

For Your Hearing Loves

By Linda Bilodeau

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Before meeting my husband, I was a woman with hearing loss, living alone. As a single gal, I had carved a life for myself, one that included family, friends, and a great job in hospital administration. Still, I couldn't stop believing that someone special would walk into my life. One day it happened. I met the man who would become my husband while I was interviewing him for an opening on my employer's medical staff. When we started dating seriously, I told him about my hearing loss, thinking he'd run away. He didn't. On our wedding day, he promised to always be there for me.

Through twenty-one years of marriage, my favorite man is sometimes surprised at how hearing loss impacts my life. He tells me I handle it bravely. When we're at a party, he stands with me, on the room's perimeter, knowing that my diving into a sea of noise creates a hearing nightmare. He helps me with challenging phone calls. He never blinked when I ask him to crank up our home alarm system loud enough to wake a person who has been dead for one hundred years.

He attributes our successful marriage to living our lives as if nothing is wrong. When we hit a hearing snag, we face it together, head on. He never admonishes me for flooding the bathroom because I no longer hear water running. He doesn't flinch when I overcook the pork roast because I didn't hear the oven timer buzz. He sweeps up confusion when I miss a delivery because the doorbell chime isn't loud enough. We've had countless parallel conversations. When he queries me about what we're eating for dinner, I might say I made a raspberry pie because all I heard was something about food. When he asks if I'm ready to go out, my response might be that I'm wearing my red dress. Instead of moans and groans, he repeats, patiently, and while facing me.

Hearing spouses and significant others are not saints. My husband and I have had our share of arguments. One day, my sweet man created a flower bed for me as a surprise. (Spoiler alert: surprising a spouse or significant other who can't hear will lead to misunderstandings!) When he told me the flower bed was hoed, planted, and watered, I should have thrown my arms around him, except I was getting out of the shower, sans hearing aids, and I misunderstood what he said, believing he expected me to plant everything. Without verifying facts, I blew up and attacked his non-gift. Sweaty, hot and tired, he was not happy with me.

A while back I asked him what his biggest problem was in dealing with my hearing loss. Intimacy, he said. He discovered on our honeymoon that there was little point in speaking

romantically when I'm without my aids. Saying, I love you, louder than Romeo ever dreamed takes the luster out of his words.

Recently, my word recognition scores declined, and when I brought home the bad news, I asked my husband if he was sorry he married me. "Nah," he said. "I married you as is, and I wouldn't trade you in, now or ever."

In this difficult time of dealing with coronavirus, when we are hunting for food and household cleaning products and finding empty shelves, when phone conversations are replacing meetings, creating tough hearing situations, it's nice to know that my reliable guy is beside me. We've held hands through the perils of my hearing loss, and we'll continue being there for each other during our nation's emergency and always.