

'My Story'

Sharron Pridham

My name is Sharron Rachel Pridham. I was born with full hearing. I'm 31 now, and I started to lose my hearing when I was about 21. I have no hearing at all now and that's been since about 2005.

Diagnosis

I have a genetic condition called Neurofibromatosis Type 2. My whole family was diagnosed with NF2. That was in 1993, a very, very tough year for us. We learned a lot about neurofibromatosis. One of the main things is losing your hearing in a very short space of time. I knew that I was very likely to lose my hearing but at that time everything was fine. I was 17 when I was diagnosed and they wanted to operate, they wanted to take two tumours out very quickly, and I would have become totally deaf within the space of months which was something I just could not comprehend at all. I looked into other forms of treatment and I actually had radiotherapy. Unfortunately that was unsuccessful and the tumours carried on growing and gradually over the years I started losing hearing in one side. The tumours became quite large and I knew I needed surgery otherwise I was going to die. It was really that bad. I had one tumour removed and lost all the hearing on that side.

In 2005 my hearing seemed to really drop off. I really wasn't getting any use from my hearing aid at all. I took the hearing aid out and since then I've been totally deaf.

Family

It was very difficult for my husband Simon and I, because we'd been together a year, we were 16, 17, we were in love, everything hunky-dory, suddenly 'bang' I

got the diagnosis. In my head I'm thinking 'I know I'm likely to go deaf, not quite sure when but it will happen'. It was inevitable and we had a very difficult conversation and I said 'I love you and you love me and we want to get married one day but this is going to be a really difficult road for us'.

We married when I was 25. I think if we're honest we probably got married a year or two earlier than we would have because it was really important to me that I could hear on my wedding day.

Employment

I still work. I work in retail. I wanted to be a primary school teacher. I was in college when I was diagnosed, doing a foundation course, and I couldn't help it, I didn't want to be a deaf teacher. I know that's very narrow minded but I had an idealistic view growing up. I didn't have big plans. I didn't want to travel the world, be Prime Minister. I wanted to be a primary school teacher. I finished college, I didn't know what I wanted to do and temporarily went into retail 13 years ago. I worked my way up to management.

Social Life and Interests

I've made more friends now since I've become deaf and that's hearing people not all my friends are deaf. We've got a great friendship with our neighbours. Once people know that I'm deaf and they realise I haven't been ignoring them saying 'good morning' to me, it's fine, and I think it's easier to make friends with people who only know me as deaf. People I've lost are people who knew me as hearing. Even being as confident as I am now people are still quite reluctant to talk to me.

It takes work if I'm out with a group. That's always quite difficult. I can lipread up to 2 people. I can keep in a conversation like that but anybody else and I get taken out of it. If we go for a family meal or something I will always get Simon to sit opposite me and by watching what he says I will try my hardest to keep into a conversation.

That's easier, it works best. I know it's nothing like when I had hearing but it's nowhere near as isolating as it used to be.

Music was very emotive for me. I loved the film *Out of Africa*. I had that music at my wedding and that's a film I can't watch any more. I think music is one of the hardest things to have lost. It was only late last year that I got rid of all my CDs. Music became so distorted I couldn't enjoy it any more. But I couldn't touch the CDs. I didn't want to look at them. They sat in the cupboard collecting dust for the last four years but finally last year I did it, it was really hard. But I'm glad I did it. It was positive. It wasn't a negative thing. It wasn't about packing them away and getting rid of them. It was a positive thing that I was finally ready to deal with it and I've given them away to friends and charity shops. Simon has kept the ones he likes. Music's one of the hardest things.

Support

I found *Hearing Concern LINK* on the internet and I emailed 'I need help. I'm at the lowest ebb ever, how can you help me?' and somebody came back to me, 'really sorry to hear that and maybe you'd like to come to an intensive week?' It sounds really dramatic but it was the biggest turn around. That week changed so much for me. I left such a different person and I feel so strongly about *Hearing Concern LINK*. That's why Simon and I are now Outreach Volunteers. I'll do anything to support *Hearing Concern LINK*, they've changed so much for me.



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