

**Have you Heard: A Listening Project  
Episode #12 - Better Hearing & Speech Month**

**Host: Jamie Machotka  
Special guest: Pearl**

Jamie (0:03) Hi and welcome to “Have you Heard a Listening Project.” On this podcast we are going to share tips, stories and practical advice to help people with hearing loss stay connected. If you or a loved one have a hearing loss or you know anyone with hearing loss this podcast is for you. May is “Better Hearing & Speech Month” so we want to join in by spreading awareness about how hearing loss affects people and what can be done to help those people who are hearing challenged and we’re excited to have you join us. I’m Jamie, your host, and today I will be chatting with a very special guest, she is the official spokes pen for CapTel Outreach. I want to remind you to stay until the end when we’ll share some specific hearing health resources with you so we can all pay our knowledge forward. Okay, let’s get to it. Joining us is none other than our colleague the official spokes pen for CapTel Outreach Pearl, welcome Pearl!

Pearl (1:02) Well hi, I, I’m so excited to be here. This is my, my first-ever podcast and full disclosure, I thought I was doing a pen cast but it’s a podcast and so I’m, I’m ready to go.

Jamie (1:18) I like that, play on words Pearl. So first of all, so for, for listeners who can’t, you can only hear us and not see us you should be aware that I did not misspeak and neither did Pearl. Pearl is a pen and she’s the spokes pen and the director of hearing health wisdom for OEI and she’s actually the host of two popular YouTube video series and she has a wealth of knowledge about hearing health. So, for those of you that have never met or seen Pearl. Pearl I would say, what, what are you about 6 inches tall, soft blue hair and you have a stylus bottom.

Pearl (1:55) That sounds like me, yes, and I, I also have a stethoscope on, on the front of me. It’s, I love having that, then I can be in people’s pockets.

Jamie (2:07) Oh right, the stethoscope helps you hang on, I didn't think of that. I like that. Okay great. So, Pearl, in order to get to know you a little better and for our listeners I thought let's play a quick game. So, I'm just going to ask you some fun questions and you can just give any answer, you know, that you come up with in the moment.

Pearl (2:25) Oh, fun! I love games!

Jamie (2:27) Okay, good. What is your favorite color?

Pearl (2:31) Oh, without a doubt It is blue. It is the color of my hair. It is the color of my, well, my upper half of my body. It's the color of my ink. It's the color of, the on the CapTel telephone there's a blue button for customer service so it's like my whole life is blue.

Jamie (2:56) I like, you know, Smurfs remember Smurfs those are all blue. So blue is dear to my heart cause I grew up watching them. Ahh, if you could have dinner with anyone alive or not who would it be?

Pearl (3:09) Well, it's kind of a toss-up. The first two things that came to me was well, the inventor of the ballpoint pen because well without that, who knows and pen ink I think, you know, whoever invented pen ink that goes inside pens because if I was you know, they used to use a quill or a fountain pen and that just sounds messy and I get all dried out so those two would be really fun to have dinner with and thank for their inventions.

Jamie (3:50) I like that. What is your favorite food?

Pearl (3:54) Basically, anything that is like a finger food because my assistant hand can help out. So like chips & salsa, pizza, sandwiches, cheese & crackers, a burrito (Jamie...I like all of those) yeah, yeah, that's kind of but yeah, anything that can get picked up.

Jamie (4:19) Okay, what's your favorite type of paper to write on?

Pearl (4:24) Well, as a pen if I see paper I don't care what it is, I mean, every kind of paper is my paper, my favorite.

Jamie (4:33) Do you like paper with lines or no lines? Do you have a preference?

Pearl (4:36) No, I really don't. I mean if there's no lines then maybe I doddle a little more. If there are lines then that's when I'm journaling but I mean paper is paper and I don't care what, how thick it is or what it looks like or what color it is. I just get, I, I get very excited when I see blank paper.

Jamie (4:58) Ha, ha, ha, I just love your honesty and how candid you are Pearl and it just makes so much sense. Do you prefer sweet or salty treats?

Pearl (5:08) Sweet! I love sweet like licorice, I, I, red vine licorice is my favorite.

Jamie (5:16) Okay, coffee or tea?

Pearl (5:19) Oh, why bother with tea. It's all about coffee (Jamie...ha, ha, ha) It is all coffee.

Jamie (5:25) Spoken like a true coffee lover. Cats or dogs?

Pearl (5:29) Ohh, woof, woof, I say dogs.

Jamie (5:34) Ha, ha. Pearl, what, what do you think the greatest invention of all times is?

Pearl (5:39) Are you seriously asking me that? That is, that's, that's a no brainer. It's the CapTel Caption Telephone. I, I mean, that's what I am all about. I get to see every day what it, what it does to improve someone's quality of life and if you can't hear on the phone that's a drag. And the CapTel phone really solved that issue for thousands of people so that, that's just a, I mean that's almost more important than, than pen ink to me.

Jamie (6:18) Wow, and you're just so passionate and it's so refreshing to be able to talk with even though you're a pen, you're a, you're a being and you're just so dedicated to this. So for people that don't know you, haven't see you yet, you can definitely check Pearl out. She's got a whole bunch of videos that are so educational and fun to watch but we want to ask you more questions. So people who don't know you can get more of a flavor of you if you will. So I think one question I have just at the top of my mind is, don't you think being a hearing health advocate is sort of, I don't know, an unusual job for a pen?

Pearl (6:57) I, I don't really see it that way. I mean it's, it's not unusual for me. Well, even though if you could see me I, you can't see my ears and, and I know that's kind of weird but they're there and I, I love ears, I have them, everybody else has them. There's like 16 billion ears on the face of the planet and I like looking at them and so working around them and what really is awesome is all of the hearing professionals that are so passionate about ears, they're like my peeps. I can relate to them so much. So, no, I, I don't think it's unusual. It's just what I do.

Jamie (7:50) Excellent! And what would you say motivates you?

Pearl (7:53) Well, as long as I'm full of ink, I am good to go. If I have ink I have energy and I have motivation. On a more personal note, what motivates me is, again, seeing all of the hearing professionals working with people that want to stay connected because well, I hope it's not too deep here but, you know, hearing loss it can be so isolating and all of those hearing professionals are out there to keep people connected. And it, it's just easy to be motivated when you see how much resources and assistive technology is available to, to help other people. So it's, it's easy to be motivated as long as I have ink, I have energy and motivation.

Jamie (8:51) Can you tell us about how you got into all of this? Where did this all start?

Pearl (8:56) Well, I know the story but thanks for, thanks for asking. It's kind of, I was, I was just at a warehouse with like a pen warehouse, I was there with thousands of other people and then one day I got like a kind of like a logo or tattoo put on my body and it said CapTel Captioned Telephones. And it was like, I

wonder what that is and what's going to happen. And that's when like the top part of my body got made and the stethoscope got, got put on and then it was like all of a sudden I got put into a bag with a bunch of other pens that said CapTel and put on a truck and shipped out and my life began. I wasn't quite sure what was going to happen or what this tattoo was but that's, you know, definitely when, when life changed It's when I left the warehouse as a CapTel Captioned Telephone tattooed pen.

Jamie (10:05) I love that story. And you gave such good detail insight into those of us who might not be familiar with what, you know, the beginning looked like for you and I have to also ask so you're clearly very motivated, you're very passionate. When you started being the spokes pen, were you aiming to become this huge YouTube video star that you are now, was that one of your goals?

Pearl (10:30) No! Like I said, I was just in a warehouse wondering what I was, you know, what was I going to do and I, you know, when I, when I left the warehouse I ended up going to an office or I go to people's homes getting a CapTel. I sometimes, go to events a lot of times I just sit in a tin cup at, at the office (Jamie...ha ha) and I was fine with that cause I got to hear a lot of neat conversations. Sometimes I get a ride around in the, the audiologists, you know, how they have their doctor's jacket (Jamie...yeah, aha) and they haven't and they have a pocket and sometimes (Jamie...yeah) they stick me in their pocket. So I get to see like the patients (Jamie... like front and center...like front road seat) yeah, and I did learn, thankfully, that, that they do take their doctor jackets off before they go to the bathroom cause that (Jamie...ha, ha, ha) that would be really embarrassing. So I was wondering what was going to happen there so that, that happened. But anyway, I'm, I'm getting a little distracted there (Jamie... ha, ha, ha) But, but then Covid happen and so you're asking (Jamie...yeah) about the video and things were getting a little weird at the office like all of a sudden like someone would, you know, sign something like a patient would sign something and then the patient care coordinator or, or the audiologist would come by with a Clorox and, and like wipe me off or put me into a tin that said, dirty and it's like, what, what is going on here? And then one day, one of the employees at, at the place that I happen to be at the office, she was packing up what seemed like more than usual put me in her pocket and I went home with her and I didn't know if it was on purpose or what was going on. But then we didn't go to the office again for a long time and I was bored, I mean, I was literally than just lying around, literally lying around with nothing to do and so hand and I were thinking now more than ever people need to know about the CapTel to be able to

stay in touch because they were, you know, physically and socially distancing, how could I get to them without being with them? So hand and I kind of talked about it and she was all game for doing videos. So that's, that's how it started that I mean, t's like hey thanks Covid but that really, it never would have happened with videos without being bored and Covid happening.

Jamie (13:35) I love it and it's just such a natural thing that happened which I think it's sometimes the, the neatest part of some stories. It's like it literally happened out of necessity, you were just bored, you were so bored, you guys wanted something to do and, and you found such an incredibly powerful way I think. So, I know, I know I keep harping on the videos but people if you haven't seen the Pearl videos yet, they are so fun, they're so fun. Okay, let's take a quick break to hear from one of our sponsors.

\*\*\* Commercial (14:05) We were excited when dad finally retired. More time for golf and the chance to move somewhere warm. What I didn't count on was how hard it would be to stay in touch. Dad's hearing loss makes phone calls difficult at best. I have to repeat myself on every call and pretty sure he doesn't get what I say. But now dad's audiologists gave him a CapTel Captioned Telephone. It works just like captions on TV only for phone calls. If dad can't hear what the caller says, he just reads the captions. Dad's local CapTel Outreach person took care of everything. She helped set up the phone, explained about the free captioning service and made sure he was comfortable reading the captions. Now we're back to talking every weekend, I know he's catching every word I say and I'm hearing a lot more about his golf scores. If someone you care about has difficulty hearing over the phone, find out how a CapTel Captioned Telephone can help, visit [oeius.org](http://oeius.org) for details\*\*\*\*

Jamie (15:04) Welcome back! Okay, well now I, we have loved getting to know you Pearl and your story and your background and now of course, because you are the aficionado on all things hearing health, we love to talk to you about Better Hearing & Speech month. So what, what can you share with us? I'm sure you have some facts or some nuggets that people would find interesting.

Pearl (15:29) So, yes, May is Better Hearing & Speech Month and can I tell you just a little about the, you know, kind of the organization that, that (Jamie... please) that got things on? Okay, well, it was way back in 1927, which (Jamie... wow) yeah, that was like, pre you know, pre ballpoint pen time, that was a long time ago. So there were some very progressive thinkers for hearing health and

they in 1927 developed the American Speech and Language Hearing Association or ASHA. I like to say AHSA, just cause (Jamie...ha, ha) it sounds more fun that way (Jamie...catchy) but what they were passionate about and so ahead of their times was they wanted to raise awareness for deafness and hearing loss in our communities and society. So that's why that started way back then (Jamie...cool) and then, well I won't go year by year cause we're in 2021 now and it be a really long podcast. But another really cool thing that happened at ASHA, I, I'll try to say it normal next time (Jamie...ha, ha, ha) is in 1986 president Reagan, who, he was the first sitting president who was fitted with hearing aids while in office (Jamie...really, he was the first one) yeah, yeah isn't that, I know, it's so interesting but (Jamie...yeah) he had a congressional proclamation in 1986 that from that day forward every year in May would be Better Hearing & Speech month.

Jamie (17:28) Wow, I seriously, I work in this industry and I'm, I'm ashamed to say I didn't know that fact before today cause you would think that it came from I don't know, maybe advocacy groups or other but I mean like at, that's actually pretty cool. So it was President Reagan and he is the one who declared Better Hearing & Speech month.

Pearl (17:48) Absolutely! And so that's really the, you know like ASHA that just propelled them cause they've been working and working and working since 1927. So having a whole month officially declared that was a big deal. It was very cool.

Jamie (18:06) Yeah, that's, that's really in that, that's good information for, for our listeners to know too. So how can people who are listening to this specially, how can people participate in Better Hearing & Speech month? Do you have any ideas for us?

Pearl (18:20) Well, first and foremost get your ears tested or screened and it, it doesn't hurt. It doesn't take very long and you know, if, while, you're, while you're at it have a friend come with you double the fun in, in getting your ears tested. But a lot of times people just don't, they don't think about getting (Jamie...yeah) it but during the celebration month, it's like, hey, let's celebrate and get our ears tested. It's a really cool way to do it if you bring a buddy maybe you could have a little contest on, you know, who has the best hearing and then, you know, maybe they buy lunch or you guys go on a picnic or something to celebrate that, that you went, went out there. Cause like I said people don't think about their ears when

they're working fine and it's good and I believe any hearing professional would, would encourage it because you want to, you know kind of get a baseline of where you're hearing is at so things start shifting overtime your hearing person would, would be ready and, and be knowledgeable about that.

Jamie (19:39) I think you're right and I've had my hearing tested too and I can also say it, it's not scary. It, it's like what I did in grade school where I don't know if some people had this, you go to the nurse's office and you have to listen to some sounds through headphones and you raise your hand if you hear the noise. And if I'm not mistaken, I think, I think it's recommended that we get our hear, our hearing tested yearly. And I think there's even, you know, ways to do it that are free. So people should, should check that out. I'm imagining probably during Better Hearing & Speech month there are places that are helping to facilitate that.

Pearl (20:15) Yeah, you know it's, it is too bad that we don't, you know, that I used to call the hearing lady, it's hearing lady day at school and it's too bad that there's not a hearing lady like everywhere wouldn't that be cool, like, you go to the grocery store and it's like oh there's the hearing lady or the gas station, it's like oh there's the hearing lady, but you know in our adult life we are the hearing lady we have to be (Jamie...yeah) proactive for ourselves and, and if we notice, you know, especially, you know, as we get older you know say your knee or hip or whatever was giving you trouble. You know if you notice you're limping you do something about it. So I, I kind of think of, you know, hearing loss overtime it's kind of like your ears have a limp in a way and, and go get things tested and looked at. So you can either keep from limping or get some assistive devices to help, to help your limp.

Jamie (21:25) Makes perfect sense to me. So how can other pens or I should say people, how can other people get involved in this month and, and what can they do to help?

Pearl (21:35) Another thing to pay attention to, I mean not just in May and then go crazy the rest of the time is (Jamie...ha, ha, ha) they, they call it a noise induced hearing loss and that's kind of just a fancy way of saying there are dangerous levels of noise that if you're exposed to over a period of time it can really, really create a lot of issues for your ears and so you know like earplugs or noise cancelling headsets when you know you're going to be around noisy things



you know, lawn mowing or maybe a well hopefully one day we'll have packed stadiums again with, with (Jamie...let's hope so) loud things or you know, like an airport or you know just so many loud places it's just being mindful and getting your ears protected. Being aware enough to know that you want to protect them so that, that is absolutely another way to kind of, you know, from this month and May forward I'm going to pay attention to the sounds around me and, and protect my ears.

Jamie (22:54) I like that, that makes a lot of sense, I mean as you're talking about it too.

Pearl (22:58) Well, and what's so interesting about, kind of why I'm hepped up on the noise induced hearing loss is between that and just natural aging. Those two things are the primary factors to hearing loss. And so if we think about it, if we worked in a really loud job and we age, there's a good chance that your ears might have a little trouble so getting your ears tested and kind of understanding, understanding that is super, super great to become aware of. And that's part of Better Hearing & Speech month is helping to raise awareness for, for things that we don't think about until we have to think about it. I wish and that's part of my just ongoing quest is to help normalize those conversations even though they can be challenging to kind of open up the door. I believe that it's more challenging to not be able to go to dinner with someone because they've chosen to stay home because it's so frustrating when they are out and I'm missing out on, on their life as, as much as they're missing out on in our life. But if we can talk about it then we can think about the massive amount of resources available, the incredibly heart driven passionate hearing professionals that are just waiting with information to, to help but if we can't crack that nut initially to just acknowledge it, we aren't going to know that there's, It's kind of like Disneyland, it's like your Disneyland once you are able to, you know, know what's going to happen as soon as you walk into the Magic Kingdom, there is ear information that is just at the ready so I, I think that would be, you know, the number one thing even though I know it can be a little hard sometimes to talk about, it, it's harder to, to not be able to enjoy someone.

Jamie (25:26) I, I think that everything you, you said it makes perfect sense and it and I, you know, like I'm like someone that wears glasses and contacts and it's to your point, we have no problem if we've got you know a vision loss it's perfectly acceptable to go get your eyes tested, okay, the expectation is you'll, you'll need

something to help you see better but people just get so funny about hearing loss and hearing aids you know, it's not as if I can walk around and, you know, look right into somebody's eye and say, okay I can see that you're near-sighted and I can see that you're farsighted. It's, it's a it's just, yeah, I hope that we can turn that stigma around together so that (unclear) not just the people with hearing loss but you're right, the friends, the family, the people want to spend time with those people we don't want to miss out.

Pearl (26:12) Absolutely, and that, that really is I think something that again kind of back to the conversation is, it, it feels sometimes that the person with the hearing loss is the one that, you know, carrying the burden of the hearing loss that if, that makes sense. But it's, it's everybody in their life that is impacted by their hearing loss just from the other side of the coin and the more that again I feel like that's why I exist is I just want to create awareness in a, in a comfort and a normalcy around hearing loss and ears that like you were saying with, with glasses and, and things it, it does feel sometimes that hearing loss kind of got the short end of the stick and, and I always when, when we used to go out and do presentations. One of the things that we talk about is you know like with glasses, I mean, they're they became a fashion statement, I mean people wear glasses without glass in them just to be cool...

Jamie (27:27) That's true...ha, ha, ha, can you imagine what if we started wearing hearing aids just for fun.

Pearl (27:33) And that's it. Exactly, it's like, have you ever seen someone be like, hey I'm just going to throw these hearing aids on cause that's a fashion statement and (Jamie...yeah) wouldn't that be cool though if it got to that point where it was that cool (Jamie...that it was that normalized yeah) it is and it's kind of not much different if you think about it like a hearing aid you know people wear earrings and those are just sitting in their ear while a hearing aid (Jamie...yeah and headphones, right, headphones over the ears in the ear) exactly so hearing aids or just more ear décor as I look at it and, and it keeps people being able to connect and so even when you get hearing aids if they're just sitting on a bedside table or something they're not doing anything. So wearing them it's, it's so so so important for, for everybody to be able to interact and for you to be able to feel like, like you're helping out. And again, that's where the, the hearing professionals can, can help get that determined and, and where you know Better Hearing & Speech month can really be a wonderful marker to kind of kick off the

embracing of, of hearing challenges. Cause here, I'm getting so excited now, I'm just rambling here but did you know it is, it's the (Jamie... is it called doodling when you ramble or no doodling it's the drawing) ha, ha it's like doodle, doodle, doodle mouth, mouth spewing. The, the statistics show that like when someone recognizes that they're having a hearing challenge they wait like 5 to 7 years before (Jamie...wow) it's address. So in that time people around them are aware the TV's is really loud maybe they're (Jamie...yep) not up engaging as much and that's part of the mission that I'm on is I want decrease the amount of time from when people recognize it to when they might get some help and that's part (Jamie...mhm) of getting annual hearing exam and, and things like that it's just ear health it's, it's it, it's so important.

Jamie (29:57) Well, Pearl It has been awesome to have you here. You know, I have to admit, we've never actually had a pen before let alone a spokespen and this has been a very "ear" opening experience for me (Pearl...ha, ha, ha), get it? (Pearl...I like that, I like that) thank you. But really, we, I appreciate you sharing all of this hearing health wisdom with us. I think that our listeners will too and I know I will be paying better attention now to the pens and the kinds of cups that they sit in and, you know, maybe I'll even be careful what I'm saying when I know I have a pen I'm wearing on my pocket (Pearl...you never know) and it's been so fun to have you here. Any, any last thoughts you want to share with us?

Pearl (30:37) Not, I mean I just, this is just been an utter joy, can I can I do some shameless self-promotion? It's not my (Jamie...yeah), it's not my, strong suit but I, I'm just getting started on twitter and Instagram and so if you go to (Jamie...wow) I know, can you believe it? I can't (Jamie...ha, ha) and as in, if you go to Pearl's hearing health wisdom on either of those follow me and I just post some kind of interesting things, it's all about ears it's not political or anything but there's some fun posts and you might, might get some more fun information.

Jamie (31:21) That is so cool. Okay, well to sum things up we talked to Pearl the official spokes pen for CapTel Outreach and we were talking about May which is Better Hearing & Speech month and there are organizations and resources out there to arm you with hearing health information. A few of them are the Hearing Loss Association of America, the National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders, ASHA or ASHA, the American Speech Language Hearing Association and of course last but not least it's OEI and or website is [oeius.org](http://oeius.org) and if you go to our website and you click on videos that is where you

can find all of Pearl's hearing health wisdom videos and they are informative they are fun and seriously guys Pearl is, is a hoot so do check that out and don't forget to join us next month when we're going to discuss Brain Health and how it's connected to hearing challenges, you won't want to miss it. In the meantime, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out. I'm Jamie and I want to thank all of our listeners for joining us today on the Have you Heard podcast and remember to stay safe and stay connected.

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