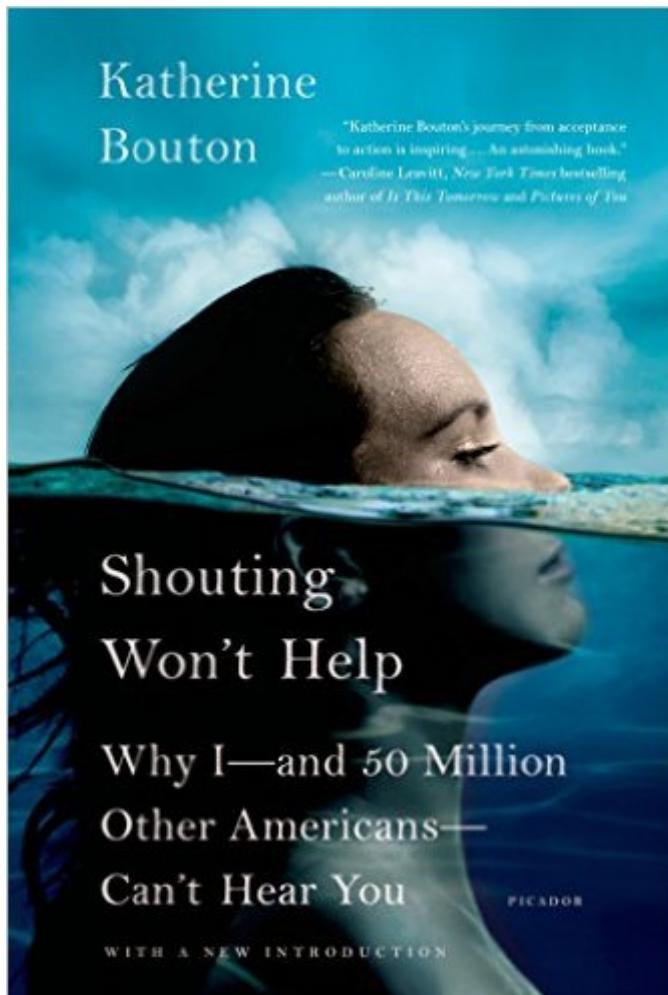


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Shouting Won't Help: Why I--and 50 Million Other Americans--Can't Hear You



Synopsis

Audiologists agree that we're experiencing a national epidemic of hearing loss. At present, 48 million Americans—17 percent of the population—suffer some degree of loss. More than half are under the age of fifty-five. In cases like Katherine Bouton's, who experienced sudden hearing loss at the age of thirty, the cause is unknown. In this deftly written and deeply felt look at a widespread and widely misunderstood phenomenon, Bouton recounts her own journey into deafness—and her return to the hearing world through the miracles of technology. She speaks with doctors, audiologists, neurobiologists, and others searching for causes and a cure, as well as those who have experienced hearing loss, weaving their stories with her own. *Shouting Won't Help* is an engaging and informative account of what it's like to live with an invisible disability—a must-read not only for those with hearing loss, who will recognize their stories in Bouton's own, but for their families, friends, employers, and caregivers. A Kirkus Reviews Best Nonfiction Book of 2013

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Customer Reviews

Katherine Bouton has been a writer for the *New Yorker*, and her literate and informative writing skill come to serve us very well in this book which is part memoir. Clearly this book is going to attract those people with hearing loss or who have family with hearing loss. But as Bouton points out, this is a stunningly large number of people, one estimate is 17 per cent of people in the US. Yet the study of hearing loss and its treatment is deeply underfunded. More to the point, hearing loss is associated with extensive emotional and social loss that the hearing understand only marginally.

did pick up this book because my mother is struggling with hearing loss. She had shared her frustration, anger and depression with her isolation. This book is able to greatly enlarge my understanding of her struggle. Bouton has met with professionals in every facet of this loss. She provides vignettes with people in specific fields who have lost their hearing. These people include nurses and opera singers. She has been able to speak with a range of people in her situation and attend most of the venues for therapy and support across the country. (My mom is planning to read the book.) Most striking for me is the sheer exhaustion of effort that is required for a person to cope with conversation even with good hearing aids. As I mentioned, the writing in this memoir allows me to absorb quite a bit of knowledge but not in a cumbersome or tedious form. Bouton is witty and wry where the topic allows it. Her tone is not preachy or self absorbed. She is open and genuine with her self disclosure. Finally I have to say that I picked up the book for a specific purpose but enjoyed the reading for the pure pleasure of learning.

About eight years ago over the course of three months or so I lost all my hearing in one ear and about half in the other. I realize how melodramatic this sounds, but it was a life-changing event. For me this book is a gratifying confirmation of just how bad it is. It's rather like swapping war stories with a friend who is also wicked hard of hearing. Much of what she has to say about the experience will be statements of the obvious to someone hard of hearing, but it's still good to hear it. For example, in her introduction (Kindle Locations 151-169) she gives tips to those who live with someone hard of hearing; here are a few:^{*} Look at them when you speak-- almost all hearing-impaired people read lips. Don't lean into their ear when you talk-- they need to see your lips.^{*} Speak in a normal voice and articulate as clearly as possible. Shouting won't help.^{*} If the hearing-impaired person says "What?" or "Sorry?" don't simply repeat what you've just said. Rephrase it.^{*} If they don't hear what you've said after you've repeated it two or three times, don't say, "Never mind, it doesn't matter." To the person who can't hear it, everything matters.^{*} Most hearing-impaired people will have a very hard time distinguishing speech over a noisy air conditioner, a humming fish tank, a fan, or anything that whirs or murmurs or rumbles. Don't try to talk to them when the TV is on, and turn off the background music when they come to visit.^{*} Don't talk to a hearing-impaired person unless you have their full attention. A hearing-impaired person can't cook and hear at the same time, no matter how collegial it may seem to join her in the kitchen.^{*} If you're part of a small group, speak one at a time.

Katherine Bouton's "Shouting Won't Help" is must reading if you, a loved one or a friend suffers

from hearing loss. Key points: First, hearing loss isn't rare: an estimated 36 to 48 million Americans suffer from hearing loss. Second, the problem isn't exclusively confined to the aged. Many develop hearing loss early in life, and Bouton notes that significant adult onset occurs between the ages of 19 and 44. Third, treatment--although improving-- is still expensive, is typically not insured, and, while useful, can't yet approach the performance of the human ear. Fourth-- crucial-- acknowledging hearing loss is necessary to deal with it. Hearing loss is neither an intellectual nor a personal weakness-- it is a fairly common medical problem that can be treated (if not cured) through hearing aids, cochlear implants, other assistive therapies and the retrofitting of rooms or public spaces with 'looping'-- wiring devices that transmit sound to appropriately equipped hearing aids or cochlear implants. This book will help the hearing impaired and their families and friends on several fronts: reducing the feelings of isolation and shame that accompany hearing loss; providing a comprehensive review of the causes of, treatments for and research concerning hearing loss; and providing guidance (see the preface) for speaking and living with a hearing impaired person. Bouton also provides an excellent, annotated bibliography of articles and books on hearing loss, and organizations that advocate for the hearing impaired. The book also contains case histories of smart and accomplished people who have coped with hearing loss. Their stories help to penetrate the stigma that often surrounds the subject of deafness.

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