

After 35 years of struggle, Caroline finds a solution

“I was always told there wasn’t anything suitable for my condition”

Caroline Gooder runs a successful fine wine company with her father and was diagnosed as profoundly deaf in her left ear and partially deaf in the right when she was two years old.

She never saw deafness as a disability and always fought to get the best out of life through enthusiasm and determination. "Deafness is part of my life," she told Hearing Matters. Though I struggled to hear all these years, I always accepted there was nothing that could be done and got on with my life."

She was never advised to get a hearing aid after being told by the doctors "there wasn't anything suitable for your condition". Caroline, now 37, spent her childhood struggling to hear the teachers at school and later on, straining to hear colleagues and friends when they were in pubs, restaurants or clubs.

"You'd miss sounds like the door bell going, the phone ringing or simple things like beeping noises. You don't hear cars on the road and have to really look so you don't get run over. "People say "did you hear that?" ..."no". You become a nodding dog hoping that at some point you'll pick up the gist of the conversation and understand what everyone is talking about," says Caroline.

"My boyfriend said I would shout out randomly "he said what?" or "did they?" It's clearly a subconscious thing as I always mishear what people say and I try and pick up the conversation with random questions. He'll reply "I was talking about how I need to do more exercise "or" what time we need to leave". Nothing to do with he or they," she continued.

After a strong cold last year, Miss Gooder asked her doctor for another hearing test, as she hadn't had one for ten years. Her big surprise came when the GP seemed to be reluctant in recommending a hearing test only because Caroline had been told before she can't have an aid.

"What's the point in getting a test then?" said the doctor, leaving Caroline even more upset and disappointed. Since then, she has finally been referred and had a hearing test, to find out that she could get a hearing aid after all and the same could have been done for her years ago.

Caroline recalls her experience after being fitted with the NHS aids."It was a great carbuncle piece of kit, impossible to fit without horrendous whistling. I walked out of the hospital and everything was LOUD, the slightest noise was deafening, plates taken out of the cupboard onto worktops sounded I crashed them onto the units. The TV gave me a headache, the sound was all distorted. I didn't want something that stuck out so much; it made me feel like I had a disability. I lasted about a week with it and threw it in the kitchen drawer."

One day Caroline met a friend of her boyfriend that wore hearing aids in both ears. "His aids were fab, directly in the ear, no wires and he said his life felt so enhanced by

it. I told him about my experiences and he said I had to visit Cubex - they had really helped him and his father before that."

Having had such negative experiences with the NHS, her first appointment at Cubex was quite an emotional one. "I'd gone there expecting nothing and came out assured that Cubex could help me improve my hearing. First thing I would say about Cubex is how you are made to feel so welcome and at ease. Since birth, I have been living my life without hearing aids and to start now was a big step.

Adam Shulberg, one of the hearing aid audiologists at Cubex, spent a lot of time explaining how technology had moved on and could make a significant difference to my life. He did a series of tests, including a simulator which can mimic my hearing loss to other people. He played a CD of classical music and my boyfriend was amazed that I couldn't hear the percussion. Adam developed a personal hearing care plan based on my lifestyle and discussed their rehabilitation programme. He gave me so much hope and confidence! I burst into tears!"

Caroline could hear the difference minutes after being fitted with the new hearing system: "It was amazing! As we left Cavendish Street, Mum and I walked along Oxford Street and I could hear people chattering at the side; I could hear more road noises, I walked purposely on my mother's right and I could hear her chatting.

That first week was a revelation; I was picking up so much more, hearing so many things, my brain had to work overtime and I would take them out at night for a rest. Two weeks later I was wearing them all the time and loving them and I still do!

It feels like everything is new, friends have said that I no longer strain forward to hear them, my brother said I looked more relaxed and my boyfriend says he's relieved he doesn't have to repeat himself.

I have started to learn French, it's something I have always wanted to do but have struggled with as I've not been able to hear the nuances in the words and sentences. I can drive the car without my passenger fearing for their life and chat to them keeping my eyes on the road! I can now enjoy my life to the full!"