

Chapter's Vice President's Monthly Column in The Venice Gondolier



[Anne Taylor is a bilateral cochlear implant user, a Gallaudet Certified Peer Mentor for the Hard of Hearing, Vice President of the local Hearing Loss of America and writes a monthly column. Here is last month's column].

In the past, people with hearing loss have been misunderstood, feared, ignored, institutionalized, regarded as not being very bright and dismissed as being a capable, useful contribution to society. Prior to 1979, people with hearing loss had nowhere to go for support and information.

Rocky to the Rescue

In 1979, Howard E. (Rocky) Stone noted that there were no services for people who did not hear well. He said they were 'between two worlds'. They did not fit in the hearing world or in the deaf world. They were hard of hearing. He came to the conclusion that all the available services, at that time, focused on people who were Deaf.

{According to Barbara Kelley – deputy executive director of HLAA - Of the 48 million Americans with hearing loss, 46 million are hard of hearing. They have all levels of hearing loss and use their residual hearing, lip-reading, hearing aids, cochlear implants and other assistive hearing technology. The remaining 2 million are Deaf (no hearing) and use sign language as their primary mode of communication. Some consider themselves part of the Deaf culture and, sometimes, not always resist any kind of surgical or technological intervention}.

Rocky Stone founded a support group named SHHH (Self Help for Hard of Hearing) in November 1979. He served as its volunteer executive director until 1993. Rocky discovered he was able to overcome the challenges of childhood poverty and a profound hearing loss. He believed in the ability of individuals to help themselves. Self-help movements were popular in 1979 and Rocky provided people with reliable information to enable them to help themselves, then, in turn to help others with hearing loss.

Rocky said, 'I established SHHH as a membership organization run by people with hearing loss. We provide the information necessary for them to make choices, but emphasize the choice must be theirs. The challenge is to develop togetherness within diversity.'

The growth of SHHH was phenomenal. Within four years, the membership grew to almost 6000 and by the end of 1984, there were 122 SHHH chapters. Today, SHHH –re- named HLAA in 2006 – is the nation’s foremost consumer organization for people with hearing loss. The mission of HLAA is to open the world of communication through education, support and advocacy.

Who was Rocky Stone?

Howard E. (Rocky) Stone was born in 1925 in Cincinnati, Ohio. During World War II, he lost hearing in both ears – the result of a nearby explosion. Despite a profound hearing loss, he was a successful CIA agent. He functioned in the hearing world by wearing a powerful body aid and reading lips. He did not know sign language and after he retired, he wanted to help others who did not hear well. He came up with the term ‘hard of hearing’ to describe people who needed technology to remain connected to the hearing world. The term ‘hard of hearing’ was introduced into our language for the first time in 1979. The term was critical in creating awareness that millions of people, who were hard of hearing and needed some form of access to the hearing world.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990

The new awareness led to the creating of the ADA, which says that ‘reasonable accommodation’ must be provided for people who are hard of hearing. In 1988, Rocky Stone was appointed by President Reagan to serve on the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (‘Access Board’) which drafted the accessibility guidelines for the ADA. Because Rocky and members of SHHH provided critical input, hearing loss technology options – such as amplified and captioned phones, loops, t-coils, hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive listening devices - are now available.

HLAA and Me

I lost most of my hearing when I was five years old possibly caused by mumps, a tonsillectomy, or the medications used at the time. I was raised in the hearing world and relied on hearing aids and lip-reading. I went to regular schools and sat on the front row. Over the years, my hearing declined to where I had 0% hearing in the right ear and 8% in the left ear. The hearing aid in the right ear no longer worked for me. I remember seeing my husband talking to me from the kitchen and I could hear nothing. I could only see his lips moving.

We had recently moved to Atlanta and knew no-one. I needed to meet people and obtained a couple of part-time jobs at the YMCA. One of those jobs was tennis court maintenance and the other was at the front desk. The tennis court maintenance worked out well as I did not need to hear. However, the front desk proved to be a problem. I was not able to hear on the phone or catch the names of members as they checked in. Needless to say, I had no choice but to resign from the front desk.

I began to refrain from talking to people as I knew I would not understand what they said. I was becoming reclusive, lonely and unhappy.

Out of desperation to meet people, I googled hearing loss groups and found Hearing Loss Association of America. I went to my first chapter meeting in April 2009 and was welcomed with open arms. There were about 20 people at the meeting – all with some degree of hearing loss. I noticed quite a few of them were wearing cochlear implants and they were hearing quite well. I wondered if the implants would work for me. After much testing, I was declared a candidate for cochlear implants. I received my first implant in 2009 and the second one in 2010.

The implants and belonging to HLAA have turned my life around. I am no longer reclusive, lonely and unhappy. I am confident, outgoing, happy - and I can hear!

SHHH – it's now HLAA

According to Barbara Kelley, deputy director and editor-in-chief of Hearing Loss Magazine, ‘the name has changed but the goal remains to create awareness about hearing loss prevention, early detection and treatment, and reduce the stigma associated with hearing loss. The mission to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy has been unwavering.’

Barbara Kelley continues, ‘for 35 years Hearing Loss Association of America has provided information so you can make the choices right for you, and, in turn, help others do the same’.

Help yourself. Make the choice for improved hearing and a better quality of life. Join HLAA. Meet others who understand. Discover how hearing aids, cochlear implants, assistive listening devices, t-coils, loops, captions and communication strategies can help you hear as well as you can.

Your family and friends will thank you.

Sources:

www.hearingloss.org/aboutus/founder.asp

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