

# I Am Here... but I Cannot Hear

BY JILL BASKIND



The lights were dimmed, and the popcorn purchased. I was sitting at the Showroom Theater, a tiny neighborhood venue in Asbury Park, New Jersey. Surrounding me were six of my closest friends, excited for an afternoon off to indulge in a movie and lunch.

After the film, at the Brickwall Restaurant on Cookman Avenue, everyone chatted about the excellent show we had just seen, but I could only hear the clattering of dishes and little of the conversation.

I was aghast — I was not able to hear much of the dialogue in the movie just an hour before going to the Brickwall. I knew my hearing was in jeopardy, but this was the moment I knew I needed help. I made an appointment with an audiologist; just as I suspected, I needed hearing aids. I waited impatiently for the aids to arrive.

Before they arrived, I had the rare opportunity to have dinner with my two adult children and their spouses. This did not happen often, as my son lives on the west coast, and my daughter on the east. Although the food and wine were delicious, I returned home and sobbed most of the night.

I loved seeing Lee and Julia laugh and gossip with each other, catching up and giggling about old times. Or so I assumed. I could hardly hear what they were saying...only the piped in music, banging of dishes, and the muffled noise of patrons in the restaurant were clear. My heart truly ached with the isolation I felt.

I am now a few years past that night and the hearing aids are now in place and finally paid for. (Most people do not know that very few insurance plans pay for hearing aids.) My life has definitely improved but there are still so many challenges.

I live by the beach, but I rarely wear the aids there — wind, water and sand are not a good combination for hearing aids. I have a nice group of women who gather at the beach, but I need to place my beach chair strategically, and even then, a lot of the conversation is lost. Restaurants and other crowded spaces are a con-

stant struggle. Now I can hear those sitting close to me, but if they are across the table, I still must deal with the never-ending restaurant commotion — music, dishes, muffled conversations.

Last week, after months of COVID isolation, I attended a play at the Showroom — the same venue where the acknowledgement of my hearing issue started. And yes, it was much improved. But anytime the actors turned away from me to speak to another character across the stage, I was clueless and had to ask my friend what was said. Although she is a good friend, I could tell she was getting impatient with my questioning.

I think my hearing is getting worse and I hope the aids can be adjusted. My audiologist never mentioned that the aids do not last a lifetime. I suppose I must save up for a new pair. I am sincerely grateful for many things in my life, but I do wish I could be really present more often, not just sitting on the sidelines. **HL**

*Jill Baskind is a retired school teacher with two children and two granddaughters. She loves to knit, but please don't picture a dowdy grandmother in a rocking chair, knitting her life away! She was divorced at 58 years of age and that brought many new adventures. She has tried everything from karaoke to studying Buddhism. When she retired, she moved to the Jersey shore and is literally steps from the beach.*



*She is part of a wonderful musical group called "Jamily." They are a large group of mostly divorced women and men who have formed a community around the amazing music right next door in Asbury Park.*

*She loves New Orleans music especially, so she has a washboard and plays in a band called "The Hot Flashes." She loves reading and writing. She is in a book club, a film club, and she tutors children in Israel all via ZOOM, which became her best friend during the pandemic. She can be reached at jilly7266@gmail.com.*