



Miss USA 1998 triumphs over unexpected hearing loss diagnosis

Shawnae Jebbia was a 27-year-old beauty queen when she was diagnosed with hearing loss. By 1998, she had not only won the Miss USA crown, but had also won several fitness competitions and was hosting her own television show on ESPN. An outgoing, energetic entertainment personality and athlete, Shawnae faced sudden and unexpected changes in her life when she could no longer hear sounds she once took for granted. Thanks to sophisticated new hearing instruments and Shawnae's bright and optimistic attitude, she has become a remarkable and humble role model for people with hearing loss.

After winning the title of Miss USA 1998, Shawnae spent the year volunteering at charities and traveling a staggering 20,000 miles a month. Shawnae had consistently battled allergies, and she was beginning to also notice some changes in her hearing. After she completed her reign, she decided to visit an ear, nose and throat doctor, who ruled out other conditions not related to hearing. Shawnae then visited an ear clinic, where she was diagnosed with the onset of Meniere's disease, a condition that is characterized by fluctuating hearing loss, tinnitus or ringing in the ears, and dizziness.

Difficulties Adjusting to Hearing Loss

After living a life full of traveling and adventure, Shawnae had a difficult time understanding and accepting the sudden hearing loss diagnosis she faced at just 27 years of age.

"Keeping up with the disease was the hardest thing," Shawnae says. "For the first couple of years, it was so difficult. I was trying to overcompensate for everything."

Shawnae has gone through phases where the hearing loss is temporarily worse in one ear, and she also has dealt with tinnitus and water retention, two other common symptoms of the disease.

Shawnae says the experience of wearing hearing instruments during the first month was also frustrating because her brain had to adjust to them. She says she went through feelings of pain and withdrawal while coping with the changes she experienced. But now, she says her quality of life is "so much better."

These days, Shawnae says she's become so much more outgoing and isn't afraid to tell people right away about her hearing loss.

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As a result of her diagnosis, Shawnae knew the smart solution was to seek help from hearing instruments. Because of her demanding listening needs and her desire to look and feel her best, Shawnae's audiologist chose to fit her with Siemens Pure® 700 hearing instruments. The instruments are tiny, discreet and flexible enough to fit Shawnae's challenging hearing loss.

Another device that has improved Shawnae's quality of life is the Siemens Tek™ wireless enhancement system, which allows her to connect her Pure hearing instruments wirelessly to various audio devices like TV's, cell phones, and MP3 players.

Tek communicates with her hearing instruments by transmitting stereo audio signals using *Bluetooth®* wireless technology. Shawnae says the device is so user friendly that she carries it with her constantly.

Tek has eliminated her need to use closed captioning while watching television, she says. "Tek has opened up something new for me," Shawnae says. "You don't understand how much joy I'm having watching TV." In addition, Tek allows for phone signals to be transmitted to both ears, giving the hearing instrument wearer an advantage that other people do not have.

Learning What Matters

After having lived with Meniere's disease for 10 years, Shawnae says she has learned to value her life in different ways.

"Once you've been hearing impaired for long enough, you learn what's really important," she says. "I figured out over time what matters to me and what I want out of life."

Shawnae says she went through depression, anger and sadness, and had to figure out what to do with those feelings. She says the experience taught her a lot about the choices she should make.

Shawnae's experience with hearing loss and her desire to help people led her to pursue a career in nursing, for which she is now studying. Motivated to further help those in the hearing loss community, Shawnae says she plans to learn sign language.

The optimistic attitude that helped Shawnae become Miss USA 1998 continues to make her a successful role model for people of all ages that may be experiencing the challenges of living with hearing loss. Shawnae's story serves as a great example of the joy of rediscovering all the sounds of life.

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