

Grief, Coronavirus, And Hearing Loss

By Linda Bilodeau

November 2020

The call came in on a Thursday evening, shortly after my husband and I had finished dinner. My sister's son had died. He was 34 years old, married, and had a seven-month old baby. The news was surreal, and in my mind, not even possible. All I could do was wonder why.

The next day, I had to make travel arrangements to go north from my Southwest Florida home to my sister's home in Vermont. I knew the trip would be arduous. Covid 19 is everywhere. Navigating through an airport with hearing loss is never easy, but during this pandemic, you are required to wear a mask from the time you enter the airport until the time you exit at your destination. The struggle to hear began when I checked luggage. It was impossible to understand what the masked United Airlines agent was saying. Similar problems popped up with TSA agents and the walk through security. I've traveled enough to know what to do, yet, there is always an uneasy feeling when you can't hear.

Luckily, my husband was with me, filling in my hearing gaps. When we got to the gate, he told me when to join the boarding line. My coronavirus travel advice is this: if you have to fly, travel with someone who can hear. If that is not possible, then let the airline that you are flying on know you need hearing help. Most provide assistance from the time that you check luggage until you reach your destination.

When we arrived at my sister's home, there were hugs and more tears. I knew I would never get through helping with funeral arrangements if I failed to concentrate. My hearing tools, my mini mic, the settings on my made-for iPhone hearing aid app that allows me to lower background noise and control volume came in handy. I wanted to be there for my sister. Losing her eldest son was tearing her apart. I believe that order and routine are important during the initial phases of grief. In my opinion, the more you can right yourself against that shock of death, the smoother things will flow.

Technologically advanced hearing aids and implants are only part of the hearing picture. Most suffering from hearing loss have to concentrate to hear; being around relatives and friends while dealing with your own sadness is exhausting. I wanted to help my sister as much as possible, but sometimes, retreating to the quiet of the kitchen to load a dishwasher or to fix a meal was a relief.

Should you have the unfortunate experience of going through the death of a family member or friends during the pandemic, be ready. Have batteries, backup aids, chargers, peripheral devices, and anything that you need to hear. Being equipped will spare you from having to hunt for necessities in an unfamiliar town.

The days passed. My nephew's funeral was planned. According to the rules of the state where my sister lived, we had to have an outdoor private funeral and insure that everyone attending would socially distance and wear masks. Though we understood and believed in keeping attendees safe, it was another hurdle. Coronavirus adds to the burdens of our hearing lives, making it tough to move through the stages of grief.

The funeral was held on a lovely, sunny, and cool fall day. Maples and oak trees, dressed in reds and golds, formed a backdrop. We sang, prayed, and heard eulogies from my nephew's close friends. They remembered him as a wonderful and passionate young man, who was devoted to his young family. We took comfort from those words and from those who were able to attend.

There is no good or right way to deal with death. We have to decide for ourselves how to grieve. Yet, I cannot help but think that wearing your devices and having hearing tools on hand might make meandering through a sad time a bit easier.