

Karen's Journey – Part 2

'The phoenix can only fly once its feathers are fully grown' (Chinese proverb).

A new chapter forward

I've reached a stage in my tinnitus (T) journey when, after massive amounts of trial and error, I've learnt to accept its presence. For me, this occurred around 15 months but for others, this timeframe could be much sooner, or later. Tinnitus wears you down so that you become used to it as your new background noise. You become so desensitised that you don't really care if you can hear it, or not.

I'm writing this next stage of my T journey to describe my T progression over time. I've had significant improvement since the first 12 or so months, which I wanted share. The T counsellors say that my brain will get better and better over time at filtering out the high pitch buzzing I have. They also informed me that the levels of T intrusion volumes I have currently, will reduce over time. There are no exact timeframes, but it will. Wait and see.

The big positive is reaching a point in time where your T no longer distresses or bothers you. You may not even be aware of your T by unconsciously ignoring it buzzing away in the background. It is quite a breakthrough when it is no longer everything you focus on (and dread with a passion). However, it pays not to dwell on this transition in too much detail either, as too much focus can interfere with solid progress.

The way I feel now is that I have accepted its presence. I haven't had any type of anxiety or depression reactions in 5 or more months. I haven't consciously tried to reach this goal, it's just been a steady state that I've reflected for the first time now, for the purposes of recording in my Part 2 journey. This is amazing progress. Compared to the Part 1, where my emotional state wildly fluctuated between good and bad days, you realise with hindsight that you've turned a corner when "your good days far outweigh the bad". This is a recited quote from one of my T counsellors (refer to Part 1), that I never thought would apply to me.

I now also understand that spikes and difficult days I detail to great length in Part 1 are a part of the habituation process, and not a sign that you've gone backwards. Your progress will not be erased by fear, anxiety, panic and depression. You've just been triggered back into having the old reaction again. It takes time for a new emotional recalibration to become the dominant and consistent pattern of behaviour.

The T counsellors stress that everyone's reaction is different. I believe that a majority of factors are within your power to positively influence, by following a combination of relaxing, accepting and ignoring your T. However, because every brain is different, I suspect some are better at "tuning out" from particular tinnitus frequencies and intensities better than others. These physiological brain and auditory factors, I can only assume are less within your power to change. The net result is every individual's habituation state is different.

I've read in other's T journeys describe that at a similar time following T onset, they are hardly aware of their T and report for large chunks of the day, or longer, they can't detect its presence whatsoever, unless they consciously 'search' for it. This isn't me now and I do wish it was. My T intrusiveness levels have not decreased at all. It has remained the same since it settled into a steady state, around the 4

month mark. Maybe this might be me into the future, which is why I plan to write a Part 3, so I can share my progress in 12 months' time.

What has changed and I think this is a key factor: I've just got better at focussing my hearing beyond the buzzing to concentrate on the sounds I wish to hear. It is still a mild annoyance...yes. If I had to quantify it on a scale 10; 3/10, compared to a 9/10 in the beginning.

Whatever my habituation end state is into the future (if it gets better or stays as it is now), my life now is so much more emotionally stable and enjoyable because I have accepted my T and don't let it interfere with anything I choose to do. Tinnitus is my new silent noise and is nothing I'm at all worried about. This will be you too.