

The Gift of Tinnitus

by Michael Potter M.L.S. L.A.D.C.

My tinnitus came about after repeated exposure to loud noise while playing Wallyball, a game in an enclosed racquetball court. The noise sounded like a gunshot going off near my right ear each time I hit the ball. I had no idea that this sound was damaging my hearing until it was too late. I was very upset at the time since, ironically, I was trying to increase my physical activity to *reduce* stress and get in better shape. Now that I had constant ringing in my ear, I had even more stress than before.

It was very easy then to feel sorry for myself and get depressed about the whole thing. But I decided that it was not acceptable to me to be depressed and feel despondent, and I reached out for help. I contacted the ATA, receiving very helpful literature and resources, and found a support person to talk with over the phone who also has tinnitus. He provided great support in our talks together. Very quickly I learned that the first thing to do was let go of my fear about the tinnitus so that I could relax and deal with it more constructively. I also realized that I had become clinically depressed from the condition, so I sought professional help. I was prescribed Remeron to relieve the symptoms of depression (lack of sleep, loss of appetite, difficulty letting go of negative thoughts, loss of interest in things that used to interest me). I also got psychological counseling to help me stop focusing on the negative aspects of the condition.

I've learned to see tinnitus as more neutral than negative, and now even more positive than neutral. How can this be? I now realize that my tinnitus is like a stress meter in my head. When my stress is too high, my tinnitus is loud. It becomes a reminder that I need to slow down, breathe, and relax. It is a reminder that I need to take better care of myself and not push myself so hard.

My tinnitus does not bother me when I am fully engaged in positive activities, helping or talking with others, reading a good book, exercising, or being fully present in my life. It does tend to bother me when I am sitting around worrying about it and feeling sorry for myself. It gets louder when I spend time thinking how unfortunate it was for this to happen to me — me of all people, how unfair it seems to be, how my life will never be the same again, and so on. I barely

hear the sound when I am full of gratitude for being alive, when my heart is full of love for myself and others, and when I am thankful for all the many blessings I do have.

My tinnitus is now a guide that reminds me to take care of myself and focus on the truly important things in life. I have a choice: I can sit and let my worries and depressive thoughts about tinnitus consume and degrade my experience of life, or I can use its constant reminder to focus on truly living and making the most of my life. Hands down, I choose to truly live.

If you think that this is a bunch of fluffy positive baloney, I understand. But I'll tell you, it concerns the crucial choices that people face every day, including people with chronic pain, chronic disabilities, chronic addictions, or terminal diseases. The truth is that every one of us will face death some day and many will face infirmity as we age. We can choose, however, how we will respond to these facts of our existence. We can accept that which we are powerless over and find peace and serenity.

To me, attitude makes all the difference in dealing successfully with tinnitus no matter how severe it is. We can look at tinnitus as detrimental to our lives, or we can look at it as neutral. Or, if we dare, we can look at it as a "gift," as a positive opportunity for spiritual or personal growth. We can look at tinnitus as a constant reminder that we are mortal and alive, that we can be grateful for our lives, that we can take better care of ourselves to reduce stress and create greater health in ourselves, and that we can reach out to others who are struggling with this condition and give them help and hope. We can listen to the sound of tinnitus as being the energy of life itself, and use this energy to make the most of this day — the only day we ever have. ☒

