



Bron Levett

Recipient of the 2016 Libby Harricks Achievement Award.

Introducing the recipient of the 2016 Libby Harricks Achievement Award, Bron Levett from Victoria, here is her story ...

At 23 years of age I was diagnosed with a profound high frequency sensorineural hearing impairment. At the time of diagnosis, I was only two years into my professional career as an accountant and was not ready to share this 'disability' with the world.

For quite some time I had noticed I wasn't hearing my mobile phone ring and was having difficulty hearing the conversation in noisy environments. Yet it took almost two years for me to gather the courage to go for a hearing test.

My experience during this test was not great, I certainly have no fond memories of the audiologist, but was lucky enough to be introduced to Warrnambool audiologist Tim Rayner shortly after, and he continues to be my hearing professional to this day.

Contrary to the large behind the ear analogue hearing aids I had seen, my first hearing aids were tiny and sat in the ear such that they were virtually undetectable – this didn't stop me from wearing my long hair down around my face to hide my ears though, and it took me a long time to get comfortable telling others about them.

Since that time I've worn four different sets of hearing aids. I was the first person in Australia to be fit with the Widex Clear in 2010 and recently upgraded to the Widex Unique after participating in a post release trial. I tell myself that as one of 100 subjects from 20 clinics across six countries, I'm special – but in reality I am continually impressed with the advancements in hearing aid technology and am in awe of the scientists behind the technology that allows me to live an extraordinary life.

I don't use Auslan to communicate and do not require interpreters, so I'm continually seeking new technology to help with my hearing. I currently use a Widex UniDex which has helped immensely with the use of my mobile phone, and listening to webinars and other presentations online is so much more enjoyable. I also access subtitles on television and YouTube whenever possible (and have even trained my family to use them too!) but am astounded at the number of movies that are released without closed captions – I find it unacceptable in this day and age.

I consider myself a very organised person and not one to lose things, so I chuckle when I remember the time I lost my hearing aids back in 2003 on a night out with friends, although I wasn't laughing at the time.

And I realise how far I've come from the perspective of simply telling people I can't hear them - I am now quite happy to talk hearing loss with anyone who is interested, partly because I have realised how important awareness is, and partly because I'm proud of my achievements.

Now a Fellow Chartered Accountant, with over 20 years' experience, and operating a boutique accounting practice The Tax Chic – I do as much work online as I possibly can, the internet has certainly helped me to find a place where I can control my working environment to some extent!

But it doesn't end there – I run a women's networking group Business in Heels – South West Victoria, am

a recently retired group fitness instructor, am currently studying towards an Advanced Diploma in Business and Leadership coaching (and have launched Bron Levett Coaching) and was the first female MC at the local Australia Day awards earlier this year all while penning a memoir which focuses on my hearing loss and the loss of my parents at a young age.

I know that all sounds rosy, but who wants to hear about the troubles? I mentioned that I'm happy to now talk hearing loss with anyone, but I don't look like I have anything wrong with me and as I'm continually meeting new people, this conversation happens a lot, and it can be draining. Getting new hearing aids is not like getting new glasses (and I wear both!), the acclimatisation takes longer, it's a time consuming process, it hurts and it's expensive – these are the trials that non-hearing aid users don't generally understand.

My hearing loss is with me every day, and I get tired and grumpy at times, but I also find it a source of strength I didn't know I had - there is so much for us all to do in this world, a hearing impairment should be acknowledged but it should not define you - I've decided that life is for living and I plan on doing just that!

I hope you've enjoyed reading part of my story (you'll have to wait for the memoir to read the rest!) But If you are interested in connecting or hearing more about how I manage my business and life, I'd be happy to talk with you, please e-mail bron@thetaxchic.com and I'll be in touch!

