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*Falling into the Sax 00:55*

*When I was in the fourth and fifth grade, I played the clarinet, and then I quit. When I was an adult, I had an associate degree in nursing, and I wanted a master's degree, so I had to get a bachelor's degree. I had 190 credits but never put it together for a degree. So, I went to the local community college, where we were living in West Virginia. I went to the music department, and I said, "I'd like to get clarinet lessons." I figured that'd be some credits. And they said, "no, if you're not becoming a music teacher, you can't get lessons." A guy walked through the room while we were having this conversation and he overheard it and he said, "Oh, listen, I have a jazz band. I need somebody to play saxophone. Can you play the saxophone?" I said, "no, but I used to play the clarinet." He said, "we'll give you a saxophone. Why don't you play saxophone for us?" I said, "if you give me clarinet lessons and saxophone lessons, I'll play in the jazz band." That was five credits. I needed 11. We had a deal. And so, I started playing the saxophone.*  
 [From [Forward Link 60 seconds a day](#) 6/19/2019]

That was a clip recorded in June 2019. The story I'm telling occurred in 1990. If you follow my podcast (please subscribe on whatever podcasting player you use), you know that most days, I join my podcasting fellows to record 60 seconds a day. The background music was the first recording I have of me playing. It was Autumn Leaves in 2011 with a community jazz ensemble. A bit rough!

This holiday episode, dedicated to my mom, highlights life under my musician hat. I'll use clips from other 60-seconds-a-day, old blog posts, and some music – blues funk, jazz, and Latin.

*Engaged with Sax – First round 03:21*

In April 2016, I wrote a post with [Geri Lynn Baumblatt](#) in the [Association for Patient Experience Newsletter](#) entitled [Engaged with Sax](#). I wrote, [my neurologist] *is most fascinated that I play baritone saxophone. "I can't offer you anything better than that. It's good for your lungs, your strength and dexterity, your mental health and creates new brain pathways all at the same time. What can I do to help you keep playing?"*

So, first and foremost, my plan for slowing progression of the seriously annoying condition, multiple sclerosis, rests on a foundation of music.

Improv for music and health 04:12

I first wrote about music and health in July 2012, early in my blogging career. The [background music](#) is Al Gallodoro playing shortly before he died at age 95. I wrote,

*As an amateur jazz musician, I spend three to six per week working on improvisation. In Upstate New York in the '90s, I studied with 90-year-old [Al Gallodoro](#), a clarinet, sax virtuoso extraordinaire. Now that I live in Massachusetts, I work with [Jeff Harrington](#), a saxophone professor from Berklee College of Music, and for the past year, I've played weekly in a student combo practicing improv under the direction of [Dan Fox](#). I'm blessed with the chutzpah to venture outside my comfort zone. I've landed on several fundamental principles while studying improv:*

1. Listen first, play next
2. Know the underlying tune
3. Keep my place
4. If nothing else, feel the rhythm
5. Less is more
6. A good sound beats dexterity
7. Forget it all and have fun

*The lessons of improv serve me well as patient, caregiver, nurse, and leader. Subsequent blogs will dive into improv and the other hats, but I can distill it down as follows:*

1. Listen first, act next
2. Excel as a team member on a good team
3. Know the goal and the related systems
4. Keep it simple. Enjoy life

*From blog post 7/29/2012 <<https://www.health-hats.com/improvisation/>>*

From virtuoso, Al Gallodoro, to Herb's Heard, the Big Band 06:18

It was inspirational studying with someone that good and that old. Al would yell at me and call me 'boy.' I guess he could. He was 95, and I was 50. Here's something I wrote in 2014. The background music, recorded in 2014, is a big band I played in for a few years, Herb's Heard. The tune is [Tangerine](#)

*Two musical events occurred for me yesterday: my combo rehearsal and Victor Wooten, Steve Bailey, JD Blair, and Derico Watson at Berklee School of Music. Two virtuoso bass players and two amazing percussionists, demonstrated energy, experimentation, creative inclusion of the audience, and remarkable unspoken communication among themselves. My combo – not so much. Some of us have played together for two years – rank amateurs. Yesterday, a new drummer joined us: we are piano, bass, trombone, and Bari sax. We all listened to each other, but none of us quite followed the tunes' form, so there were conflicting cues, frustration, and much verbal communication. We kept at it and improved some over the 90 minutes. My sax teacher has me working on the basics: chords and scales. Don't worry about the improv; it will come. I do angst about the improv, constantly criticizing myself. I hate it when people criticize themselves. I left the Berklee concert, thinking that these musicians sound like no one else and they are unafraid. I certainly sound like no one else.*

*What do I extract from these experiences for the health team's journey? 1. Listening isn't enough. There needs to be a solid frame, and 2. Sounding like yourself is good enough. The frame for a health journey comes from the person at the center of care. If listening to each other still feels confusing or disjointed, revert to listening only to the person at the center. Every health journey is unique-some polished, some not – the choices we make work out or don't. Harping on being right or being good doesn't help us move forward.*

From blog post 6/14/2014 <https://www.health-hats.com/sounding-like-yourself/>

#### Amateurs with Professionals in Music and Health 09:26

I loved playing in a big band, but I couldn't handle playing in two groups. So, I stopped the big band and stayed in the combo. In 2015 I wrote this. The tune is from a gig a couple of weeks ago playing in a blues funk band. The tune is Some Nerve.

*I play in an amateur blues funk combo. Yesterday we had a gig at a local Jazz club. We played in a lineup of nine amateur community bands, each led by a professional musician. An entrepreneurial professional, Dan Fox created more than 20 such groups, Morningside Studio. All of us aspiring musicians have a chance to advance our musical dreams. Already quasi experts in our instruments (also taking individual lessons), we're learning about making music as a team. It got me thinking about health care. The vast majority of people and caregivers are amateurs gigging with professionals. Unlike the musicians, most have no interest in health care, just there because they have to, gone when they don't. Others have great ability in their own instruments, their bodies, learning about working with a health care team. Some health care professionals are good team members. Others are not. Some are good teachers. Others not so much. Even the professionals are amateurs when it comes to their own health. For the most part, the only professional patients are those with chronic illnesses.*

*I'm struck by this constant challenge in healthcare: amateurs and professionals working together with that toxic overlay of big business. Can I learn anything from the combo experience? Well, I can leave a group if I'm not simpatico with the professional. I can usually leave my clinician if we're not aligned, but it's much harder. I learn as much from fellow amateur musicians as I do from the professional. I learn much from others with chronic illness, multiple sclerosis, and others fine-tuning their lives and their health. I look for one pearl a session from the professional musician. I'm delighted when I see it. Same with sessions with health professionals. Arrogant, distracted professional musicians are a drag. Arrogant, distracted health professionals can be dangerous. It's a matter of degree. Hat's off to amateurs learning to work with a team. [From Health Hats blog post 12/7/2015]*

#### Humbled with Lechuga Fresca, Latin Band 12:41

That might be the best I've ever played. It's good to have some successes. Let's shift now to my Latin band saga

*You know, I feel like I'm as good as they come professionally. I'm full of myself. I'm a good podcaster. Now I've been playing music for more than 25 years as an amateur, and I'm not confident at all. It's just so interesting to me. I went yesterday, last night, and I played for the first time with a Latin jazz band. I was as good as I am. It's a good thing I wasn't the only horn player because so much of the time, I didn't know what I was doing, but I did it. And part of the reason I did it is the confidence that podcasting has given me. So, thanks. [From Forward Link 60 seconds a day 7/7/2019]*

That was from a 60-second clip in July when I first started rehearsing with a Latin band, Lechuga Fresca. I've never played Latin before. My goodness. The background music is just a jam. I recorded the following clip a month later.

*I attended the third rehearsal of the Latin band that I joined, played Friday night. It was much better. I was more prepared, even though it did start with the expectation that I would transpose on the fly a tune that I did not have a chart for in my key. So, I didn't play that tune at all because I cannot transpose on the fly. I have a hard enough time transposing in any case. But I was prepared enough. And I did solo*

*some and they're a very positive group. A forward link would be very proud of them. They recognized the improvement and appreciated this and thought I sounded pretty good. What a relief though. [From Forward Link [60 seconds a day](#).10/27/2019]*

Now a holiday word from our sponsor, ABRIDGE. Record the rhythms, the riffs, and the improv of your clinical visits with ABRIDGE. Push the big pink button and record the conversation with your doctor. Read the transcript or listen to clips when you get home. Abridge was created by patients, doctors, and caregivers. Check out the app at [abridge.com](http://abridge.com) or download it on the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. Record your health care conversations. Let me know how it went!"

Music from [Christmas Jazz Music I Instrumentals & Vocals I No Copyright Music](#)

Reflections on a Merry Holiday 15:38

Sometimes I wish I had fallen in love with the flute. It would be easier than carrying the 40-pound sax up and downstairs. But it motivates me to keep doing my squats and increasing upper body strength as my lower body function diminishes. So, engaging with sax is perfect for me. Using different parts of my brain, learning every day, keeping me humble, and spiritually strong. *Are you still playing the baritone sax?* is a spot-on personal health outcome for me. So merry holidays everyone. I hope you have a musical season