



Spring 2008



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## Char's Chat

### HLA?! Who Are We?

You and I are just like the others who make up the Hearing Loss Association of Whatcom County. Yes, most of us are people with hearing loss, but we're so much more. Our actions affirm that it's what we can do, not what we can't that makes the difference. That's why our chapter is thriving.

First, we have recognized that we have a hearing loss and are no longer in denial. That's a big step! Not only are we aware, but also we are pro-active - finding ways to "bridge the communication gap" by

- Looking for information, support, and resources
- Securing reliable, highly skilled audiologists
- Testing our hearing to learn what our needs are
- Exploring what hearing "aids" might serve us best
- Sharing our insights, compassion, and successes
- Learning to cope
- Working for hearing access in our community

Second, we have become not only friends, but an extended family, joining our chapter and providing financial support.

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## WELCOME!

You've all been patiently waiting for the long-promised Whatcom HLA newsletter and it's finally here! Once we had a name for it, there was no excuse not to get it done.

This is **your** newsletter, so your feedback and suggestions are needed and welcome. The aim is to bring you the information and news that is relevant, up-to-date, and useful to you. Some of the columns that you can contribute to:

- **Person to Person:** Personal stories about members and their hearing loss experience.
- **Resources:** Information on websites, events, and services of interest to members
- **Tips and Tricks:** Ways you have found to deal with any aspect of hearing loss.
- **Profiles of Winners:** Spotlighting member's special accomplishments like publishing a book, hobbies, activities.
- **Fun Page:** Humorous stories, cartoons, jokes, funny photos, that relate to hearing loss.
- **Congratulations!** Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, accomplishments

Putting together a newsletter that is useful and entertaining is a big job and the best way to accomplish that is to get information, feedback suggestions and from the readers. On the outside of this newsletter is contact information for the Newsletter Team Leaders. We will be glad to hear from you with your ideas. Together we can make this the best newsletter in the

**Dollars & Sense:** Our treasurer, Joyce Sweeney, reports that our current bank balance is \$570.36. Thanks for your continued support!

## April Showers



April brought our chapter a shower of gifts. Our new brochure was unveiled thanks to the efforts of Bert Lederer securing a grant for its printing, and to Michael Rodriguez for donating his excellent typesetting skills.

We also learned that Charlene MacKenzie and Bert Lederer will receive the National Advocacy award from the Hearing Loss Association of America at the national convention in Reno in June. No one deserves it more for their tireless efforts on behalf of those with hearing loss.

Not least of our April blessings was a great program, Peaceful Co-existence - Hearing Friendly Family Support! We were both informed and entertained by Jerry and Joanna Olmstead and Kendall and Donna Sherman who came up from Skagit County. These husband and wife teams related to us their experiences in learning to cope with one partner's hearing loss. The point of their presentation was that both the hearing and hearing loss partner must make significant adjustments that require loving patience and understanding.

Joanna and Donna were kind enough to provide a text of their presentations which are reprinted on page 4 of this newsletter.



## HUH?

*Ever heard someone say something that just didn't make sense? It happens to everyone from time to time, but more often if you have a hearing loss. In this column we'll be reporting on some real-life head-scratchers submitted by our members. I'll start it off with one of my own.*

We were waiting for a car to clear the intersection so we could make a left turn. When the car made a right turn and came past us, my husband said, "My turn signal fell off." A short pause while I looked over to see the damage.

Turn signal looked OK so I asked him, "What do you mean, your turn signal fell off?" Turns out he'd made a comment about the car that we'd waited on - "Nice turn signal, fella!" Now that made more sense. If "fella" had signaled we could have made our turn safely without waiting for him. As it was we had a little chuckle about my mishearing and went on our way. -Kathy Mason

*Got a good story? Let me know and if we print it you'll be eligible for our "Chuckle Award".*

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More than that, we are thriving because so many take part in our chapter life; provide refreshments; set up and clean up the meeting room; offer thoughtful suggestions; regularly attend; step up when asked to help; phone or email our meeting reminders; take responsibility and leadership roles; invite and bring others; contribute to our newsletter, and on and on~

We know that we matter to one another by assuring that our chapter life is vital, personal, relevant, positive, helpful, and compassionate. In a word, we are truly acting out the mission of the Hearing Loss Association of America and Washington State:

*Together we open the world of communication to people with hearing loss, providing information, education, support and advocacy.*

I value each one of you, our friendship, our family, our mission. Thank you for continuing to invest so much of yourself in our growth and success. I will lead if you will follow.

Charlene MacKenzie  
President

### Whatcom County Chapter Donation

Please donate \$15 (or more) per household annually to help fund our activities. Includes a subscription to our local chapter newsletter. Also ask about our donation "Wish List".

Please make checks payable to HLA  
All donations are tax deductible



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## Rocky Stone Left a Legacy of Self-help

Howard E. "Rocky" Stone, who inspired hope and spread encouragement among hard-of-hearing people throughout the country and beyond, died on August 13 at Washington (DC) Hospital Center of complications from pneumonia. He was 79.

To those who, like him, were hard-of-hearing and to the whole hearing healthcare community, Rocky Stone was renowned as the founder and volunteer executive director from 1979 to 1993 of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH). However, as many people learned only after his death, the quarter of a century he devoted to hearing issues was Stone's second career. For the preceding 25 years, he served the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with distinction.

Born in Cincinnati, Rocky Stone began working at an early age to help support his mother and two sisters during the Depression. He suffered a bilateral hearing loss at age 19 while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II. Following the war, he enrolled at the University of Southern California, where in 1949 he earned a degree in international affairs. He won a scholarship to the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, but did not complete the program because his hearing loss precluded him from taking the oral exams.

That disability did not dissuade the newly created CIA from recruiting him in 1950 and sending him on sensitive assignments all over the world, including the Middle East and Vietnam. His postings with the agency included chief of station in Khartoum, Damascus, Katmandu, and Rome. From 1968 to 1971, he was chief of operations of the Soviet bloc division. He spoke several languages, was a proficient speechreader, and earned the CIA's highest award, the Distinguished Intelligence Medal.

### A SELF-HELP APPROACH

When Stone founded SHHH in the basement of his home, there were organizations for the deaf, but not for people who suffered what he called "the invisible disability" of hearing loss. He recognized that they needed a voice to advocate for them in the areas of research, technology, and services, and he set out to provide it.

Having overcome the challenges of poverty in childhood and deteriorating hearing throughout his adult life, Stone placed great confidence in the ability of individuals to help themselves. That staunch belief in self-help provided the philosophical underpinnings for his new organization.

SHHH was to be an organization of, not for, its members, and its mission was to empower them to help themselves. He stated, "We provide information necessary for them to make choices, but emphasize the choice must be theirs."

Barbara Kelley, the editor of SHHH's journal, *Hearing Loss*, wrote about how her former boss fulfilled his vision: "Always taking the lead while building consensus, he inspired others to join him, to give their time and talents, and provide financial support to establish what is today the pre-eminent organization for people with hearing loss."

Stone also advanced SHHH's cause through his stature in the public sector. In 1988, President Reagan appointed him to the Access Board, where he saw to it that communication access for hard-of-hearing people was written into the guidelines of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. In 1990, he was named to the advisory council of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

In 1993, Stone stepped down as executive director of SHHH, in part to put the organization to the test of flourishing without his day-to-day leadership. It did, and so did he, as he continued advocating for the hard-of-hearing. He became president of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People and a trustee of Hearing International and Cochlear Implant Association International. In 1994, Stone faced a new challenge: macular degeneration.

Characteristically, even as his vision was slipping away, he did not complain. He liked to say, "I have only lost my sight, not my vision." He also was quick to tell friends and associates that his new cochlear implant had restored much of his ability to communicate. His experience inspired him to found Teamwork, Inc., to promote cochlear implantation.

### ROCKY STONE'S LEGACY

Rocky Stone is survived by Ahme Stone, his wife of 53 years, without whom, he often said, "There would be no SHHH." Also surviving are their four children, Jolie Stone Frank of Potomac, MD; Michael Stone of Greenbriar, WV; Ted Stone of Bethesda, MD; and Melanie Stone Hogan of Lakewood, OH; and 10 grandchildren. Survivors also include his sisters, Mary Meyer of Libertyville, IL, and Helen "Teddie" Spies of Silver Spring, MD.

Rocky Stone also left behind countless friends and admirers, many of whom attended his funeral mass at St. Bartholomew Catholic Church in Bethesda and flooded the SHHH web site with their tributes. One of the most eloquent statements was written by Barbara Kelley in the September/October 2004 issue of *Hearing Loss*:

"Twenty-five years ago, Rocky inspired a cadre of volunteers who today number in the thousands. Few people could match Rocky's depth of understanding of the human condition and the effects of hearing loss. Many would say he changed their lives, even saved their lives. He would take strong objection to that, saying that each person took responsibility for changing their *own* lives. 'SHHH does things *with* people, not *for* them.'"

**David H. Kirkwood**

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## The Olmsteads



We met in college and have been married for 50 years. Jerry lost his hearing in one ear at age five due to mumps and then had a fluctuating loss starting in his teen years. As it fluctuated, his hearing decreased to the point he was dependent on lip-reading to communicate. We have faced the challenges of hearing impairment from the beginning of our relationship with new challenges coming on a regular basis as his hearing loss increased. I eventually became his second pair of ears, until his implant. Now he is independent again and I am no longer his ears.

I, Joanna, was a school nurse and worked in a school for hearing impaired so had some help from audiologists and speech therapists. I encouraged Jerry to use the services of the Hearing, Speech, and Deafness Center in Seattle. He took a lip-reading course to improve his already good skills, used the services of a wonderful audiologist for hearing aids, and was referred to state services for rehabilitation services. I thought that sign language would be an option but was totally wrong since he lived in a hearing world and found second languages a challenge. (But knowing the sign for Toilet was helpful so I didn't have to shout that I am going to the bathroom. Thumb between first and second finger and shake hand)

I went to medical appointments to be his ears since most medical professionals found it very hard to accommodate him. I would repeat what the doctor said or sometimes write what was said. With his implant he now hears well enough to have his privacy with his physician. Now the only problem is when his processor is removed for a procedure.

When working on our boat if someone stopped to talk to him I used to come out to make sure that he "heard" them correctly. I monitored interaction. If I repeated what he missed he could lip-read me so I became his ears by repeating what was said. As his hearing loss progressed I started to write what was said to him so that he could understand the conversation. Now I can let the boys talk on the dock. I still have to stop myself at the cabin door. Old habits are hard to break.

We have learned that when we entertain to keep the group small – only 2-4 guests. We are careful that the seating arrangement is optimum; guests sit on his side of implant and across table so he can hear and lip-read. Our living room is arranged so Jerry sits across from guests and can lip-read them.

Over the years we have bought a number of amplified phones and a closed caption decoder (before TV required to have CC). He hasn't used the phone in a number of years so I remain his phone secretary. We have closed caption on the TV full time. I miss words too so it isn't just for him. In the car

we used a magic slate to communicate in the early years, being careful to not distract him while driving. He can now hear me in the car because his implant is on the right side. We can now have those special discussions that we had in the early years of our marriage.

Losses and challenges included reduced communication by family, friends, co-workers which led to miscommunication and frustration for everyone including him. I became his ears but tried not to answer for him, which sometimes was hard not to do. After his implant I began to realize how much we had altered our lives to accommodate his loss of hearing. Life is full of many more activities, and we now enjoy traveling on tours since he can hear the tour guides, etc.

When we retired, thanks to a neighbor, we started attending HLA meetings.

This gave us new information and we met people with CI's. Today there is room for optimism, unlike many disabilities, when your hearing becomes more significant you may qualify for a CI or Baha. For many people it is a miracle, meanwhile HLA helps both the person and their family cope. Remember there is new technology everyday to assist the hearing impaired.

## The Shermans



We, Kendall and Donna Sherman, joined Jerry and Joanna Olmstead for the Whatcom HLA meeting on April 19, 2008. We were asked to share stories and information about our experiences as a couple dealing with hearing

loss. Kendall has had many years of hearing loss. He has endured so many years of not hearing well, frustrations, embarrassments, and feeling excluded. His hearing became so profoundly affected that he qualified for and had a Cochlear Implant done in 2007.

I, Donna, understood that Joanna and I were to share how *wonderful* we are and what a *consistently* sweet, lighthearted job we've done with having a spouse with profound hearing loss. Well ... that isn't the case with me so I can't tell you that. There are times I failed to have a good attitude.

As you all know, life with hearing loss isn't fun for the HOH individual or their spouse. It is a "special services" training ground for all involved – and if your spouse has a hearing loss then you ARE involved. I remember the gradual regression we experienced for some years. Kendall was in denial of how difficult a time he was having and I suspecting some "selective hearing loss". We plodded through the times of, "Do you HAVE to have that TV so LOUD?", "You should DO something about your hearing." Finally, one holiday, our children all told Kendall he

should "do something" ... so he did. Hearing aids officially became a part of our lives.

**How I've learned to assist Kendall in hearing better?**

Primarily we've learned through the school of hard knocks – by experience and discoveries along the way. I learned that Kendall couldn't understand me if I was talking with my back turned to him, or while walking away, or when my head was in the cupboard. Ways to help: First get the HOH person's attention; be willing to move closer to say things; look at him when speaking; try to speak clearly and SLOW DOWN if necessary. I'd love to say that I am always good about doing these things - but after all these years, I still sometimes goof, but try to correct myself when I realize I'm not helping.

Some years ago the good Lord brought to my mind that, it could be ME that had the hearing problem and I'd sure want Kendall to be cooperative and encouraging. That gave me a big attitude adjustment. Kendall didn't ask for this problem. He has no more control over this than I do with needing glasses.

**How Have I Helped – Specifically?**

See previous paragraph for the first steps. I also became the "phone person." First I was on an extension when he made calls to help out if needed. Eventually I had to do any phone calling (which I'm not fond of). Sometimes I needed more attitude adjustment. I became Kendall's ears for many things, like appointments with his doctor or others - going along to be sure he heard what was said. With family, friends, grandkids and neighbors – I often had to re-state things for Kendall to understand. This included taking notes for him at the HLA meetings. Helping him understand questions in restaurants or when ordering pizza. After all it could be me.

Now don't think I'm saying "aren't I grand?" I'm NOT. These are just some needs that became a part of our lives as Kendall's hearing continued to regress. Likely, it is what you have and are experiencing, too.

I've learned to get over personal disappointments because we could no longer enjoy concerts, plays, movies, church, programs, etc. together. I would far rather have Kendall than all these events. We had to accept that we couldn't converse while driving. Just as we must do in many areas of our married life, we can be a listening ear for the HOH person's frustrations. Learn how they feel, seek helpful information for HOH folks including Assisted Listening Devices, encourage him as I am able. It could be me.

**How can we complement and not override?**

I need to be Kendall's advocate – as his wife, not his mommy. When being his ears, sometimes the speaker (like Kendall's doctor) will look at me when

they talk rather than Kendall ... so I look at Kendall, forcing them to.

Sometimes Kendall felt he was invisible. I shouldn't answer for him but give him the courtesy to ask him first. It could be me. I was so used to his dependence on me for such things that after his CI we were in a fast food place and he told me he wanted to try to order. When we stepped up to the counter I began to place our order on automatic pilot. I had to catch myself and close my mouth.

SO – how do you survive? We are still working on figuring that out – but then over all our years of marriage we have had to figure out how to "survive" in other challenges. We need to learn our new roles and look for the best ways to deal with them. We are learning from each other. Hearing loss won't be our only opportunity to grow in grace and tolerance and Kendall will have opportunities to help me with a need.

Now we have entered into another adventure with Kendall's Cochlear Implant (CI). We had such incredible joy when Kendall first HEARD with the CI. Tears just kept streaming out of my eyes. Then, after all the years of dependence on me for so many things, Kendall had to go to a follow-up appointment at UW without me. It was just before the holidays and he was also going to stop at a few stores on his way back to pick up an item, return something and shop at Costco. I worried about him ALL day (and he was very concerned before hand). His day went just great! He understood, was able to ask questions and ALL! He felt like he regained a lot of himself and his independence that day.

In spite of the amazing success with the CI, Kendall STILL has profound hearing loss. The implant and some assisted listening devices (i.e. Neck loop) add to his successes. But, when the CI processor comes off the hearing is gone. The implant will never restore his hearing to what it was before the problem began. But it could be me.

We don't know what is ahead for us but we are grateful that the prospects for Kendall's hearing are so wonderfully improved. Hopefully I won't end up having as severe a hearing problem as Kendall has experienced but the stage is set ... I now DO have some hearing loss. Someday I may have to ask Kendall to tell ME what someone said. With Kendall's CI we have NEW adventures ahead ... and he can even understand his grandkids! How great is that?

*As a finale to our April meetings bounty, close to 40 of us went to lunch at Five Columns Greek restaurant. We all enjoyed good food and great company to top off an April's tower of wonderful gifts!*

