.

It's a journey, with many components, barriers, opportunities, and small victories. It becomes a way of living…

When hearing loss enters our lives,

When it takes hold and grows roots,

It becomes more than a medical condition or disability.

It transforms into a way of living, of being.

Hearing loss is what we *have,* not by choice,

But because we are organic creatures, vulnerable to changes

So, we *have* it and *will* have it until the time when science breaks through

The walls of its mysteries.

Until then, this way of living influences our actions,

Our responses and our interactions

With other people and the world.

Every day, or every hour, or sometimes minute-to-minute

We act and react because of our hearing loss –

What to do, where to go, and what we ask for from other people.

That person mumbles, has a soft voice, avoids eye contact,

I won't go to that show, that restaurant, that party,

I can't do that job, this relationship

Because it's too hard. I'm tired of the energy I need to expend

In order to hear and understand.

Yet…

There should be no judgement on this way of living.

We were dealt this human condition, it is ours.

We can and must learn to handle our hearing loss

In as many ways as it affects us,

(Except, for now, how to get rid of it.)

We have the power to change and create

Listening environments that *work.*

We can revolutionize how we interact with other people – and they with us –

If we understand how to *lean in* to the rhythms of communication –

It’s a tango for two, a folk dance for many

When we assess and express.

We ask. They repeat and rephrase.

We move a chair, a seat, turn down the noise and turn up the light,

We speak face to face, eyeball to eyeball

We have tools, we have knowledge.

New technology. Behaviours and mindsets.

And we have people, those with hearing loss and those without,

Who walk with us because they want to talk with us.

This is the rhythm of hearing loss – it’s our way of living.