

Every second of every minute of every hour of every day.....

In April last year I celebrated my 39th birthday and as I took stock of where I was at in my life I felt satisfied with what I'd managed to achieved. I was a corporate lawyer with a great job and I was married to a lovely man with two beautiful children. I knew that these things hadn't just happened and were the result of hard work and what I perceived to be a fair amount of suffering but little did I know that within a matter of weeks my life would be changed forever.

It started when shortly after my birthday I came down with ear infections in both ears that turned out to be the most painful experience of my life (which included the pain of the caesarean I'd had to deliver my twins almost one year before). I really believed that my head was going to explode and after three days of suffering and as the pain started to subside I began to notice a loud noise in both ears that played in stereo. At first I had no idea what the noise was and I tried my hardest to ignore it as I thought it was the residual effect of the infections but it was just so persistent and it wouldn't leave me alone. It followed me into the bathroom, the car and even my closet. In fact everywhere I went to try and hide the jack hammering construction noise in my head was with me every second of every minute of every hour of every day. I started to feel like I was going insane and I was driven to such despair that I even resorted to calling an ambulance to take me to the hospital at 3.00am one night as I was sure that something had exploded in my brain and was causing this horrendous noise. The hospital reviewed me and just as I had been told by my GP countless times they informed me that they could not identify the cause of the noise and promptly sent me home with a couple of sleeping pills.

By now I was distraught and my GP was trying her hardest to support me even though she couldn't understand why I had developed this noise. She referred me for hearing tests and then to an ear nose and throat specialist. All confirmed that my hearing was normal and that they were unable to provide any answers as to why I was suffering from the noise. She even referred me to a neurologist so I could have an MRI to confirm that something hadn't exploded in my brain. Again the tests came back normal and as I left the hospital in tears with my poor husband beside himself trying to take of me and our one year old twins I really didn't know what we were going to do. By now it was June and the noise had been with me for almost 2 months. During this time we had also endured my husband being involved in a serious car accident, his redundancy, my grandmother passing away and my mother's attempt to take her own life as a result of a long term illness that she had been suffering. Things in my 39th year were not how I had imagined them to be.

I felt that we had chased every rabbit down every hole and I had taken to the internet myself to try and find some solutions. I had two children to look after and I needed to keep my job now that my husband was out of work so I was on a mission to rid myself of this noise. As I scrolled through the overload of information that was available on this condition called tinnitus (something I had never heard of before) I was overwhelmed with the number of remedies available. I decided to jump on board as I had never let anything get the better of me in the past so why would I start now. I started seeing a Chinese herbalist for acupuncture, a masseuse and a chiropractor. I went onto a very expensive regime of herbal medicine and I started looking into music therapy (even toying with the idea of paying \$8,000 for some machine that would train my brain not to hear the noise). I was wearing head phones everywhere to try and drown out the noise and invested in a sound machine which we had running in our bedroom 24/7. Luckily in my mad desperation to get to the bottom of this noise I happened upon the website for the Tinnitus Association and my husband and I decided to attend a seminar. The day that we walked into that room was the first time since developing the noise that I found answers about my condition. Of course these answers were

not exactly what I was hoping to hear and I did spend the entire two hours at the sessions in tears, but, it was comforting to know that someone was able to shed some light on what I was going through.

We came out of the session much more informed about what the future might hold and with the support of two people who would go on to help steer me through what had now become the hell of my life. Honestly, without Ian and Ross I would not have survived, there were many dark days and nights and each day became a fight to survive. The noise was all consuming and there were so many times that I just didn't want to get out of bed or to go on at all. My poor husband, parents and brothers were tortured with my constant threats of wanting to end it as even though I wanted more than anything to see my two beautiful children grow up I just wanted the noise to stop. I was unable to sleep and had driven myself almost to the brink of insanity with questions like: "is there something else causing this that the doctors haven't found yet?"; "how will I go on if this noise is going to be with me for the rest of my life?"; and "why is this happening to me?". By now I was under the care of a psychiatrist and I had started on a very high dose of anti-depressants to try and help control my reaction to the noise.

My husband and I attended an appointment with Myriam Westcott of Dineen and Westcott who was of great assistance and support in being able to provide me with further information about the condition and also some of the triggers (like emotional stress) that might be contributing to the noise. At first my objective mind could not accept that my emotions could be helping fuel the noise but over time and with the help of Ian, Ross and my wonderful husband and family I started to turn the corner. I began to understand that the best way to tackle this problem may not be head on as I had done with so many other challenges I had faced in my life. In the alternative it seemed that the noise needed to be approached in a more subtle way by getting on with my life and accepting that it was now just part of it. This was a whole new way of thinking for me and a lot of times I felt that it "just wasn't working" and I really wanted to give up and just find a "bloody cure for this ridiculous noise". But with the constant help of those around me and lots of cups of tea and banana's I gradually moved forward.

In April this year I turned 40 and I can honestly say that the dark days are behind me. That's not to say that I don't carry the lessons I learnt with me but I have managed to get my life back on track. I'm not sure exactly how it happened but as each day went past it seemed that my acceptance allowed the noise to get quieter and these days it is hardly noticeable. I still have my job, my husband and my beautiful children who have turned into very noisy 2 year olds. The things I never thought I'd enjoy again have become enjoyable and I have a new respect and appreciation for the life I'm so fortunate to have. I will never forget the incredible support that I received from Ian, Ross, my husband, parents, brothers and other family members and I encourage anyone who might be suffering from tinnitus to get in touch with the Tinnitus Association as it is here that you will find the answers that you are so desperately seeking.

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