

Caitlin Connors' Love for One Helps Many

By KATIE FULLER, EXECUTIVE & DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE

A Series on Families Living With Tinnitus

We often have little influence on a loved one's chronic condition. However, we can learn about the issues, remain supportive and take care of our own well-being. For some, working to enhance treatments, find cures and raise awareness are ways to cope and create hope. This is certainly true of the tinnitus community.

This is the second story in our series on families made up of members with and without tinnitus. The series explores their experiences, the feelings that penetrate their lives and the frustrations they face. It also illuminates some of the solutions that diminish their stress and allow them to settle into a "new normal."



Many people with tinnitus remember just how and when it began and how the onset of those uninvited sounds became ingrained in the very fabric of their lives. This is certainly true for Caitlin Connors' aunt [who wishes to remain anonymous].

During a weekend trip to Miami, Fla., in February 2006, Caitlin's aunt experienced a screeching fire alarm going off in her hotel. As a result, she acquired tinnitus and sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSHL), losing 70 percent of her hearing up to 4,000 kHz. Caitlin says of the incident, "We try not to talk about it ... but her anger about what happened is always there."

One alarm alters a woman's life

After that fateful trip, almost everything in Caitlin's aunt's life changed. With communication being a significant part of her job, her Wall Street career became even more stressful. She started traveling less and no longer enjoyed happy hour with friends after work; being in noisy restaurants and bars was unbearable. Her relationships began to suffer as she realized who supported and understood her challenges and who did not.

Caitlin's journey

Through all of this, Caitlin stood by her aunt, learning about the tinnitus and supporting her efforts to find ways to manage her condition. In November 2007, Caitlin reached out to the American Tinnitus Association to see how she could help our mission of curing tinnitus through supporting tinnitus research.

Caitlin had begun training for the 2008 *Philadelphia Independence Triathlon* and wanted to dedicate her race to her aunt, while fundraising and donating the proceeds to ATA. Her athletic effort raised over \$5,000!

How families can help

Watching her aunt struggle has been extremely difficult for Caitlin and her family. While searching for information to help them understand what Caitlin's aunt was going through, they found ways that helped them cope. "We talked to each other about my aunt," says Caitlin, "to solidify our feelings about the situation and to talk through the pain we all felt in watching her [endure] the demons that came along with these [disorders]."



“Take this time to reassess your life and perhaps try something new, whether a hobby, like gardening, or a path [in life]. Whatever brings you peace and reprieve.”

~ Caitlin Connors



Caitlin suggests important ways to help someone you care about who has tinnitus:

- Learn as much as possible about the condition and be open to new solutions.
- Share your findings and encourage your loved one to try out-of-the-ordinary things, like acupuncture or essential oils.
- Encourage them to look within their own life to see what changes they can make to lessen their tinnitus. Is this a signal that they need to make lifestyle changes? Maybe it's their diet; problems with their professional or personal relationships; or dissatisfaction with their job or own self.

“Be patient, understanding and supportive,” says Caitlin. “Despite what they think they need, they need these support mechanisms most.”

Caitlin believes this is a time of opportunity for her and her family. “Take this time to reassess your life and perhaps try something new, whether a hobby, like gardening, or a path [in life],” she suggests. “Whatever brings you peace and reprieve.”

Families Matter

Being part of a family can be wonderful, energizing and to say the least, entertaining. We enjoy, debate, hurt, encourage and applaud each other. Sometimes we hold our loved ones to a higher standard than we hold our friends, criticizing and scolding when understanding would be more helpful. But no matter what, there is the instinct to protect one another and “fix” any emotional and physical ills overwhelming the people we love.

Why Caitlin supports ATA

Caitlin sees ATA as a network and focal point for those looking to connect with others affected by tinnitus, as well as a tool to stay up to date on the latest in technology, tips, advice and medical advances. She views ATA as a support group of those who are there to help in whatever way they can. Caitlin and her aunt believe that tinnitus research is on the right track and that hopefully, someday soon, the medical community will be able to stop the debilitating sounds of tinnitus. ☺☺

Turn your old hearing aids into an ATA donation!

P.O. Box 5, Portland OR, 97207-0005

Send hearing aids you no longer use to ATA. We send them to Starkey's *Hear Now*, a hearing aid recycling program. They assess their value and write ATA a check for the salvage amount. For more information on this and other creative ways to give to ATA, please visit www.ata.org or call (800) 634-8978. All donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.