

Hear & Beyond: Live Skillfully with Hearing Loss

BY CARRIE JOHNSON

I interviewed Shari Eberts and Gael Hannan about their new book, *Hear & Beyond: Live Skillfully with Hearing Loss*. The book is now available anywhere you buy books.

Shari and Gael's Hearing Journeys

Shari and Gael saw a need to develop a how-to-guide to help people live more skillfully with hearing loss. Shari first noticed her hearing loss in her mid-20s in graduate school, but her hearing loss journey began many years before as she watched her father struggle with his own hearing loss. Shari's role as a self-advocate turned into advocacy for the hearing loss community. She writes a weekly blog at LivingWithHearingLoss.com where she shares her tips and tricks for living her best life with hearing loss. During the pandemic, she co-executive produced the documentary *We Hear You, Now Hear Us* to raise awareness about the hearing loss experience. Shari also writes and blogs about person-centered care for the Ida Institute. Person-centered care is about taking the time to build a treatment plan that is catered to each person specifically. Shari is a member of the HLAA board of directors. She also serves on HLAA's Employment Task Force.

Gael was born with hearing loss, but it wasn't until she reached the adorable toddler stage that her mother, a nurse, realized that something was going on. At age 20, in a life-changing moment, she switched doctors and had a hearing aid within a month. Over the next two decades, her hearing worsened but hearing aids just got better. She had developed superb speechreading skills, as well as the bad habit of bluffing her way through challenging listening situations. Gael also had a lot of negative attitudes relating to her hearing loss — she didn't want to have it! At age 40, in one of the best moves she ever made, she reached out to other people with hearing loss for the first time. She

walked into a Canadian Hard of Hearing Association conference as one person and walked out another. Her negative attitudes faded away. She was stunned to learn that she was not alone. Gael writes articles and blog posts for HearingHealthMatters.org. Her first book was *The Way I Hear It* and now, she has a joyous partnership with Shari Eberts to create and co-author *Hear & Beyond*.

The "Big Picture"

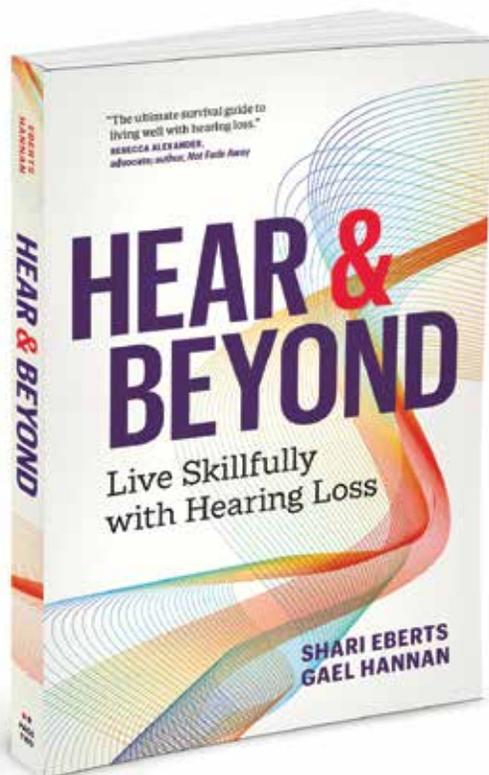
One of the reasons Shari and Gael and wrote the book is that few people are given the "big picture" of hearing loss by their hearing care professional. *What should I expect? How do I live my life well with this new challenge? Why do I have all these emotions? What do I need to do now?* Many hearing care professionals limit their focus to hearing aids. Hearing aids don't always work right out of the box — it can take time to adjust to them.

While each person's hearing loss journey is unique, most pass through a sequence of five stages which Shari and Gael lay out in the book. Getting the diagnosis is Stage 2. Yet, most people's journeys begin well before — an average of 7–10 years — as they wonder why communication has become so difficult, and debate with themselves about what to do or not do about it.

Shari and Gael encourage readers to partner with hearing care professionals who can provide this "big picture," although they might not use that exact term.

How Does One Communicate Better With Hearing Loss, Not Just Hear Better?

People with hearing loss may hear better with devices, but it is



unlikely they will ever hear “normally.” So, if hearing well or even better is their only goal, they may be disappointed. Once Shari and Gael shifted their focus to communicating better, these friends and co-authors immediately started living more successfully with their hearing loss. By focusing on an achievable goal — and one that is under their control — they were able to take the steps needed to stay engaged with the people and activities they love. And that is what matters most.

The Three-Legged Stool

Shari and Gael developed a trio of strategies that they compare to a three-legged stool that never wobbles, even on bumpy ground. Hearing aids cannot do it all, they are best supported with other tools.

When you read the book, you’ll learn more about: The first leg of the stool is attitude change, something Shari and Gael call MindShifts.

The second strategy is utilizing a full range of technology tools (traditional and nontraditional).

The third is an array of interpersonal, non-technical skills such as learning to advocate for yourself, using visual cues, not bluffing and Shari and Gael’s tool to transform any listening situation called HEAR. **HL**

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Learn more about the book, and Shari and Gael!

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Don't wait to take control of your hearing



Nearly 1 out of every 3 people over the age of 65 are affected by hearing loss.¹ Hearing aids help many people by making the sounds they hear louder. Unfortunately, as hearing loss progresses, sounds need to not only be made louder, they need to be made clearer. Hearing implants may help give you that clarity, even in noisy environments.²

References

1. Who.int. WHO | 10 facts of deafness [Internet: Cited 10 Jun 2019].

2. Hirschfelder A, Gräbel S, Olze H. The impact of cochlear implantation on quality of life: The role of audiologic performance and variables. *Head Neck Surg.* 2008 Mar;138(3): 357-362.

Please seek advice from your health professional about treatments for hearing loss. Outcomes may vary, and your health professional will advise you about the factors which could affect your outcome. Always read the instructions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information.

Views expressed are those of the individual. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear technology.

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