



Sound Bites Podcast Transcript

Episode: Gerry Tuner

- Dave Fabry: Welcome to Starkey Sound Bites. I'm Dave Fabry, Starkey's Chief Hearing Health Officer and the host of Sound Bites. Now last fall, my guest today captured the hearts and minds of people when he appeared on a reality television show program. And I think it was really refreshing because for the first time, rather than showing 20-year-olds trying to win over the affections of a bachelor or a bachelorette, it was somebody who like me, is now old enough to qualify for Medicare. And really that broke a lot of barriers in TV, I think. And it brings me great pleasure to have Gerry on the show here today with us, Gerry Turner. And thank you for being here today as a guest on Sound Bites to talk a little bit about your experience on the show. And selfishly, I want to talk with you a little bit about the fact that you also happen to have a hearing loss and wore hearing aids.
- Gerry Turner: Right. Well, thanks for the wonderful introduction. I'll try really hard to live up to it.
- Dave Fabry: Well, I was with you. I saw you relatively early in the process when you happened to make a trip here to our world headquarters for Starkey in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. And there's been a lot that's happened since I saw you last.
- Gerry Turner: Yes, there has been a lot. That trip, by the way, was a real eye opener to the level of industry leading technology that you have and the facility that you have and so forth. I mean, it really states loudly that you are a leader in the industry. And as far as my experiences, yeah, it's been a lot of fun. I've had some great times since the last time I saw you and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I can't say that I have any regrets.
- Dave Fabry: Yeah. Well, let's talk a little bit about the reality show that you were on. Really, as I said, for the first time, not only someone who is technically considered a senior citizen was on there in a situation where I think it's got to be a really artificial situation where you're put together with a whole bunch of people. And how different was that for you? You were widowed and the love of your life, I know, passed away and that had to be in itself very difficult to address and deal with, but then to enter into this relatively crazy kind of dating situation, how was that going into that?
- Gerry Turner: The environment is very artificial and when you're in it you don't realize that what you're living at that moment isn't really as reality as it's presented. In retrospect, you look back and you go, "Geez, why did this happen? And how did that occur so quickly?" But when you're in the moment and the velocity of everything that's going on and the energy and the excitement about meeting



new people, it takes you over and there's this tidal wave that just carries you through the experience.

Dave Fabry: And for the other, I think most of the bachelorettes who were on this show were also in the age group of 50s and up in that case. And again, they must have been also struck by the monumental aspect of this. For the first time really. We know that ageism exists. I turned 65 this year and increasingly, although I think of myself as one of the young kids in the meeting rooms around on our campus here, I am almost always the oldest guy in the room. And inside, I don't feel that way and then I look in the mirror and I think, what the heck happened? But that was revolutionary about this show in addressing that.

Gerry Turner: It was. And the interesting part of this is the extension of the show, what has happened after the show is long gone. The friendships that I've developed and the depth of knowledge that I've learned about the contestants that I was in this environment, I was supposed to make these life-changing decisions, and I didn't have the information that I learned after the show.

Dave Fabry: Interesting.

Gerry Turner: There's seven or eight of the women that I carry ongoing conversations, texts and the occasional phone call and so forth, and I've gotten to know some of them really well. Had I known them this well in the show, it would've been a lot more comfortable. The whole experience would've been a lot easier. Unfortunately, that's not how it works.

Dave Fabry: No. Well, and it's a little like life. I mean, I'm very happily married to my wife, Liz. I've never been in a situation where I dated using an app. And with the show you did have some biographical information about each of the other contestants, little different than in the wild. Maybe this kind of bridges the relationships that you established on the show and then continued to learn about them after the show might've been helpful for the show.

Gerry Turner: It certainly-

Dave Fabry: But it's a little real life, meeting people in the wild is very different than swiping left or swiping right or whatever the heck you do on a dating app.

Gerry Turner: Right. And from the beginning with the women on the show, I didn't know a thing about them. So the limited amount of time that I had with conversations with each of 22 women that first night was all I had to go on to decide who stayed and who went home. That's really a situation I don't want to ever find myself in again. The women sacrifice so much to be there. They had invested their time, their money, and their hopes to be there. And I had to be the guy that decided who stayed and got to continue with those hopes and dreams and who went home. It's not an enviable position at all.



Dave Fabry: No, I can only imagine the burden of that, knowing that when you selected people, there were also people that weren't going to be on the show. And although in real time, those of us who watched the show, lived this out over weeks and months, this was a very compressed time for you in real time.

Gerry Turner: Yeah, 36 days.

Dave Fabry: 36 days. And it lasted all season and it captivated people. Again, not the least of which, dealing with people 65 and up in the majority, dealing with that sort of thing, where people now have a lot more wisdom than a 20-year-old going into a dating environment. And also bringing with them perhaps more pain, like you where you lost your life partner. And some of them were divorced, some of them were widowed, some of them had not married. But bringing in that from the perspective, I know that at the age of 65, I look at life a whole lot differently than I did at 22.

Gerry Turner: Oh, yeah. Well, see the themes of the show, of hope and heart and humor and being open to possibilities and being vulnerable, those things kind of were dismissed for people of our age. And Joan, wonderful contestant, made the comment on air that we had become invisible and that show made us not invisible any longer, that we had some impact on culture and that what we had to say and what we were thinking was very important. It was meaningful. And so for that reason, I'm most thankful for the show.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. And I hope they continue to slot this in as something that does help with intergenerational relationships. That people can understand even at this advanced age that I'm at, that I still think that I've got something to offer. I still think that I want to live my best life at every point of my life.

Gerry Turner: Right. And I have so many stories about men and women who have repeated that theme to me, either by text or an email or some of the social media. They said, "Gerry, after watching your show, I realized that I still have a lot to offer and I still want to be out there, I still want to find my person." Many times they end the story by saying they have found someone, that they are dating someone. So it's awesome.

Dave Fabry: I think it's fantastic. And from an audiologist's perspective, I'm an audiologist and many of the viewers of the Sound Bites podcast or listeners are hearing care professionals. So I for years advocated the normalization of hearing loss and the use of hearing aids on television, in movies and common knowledge. They showed you in the very first episode where you were putting your hearing aids on. And I thought that was spectacular because it wasn't made this big deal, it was just, hey, people put on their glasses, they'll put contact lenses, they'll put their hearing aids on, and it didn't have to be a big fuss. But I can tell you that every hearing care provider that saw that episode at the beginning of this show cheered, at least inside.



- Gerry Turner: Yes. I wish I could remember the movie, but years and years ago, there was a scene, a husband and wife, and the husband is putting contact lenses in, and the subliminal message is, we're doing something special to make ourselves look good. And then look at how contact lenses became so mainstream, it was almost invisible, unimportant. I hope the same thing happens with hearing aids, that people look at my simple gesture of putting in hearing aids as being noticeable now that as years go by, it's not noticeable, it's just part of what we do to help improve the quality of our lives.
- Dave Fabry: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. And I thank you for, I don't know whether that was your idea, their idea, or if it just naturally occurred as you were prepping to go on to the very first episode where you were meeting all of the bachelorettes. And from my perspective, I do have one question. I mean, stigma related to hearing aids and hearing aid use in the general population still exists. I've seen changes, particularly with younger patients like yourself saying, "I don't care if people see that I'm wearing devices. I want to hear better. I want to be able to engage in communication with other people, to not miss any of life's most important moments." But the general population still, some people may think, oh, hearing aids are just for older people. Was there any moment when you were getting ready for that first show where you thought, gosh, I'm putting my hearing aids in. I wonder if any of the bachelorettes are going to think any less of me because I have hearing aids on?
- Gerry Turner: I almost would say the opposite. I was putting in those hearing aids and I was happy to make the statement that I will do whatever it takes to find the best quality of life, to live every minute to the max. I wanted a woman to look at me and say, "He's not afraid to be vulnerable, to show his weaker side." Because that can be very sexy to someone. And as I've gone through things, the other part of that is that you don't have to have hearing aids that are really noticeable.
- Dave Fabry: Well, you cannot even see these.
- Gerry Turner: Yeah. Well-fit, good functioning hearing aids are all but invisible. They're really not much different than that contact lens. And when people realize that, and it's really a crusade for me, don't think it's something that is admitting that you're older or that you have a disability. It is not that, it's just a part of aging that we need to accept. Just like the person that needs the artificial knee or the person that needs the contact lenses or the reading glasses, whatever. It's just a part of what we do as we get older to make life better for ourselves.
- Dave Fabry: I love it. Yeah. Some people take statins, other people put hearing aids on. I mean-
- Gerry Turner: Yeah.



Dave Fabry: ... no difference.

Gerry Turner: It's not.

Dave Fabry: Hearing care is healthcare. And would you encourage people who are still struggling with making that leap to do so?

Gerry Turner: I absolutely would. And I wish I could make this statement to people every day in all the different situations that I could. It's get past the notion that there is a stigma about this. There is not. And you'll be amazed at how much better your life is being able to hear the subtle things that you've missed maybe gradually for the last several years. Because it's pretty revealing. You put in the hearing aids and you pick up on nuances that you haven't picked up on for a while. The simple enjoyment of watching a TV show without struggling to hear dialogue is important enough. I mean, it's relaxing all of a sudden to watch a movie rather than a struggle. And god, if anything, if people, and in one-on-one conversations, I say it over and over again, "It's not a big deal. Put them on and forget them."

Dave Fabry: And I can think of no better example again of putting them on and forgetting them and also the normalization of hearing loss and the use of hearing aids was the fact that at least a couple of the other bachelorettes also took their hearing aids out and showed you or talked about the fact that they have hearing loss and wear hearing aids. So again, further testimony to that, this is a part of aging for many of us and it should be celebrated, not something that we should struggle with over the stigma.

Gerry Turner: Right. I mean, the term that one of the contestants used when they showed me their hearing aids was, she pulled her hair back and she goes, "And I just want you to know, I too have ear candy."

Dave Fabry: Yeah, I love that.

Gerry Turner: It's awesome. You don't have to be worried about it. Women have a nice advantage though, usually their hair's longer and they don't have to worry about hiding it. But well-fitting hearing aids, I'm thrilled with this. People have to look pretty hard to see that I have hearing aids in.

Dave Fabry: Absolutely. And let's talk a little bit about your journey with hearing aids. I mentioned you had Audibel hearing aids and you've worn Starkey Genesis AI devices. So we had the Olympics this summer. Would you give these a gold or a silver or a bronze medal?

Gerry Turner: I'd give them a gold, but world records are always meant to be broken.

Dave Fabry: Indeed.



- Gerry Turner: So the encroachment, the improvements in technology are happening all the time. I'm thrilled to see what is going to happen next with it.
- Dave Fabry: Yeah. Well, we could extend that metaphor. I mean, yeah, the bar keeps getting raised. And so the Kentucky Derby is always held around Memorial Day each year, there's a Run for the Roses, and so you could continue to work to achieve that higher level, those records with roses. So we want to continue to work with you to always raise that bar with the technology.
- Gerry Turner: Yeah, that's something that I think everyone should look forward to. I do. Okay, what's next? The firmware improvements that come out that you load. It's like, okay, what's better now? And it's always fun to see them.
- Dave Fabry: I think that's so cool. You just did a firmware update. Can you talk a little bit about how difficult that was?
- Gerry Turner: Okay. I did the firmware update at the bar at the hotel, during my second vodka cranberry. You don't have to be really in tuned to do the firmware. I think the button was "Continue", yes. "Put your phone down", my hearing aids went down by my phone. It said several minutes, you won't be able to use your phone. And pretty soon it was less than a minute that it was done. And it said, "Yep. Complete." So I put them back in. That's all there was. I mean, literally, I'm not exaggerating in that story. Second cocktail at a bar, boom. Five minutes, done.
- Dave Fabry: Yeah. I think one of the things that a lot of people may not realize is that although hearing aids may last on average about five years, it's not that they're wearing out, it is that the technological bar keeps getting raised. But a lot of people aren't really familiar with the idea that within that five-year life expectancy, as new feature improvements come out, enhancements occur. Like you just saw with a firmware update that you can do either with the app or when you see the hearing care professional, they can do it in the software as well. But you just did it while you were recreating in the evening and you took advantage of additional features to keep those devices state of the art over their life expectancy to a degree that wasn't possible before.
- Gerry Turner: Right. And I think that's a huge plus. I'm really not a techie. I don't enjoy learning about it, I really don't want to. But when it's that simple, it's not a problem. Had it been or had I looked that and said, "Geez, I don't want to," it's a simple trip to the audiologist that you've worked with, they do it for you. It's not a big deal.
- Dave Fabry: That's awesome. So what are you doing now after the hubbub, all of the excitement that compressed drama in your life and everything? What's next?
- Gerry Turner: I'm fortunate enough, I have a good circle of friends and we're traveling quite a bit. I've been to the Grand Canyon recently. I've been to Michigan along Lake



Michigan in recent weeks. But I think the biggest project I have going is that I'm actually writing a book.

Dave Fabry: Oh, fantastic.

Gerry Turner: And so many of the experiences that I had in the show and after, and even some before, will be more greatly defined in the book and so forth. And the process is you work with a collaborative writer. And so I kept a diary while I was on the show, every night, as tired as I was, I would at least make some notes. And when I got done with the show, I transcribed those, type them up. And that was my first step as I sent those notes off to the writer. And from there we've had interviews and so forth. So I'm excited about that.

Dave Fabry: That's fantastic. I hope hearing finds its way in one way or the other, into the book.

Gerry Turner: Oh, yeah.

Dave Fabry: And given that it is such an important part of your journey. And certainly selfishly again-

Gerry Turner: Yes, the importance of-

Dave Fabry: ... I love that you represent the community with hearing loss who chooses to wear hearing aids because they want to experience all of what life has to offer.

Gerry Turner: Yes. Those moments in the show where the women were showing me their ear candy and the events surrounding those moments, they're pretty interesting. One in particular, I really hope that we do it justice in writing.

Dave Fabry: Oh, that's awesome. And talking a little bit more about some of these stereotypes that you broke. I mean, for us, as I said, it was really with hearing aids. One of the other issues that we saw coming out of the pandemic for the overall population, and especially for those who struggle with hearing loss who didn't do anything about it, is an epidemic of loneliness. And I think there was even certain elements of that that came into the show of one of the different situations where you feature bachelorettes going through the dating process in their 60s, in their 70s is different than in their 20s, is they're looking for a life partner for... The reality is there are more days behind you than there are in front and we don't want to be lonely.

Gerry Turner: Right.

Dave Fabry: Did that factor into any of your experiences that you can speak about from the show?



- Gerry Turner: Well, it does, but it is more of a general overlay of almost everything you do now. Now, if I'm going to date someone, one of the first questions are, "How healthy are you? What prescriptions do you take?" We don't care about children anymore. We don't care about life goals and a career or anything. It's like, okay, can we take care of each other as we get older and older? And of course, again, part of that is being able to communicate well. It's a very big thing for me. The beauty of the word between people is very powerful. And the ability to hear those words is a critical tool for that.
- Dave Fabry: For sure. And I think, yeah, when you're in your 20s, you're maybe looking for Miss Right or Miss Right Now sometimes. But now I think looking for Miss Right for the rest of my life. And one of the things that I see as I get older is the ability, you mentioned you've been traveling a lot lately. I think a key indicator for me, my wife is my favorite travel companion. We travel well together. Our outlook for how we plan our days when we travel is consistent. And I think looking through that lens of how it is that you live your day-to-day life is a little different at 22 and 70.
- Gerry Turner: I'm really happy for you then because that's a big deal. I've traveled with several different women and the objectives that you have day-by-day and long-term for a trip, if they're significantly different, you don't enjoy the vacation time as much. When you find the right travel partner and they happen to also be a spouse or someone that you're going to be with permanently, that's huge. I am seriously happy for you.
- Dave Fabry: I'm very blessed. And like I said, we all have something. We all have something we have to address with as it relates to health or physical condition or whatever. But hearing loss and hearing aids, the ability to engage with others and have an untreated hearing loss is something that would be difficult if someone was unwilling to go down that journey.
- Gerry Turner: Right. The willingness is the important part too. Maybe they haven't gotten to it, maybe they haven't recognized the level of need. So I find a new person that I'm interested in dating and all of a sudden I realize that I'm enjoying certain things in a movie that maybe she's not hearing. Or I'm getting dialogue and she keeps saying, "What did he just say? What was that?" And it's like, okay, that was my first indicator of I need to think about hearing aids, is that I was missing so much. And yeah, if that's the case, it's like, "Okay, honey, maybe we need to go see somebody and we'll just do testing. We'll see. I hope I'm wrong."
- Dave Fabry: It's a very common experience where it's not the individual. How did you first notice that you had hearing loss? Because it's usually not the person, it's more commonly a family member, colleague, friend.
- Gerry Turner: Yeah. It was my daughters. They were making fun of me for not hearing and I kept saying, "Oh, it's just selective. I don't want to listen to you right now." Or



something like that. When the reality was, I was missing a couple of key words, particularly if they were talking to me and they turn and I wasn't able to lip read for a couple of words. And I didn't know if they were ending the conversation with, I'm not doing such and such, or I'm doing such and such. And then that made me aware. And then I'm noticing the dialogue on TV that I'm struggling for and I'm turning the volume up even more and even more and I'm trying to find the controls that will give me more treble so that I can hear the voices easier. And I go, "Jesus, my dad has trouble, he has hearing aids and I know that's where I am, get over it and go take the next step." That's how I got there.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. And so for our listeners, and as I said, many are hearing care professionals, but many for this episode, I think in particular, you were so inspirational to so many people who were struggling with the loss of a partner, struggling with some sort of physical concern like that. If you notice that you're having difficulty with your hearing, you didn't hear it from me, you heard it from Gerry Turner, get your hearing checked. And then, importantly, if you have a loss, do something about it.

Gerry Turner: Do something about it. Isn't it wonderful that we provide that service? And you can walk into an audiologist's office with no expectation of cost, they're going to do something for me that is going to make my life better if I just let them.

Dave Fabry: Yes.

Gerry Turner: So you get the test and all of a sudden you've identified where you have trouble hearing, and it's my gosh, now take the next step. Make your life better. I am genuinely a big advocate of this. My wife used to make fun of me, I would shop five places for a pair of jeans. Can you imagine how critical I am of hearing aids? I want the absolute best. If I'm going to pay for this service and this product, I want the best value I can get. And I feel like I've gotten that at this point. So don't deny yourself the enjoyment of life. Do what you need to do, whether it's, like you said, a statin or a contact lens or a hearing aid. Do it.

Dave Fabry: Right. And connect to the people around you. And so what's the one thing? You talk about, you're a critical shopper and you want value. And value is not cost. Value is the benefit you receive for what you pay. And we offer products that meet anyone's budget through our commitment and our belief and our strong experience has been that our technology in the hand of the professional delivers the best outcomes. Because we make the technology and offer all the cool features, but the professional really works in concert with the end user, with the patient to identify what their lifestyle is, what their hearing loss considerations are, cosmetic issues, features that they might like or features that they may not think that they need until they explain a little bit more about what they can do.

Gerry Turner: 26:58 There's a lot of features I love about this, in addition to the hearing. I really like that I can Bluetooth all my phone calls to my hearing aids. That was a



big plus. I didn't realize it. Because phone calls, you can struggle. It's a little bit more difficult to hear, you don't have lips to read and all of that. When that goes directly to your hearing aids and you can set a phone down, put it in your pocket and go about your business until you carry on a phone conversation. It's pretty cool. It's pretty good.

Dave Fabry: I love it. And you are taking me to where we're going and I know your next set. We're using artificial intelligence and deep neural networks with the express intent of reducing background noise to improve speech understanding in very challenging background noise situations.

Gerry Turner: You'll get a rose for that one.

Dave Fabry: All right.

Gerry Turner: You'll get a rose for that one.

Dave Fabry: You're on. Thank you.

Gerry Turner: Yes.

Dave Fabry: And Gerry, I can't thank you enough for your vulnerability on your reality series that you were on. I look forward to reading your book when it comes out.

Gerry Turner: Thank you.

Dave Fabry: Thank you as well from every hearing care professional for so eloquently speaking about the issue of hearing loss and wearing hearing aids and not having to have, what I've said in movies is I don't want hearing aids or hearing loss to be a critical plot element in a movie. In the past, anytime you saw someone with a hearing aid, you were like, "Oh, it's going to factor in somewhere along the way." Think A Quiet Place or something like that. With you, you just happened to be a guy who was looking for love, who happened to have a hearing loss and chose to wear hearing aids to live life to your fullest.

Gerry Turner: Yeah, it's incidental to my life. It's become an assumed part. Put them on in the morning, don't take them off until the very last thing at night. It's just part of my life now. Without them, the rare day, and I think I've done it once in the last year, the rare day that I get busy and I walk out the door without my hearing aids, I am lost that day. And I'm annoyed with myself that I made that mistake.

Dave Fabry: As difficult as it was that day, sometimes it's a good reminder of what life would be if you weren't getting that benefit.

Gerry Turner: So true.



Dave Fabry: So maybe a little refresher from time to time is a good thing. Well, thank you for this conversation. It's really been one of my favorites that we've had in recent past on Sound Bites.

Gerry Turner: Thanks.

Dave Fabry: For our listeners, if you enjoyed this episode, please like it, subscribe, share it with your friends, your colleagues, your family members. And if you have topics that you'd like us to address in the future, send us an email to soundbites@starkey.com. Gerry Turner, thank you again for today.

Gerry Turner: My pleasure. This was very enjoyable.

Dave Fabry: And you know how to get him a hold of me and we'll work on that next gen for you too.

Gerry Turner: Oh, that'll be awesome. Looking forward to it.

Dave Fabry: Thank you.