



ITINERANT SUPPORT SERVICE PRESENTS

AMPLIFIED

is a collaborative short story project, proudly put together with our clients at SADeaf Itinerant Support Service. It celebrates their success, their determination, their grit, amplifying to the world that despite their hearing loss, they can and they did.

Join us in celebrating their life journey.



NOT FOR SALE

AMPLIFIED



A short story project on the experiences of
children with hearing loss

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Featuring

Luah Shi Yu Samuel

Mirza Zuhair Ahmad

Zoe Yong

Tan Jun Hao Reeve

Lin Jia Jian Jaxier

Lin Jia Jun Justin

Soh Ying En Regina

Thirumuru Krishna Hriday Reddy

Muhammad Fazil

Wong Yu Han

TEAM AMPLIFIED

Editors

Satyawathi Yadav

Yamunna Mahendran

Layout Designer

Joan Peh

Special Mention

Lynn Chew

Alvan Yap

With much appreciation to our colleagues, clients, parents and stakeholders at SDeaf & Itinerant Support Service who made this project come true

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Foreword

Alvan Yap

Deputy Director
The Singapore Association for the Deaf

Reading these stories is like taking a walk down memory lane. I am deaf myself, having been diagnosed at age eight with moderate hearing loss (now at the severe-profound stage).

Hence, I can relate to the confusion, sadness and sense of isolation as a child and teenager who was mainstreamed throughout my schooling years. I struggled to fit in. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, there was no dedicated staff, little funding and quite crappy technology, to be honest.

It makes me very happy to know we now have greater support and services for students with hearing loss. We have access to cochlear implants, (very powerful) hearing aids, FM systems, and other high-tech devices. And just as importantly, there is greater awareness, understanding and acceptance amongst teachers and peers and even within the larger society.

For me, what has made the biggest difference is something else. It is in how I have come to view my deafness – not as a medical condition nor as a condition to be ashamed of. Instead I now regard my deafness as part of my identity, just like how I think of the colour of my eyes and skin and Chinese heritage as a part of 'me.'

We are all different in our own ways. And being different is natural and part of the diversity of life. But here, we are the same in many ways because we share many similar experiences in life as persons who are deaf, who have hearing loss, who are hard of hearing – or whatever your preferred term is! All of them are ok.

Some of you may wonder: How do I cope? How do I communicate, interact socially and understand others? Well, I use whatever method works – for me. I wear (very, very powerful) hearing aids, I use my voice (though my pronunciation is still terrible at times), and I have learnt and love to use sign language (with those who know sign). I also use technology such as messaging and speech-to-text apps, and I simply love to watch captioned TV and theatre shows.

All these do not mean my problems - and which are probably also your problems - are totally resolved. We will still face challenges and difficulties because of our deafness. That's life. But we also know - phew! - we will have support and help from others.

And, here, I will repeat the secret to dealing with it all: You, me, all of us have to first fully accept ourselves for who we are.



I can “hear”

by Samuel

I liked to hum the melody of the songs I love, especially when my Kindergarten teacher was teaching. It made me happy. I could hear the sound of handbells, I could hear the sound of the piano, I love music lessons. I liked my school, my teachers and my friends. I could hear them, but it was very difficult to know what they were saying. Their words sounded blurry and weird that I wasn't able to reply. It was like trying to piece a puzzle with so many missing pieces.

I thought that everyone was hearing the way I was.

After my Kindergarten lessons, I would go for my speech therapy and also to the early intervention center where I learnt to read in a much quieter environment. I could read well but most of the time, I didn't know what I was reading. If you asked me questions, I didn't know what to answer.

My preschool years went by happily albeit exhausting with back-to-back classes. I was excited to be promoted to Primary One just like my peers.

During my Primary One orientation, I was overwhelmed to find sounds spinning around me to a much greater extent as compared to that at my Kindergarten. It was much harder to figure out what people were talking about and who was talking. Most of the time, I could not catch the words spoken as they seemed to be swallowed by the noises around. I also had to start all over again to match my new teachers' and new classmates' voices to their faces.

Two weeks later, I got my FM System. Suddenly, the teacher's voice amplified into my hearing ear. It was like having a spotlight shining onto her. I told my mother that it was the first time that I could hear my teachers so clearly in class without having them speak near my hearing ear.

Before I knew it, my parents brought me to a new ENT clinic where I played some listening games with an Audiologist. After that, the Audiologist told us that I can wear a BAHA behind my quiet ear. "What is a BAHA?" I thought to myself.

Finally, on 8 March 2019, my quiet ear woke up after a long deep sleep. It felt magical. I wore my BAHA for the first time. A BAHA is a bone anchored hearing aid. I use a special headband to wear my BAHA behind my quiet ear

and it is very easy. I started to realise that there are many new sounds around me. I couldn't help but keep asking, "What sound is that?"

Me: "What sound is that?"

Mother: "That's the sound of a car that just drove past."

Me: "What sound is that?"

Mother: "That's the sound of an insect."

Me: "What sound is that?"

Mother: "That's the sound of..."

This went on for months. Although a lot of background sounds became more familiar to me, it remains difficult to hear the announcements broadcasted in school and shopping malls. I still do need to check where new sounds come from even though I have my BAHA on. However, I am always ready to learn and find out about the new sounds that I hear and their source.

In addition to having the FM System for my hearing ear, the FM System can also be connected to my BAHA.

With access to bilateral hearing via the FM System, my teacher sounds even clearer in class now. By connecting the FM system and BAHA to the laptop, it feels good to be able to listen to the words from videos and cartoons as

well as the lyrics from songs clearly. Hence, I don't need to hum songs in class anymore. I enjoy a lot more of what I am learning in class.

With bilateral hearing, I also started to hear more words in sentences and understand better what they mean. I also hear peoples' conversations and questions more clearly, especially in quieter environments. I still remember the surprised look on my parents' faces when I commented on something that they were discussing in a supermarket! It was such an achievement to be able to hear them and contribute.

Two-and-a-half years have flown by, I am now in Primary 3. I can do a lot more after having my BAHA for my quiet ear and a FM System in school. I continue to pick up as much as I can. I wish that I had my hearing aids much earlier but I'm glad that I have them now. With them, I find it easier to focus in order to learn more in school and chat with my family, teachers and friends.

I want to hear clearly, with understanding, with both ears, just like everyone else.

Samuel Luah Shi Yu

August 2021

Unilateral Moderately-Severe Hearing Loss



My Life as a Deaf Child

by Zuhair

This is a sad life story.

I was diagnosed with hearing loss when I was in Primary 3. It happened in school when I was playing with my friends. When they spoke to me, I kept going "huh" to them all the time, so they spoke to me on my left. It was a difficult time for me to study, because I could not hear nor understand my teacher clearly.

One day when I was at home, my sister and I were playing. My sister whispered into my right ear but I couldn't hear anything. It was then that I told her to speak into my left ear. While my mother was cooking in the kitchen she saw what I had done. She was frightened and made an appointment for me to see the doctor.

Once the doctor had run all the tests on my ear, he found out that I had hearing loss. After the test the doctor informed my mother that I had hearing loss in one ear, but to improve my hearing he suggested that I get hearing aids for both ears.

The cost of getting the hearing aids was \$1000. When my mother heard the cost of the hearing aids, she was worried, she wondered how we were going to afford it. My mother wanted to get me hearing aids because she wanted me to be able to hear better. After saving up for a year, she managed to get me the hearing aids.

I was so excited to see how the hearing aids would help me and I thought that I could hear anything and everything. At the hospital, when they put on the hearing aids for me, I was able to hear everything, but it was so loud, I didn't know how to make it softer. The doctor taught me how to use the hearing aids and how to clean them. I was so happy, because I could finally hear my mother saying "Hello" to me. I have now stopped saying 'Huh' to people when they talk to me. After getting my hearing aids my life became as easy as ABC.

That year I finally passed my Primary 4 English exams because of the help of my teacher. She was kind and patient with me and taught me everything I had missed because of not being able to hear before getting my hearing aids. She is always happy and pleased when she sees me.

I have a better life now.

Mirza Zuhair Ahmad

August 2021

Bilateral Severe to Profound Hearing Loss



My World, My Frustration

by Zoe

My name is Zoe Yong. This is how I got this hearing aid.

Once upon a time, when I was two years old, I started wearing my hearing aid because I have a hearing need. Then three years ago, people kept asking me questions like, “What is that?”, “What is it like to wear that?”, “Can you hear me?”. Even teachers and staff kept asking me and I felt frustrated until I got used to it. The following year, I couldn't choose the school but I entered Primary School with three other classmates from kindergarten. The same thing happened and people kept asking me the same question over and over again. I was very frustrated.

Now, two years later, everyone in the school knows what it is.

Zoe Yong

August 2022

Bilateral Mild to Moderate Hearing Loss



My FM Mic

by Reeve

My name is Reeve Tan, the President of the Deaf Student Committee in my Secondary School. I have right sided hearing loss. This is my story.

When I was in Primary school, and first presented with the FM Roger Focus, I was worried yet at the same time excited. How was I going to keep my FM system safe and fully charged? I was merely a young boy. My Primary school teacher, helped me to keep it safely in school and ensured it was always fully charged, so that I do not miss out on hearing and listening in the classroom. I knew my FM Mic and system were in safe hands, and I would never have to worry about it.

The FM system and Mic, followed me to my current Secondary School. My teachers were curious and wanted to know how to operate the FM Mic and

how it would be helpful to me during lessons. My teacher frowned upon knowing that she would have to wear the FM Mic around her neck. She avoided me like I was a demon.

It was a beautiful Monday morning. My first lesson was Maths, and my teacher ignored me and the presence of the FM Mic that she needed to use, in order to help me. She stayed away from it, as she probably didn't like hanging anything around her neck, because it's too heavy for her delicate neck. To her it felt like she was being imprisoned, but to me it was the freedom to hear with clarity. However, I didn't do much about this situation, and lucky for me Maths lessons are usually quieter than other lessons, so I did my best to focus on the lesson by using my good left ear.

After class, I approached my Maths teacher, to explain to her why I needed her to use the FM Mic and how it would help me. She explained why she didn't want to use the FM Mic, I acknowledged her explanation, and wasn't going to force her. I chose to continue the rest of my Maths lessons by using my good ear, instead of the FM Mic.

It does get difficult at times, but I wouldn't want to impose on anyone.

Tan Jun Hao, Reeve

August 2021

Unilateral Profound Hearing Loss



Double Struggle

by Jaxier

When I was four years old, I realised that I could not hear anything that my sixty-seven-year-old, Hokkien speaking, grandmother was saying. I vaguely remember getting an injection from a doctor and feeling sleepy. When I awoke, I noticed a wound behind my right ear but I still could not hear anything. After my wound recovered, my mother brought me to KKH and I was fitted with the cochlear implant. Suddenly, I could hear loud sounds.

On my first day in Primary School, I felt nervous about school and meeting other new faces. When I got to the classroom, some students asked me about my cochlear. I felt nervous as it was very hard for me to explain what it was. At that moment, my teacher came from behind me and helped me to explain to my classmates. I felt a little happy and understood. Due to my hearing loss, I noticed other students kept looking at me whenever I walked past. Suddenly, some students approached me and told me that there were a lot of other students who used cochlear implants in school.

Then they introduced me to Dayat* who also used cochlear implant and Srindar* who wore a hearing aid on his left ear. Dayat and Srindar brought my brother, Justin, and me to the canteen where we chatted more.

When I was in Primary 4, my teacher suggested that we enroll into a mainstream Primary School. It was unpleasant for me from Primary 4 to Primary 5. I remember another friend, Dayat, Srindar, Oscar and I were being bullied by two of my classmates. They punched each one of us. I saw bruises on my right arm and I felt pain, anger and unfairness. Although Srindar went to tell two teachers, the two bullies pretended that nothing happened and told the teachers that they did not know what happened. After that, they continued to bully us when the teachers were not around. They stopped bullying us when we went to different classes in Primary 6.

My mother told me to study hard and focus on studying so that I could be prepared for the test that was coming up in a few days. I hoped that I can pass the test. I got my test back and I failed the test. However, I did not let that affect me. My brother passed his test and he felt elated.

When we got home, my mother asked us, "How's your test?" I told my mother, "I failed the test but my brother passed the test." She told us that we must study hard for

PSLE. We continued studying hard and soon, it was PSLE.

It felt only a while ago that we were in the classroom waiting to start writing, when the teacher said that the time was up and collected our exam papers. It also felt as if it was just a few days ago when we were nervous about collecting PSLE results.

A teacher called my name and I collected my results and went back to my seat. My brother and I passed with flying colours and I felt elated. After the school holidays, we went to a Secondary School the following year.

It was my first time in the school. I saw my old friends in the same school. My brother and I also made new friends.

Lin Jia Jian Jaxier

October 2021

Bilateral Profound Hearing Loss



Hearing & Healing

by Justin

The first three years of school were difficult because I could not understand what my friends and teachers were talking about. Often, I quietly asked my friend what the teacher was talking about. Sadly, my friend did not help me. I felt upset because no one helped.

A friend probably heard me. Suddenly, that kind friend raised his hand and asked the English teacher to repeat all that she said so that I could hear and understand her clearly. I am grateful to the person who helped me.

Using a cochlear implant on my right ear and hearing aid on my left ear at all times during PSLE made me feel normal like everyone because I could hear like everyone else. Other than that, I felt it was boring as I had nothing to do and had to wait

for thirty minutes after being given extra time during the exam.

Now that I am in Secondary 3, Jaxier and I have appointments with Singapore General Hospital (SGH) which is in Outram Park. The two of us dislike going to SGH even though the appointments are so important that even my mother will go together with us. The doctor checked our ears. After the check-up, the doctor told me that I no longer needed to wear hearing aids because I can hear without the hearing aids.

Lin Jia Jun Justin

October 2021

Bilateral Profound Hearing Loss



From Hate to Love

by Regind

PART ONE

I first got my hearing aids in Primary 3. It all felt awkward and different as I could not understand why everything was so loud and why my other schoolmates were able to hear without having to put on something as special as my hearing aid. However, things started to change when I was in Upper Primary. I started to know more things and I was learning new things slowly. Whilst it took time, I eventually understood. Sometimes, I believed things easily, without a second thought to the truth of it.

Over 3 years in Upper Primary, I slowly began to learn about my surroundings and understood that academic skills were more difficult than they were in lower primary. All these new knowledge and understanding drove my curiosity to learn and acquire more knowledge. While I slowly begun to understand my surroundings, I also realise that many people did not understand my condition.

Despite, my intrinsic motivations, the environment I was in was not helping my esteem and emotions. I was verbally bullied so many times because of my hearing needs and hearing aids. Some students labelled my aids as ear plugs. I was embarrassed and sad, as they had made no efforts to understand why I needed my aids.

I argued with these bullies, sometimes I tried my very best to explain to them but to no avail. They had chosen to torment me regardless. I had some good friends who knew all about the bullying, yet they could do nothing about it, as my friends were taking Standard level subjects, whilst I was in the Foundation level classroom.

There were times where I would go home and start crying because of this verbal bullying in school and I would tell my mum, hoping and believing that she could do something about the bullying. Sometimes I would tell my mum to go away or even use hurtful words towards her. I was angry with my mum because she could not help me, though I understood there was not much she could do.

The only thing I looked forward to was the fact that I was getting out of this toxic place at the end of Primary Six. I was going to miss the few good friends who had tried to stand up for me, but I was more determined to get away from the bullies.

PART TWO

I was so excited to meet a lot of friends but I also saw in my new school a lot of students from my Primary School. Yet, I was glad that I could talk to them without being scared. Things didn't go well even though I was in a new school and environment. There were a lot of things I couldn't cope with in the first two years of my secondary school life.

My relationships with my classmates weren't going as well as I had hoped, yet in the midst of it all I managed to make a few good friends who have always been my source of strength and support. In the four years of my education in Secondary school I met a lot of people, both junior and senior to me. But with every new meeting, there is always a question, "share something very unique about yourself".

I would confidently say that something that is unique about me is that I have hearing loss. I know that not many people think that I have hearing issues and people would start judging me without knowing me. I really love explaining to people so that people know about it. I always chose to keep out of the limelight, so that I am not judged or laughed at, yet I am also thankful that I have 3 best friends who were my biggest supporters and were there for me in those four years.

PART THREE

When I was in Secondary 3, things got a little better as I could better communicate with my classmates. Then COVID-19 hit and I wasn't able to socialise with my classmates as much as I would have liked to. However, like most teenagers I was so happy as I could stay at home and wake up later than usual. This initial joy was short-lived, as I wasn't able to communicate with my classmates, there was a lack of human communication. Yet as we all know time really flies and it was nearly to the end of the year.

It was then when one of my friends decided to invite me over onto a zoom call. Though apprehensive initially, today, when I look back I don't regret saying yes to that friend. I was initially shocked and surprised that my friend would invite me onto a zoom call. That first call was interesting, as we were asked to dress in a very colourful manner. I had so much fun communicating with my friends over technology. From then on I kept joining them every weekend for many online hangouts. I realized that having friends who understand us would give so much happiness and fun-filled times. When finally, the restrictions were lifted and we could meet in-person, we went to Downtown East to roller skate.

I didn't know how to roller skate at all. One of my friends who is older than me, held my hand and taught me how to roller skate. I felt so loved and supported, it really felt nice to finally have real friends, who weren't asking me about my aids but instead getting to know me as a person.

It is not nice to make fun of people who are different from us. Instead of making fun of another person, we must all strive to learn more about them, to accept and understand.

Soh Ying En Regina
September 2021
Bilateral Moderate Hearing Loss



My Journey with Hearing Loss

by Hriday

Hi everyone, my name is Hriday, I am 15 years old this July. I was born in India; I came to Singapore when I was in kindergarten. I have profound hearing loss on my right and moderate hearing loss on my left.

How did I find out about my hearing loss? My parents found out I could not hear because whenever they called me I did not reply. Hence, they took me for a hearing test. The doctor said I had little hearing capacity on my left and no hearing capacity on my right. My mother wanted to fix my right ear but it wasn't possible according to the ENT specialist. I felt fine though as I could still hear though only slightly using my left ear. I finally got my hearing aids in kindergarten.

When I went to Primary school, I noticed and realised everyone there had hearing loss. I felt welcomed and managed to make many friends.

When I joined Secondary School, people asked me about my hearing aids. I explained to my friends. However, few of them really understood, and my classmates were always creating much ruckus in class, I wasn't able to focus on the lessons. While I wanted to tell them to be quieter, I was afraid to, as these were the same students who will pick a fight with anyone, and they looked like gangsters. I approached my teachers for help, who helped by asking the students to keep quiet.

When my friends don't understand my speech, they ask me to repeat myself. I am not annoyed by this, as this helps me communicate with them and it is important to be understood instead of being misunderstood. My friends give me the same respect in return, when I ask them to repeat themselves in conversations.

To hear and to listen with intent is important. Though many can hear, and I too can with the help of my aids, we must always remember to listen. I chose not to just hear my friends but listen to them, and vice versa, and hence we have a beautiful relationship.

This is my journey. Thank you for reading.

Thirumuru Krishna Hriday Reddy

August 2021

Profound (R) & Moderate (L) Hearing Loss



From Anger to Acceptance

by Fazil

My name is Fazil, I am 16 years old this year. I have severe hearing loss on both ears. In 2010 during Kindergarten I did not know about my hearing loss. I could hear a little bit but it was not clear. Teachers and friends were talking and I could understand only a little bit. 5 months later I told my mother "I can't hear." Later that same year my parents and I went to KK hospital for a check and scan of my ears. 2 months' post diagnosis, I received my first hearing aids.

When I first put on my hearing aids, I felt terrified of the loud noise coming from my hearing aids. I started crying and pulled out my hearing aids and gave them to my mother. My mother was very shocked and placed my hearing aids back in the box. Two days later, she put them on for me again. I was very stressed but my mother helped to calm my anxiety by telling me "You will be able to hear people talk." My mother always understood me.

Slowly, with my hearing aid, I learnt how to speak. Today, I can speak two languages, Tamil and English.

In Secondary One, I felt very anxious, stressed and scared because I was afraid people would bully me for wearing hearing aids. During lessons, I sat in the front. I passed my teachers the FM system. My friends kept asking me “Why was I wearing hearing aids?” I explained to my classmates and schoolmates why I needed to have hearing aids. However, there were some students who kept playing with my FM system by swinging it around. They also bullied me by taking the FM System and screaming into it. Though I would complain to my teachers, and the bullies would be reprimanded, I couldn't stop feeling embarrassed and angry all the time.

Overtime, I met some very supportive and kind friends. They understood my situation, they respected me and helped me wherever they could. Though I still have people laughing at me, I am in a better place, as I don't feel alone anymore. I have friends to protect me, I have friends that understand me and my teachers are always there for me. I still continue to sit in the front, as it helps me to follow the lessons.

Muhammad Fazil

August 2021

Bilateral Moderate-Severe Hearing Loss



The Gift of Friendship

by Yu Han

My father shared that it was discovered that I had hearing loss when I was in kindergarten. However, I only realised this when I was 8 years old. When I found out that I had hearing loss, I felt disappointed. I had to wear hearing aids. I didn't like wearing my aids, as they just made everything so loud, and I didn't know how to handle the noise.

I don't have fond memories of my primary school years. Yet, I would like to share my feelings of those years. I was bullied by my classmates since I was in Primary One. I had complained to my teachers and parents, yet the bullying never stopped. To protect myself, I stayed away from classmates, by seeking places in the school to be alone. I have forgotten the pain and loneliness of those six demonic and torturous years.

My Secondary school years were blissful and filled with beautiful memories. I made several best friends

in school, we shared our fears and joys with each other. I played games during PE with my classmates. I wasn't shunned nor bullied. We had had a lot of fun over the four years of secondary school, celebrating events like Teachers' Day, Apex Day and birthdays. We went on picnics and outings, we basically, just learnt to enjoy each other's company.

In secondary school I was the happiest because when I stepped into a new environment, my emotions changed, as people made an effort to know me and understand me, my classmates became my friends, who didn't treat me any less than a sibling. My relationships grew stronger, I even had a classmate who later became my boyfriend. We have a lot of class photos and videos from our time in secondary school.

I realised that my friends did care about me very much. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be after my disastrous years in primary school. My friends in secondary school always spoke to me with such gentleness and kindness. Now, they weren't perfect; sometimes we argued, sometimes in their over protectiveness, they treated me like I was a child. Despite all of this, the joy of having such friends who showed me love, is one I will always treasure. It is because of these friends that today, I am more confident and independent, I am able to advocate and stand up for myself.

Though we may have parted ways, each to walk onto the path of their dreams, I hope when we reconnect later in life, things wouldn't change, that we'd still be able to share openly with one another. A quote that best describes my gratitude of this beautiful gift of such friends:

*“The most valuable gift you can receive
is an honest friend.”*

Before I end my piece, I would like people without hearing loss to understand that they must be patient with us and to try to understand us.

Wong Yu Han
August 2021
Bilateral High Frequency Hearing Loss

