

Hearing loss nothing to be ashamed; it's just a part of life

Senior Beat
Carol Higgins Taylor



Hearing is a funny thing. Late at night, I can hear the floor boards creak under the cat's paws from three rooms away. Wires hitting the house in the wind can jump me out of my chair.

But, I can still remember my mother predicting that my hearing could be in danger if I didn't turn down the music, that I could only enjoy at high decibels as a teen. Turns out she was right. Partially anyway. I find myself saying "what?" more often, especially in a crowded room with lots of background noise. I always assumed everyone was mumbling but perhaps not.

According to the National Institute on Aging, (NIA) one of the most common causes for hearing loss is loud noises. Music qualifies as does lawn mowing, snow blowing and a host of other activities. But, there are other reasons for hearing loss, including some medical problems such as strokes, heart conditions, ear wax build-up or even certain medications. Whether hearing loss is slight or severe, it can have serious ramifications to a person's quality of life and safety, such as withdrawing from social interactions or being unable to hear a smoke alarm.

I have senior friends who wouldn't be caught dead in a hearing aid. But the newer models are all but invisible, really, and a hearing aid is no different than glasses. It's just a tool to improve our quality of life.

NIA website recommends seeing a healthcare provider if you are experiencing the following symptoms:

- Having trouble hearing over the telephone

- Finding it hard to follow conversations when more than one person is talking
- Frequently asking people to repeat themselves
- Turning up the TV volume so loud that others complain
- Having problems hearing because of background noise
- Thinking that others seem to mumble (uh-oh)
- Difficulty understanding voices in the higher register like women's or children's. To all my male readers, this is not an excuse to ignore your wives.

NIA offers tips to help you compensate for hearing loss, and while admitting it may be difficult, it is better than missing out. So let people know that you have trouble hearing and ask them to face you when speaking, to speak slowly and clearly, and please no shouting, as it doesn't help. It does help to pay close attention, not just to the words being spoken, but to facial expressions and gestures, as well.

If you know someone with hearing problems, there are some things you can do to make their life easier. NIA has tips to help make the person more comfortable and included:

- In a group, include people with hearing loss in the conversation.
- Find a quiet place to talk to help reduce background noise, especially in restaurants and at social gatherings.
- Speak at a reasonable speed.
- Do not hide your mouth, eat, or chew gum while speaking.
- Repeat yourself if necessary, using different words.
- Try to make sure only one person talks at a time.
- Be patient. Stay positive and relaxed.
- Ask how you can help.

There are also assistive devices on the market that can compensate for hearing loss. For example, alert systems such as lights or vibrations work with doorbells, smoke detectors, and alarm clocks.

A flashing light may alert you that the doorbell is ringing. Your alarm clock could have a vibration setting that, if put under your pillow, would awaken you at the appointed hour. Some people rely on the vibration setting on their cell phones to alert them to calls.

We've all seen the commercials touting devices that allow you to watch TV and listen to the radio without needing to turn up the volume, thus irritating those around you. Some of them actually work well so it is worth investigating.

For more information, search hearing loss at www.nia.nih.gov. And call your doctor for an evaluation if you're having troubling hearing everything you should. Don't suffer in silence.

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Bangor Ballet artistic director stepping down

Bangor Ballet announced that Ivy Clear-Forrest will retire as artistic director after performances of "The Sleeping Beauty," set for 7 p.m. Saturday, April 9, at the Bucksport Performing Arts Center and 4 p.m. Sunday, April 10, at the Gracie Theatre in Bangor.

Forrest began her career at New York City Ballet under the legendary George Balanchine and was a principal dancer with the Joffrey Ballet under founder Robert Joffrey. She has served as Bangor Ballet's artistic director and choreographer since the company's founding in 1994. Although stepping down as artistic director, Forrest will continue to coach members of the company, and will teach classical ballet at Thomas School of Dance, the company's official training school.

A master teacher, Forrest has provided opportunities for local dancers to perform in some of the great classics of the 19th century, including "Swan Lake," "Les Sylphides" and "Coppelia." "The Sleeping Beauty," her final produc-

tion as artistic director, features both traditional and original choreography. In addition to staging the classics, Forrest has choreographed original ballets for Bangor Ballet, including "Alice in Wonderland," "Cinderella," "New York Concerto," "Porgy and Bess Suite," "Salute to the Troops" and others. In 2012 she staged "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," which featured choreography by Nell Shipman of Portland Ballet and live music by the Bangor Symphony Orchestra. Forrest's "Nutcracker in a Nutshell" from 2013 has become a holiday favorite.

Although stepping down as artistic director, Forrest will contribute a piece of Balanchine-inspired choreography to the final production of this season. For information, visit bangorballet.com.

Solar Energy workshop set for April 8 in Bangor

Representatives from Re-Vision Energy and Pika Energy will host a workshop on new and changing solar options in Maine at 5:30 p.m. Friday, April 8, at Coespace,

48 Columbia St.

The focus of the workshop will be current and forthcoming solar energy options, including growing options for battery storage. Guests will have the opportunity to learn how solar electric systems, especially when paired with heat pump technology for space heating and water heating, are a cost-effective way to reduce fuel usage. Current system pricing, financial incentives and loan programs, and community solar farm options in Maine also will be discussed.

ReVision Energy, with locations in Liberty and Portland, and in New Hampshire, has installed more than 5,000 residential and commercial solar energy systems across New England; Pika Energy, based in Westbrook, is a manufacturer of direct current power electronics, including high-efficiency inverters and charge controllers, small wind turbines, and solar optimizers.

Guests are encouraged to ask questions and bring electric bills, and will have the opportunity to sign up for a free solar site evaluation. The event is free and open to all. For information, call 589-4171.

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