

# “Till There Was You”—and What Audiologists Should Learn from It

By Andy Lau

One of my favorite songs growing up came from the musical *The Music Man* by Meredith Wilson. It was the song entitled “Till There Was You,” sung by Marian Paroo, the librarian to Professor Harold Hill toward the end of Act II.

Cheesy, perhaps, but if ever there were a theme song for the field of audiology, I feel this was it. Each time a patient tells me he is hearing things he has not heard before because of the hearing aids I have fitted, I can hear this song playing in my head. Each time a patient feels relieved because someone actually understands what she is going through when she is experiencing dizziness or tinnitus, the song goes off. It is an earworm waiting to happen. Yet, this song resonates with me, not only because it has a catchy tune but because it speaks volumes about the importance of value, and it depicts the doctoral education experience for me. Hear me out.

As I read blog posts and commentaries within the audiology community, I am beginning to notice an increasing pattern for us as audiologists to talk about the cost of things. This is not surprising, given the fact that the changing

landscape of healthcare dictates that we focus on the practicality of doing business. The cost of things—the pricing structure of hearing aids, the reimbursement rates for various procedures, and the [student] debt to income ratio to name a few—is an easy outcome measure. Yet, there are just some things you can’t measure with a price tag alone. If that were the case, people would not buy popcorn at the theaters, eat a fancy meal at an upscale restaurant, drink wine, own a boat, or invest in time-shares. They still do because the experience is worth something to them.

Likewise, audiology is not about the number of visits, the amount of batteries provided, the level of technology available—it is about being able to hear the voices of loved ones, the birds chirping in the air, the cat purring at their feet. It is about the audiologist’s ability to empower the patient with whatever resources available. We must refrain from marketing audiologists as a practice or a set menu and start presenting an audiologist as the person. Strip away the flashy hearing aids, take away the fancy equipment and instruments, what is something down and dirty that an audiologist can do that makes him or her invaluable?

There were bells on the hill  
But I never heard them ringing,  
No, I never heard them at all  
Till there was you.

There were birds in the sky  
But I never saw them winging  
No, I never saw them at all  
Till there was you.

And there was music,  
And there were wonderful roses,  
They tell me,  
In sweet fragrant meadows of  
dawn, and dew.

There was love all around  
But I never heard it singing  
No, I never heard it at all  
Till there was you!

If we were stranded on an island with a group of people, what do we bring to the table that makes us worth saving, what gives us the right to stake a claim on the limited resources? That should be the focus of our education—to prepare a professional who is indispensable by sheer importance of their expertise. Some may shake their heads and say the scenario I propose is far-fetched, but I firmly believe the value of what we do lies not in our ability to handle the ordinary but, rather, how we are ready to aptly deal with the extraordinary. Our imagination should not limit us only to the possible obstacles but find ways to go beyond it.

This brings me to the next point—how to enrich the doctoral education experience. I envision the doctoral education experience to be as rosy as the song lyrics depicted. Education, when done right, should be like falling in love. After all, the guiding principle for every audiologist should be this—do what you do out of the love for your patients and for the field. When you are in love, it stirs something deep within you, a heightened sense of awareness and creativity. That was how it was for me when I was a student. It remains so now that I am a practitioner. Love is essential to what we do. Sometimes love is the act, and sometimes love is the emotion.


Think of the parent who loves a child. While it is perhaps easy to hold, to comfort a crying child in the middle of the day; it is perhaps not so easy to do so in the middle of the night. The act is the same, but the causality is perhaps different. In the day, when the parent is feeling more intact, then love comes easily and the comfort naturally. A night when the parent is tired, the act itself of holding the child is that which

inspires the love and comfort to follow. This is the same with audiology. There will be days when we love what we do, and then there are just days we don't feel it. But we keep doing it because the action would remind us why we do what we do, and love for it will find its way back. An education that begs that student to fall in love with audiology in such a fashion is essential.

It doesn't stop there; love needs to be cultivated and shared. A child who is well loved doesn't mean a whole lot if they are incapable of loving themselves and sharing that love with others. Likewise, the mark of a successful education is not simply a matter of how well educated students have become but rather, how motivated they are in continuing their own education, and how much they inspired others to become educated.

Science is the foundation; art is the expression. In order for audiology to be successful, we need to establish new benchmarks that not only take into account what a student knows but how well they are expressing and sharing it. We need a movement that inspires audiologists to give back or pay it forward. I have already seen

it in the many amazing preceptors who so willingly give their time and share their wisdom as mentors. We need to challenge the field of audiology to continuously find new ways to inspire new audiologists, to help them learn.

I hope that each of you will consider experiencing that which I have experienced and become a mentor yourself. I fell in love with audiology for the very reason that it is a profession of nurturers and educators. It is within our nature to listen to our patients, and help them understand more about hearing, listening, and effective communicating. What better way, therefore, to fine-tune our skills than by helping our "young." In closing, I want each and every one of us to become the "You" in "Till There Was You" for our patients and students alike. 

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