



July 2022 Newsletter

Renew your membership in our local chapter for only \$15 a year! Ways to renew: pay at our website on the “Donate” button in the upper right-hand corner; mail your renewal with your name, address, phone number, and e-mail to: East Bay Chapter, HLAA, P.O. Box 12484, Oakland, CA 94604-2484. See the back page to sign up and support National HLAA.

At the July 9 meeting we will present: “Can Training Improve the Understanding of Noisy Speech by Listeners with Hearing Loss”. We will view a presentation about research conducted by a team from the Speech, Language and Hearing Department at George Washington University about how lipreading can improve understanding of speech in noisy environments, how training can help and an opportunity to participate in a study on this issue. After the presentation, Ed Auer, one of the research team members, will be available for Q&A and discussion time. **Social time: 9:30 a.m., Meeting begins: 10 a.m.**

Mark your calendar for August: John Galvin, a researcher from the House Ear Institute, will talk about cochlear implants and speech and music. There will also be some demos.

Register for these free events HERE. Or use this link if you are getting a hard copy of the newsletter: <https://www.hearinglosseb.org/monthly-meetings-1>. After you register, you’ll be sent the link to join the meeting. Consider staying after the meeting for AfterWords – a chance to ask more in-depth questions, as well as discuss anything you want with fellow members!

HLAA-EB posts our newsletters to the California State Association webpage and a link on our website. **VOLUNTEER! Contact us to let us know you are available!** Check out our website at: <http://www.hearinglosseb.org/> Contact us at: info@hearinglosseb.org

Bay Area Walk4Hearing

By Nancy Asmundson

The Bay Area Walk4Hearing was held Saturday, June 4, at Robert Crown Memorial beach. Kudos to Connie Gee who organized our table at the event. Kudos goes also to Len Bridges who was the volunteer treasurer for the Bay Area Walk4Hearing. Thank you to all who showed up! I remember seeing Connie Gee, Len Bridges, Dale Davis and her partner, Deb; Robin Miller, Sue Getreuer, George Chin, Sr., Janice Armigo Brown, Yorkman Lowe, Peter and Nancy Townsend with son-in-law and grandkids and myself and my guest, Carol Clive. Alan Katsura generously made “Participant” stickers for us to add to our “Step Up to Hearing Health” t-shirts. Our chapter had a wonderful table set up by Connie and hosted during the morning by various helpers. At 10 a.m. there was a rousing speech from Ronnie Adler, HLAA organizer, a performance by the Alameda High School cheerleaders, a visit from Lou Seals, mascot for the San Francisco Giants, and others. Then everyone headed off through the balloon structures to the 5K on the sidewalk by the beach. Plenty of water and snacks were available to keep everyone hydrated and happy. To add to the ambiance were a live D.J., a balloon man (I saw

some fabulous butterfly wings), and a Shaved Ice truck which opened as walkers came back and was a fabulous cool-down! Various vendors were showing their products such as Olelo, Starkey, and Cochlear (and you could get swag by stopping by their tables). Ann Thomas set up a HLAA booth with lots of literature. A wonderful time was had by all! Enjoy a few pictures!



HLAA-EBC booth with Nancy, Sue, Connie & George C



HLAA-EBC Booth with Sue, Connie and George C..



Nancy returning from walk between balloon structures



Connie won an Amazon gift card!



Ann Thomas and Janice Brown, our new Chairman of HLAA-California



Janice Brown at the half way mark of the walk

"Eh?"

By Barbara Scott Nelson

When I first began to wear my hearing aids I was amazed at how much I had been missing. More people said hello to me in the street than I had realized; the rustle of dry leaves in the wind and underfoot, marking fall, returned; quiet murmurings with a friend around the edges of a concert became possible again. I was back in the world of friendship and warmth, quick jokes and laughter, love.

This world also was bangy and clangy. The sounds of pans knocking together in the kitchen had a new ring, like the cymbals in an orchestra. The set of keys in my hand were noisier than I remembered, chattering away to each other while I searched for the right one. The grind of the garbage truck in the street had more layers — several different gears to grind away at garbage, cans, and bottles, each advertising itself individually.

The little pieces of plastic-coated technology in my ears were bringing me both the beautiful and the ugly. Regaining this complex world of sound had involved a journey through denial, anger over the diminution of my world, and finally the charting of a new, and happier, path.

I had begun wondering about my hearing several years earlier when I found it difficult to hear the soft, light voices of my nieces and watched them contort their faces in the effort to speak to me more slowly and loudly. Or when I could not hear a piano playing in a distant room when asked what that piece of music was. I had brushed these lapses aside, thinking they were isolated events and my hearing was fine, for most purposes. Denial is a very convenient defense.

But the experience of an evening meeting persuaded me that the time had come to acknowledge my hearing deficit, wrestle with what it was teaching me about the declines of aging, and do something about it. It was a two-hour meeting; ten people sitting in a lush, comfortable living room, with wine and Brie, discussing how to raise money for a favorite charity. The light was elegantly dim, antiques gleamed, and the 19th century aristocrats on the wall seemed part of our group. I found it extremely difficult to hear what was said; words and phrases slid in and out of focus but didn't add up to full sentences. Granted, those particular people tended to speak softly, but still, they seemed to be able to hear each other. Later, minutes of the meeting were written and distributed, all agreeing that they were an accurate rendering of what had transpired. For the first time I had a coherent picture of what had been discussed — the decision had been made to have a silent auction and individuals had volunteered to organize the tasks of making location arrangements, assembling mailing lists, and collecting auction items.

Having had only patchy access to an entire event terrified me. I had always taken good hearing for granted; it provided me with the world — conversation, birdsong, the crash of ocean waves, the blur of traffic outside my office window. But attending this meeting had been like watching a TV movie with an erratic mute button on. Piecing together what was going on was work; participating, close to impossible.

This was not the way I wanted to be in the social world. What else had I been missing? Finally being honest with myself, I recalled other hearing problems — being on edge before social events; asking people to repeat or speak louder, which slowed conversation considerably; pretending I had heard things, which always left a gaping hole in the conversation I was sure the other person could feel.

Denial didn't work anymore. I really couldn't hear well enough. The taken-for-granted was gone and I now lived in a new, strange, world. Fuming, like Hamlet, at fortune's slings and arrows, for several

months I was a troll – short-tempered, grouchy, sure the world was a malignant place. I howled. I wanted my world of sound back.

While hearing loss is a normal part of aging, perhaps made more prevalent by my generation's immersion in the high-decibel music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones when we were young, it seems to be particularly hard for many people to acknowledge and address. The number of people my age, who need words repeated, or spoken more slowly and loudly, is so large as to have become a stereotype. New Yorker cartoonists have made careers poking fun at elderly couples in restaurants, older men standing at bus stops, and pedestrians in Central Park nearly clipped by skateboarders; all oblivious to important messages headed their way.

Members of my generation often look young — hair suspiciously near its original color, dressed in Spanx-enabled slim pants and jackets — and move along briskly thanks to regular exercise and physical therapy. Hearing aids are visible and unambiguous signs of aging, though acoustic engineers are getting better at making them discrete. Many of us would rather suffer the embarrassment of not knowing what is going on than wear these devices that shout, "Old. Old."

I had relatively little trouble dealing with the hearing aids issue. Set against the cultural forces that tilt toward denial, the very practical family in which I grew up helped. As was true of many in their generation my parents faced and dealt with issues in a rational, practical way, with little attention to the emotional side of things. Inevitable breaks and spills by children navigating a kitchen led more often to lessons in cleaning up than comfort of the perpetrator's anguish. My family's practical orientation had the advantage of getting on with life, with little muss or fuss. I still have the problem-solving skills I developed then.

Later, I added to those practical tools the idea that one could go beyond task accomplishment and navigate the world to produce and maintain an inner feeling of wellbeing. I began to value things that made my life fulfilling — time spent writing and deep in good books; long conversations with friends and family; careful listening to music, tracing out the inner harmonies played by oboe and viola. I found ways to minimize time spent on things that did not contribute to my sense of wellbeing, like laundry and household paperwork.

Navigating to maximize a sense of wellbeing requires acknowledging when things are uncomfortable. Denial is not an asset here. It took the feeling of terror after that evening meeting to cut through my denial and bring to my full attention the unsatisfactory state of the world I was living in. Probably because of the problem-solving orientation absorbed from my family, anger at the decline of my hearing translated quickly into a search for improvement. I wanted my world back as quickly as possible and saw hearing aids as much like eyeglasses — one might not want to wear them, but they were useful. The trade-off seemed worth making — wearing a barely visible sign of aging in exchange for getting back my world of sound.

Because of sophisticated digital technology and miniaturization, the prices of hearing aids can range from less than \$2,000 a pair to more than \$8,000 for a pair with all the bells and whistles. I went for the medium/high end on the theory that conversation with family and friends and the nuances of good music were basic for me and I wanted to hear them well. My hearing aids amplify sounds within about 10 feet, toning down background noise: great for dinners in restaurants, where the clinking of glasses and silverware, and guffaws of laughter from two tables away, tended to overwhelm conversation with my friends. My hearing aids also have special programs I can turn on with the flick of a finger. One expands the ten-foot perimeter to amplify live music without distortion. It turns out that this also allows me to eavesdrop on conversations across the room, a feature I discovered quite by accident at a cocktail party a few months ago when I overheard two women discussing stocks from

thirty feet and three conversations away, raising the ethical dilemma of when to use my wonder woman hearing.

Different brands of hearing aids have slightly different qualities of sound. I chose my brand because it captures the depth and overtones of sound – a rich mixture that is interesting to listen to. To my ear, other brands made sound thinner and sharper. The distinction is like the difference between analog music recordings on vinyl and digital recordings on CDs. The sound of vinyl is fuller, with more depth. The sound of CDs is crisp and the notes have sharp edges.

My hearing aids are close to invisible. Vanity has influenced the development of hearing aids for decades. The most primitive form of hearing aid, used for millennia, is the hand cupped around the ear, creating a larger area for catching the sound, and signaling to others that volume is an issue. In the early 17th century sailors held long trumpets to their ears to hear the calls of other sailors on distant vessels. Later, smaller versions of those "ear trumpets" were adapted to help ordinary citizens with hearing loss. Over time, increasingly extreme efforts were made to hide ear trumpets. Furniture makers went so far as to build chairs with sound intake cavities hidden in ornate arms and output cavities hidden in the carving of the upper back, near the ear. This drive toward invisibility was more about hiding the individual's disability than about helping him cope with his problem. It wasn't until the 1970s, with the invention of the microprocessor, that truly small hearing aids became possible and our vanity could be satisfyingly assuaged. In an age of wearable computation, hearing aids of the future might become part of earrings, glasses, jackets, or hats.

It turns out that mine was the most common cause of hearing loss - loss of hair follicles in the inner ear that convert sound waves into messages to the brain. This follicle loss first affects the higher frequencies of sound, from which the consonants in speech are composed. It was the consonants giving shape to words that I couldn't hear well, which accounted for my ability to know that people were speaking but be fuzzier about exactly what they had said. In amplifying the high frequencies my hearing aids were bringing to me all sharp-edged, higher frequencies, hence my chattering keys. I have re-adjusted to this noisy world. When I am not wearing my hearing aids the sound of the world is quite muted and, I must say, a bit dull.

My encounter with hearing aids leads me to wonder if I had inadvertently stumbled on a more generally useful strategy for dealing with aging. First, face the facts. Denial at this stage had only trapped me in a diminishing world that it took a dramatic event to shake me out of. Second, absorb the feelings of loss, anger, or fear of inevitable decline, but don't get stuck. A sense of wellbeing does not lie here. Third, chart a new and happier path with all the inventiveness and energy I can muster.

I now live in a slightly noisier world but one that also lets me hear my nieces' jokes about the dorky guys their age on dating websites and appreciate the edgy music of Prokofiev and Miles Davis. It's a trade-off, but if I can accept these little pieces of plastic in my ears and the minor inconveniences of managing them, rather than push them away, frightened that they mean "old," they will bring me the ugly and unpleasant noises of pots, pans and garbage trucks as well as the nurturing sounds of my nieces' jokes and good music. My hearing aids are bringing me more of both — more of life.

Barbara Scott Nelson is a writer living in New Hampshire. Barbarascottnelson@yahoo.com. "Eh?" is one in a series of essays on what the world looks like from the point of view of being seventy. It is reprinted from *Kendalights: A Magazine of Humanities and Sciences*. Vol. 33, No. 4.

JOKE CORNER

A 92-year-old man went to the doctor to get a physical. A few days later the doctor saw the man walking down the street with a gorgeous young lady on his arm. At the man's next appointment, the doctor said, "You're really doing great, aren't you?" The man replied, "Just doing what you said, 'Get a hot mamma and be cheerful.'" The doctor said, "I didn't say that. I said you got a heart murmur. Be careful."

Q: What does Santa Claus say when he loses his hearing aid? A: Huh? Huh? Huh?

Q: How many deaf people does it take to change a light bulb? A: None, can't communicate in the dark.

East Bay Leadership Team

The chapter is run by a Steering Committee, Leader Dale Davis, ddavis94605@gmail.com, who also oversees the Membership Database.

Outreach, National Chapter Coordinator/Liaison: Susan Jeffries Fitzgerald, susanlj29@gmail.com

Treasurer: Len Bridges, lenbridges3993-hlaa@outlook.com

Programs: Robin Miller, robin@robinmillerlaw.com

Technology and AfterWords Small Group: George Chin, Sr., (510) 352-1569, georgechinsr@gmail.com

Membership: Connie Gee, cbgee2014@yahoo.com; Marlene Muir, muircmc@comcast.net; Derek Daniels, d.c.daniels262@gmail.com

Newsletter Editors: Nancy Asmundson, nasmundson@comcast.net; Kathy Fairbanks, mkathyfairbanks@att.net

Publicity: Andrea Doehrman, andreadoehrman@gmail.com; George Chin, Sr., georgechinsr@gmail.com

Refreshments: Marie Rhein, Coordinator

Technical/Audio Loop: Peter G. Townsend, peterg.townsend@gmail.com, Steven Ulrich

JOIN HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (HLAA) – THEY ADVOCATE FOR YOU!

Go to this URL to join: <https://www.hearingloss.org/make-an-impact/become-a-memberrenew/>

OR, if you prefer to pay by check or card thru the mail, Nancy Asmundson has membership forms to send to you, or contact HLAA at 301-657-2248 or e-mail membership@hearingloss.org. Your membership form & payment go to HLAA, 6116 Executive Blvd., Suite 320, Rockville, MD 20852.

COSTS: Regular Membership/year (will receive *Hearing Life* magazine in print and digital format):

Individual - \$45; Couple/Family - \$55; Professional - \$80; Nonprofit - \$80;

Veteran Membership: Complimentary 1-Year Regular Membership & Lifetime Online Membership.

Do you have something to contribute to our
newsletter? Let us know!

*See you on Zoom on July 9 for our next
presentation.*