

# Hearing Loss and Ear Care / Hui Chew's Story

**Carol:** Mum called Susi to come for lunch. She loves her food and would usually come running but this day she kept playing quietly and didn't answer. Mum called again a little louder. Susi still didn't hear...

**Tammy:** Hello there...this is *Women of Hope*, I'm Tammy. Carol's here too...and this is our special time to sit down together and enjoy some good music, interesting people...and a special message for your heart.

**Carol:** Hello – it's good to be with you.

**Tammy:** Carol, you were telling us about the day Susi didn't hear her mother calling her for lunch...

**Carol:** I was... So mum came right up to where Susi was playing and started to speak. Susie jumped: "Oh mum, I didn't know you were there – you surprised me!"

When Susi knew it was lunch time she was very happy to come.

**Tammy:** I wonder why Susi didn't hear her mother call her? Was she deaf?

**Carol:** Well – she wasn't deaf, but she couldn't hear her mother *that* day because she had an *ear infection*.

**Tammy:** How did her mother find out?

**Carol:** Well, Susi was 5 years old, and she had had a few ear infections before. So after lunch she asked Susi if she had sore ears. Susi said one of her ears was hurting and had been making some funny noises.

**Tammy:** So it was time for a visit to the doctor?

**Carol:** Yes. The doctor looked into Susi's ears and said, yes, they were right, she had partly blocked ears from an infection and would need some medicine.

The doctor told Susi's mother that it was a good thing she came as soon as she realised there was a problem. If she'd left it too long it could have become much worse and maybe even caused permanent damage to Susi's ears – especially the one that was sore and making those funny noises.

**Tammy:** I remember Ros talking to us one day about finding out that your baby has a hearing loss and she said exactly the same. She said it's very important to go to the doctor if you think your child's not hearing properly, no matter how old they are. She said that a *temporary* hearing loss, because of an infection in the ears can be treated. But it can cause *permanent* or long-term hearing loss if it's not treated.

Ros said she'd come and talk to us again about a growing child and hearing loss. So...here she is today...

**Ros:** Hello – how lovely to be back with you again.

**Carol:** And Ros, I remember too that you were a teacher of children with hearing loss weren't you!

**Ros:** That's right Carol. So I'm always happy to talk about how to care for children's hearing. For those with a *permanent* hearing loss – and children who have a *temporary* hearing loss, like Susi. Our ears are SO important aren't they!

**Carol:** Oh yes – what a wonderful gift God has given to each of us – our ears...and we need to take care of them. For most of us, you can hear my voice...your own voice...your favourite music...the sound of the wind in the trees...and your special child who talks to you. What would we do without this incredible ability to hear the sounds around us?

**Ros:** Well, there are millions of people in the world who *can't* hear. And there are lots of reasons why it happens. It may be hereditary – passed down from a family member. It may be caused by an illness. It may be from a head injury of some kind or an infection in the ears – like Susi's.

Do you have children in your life – children who are special to you? I think many of us have a special child in our lives – our own, our grandchild, or a child we look after. Just the other day my 3 year old grand-daughter came to spend time with me – in the car, she chatted non-stop about all kinds of things. At my home, she stood, looking into the mirror, having a conversation with herself – then she laughed and gave me instructions to talk to 'the other Gran' in the mirror!! I did what she told me and we both walked away laughing!

**Tammy:** That's funny! And what a pleasure to be able to hear each other and share in the fun.

**Carol:** We are really grateful to be able to hear such lovely things. ...But let's take some time to learn a little more about those who can't hear...or who can't hear very well.

**Ros:** First let's talk some more about ear infections...

**Carol:** We know that Susi had an ear infection because she couldn't hear her mother.

**Ros:** That's right – when a child has what we call a *middle ear infection*, the ear canal behind the eardrum is filled with fluid. Sound doesn't travel well through fluid, so a child with an ear infection may have difficulty hearing. To them, normal speech will sound like a whisper. This only lasts as long as they have the infection, so if it's treated early there will be no damage to the ear and no permanent hearing loss.

However, if the child is regularly getting middle ear infections, it can cause permanent damage to the middle ear, and because they can't hear very well, their speech might not develop at the normal rate.

**Tammy:** What other symptoms might a child have Ros?

**Ros:** Because it's an infection, they might have a fever and they might have pain. Ear pain can be quite severe, and make the child cry. If they're not old enough to tell you they might rub their ears as they cry. They might have a headache too – and not want to eat much, if at all.

Of course if your child has any of these symptoms you should take them to your health clinic.

These middle ear infections are caused by either bacteria or a virus – sometimes following a cold. Babies and young children are more likely to develop infections because their *immunity* – or resistance to infection – is not well developed yet. Once a child is about six, these infections are not so common. The tube connecting the nose to the ear, called the Eustachian tube, has grown bigger...and they will have developed stronger immunity to infection by then.

**Tammy:** What will the doctor do to treat the infection?

**Ros:** If it's a mild infection it will clear up by itself. He might say to give the child some pain medicine. Or even give you some drops to put into their ears. But if he thinks it's necessary he'll prescribe some antibiotic medicine – to kill the bacteria. Always be sure you give your child exactly the amount the doctor tells you to, until the medicine is finished.

If your child's hearing gets worse or other symptoms get worse after an ear infection, he might have developed something we call *glue ear* where thick pus builds up in the ear, behind the eardrum. It's really important to treat this. You can imagine how little sound would travel through an ear full of pus, like glue! Not much.

**Tammy:** And what can the doctor do about that?

**Ros:** If antibiotics don't clear it up, the doctor might suggest your child has a little operation. They will make a small hole in the eardrum and put in a little plastic tube called a *grommet* to let the pus drain from the ear.

**Tammy:** Does it hurt?

**Ros:** No – it should relieve any pain.

**Tammy:** So do they have to have the grommets taken out later?

**Ros:** No, not usually, they'll fall out by themselves after a few months...or up to a year. The ear will usually completely heal – and their hearing will return to normal.

**Tammy:** We've talked about ear infections. Is there anything else that might cause a child to have temporary hearing loss?

**Ros:** Yes, we all have wax in our ears. It's there to help keep our ears clean and remove any dirt. It usually comes out by itself, but sometimes it can build up too much and block the ear canal – in front of the eardrum. If your child's not hearing properly, go to your health clinic. They will tell you if he has an infection, or blocked ears from wax. But don't try poking anything into his ears to clean it out. This might push the wax in and make a *plug* that will block the ear canal. Your doctor or nurse will advise you what to do. They may tell you to put some warm oil in the ear to loosen the plug so that it will come out by itself.

And of course a child will sometimes push something into their own ear – like a bead – that will get stuck there. Again, don't try to remove it yourself. You could damage their ear. Go to your health clinic.

**Tammy:** Now Ros, what else do we need to know about a child with hearing loss?

**Ros:** We talked before about *permanent hearing loss*. This means that for some reason there's been damage to the ear. Or there's a history of deafness in the family.

The biggest problem with any hearing loss over a long period of time is that it makes communicating with others very difficult. This is why it's very important to have your child's hearing tested if you think they might be having difficulty hearing. A child can be born with a hearing loss or they can develop a hearing loss later in their lives. Deafness can be *mild* – so they only miss some of the higher sounds; *severe* – where they will miss some of the middle sounds too – especially the speech sounds; or it can be *profound* – and they may only hear very deep sounds.

Having a severe or profound hearing loss can affect a child's speech very badly, even if they could hear and speak well before. For example if a child suffers from an illness like meningitis, they might lose their hearing if the disease damages the nerves in their ears. I taught a boy of about 8 years old who'd become profoundly deaf after having meningitis at about 6 years old. His speech was very unclear – he sounded just like a person who had been deaf since birth. If you can't hear

other sounds, you also can't hear your own voice. He needed just the same help as the child who had never been able to hear.

Now another thing we need to know is that a child might be deaf in *one* ear.

**Tammy:** How can we tell?

**Ros:** They might seem to ignore you if you speak to them in a noisy room. ...They may always want to sit on the same side of you when you're telling a story. ...They may find it hard to hear you when they can't see your face. ...They often find it hard to tell where a sound is coming from, as for them, it's always coming from the same side.

**Tammy:** And how will they get on at school?

**Ros:** It's important to tell the new teacher at the beginning of each year about their hearing loss. They may still hear well enough to be in a regular classroom at school, but they will need some help. They should sit close to the front of the room. They will need to sit with their good ear toward the teacher. They may have difficulty hearing instructions if the room is noisy, or if they can't see the teacher's face. They may have trouble hearing in the noisy playground, so they might feel a bit 'lost' and find it hard to make friends.

Talk to the teacher about their progress at school.

**Carol:** On Women of Hope today, we've been *hearing* about hearing loss. And today we have our friend Marli back again to tell us about *her* friend. Welcome Marli.

**Marli:** Hello...It's my pleasure to tell you today about someone very special.

My friend Hui Chew can't hear me. She can talk to me, but I have to write down what I want to say to her. That's how we communicate. Let me tell you her story.

Hui Chew was born into a normal family, and led a pretty normal life. As a young girl, a friend took her to a Christian church where she learned about Jesus. She came to understand that she was a sinner and separated from God. In her heart she longed for a close relationship with God, something she had never had before.

She got married at 19 and soon became the mother of a baby girl. After this, something unusual happened to her. During her time of confinement after her girl was born she was not able to hear properly in one ear. She had constant ringing in her ear. The doctors could not find any reason for it.

Hui Chew had two more children...and after each pregnancy her hearing got worse. When her third baby, a son, was around 5 months old, she completely lost her hearing. At the same time, her

husband began to have heart problems. They didn't have much money and life became very difficult.

There she was - deaf with three young children and a sick husband. I asked her how she was able to cope with that. This is what she told me...

*I was lost, depressed and frustrated. I felt so helpless. I cried many days and many nights. I felt isolated and uncertain. The responsibility of raising three children...it was all so hard, specially because so many bad things were happening and I had no one to help me.*

**Carol:** So did her faith in Jesus help her?

**Marli:** Oh yes, but at first she didn't want to go to church. It was so hard to communicate with the people there. So she started to study the Bible alone...and God comforted her through his Word. She would read her Bible every morning before she started each day of struggles. God's Word kept her going - one day at a time.

She did end up going to church and she found that her friends showed their love to her by praying for her and helping her in lots of practical ways.

I asked Hui Chew if there were any special lessons she learned through this very difficult time.

She said she learnt many lessons. She said: *I learnt that God alone could give me strength to go through the hardships and loneliness. Being deaf leaves you very lonely.*

**Carol:** I can understand that. A person who's deaf is cut off from what's happening around them...and most people don't know how to communicate with them.

**Marli:** No, they don't. I asked her how she talked with her family. She said they had to write everything down – just like I did with her. She learnt to lip read a little...so she could follow some conversations. But they were often impatient because she was slow to understand.

**Carol:** That would be hard!

**Marli:** Oh yes – but she said that she learned to forgive them. She told me: *In my situation I have many opportunities to learn to forgive, you know! I try to remember that God wants me to love others and forgive them if they're impatient.*

Then, to make life even more difficult, her husband died. She really struggled with her feelings – it did *not* seem fair to have to suffer so much. She told me one day:

*I don't understand why all this has happened to me, but I just trust God's love. When my problems seem too much for me to bear, I remember God's promises. The Bible says: "Give all your worries and cares to God because he cares about you." (1 Peter 5:7 NLT) And that's the way I try to live.*

**Ros:** Thanks, Marli for sharing that story about your friend Hui Chew. It would be very hard to lose your hearing as an adult wouldn't it! I wonder what sounds she missed the most.

**Marli:** I asked her that – and she said she really missed listening to Christian music - songs that would inspire her and feed her soul down deep in her heart.

**Ros:** I love music too and can't imagine not being able to listen to those beautiful songs about God and his love.

**Marli:** She said to me: *When I go to church I can't worship the way you do. But I **am** thankful that I can see. I can read my Bible every day. It gives me answers to my problems and gives me strength to go through the difficulties in my life.*

**Carol:** So Hui Chew can't worship the way we do at church, but she still goes to church and joins in with others – worshipping God in her heart.

**Marli:** My friend, when I met Hui Chew, her life story really made me think. She was not bitter, or angry. She knew that God loved her and wanted the best for her life. She knew that nothing could separate her from God's love.

Whatever God allows to come into your life, my friend, you can know it is not meant to make you bitter or angry. *God is love*, and his love will last forever.

Maybe you have some emotional, spiritual...or physical disability just like Hui Chew. I pray that you will come to know God, personally. That you will open your heart and mind and receive him into your life, and that you too will have peace.

**Carol:** Thank you Marli...and Ros. It's time for us to go now.

**Tammy:** Remember you can contact us at TWR Women of Hope. Goodbye – and remember that God will always love you.