

Getting hearing aids is only the latest example in a long history of practical, life-affirming, community-minded decisions for Gail Kaplan.



SARAH WATERS

Spinning

When I grow up, I want to be Gail Kaplan. It's not just that she's so well loved in Baltimore. Or even that she looks 20 years younger than her actual age, and can buzz around a Classic party giving directions, greeting guests, and bantering with staff, all in 3-inch heels like Ginger Rogers.

What is truly remarkable about Gail is her unflinching ability to wrestle adversity to the ground—to spin hay into gold.

Born in Baltimore, Gail's father was in the deli business. Her parents had to elope because her father didn't think his family would believe that his blond, Southern belle sweetheart, Minna Sachs, was Jewish enough. Her father, Leon Shavitz, was the "Leon" in Nate's and Leon's, a West North Avenue delicatessen, and later the owner of the famous Pimlico Hotel.

The Shavitz family lived on Brooks Lane in Druid Hill. As a child, there were times when Gail had to fend for herself which, she says, made her appreciate friendships more. She worked as a hostess in the family business when she was a teenager, and went to the University of Alabama (UA) after high school. There, she was honored with the Outstanding Freshman award, a coveted prize rarely given to a female student, especially one who happened to be both a Yankee and Jewish. She studied communications at UA and met her husband, Lenny Kaplan, there, as well.

In the sixties, Gail and Lenny had their three children. Gail became a mother, a volunteer and, eventually, she earned a graduate degree in Speech-Language Pathology at Loyola. After a few years working for Baltimore City Schools, Gail pushed her career in a different direction, working to develop a state Task Force on Aging and helping to get the first

Hay into Gold

Professional Services Directory off the ground in Maryland. Meanwhile, after many years in the restaurant business, her husband Lenny opened Classic Catering. Life was good. The kids were growing up.

One day, Gail got a call from Lenny saying "I've had to fire my catering manager. Can you come help?" It was the day of the first Hopkins gala. It was also the day Gail gave up her career and learned—and learned to love—the catering business. Hay. Gold. You get the picture.

Then, a terribly traumatic event changed Gail's life. She was attacked in her home in Mt. Washington. And though she escaped with her life, it would take many years, a new home, and an enormous amount of resilience for Gail to piece her life back together. Of her recovery, Gail says "You tap into things you never knew you had to survive, and you recognize what you're really all about." Gail talks about her experience with other survivors of violence through a program at a Baltimore nonprofit organization called TurnAround. That's pure gold.

Now, believe it or not, this is a story about hearing aids. But you have to understand Gail Kaplan and her ability to handle adversity before you realize what a great example she is for anyone in the community who is hesitating to take care of their hearing.

Having been through so many crossroads at which she might have gone toward anger or resignation, but made a more life-affirming

choice instead, Gail had little trouble dealing with her hearing loss. She needed to face the situation head on, get it resolved, and not let it hinder her life. Here's how she tells it:

"Several years ago, I noticed that my hearing was not as good as it used to be. But I waited a bit to decide what to do. Finally, when I couldn't hear my grandchildren trying to tell me something in the car," she says, "I decided that was it. I was going to go take care of it."

In true Gail fashion, she took care of the problem, but she did so in a way that would benefit others in the Baltimore community, too. "Baltimore has been good to us," she explains. "We love the city and we give back as much as we can."

Gail wanted to get her hearing aids at a place where payment for the aids would be helping others. She chose to go to The Hearing and Speech Agency (HASA) for her care. She knew about HASA's very highly credentialed audiologists and their state-of-the-art facility, but she was most attracted to the idea of getting her hearing aids at a nonprofit.

Of her experience at HASA, Gail says: "The audiologists were so wonderful and professional. They found me the right hearing aids and programmed them exactly for my particular hearing loss. Now, the aids make a big difference in my life," says Gail. "And life is worth hearing."

To make an appointment at The Hearing and Speech Agency, please call 410-318-6780. Visit www.hasa.org for more information.



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