



THE BETTER HEARING CONSUMER

The Better Hearing Consumer addresses the personal experience of living with hearing loss. Editor Gael Hannan, and her occasional guest bloggers, explore every corner of the hearing loss life with humor and poignancy.



Gael Hannan
Editor

I'm pleased to welcome Ed McGee as my guest writer this week, who shares his story of coming through Ménière's, hearing loss and a curtailed lifestyle, to a new world of hearing and activity.

Dancing, Again, to the Melody of Life

By [Gael Hannan](#) On September 12, 2017

I remember my first episode with vertigo in 1977. I had developed Ménière's disease, a disorder of the inner ear that causes vertigo, and with each episode more and more hearing loss occurred in my right ear. While irritating, I was able to get by with my good, left ear for several decades.



In 2012, I started experiencing feelings of vertigo again, and this time it affected my left ear. By the end of 2014, the hearing aids I tried became more of an annoyance than a solution. They amplified sound, but I increasingly lost the ability to pull those sounds apart and make sense of them. I began dreading all social situations. A runner most of my life, I loved to stay active through a variety of sports and activities – tennis, pickle ball, basketball, cribbage and, my favorite, ballroom dancing. However, as my confidence deteriorated, I began withdrawing from these activities, including singing in the choir. I felt embarrassed attempting simple tasks, like talking on the phone, because I had to keep asking people to repeat themselves. Eventually, I would just fake it and pretend I could hear rather than aggravate the person on the other end of the line.

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The social impact of my hearing loss was enormous. I had long enjoyed a wide variety of activities dependent on sound: movies, theater, concerts, teaching Sunday school and the pleasure of interacting with friends and family. I retreated from these activities simply because I could not understand. The phone, for example, long an instrument of great usefulness, turned into an object of fear. And I painfully remember one Thanksgiving when my sweet, lively, mischievous granddaughter tried to tell me knock-knock jokes with a huge grin on her face. I could not for the life of me understand her questions. My family had a hearty laugh at my confusion, but even as I smiled at their enjoyment, I was deeply embarrassed, unnerved and frankly depressed. I backed away from what had once nourished and enriched my life.

One of the hardest parts of my hearing struggle was when I was participating in and teaching ballroom dancing. Looking for companionship in my mid-40s, I started ballroom dancing. I took some lessons and was instantly hooked. I love a variety of swing dancing, the tango and, my personal favorite, the Carolina Shag, a dance that originated on the coast and is primarily done to beach music.

While working as a history professor at Belmont Abbey College, just south of Charlotte, North Carolina, I convinced the college dean to let me offer ballroom dance classes to students. I taught for 20 years only hearing out of my left ear. But, over time, not being able to hear the music and beat made it very difficult, and my partner would have to do all the counting for me.

Things changed for me when I was introduced to Dr. Scott Greene at ENT Associates in Pinellas County, Florida, and he recommended cochlear implants. In January 2016, I had my first cochlear implant surgery on my left ear, and my right ear followed suit one year later. After my first cochlear implant, I immediately experienced restored sound in small things such as the sound of my clothes as I dressed in the morning, my footsteps as I walked about the house, birds chirping and the wind rustling through the trees. With my second cochlear implant, my hearing seemed to expand to the quality of surround sound.

Each time one of my implants was activated, a broad smile consumed my face as my life lit up. Tears came to my eyes, and when I met the eyes of my lady friend gripping my hand, I saw she was smiling back with tears in her eyes too!

On my way home, I heard music from the car radio with a clarity that allowed me to understand words, a first. My cellphone became an object of great utility once again. I call all of my children for extended conversations, and I speak to my still mischievous granddaughter with ease, which can be a challenge in the best of circumstances as she's a rapid speaker.

Now that I'm a bilateral cochlear implant recipient, ballroom dancing is a heck of a lot easier being able to hear the beat. I can hear the words in songs again and hear the melodies. It's been such a transformation. I always listen to music now when I work out. I stream songs from my iPod through the Cochlear Wireless Mini Microphone, and the music is so clear. Today, I wear the Kanso sound processors on both sides.



I love how they sit off my ear, discretely blending into my hair, and are simple to use. It also supports my active lifestyle, allowing me to play all my beloved sports and participate in my favorite activities with ease.

Before my cochlear implants, I looked to a dark future of withdrawal. Now the future beckons me to more. I am a renewed man enjoying my life again.



Ed McGee, 75, is a [Cochlear implant recipient](#) who lives in Florida.

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