

A true story of a husband, a wife and a hearing loss that almost came between them.

He said . . . She said . . .

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Let's listen in on a real-life conversation involving a hearing health consultant, a prospective client (John) and the client's wife (Carol). This short skit reveals the typical psychosocial responses of a person with a gradual, progressive high frequency hearing loss. Unfortunately, the last to recognize the problem is often the hearing-impaired person and significant others whose lives have had to be rearranged to accommodate an "invisible handicap."

Consultant: Do you hear, but have difficulty understanding some words?

John: Oh, I hear fine . . . I hear things she can't hear.

Consultant: Is that right, Mrs. Smith?

Carol: Oh, no. He keeps saying that because the noise in the car bothers him so much. But it doesn't bother me.

John: I hear all right, but people just don't talk as plain as they used to . . . you know, they mumble a lot . . . if they would just speak out a little bit more, not down in their throats, I'd do just fine.

Consultant: Mr. Smith, do you hear men or women better?

John: Oh, men definitely. Women talk so softly, anyway.

Carol: Well, John. I raise my voice 'til I'm hoarse and you tell me to stop yelling. When I talk normal you say I'm mumbling. I don't know what you want.

Consultant: Do you have difficulty understanding in noisy places?

John: Doesn't everyone? Sometimes it's . . . just a mass of confusion. So, I guess, yeah, I have a little problem . . . but I don't think it's just me.

Consultant: Now, tell me, Mr. Smith . . . do you have a problem on the telephone?

Carol: He sure does!

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John: No, I don't. Not unless there's a bad connection or they're not talking into the telephone.

Carol: Then how come I can hear them just fine?

John: Well, I don't know . . . you're just used to talking on the phone a lot, I guess.

Consultant: Do you turn the television or radio up louder than normal?

John: Nooo . . .

Carol: Oh, yes you do! I can't stand to stay in the same room when you have the television on . . . it literally runs me out of the house.

Consultant: Did you realize it was so loud it bothered your wife, Mr. Smith?

John: I didn't know it was up any louder than normal. I just figured she had something else to do.

Consultant: Mrs. Smith, so far everything we've talked about points to hearing loss in your husband. How long has he been suffering from this problem?

Carol: Oh, I hadn't really thought it was just his hearing. I really thought he wasn't always paying attention or heard me when he wanted to.

Consultant: How's that?

Carol: Well, he seems to be able to tell when I'm talking. I figured he just tunes me out.

John: No, Carol, I can tell when you're talking, but it gets so tiring sometimes. I have to stop reading or turn off a machine. Heck, sometimes, I've nearly run off the road.

Consultant: Mr. Smith have you avoided going to a meeting or some other event because of your hearing?

John: Not that I know of.

Carol: For what it's worth, he doesn't go to church anymore . . . says it's boring.

John: Well, I just sit there like a dummy. The preacher sounds like he's got cotton in his mouth. And then when I go to Sunday school class I seem to just make a fool of myself.

Carol: Well, if you'd just listen before you speak.

Consultant: Mrs. Smith, what your husband is describing is very typical of people who have unrecognized hearing loss. Without amplification, it's often enough to discourage them from going to places where listening is critical.

Carol: Well, I hadn't thought of it that way. You mean, his listening problem could really be a hearing problem?

Consultant: Yes, and that brings me to the next question. Mr. Smith, do you ever find that you are tired or fatigued after listening for long periods of time?

John: Yeah, as a matter of fact. I have noticed that I feel worn down when I have to sit and listen for a long time. But I never connected that to my hearing.

Consultant: Not only can hearing loss cause fatigue while listening, but our hearing also acts as our "radar system" — always alerting us to what is happening around us — common, ordinary sounds like background noise, children at play or automobile horns honking can cause us to be more nervous and anxious. That is why it is so crucial to resolve a hearing problem in its early stages rather than waiting until it's too late to receive maximum benefits.

Carol: I, for one, did not realize that John could really have a serious hearing loss. I've noticed him changing over the past half-dozen years or so . . . closing me and the kids out . . . and now the grandkids.

Consultant: This brings me to the final question. Mr. Smith, if we find through this evaluation that we can help you hear and understand better, are you ready to accept that help?

John: Yeah . . . if you can help me. That's what I came in for.

Consultant: And what about you, Mrs. Smith, would you like your husband to hear and understand better?

Carol: Oh, yes! I'd love to have my husband back! □

The road to rehabilitation begins . . .