

## [Read John Barrowman's Deaf for the Day blog](#)

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Hi, I'm John Barrowman and I went Deaf for the Day for Hearing Dogs. I hope you enjoy reading my diary from the day.

### **10.00 Sudden hearing loss**



John getting the gel ear moulds inserted

I arrived at Specsavers Hearing Centre in Edgware Road to meet the audiologist who would be making me deaf for the day – Mark Edgar. I wasn't feeling particularly nervous as I imagined it would be a fairly straightforward day. Nothing could have prepared me for just how challenging going deaf would be.

The ITV Good Morning Britain film crew began filming my experience as Mark inserted special gel moulds into my ears which gave me around 60% hearing loss. I could feel the difference immediately. It's really hard to explain how a sudden hearing loss affects you, but I could no longer hear what Mark was saying to me. Straight away, I was lip reading everything he said.

### **10.30 Conversations**

I was concentrating so hard on lip-reading one person at a time, that if someone else started speaking I just couldn't keep up. A member of the film crew was standing beside me and apparently he asked me a question, I didn't even register a sound. It soon dawned upon me that this experience was going to be much tougher than I had anticipated.

## 11.00 The silent streets of London

As I left Specsavers, I walked along Edgware Road and suddenly the world was closing in around me. I could no longer hear the sound of busy London traffic, the footsteps walking behind me, the buzz of conversation around me. I felt anxious crossing the road. All the sounds I take for granted had gone. I had entered into a world of silence.

Next, I hailed a cab to take me to my manager's office. As I got out the taxi driver said something to me and I couldn't hear what he said. It was too late to ask as he drove away. It's strange the things you miss when one of your senses is taken away – like the tail end of a conversation. I wonder what he said to me...

## 11.30 Business as usual?



John and his manager Gavin try to communicate

Next stop – a meeting at my manager Gavin's office in central London. Gavin and the team knew I was going deaf for the day, and were intrigued to find out how it would affect me. I had to ring the intercom five times as I couldn't hear a response. The first thing the team noticed was that I had been speaking really loudly. I was completely unaware of the volume of my own voice as I couldn't hear it.

It was really difficult trying to have a conversation with Gavin as I had to concentrate intensely on watching his lips. Gavin kept telling me that my phone was ringing, I felt like I'd lost control.

It was already so much harder than I ever thought it would be. I was tired. In fact, I was exhausted! Is this how deaf people feel every day?

### **12.30 Tired, frustrated and withdrawn**

I could feel myself getting more and more frustrated as the day went on, and to be honest I just wanted to go to sleep. I couldn't understand what people were saying unless they were looking directly at me, and when everyone was having a conversation amongst themselves – I felt excluded.

It was like I was invisible. I started to withdraw from conversations and everyone noticed that I was being very quiet, which doesn't happen often! From this experience – my advice would be that if a deaf person asks you to repeat something, never say “it doesn't matter.” It does matter. It matters more than you know.

### **12.30 Lunch 'break'**

At lunchtime, I went to a nearby coffee shop to order some lunch and a coffee. Simple every day task right?

The lady behind the counter completely ignored me. I asked “how much is it?” and she just looked down and muttered something underneath her breath. “Excuse me – how much is it?” I had no idea what her answer was as she didn't even look up for me to read her lips.



John tries to speak through an intercom

At this moment, I remembered a conversation I had with a deaf person a few months back. He told me that when he went to the local shops, he would carry a £50 note with him to make sure he always had too much money to give the shop assistant. That way, he wouldn't have to keep asking "sorry how much is it?" and suffer the embarrassment of people in the queue being rude and asking him to hurry up.

That's why deafness is known as an invisible disability – you cannot see if somebody is deaf. I felt increasingly frustrated and wished people could just see that I was deaf for the day, perhaps then they would make more of an effort to communicate with me.

### **13.00 She is my ears**



John meets "his ears" – gorgeous hearing dog Robyn

After lunch, all I wanted to do was have a nap. I'm an entertainer and I'm used to very busy schedules, late nights and early mornings. But hearing loss makes you feel tired from concentrating so much. I felt a bit low.

But my spirits were lifted as soon as I was introduced to my new best friend for the afternoon – Robyn the chocolate Labrador!

Robyn was everything I expected and more. Her tail didn't stop wagging from the moment she arrived, she was so excited to meet me and I was delighted to meet her too.

I sat down on a chair to check my text messages and moments later Robyn came bounding up to me and nudged me on the side of the leg with her nose. I asked ask her “what is it?” whilst giving the British Sign language sign for ‘where’ as all hearing dogs are trained in both voice command and sign language. Robyn then walked over to the telephone – waiting for me to follow her. She then nudged the telephone to show me that the phone had been ringing. I hadn’t heard a thing. Amazing!

A little later in the afternoon Robyn nudged me again, and this time she led me to the front door where a member of the ITV film crew had been ringing the doorbell. I would never have known that someone was at the door if it hadn’t been for Robyn. She’s so intelligent.

### **15.00 Danger sounds**

Later that afternoon, Robyn nudged me again but this time she didn’t lead me to anything, she just lay down on the floor. When a hearing dog lies down like this, it signals that there is a danger sound. This means that the fire or smoke alarm has gone off, and informs a deaf person that they need to evacuate the building.



Hearing dog Robyn alerts John to a danger sound

One hearing dog recipient called Cas was in a changing room in a superstore when the fire alarm went off and she didn’t hear it. When Cas came out of the changing room, the whole store had evacuated, there was nobody there and she didn’t have a clue what was going on. I can’t imagine how frightening a real life situation like that would be.

I was amazed at what this clever hearing dog could do for me. Robyn was incredible and helped me see just how life-changing a hearing dog can be for a deaf person. It wasn't just Robyn alerting me to sounds, it was her being there. The morning was hard but Robyn brought a big smile to my face and stopped me from feeling isolated. To a deaf person, I can only imagine how important that feeling would be.

Here is a short video of my Deaf for the Day experience >>

### **17.00 Making deafness visible**



Hearing dog Robyn's jacket made John's deafness visible

After plenty of cuddles with my new hearing dog, it was time to head back to Gavin's office. I walked along the streets in Central London and straight away, Robyn brought visibility to my deafness. People could see that Robyn was wearing a hearing dog jacket and then they immediately knew I was deaf.

Strangers wanted to come up and ask me about what Robyn does to help me, which is a great ice breaker and encouraged me to talk to new people. She gave me back the independence that I felt I had lost earlier in the day. Having a hearing dog really brought me back into the hearing world again.

Deafness can be a very isolating and lonely disability, but Robyn provided me with invaluable companionship.

### **17.30 Time for bed!**

I took Robyn up to Gavin's office to meet the team and of course they all fell in love with her! When I finally had my ear gels removed, I sat down on the sofa in Gavin's office and I could have fallen asleep right there. I couldn't wait to go back to my hotel to sleep.

In all honesty, going deaf for the day was one of the most insightful yet exhausting days of my life. But I only experienced hearing loss for one day; deaf people face these difficulties every day of their lives.