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My mother has had severe hearing loss for most of her life. We spent many years shouting to communicate because good hearing aids were not affordable and were not covered by her health insurance. She hated the piano and most music because it provided little to no satisfaction for her. It was not until she was lucky

enough to work for someone who's insurance plan covered hearing aids that she was able to get the devices. She became alive again after this. She realized how many sounds she was missing out on such as the rustling of her own hair. Being who I am, she was still forced to listen to me play the piano, but it was a different experience. She was able to recognize the timbre of my piano and even started to notice when it was going out of tune. Music continues to not be a major part of her life, but she is happy to have found a new appreciation for it, and so am I.

I wear glasses for nearsightedness (I cannot see things at a distance), and although it is not the same as hearing loss, I have an understanding of a physical handicap. I could try to walk around in the blurry world I see, but I know I would completely miss certain things such as birds flying by or road signs. It would cause problems for me trying to live in a world that looks like a Monet painting and so I am very thankful that I have my glasses.



As you probably have heard, Ludwig von Beethoven started going deaf in the middle of his life. Hearing loss for a musician in his prime is devastating. I have read stories about him frequently breaking his piano and severely knocking it out of tune because he would bang on it. He would bang on it because he could not hear it. Once his hearing had completely left him, he could only remember what music sounded like and work with it in that way. He knew music theory and was able to put down something on the page that theoretically would sound interesting as he struggled to stay relevant, but only the audience would know for sure. This might explain why his music is rough and deeply emotional, because he was angry and sad about his handicap.

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I know piano technicians too with some level of hearing loss. The ears of a tuner are usually more sensitive than most because we spend a lot of our time hyper listening. It is such an intense level of focus that any external sound can be not only heard, but bothersome. Extraneous sounds during a tuning can be like looking through a microscope when someone comes up and shines a flashlight directly into the lens; distracting to say the least. I recognize the value of this ability and do what I can to protect my ears such as wearing earplugs around anything that might be loud. For those that need a little bit of extra help for speed or hearing loss, computer programs have been developed for tuning pianos. Those devices have the highly sensitive ears of a sophisticated machine that usually hears more than any human, but they will never be able to tell if the piano sounds “good” or not.

All of our physical senses are important to guide us through this human experience, and it can be a challenge to keep up when we find ourselves missing one of these senses. Take care of your health and what senses you have, and don't be ashamed if you need assistance. We all have a different path to walk.