Wake Chapter Newsletter October 2021

Websites: Wake Chapter HLAA-NC HLAA National

In This Newsletter

Meetings and Events Available to All

HLAA NC Walk4Hearing Sunday Oct 10th 12 noon	Plan to attend our HLAA NC Walk4Hearing. The Walk will be outdoors at WakeMed Soccer Park in Cary. Registration is at 11 a.m. with festivities starting at noon. Stormy the Ice Hog, mascot of the Carolina Hurricanes, will greet walkers as they check in. For the enjoyment of kids of all ages, Happy Dan The Magic Man will perform following the walk. Event activities include a photo booth and raffles for numerous items. Water and ice cream also will be provided. There will be chairs, but please bring folding or lounge chairs if you want to be sure of having a seat. To read the full press release on the NC Walk4Hearing click HERE. At the HLAA Wake Chapter Team Web Page, you can join our team by clicking on the green Join Team box. That will let you register as a new walker or log in as a returning walker. You'll be added to our Wake Chapter Team and people can donate to support you as a walker. You don't have to be a walker to attend, or to support a walker on our Wake Chapter team. You can make a secure donation to support any existing walker at the Wake Chapter Team Web Page by clicking on their name in the Team Roster. If you prefer, you can send a check to the Wake Treasurer, Susan Goldner. The check should be to HLAA Wake Chapter, with a memo indicating NC Walk4Hearing, Wake Chapter. Either way, the funds raised will be used to support the important work of HLAA and Wake Chapter.
HLAA Wake Chapter Virtual Meeting Thursday Nov 18th 7 p.m.	The next Wake Chapter virtual meeting will be about assistive technology. Brittany Hawley, of the NC Assistive Technology Program will tell us about services they provide, and we'll have time for members to share what works for them. Our virtual meetings are captioned.

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Focus on People – Janet McGettrick, Wake Chapter Board Member

My life with a hearing loss began when I was born in 1944, but it was not diagnosed until later. Infant hearing screening was 50 years in the future, so a hearing loss was often not detected until school age. I was fortunate that my hearing loss was discovered as early as age 4.

Finding a diagnostic clinic was a daunting task because clinics that diagnosed hearing loss were rare. The field of audiology, the study of hearing, was just emerging at the time I was born. My parents searched near my hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, then took me to ear clinics in Florida and Tennessee. I was evaluated by ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctors and was given hearing tests by audiologists. Tests from both clinics revealed a moderately severe hearing loss in both ears with no known cause.

My parents looked for ways to help me hear and discovered that electronic hearing aids were beginning to be marketed. The sound clarity of my 1949 hearing aid was poor, but it was better than nothing. The hearing aid was the size of a pack of cigarettes but much heavier. A long cord ran from the boxy hearing aid to an “ear button” and ear mold that fit tightly in my ear. I wore the heavy metal hearing aid in a bra-like halter against my chest under my clothes. When I moved, my clothes rubbed against the hearing aid's microphone and made a scraping sound that momentarily drowned out the speech sounds that I needed to hear. Nevertheless, I was a compliant child and adjusted to living with that inadequate device. I readily wore it daily, all waking hours. With my new hearing aid, I now had the potential to succeed in school along with my hearing peers.

Success in school did not come initially. I began my school days in first grade at my neighborhood public school. The classroom was large. Reverberant sounds bounced off the high ceilings, bare walls and shiny wooden floors. I sat in a desk in the middle of a large group of students all listening to a teacher who may have been speaking Greek for all I knew. I soon developed school phobia and refused to go to school. My parents sought help from the school. Soon I was given some tests, but my hearing loss was totally ignored. The results of the tests showed that I was academically ready for school, but the school staff decided that perhaps I needed another year to mature. The administrators told my parents, “Keep her at home.”

My wise parents knew I would surely fail again the next school year since there was no support service. The law that guaranteed all children the right to an appropriate education was far in the future.

Instead of keeping me home, my parents enrolled me in a small private school with few students in each class. I remained in private schools through high school, thriving academically and socially. I gained a fine education mainly because my parents could afford a private school education with small class sizes as well as private speech therapy. Also, they paid for the expensive hearing aids that I needed for school. Their wise decisions and their willingness to pay for these special needs helped me to succeed in school.

I wasn’t involved in my parents’ quests and decisions. I was far too young to search with my parents for a diagnosis of my hearing loss. I don’t know how they found the schools that agreed to educate me. These years were bound to be emotionally wrenching for them, but I wasn't aware of their turmoil. In my memory, my parents were fun-loving, supportive and wise. They provided me with a joyful and privileged childhood that allowed me to flourish educationally and socially despite my hearing loss.

There were more educational roadblocks ahead. The next bump in the road came during my senior year at Auburn University where I majored in Elementary Education. All went well until the final semester when I took a hearing test that was required of all students in the School of Education. I wasn't worried about passing the test, for I thought my hearing aids would prove that I could hear well enough to be an effective teacher. The administrators thought otherwise. They ridiculed me for daring to attend Auburn University with a significant hearing loss. I pleaded that I was an honor student with a "B" average. The dean and faculty members turned a deaf ear. I was told to drop out of school immediately, for my presence soiled the fine reputation of Auburn University.

I did not follow their orders. Instead, I continued to attend classes and do well. The dean called me into his office again and repeated the order to leave campus. I remained polite but non-compliant. Soon, I received a letter to meet with professors and the dean. At that meeting, I spoke of my passion for teaching and asked to be judged on my high achievements and not solely on my disability. After I left, they discussed my case, then declared that I would be allowed to graduate from Auburn University; however, I would not be allowed to obtain recommendations from any faculty member. Also, I would not be allowed to receive any awards at graduation. I accepted their decision despite the injustice, for I was pleased to be graduating. I was relieved that I hadn't wasted my father's money on four years of college expenses. Most of all, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to follow my passion for teaching.

I took my diploma and fine transcript to Florida where there was a teacher shortage. As I filled out the teacher application, I realized that I faced yet another barrier. One question on the job application asked if I had a hearing loss. If I wrote yes, that would be the end of my dream to teach before my career even began. If I wrote no, that would be a bold lie. I chose to lie. For many years, I carefully hid my hearing loss. I lied each time I changed jobs over the years as I moved and applied for teaching positions in Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina. Fortunately, I was hired wherever I applied thanks to excellent job evaluations and, of course, my big lie. Occupational barriers remained throughout the nation until the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990. Around that time, I moved near Raleigh and once again I applied for a teaching position. For the first time, the dreaded question about hearing loss was not on the application because of the new ADA law. What an enormous relief! No more lies. I didn't have to hide my hearing loss any longer.

A hearing loss can initially be invisible. I hid my hearing aids behind my hair and often tried to bluff my way through a conversation while remaining clueless about what was said. In reality, though, a hearing loss can't be hidden forever. Bluffing rarely works, but for many years I boldly tried to hide my hearing loss by using poor coping strategies. I did not want to be around people who were deaf or hard-of-hearing. From my life experiences, I knew society could barricade the door on opportunities for education and employment and act unjustly or abusively towards people with a hearing loss. I looked disdainfully on deaf and hard-of-hearing people the same way that some professionals looked on me long ago with my hearing loss. I did not think of myself as one of those deaf people. For many years, I buried a significant part of who I was deep inside me.

Fortunately, over time, this hidden part of myself began to emerge like a budding flower glowing in the sunshine. This metamorphosis began with a visit to an audiologist soon after I moved to Raleigh. At my first appointment, he told me about the SHHH organization (now HLAA) and suggested that I go to a Wake Chapter meeting. Normally I would have been turned off by the idea but the way he worded the advice intrigued me. His persuasive words were, “They need you.”

I thought I knew something about hearing loss since I had lived with it for nearly 50 years. I could teach these people a thing or two. Little did I know how much they would teach me and impact my life. At my first Wake Chapter meeting in 1990, there were only six or seven elderly people there. My audiologist was right. They needed me, but not because of my experience with a hearing loss. They needed new, younger members like me.

At my first meeting, I was amazed as I sat among people who proudly showed me their assistive listening devices. All of my life I had tried to hide my deafness and my hearing aids for fear of rejection or ridicule. I prided myself on succeeding in school and in my career surrounded by hearing people. I did not live around hearing-impaired people. I did not think of myself as one of them. Yet, I was here this evening in a room with deaf and hard-of-hearing people all around me.

My initial condescending attitude changed the moment the moderator turned on the FM system that activated the wired loop around the room. My eyes widened and I felt electrified! I still remember that clear voice that sounded like the speaker was talking in my ear. The experience so energized me that I could not sleep that night. Since that night, I’ve been introduced to many assistive listening devices at HLAA meetings and national conventions that have kept me in the hearing world despite my declining hearing over the years.

Since that first meeting that I attended, Wake Chapter has grown. Steve Barber arrived not long afterwards at the urging of his wife. We have been leaders for almost 30 years. The other board members, as well as many other faithful chapter members, have all inspired me to live a full, meaningful life, embracing my hearing loss, the part of myself that lay hidden for so long.

After I attended several chapter meetings, I began to develop a healthier perspective on my deafness. I considered how I could help students with a hearing loss succeed in school. This led me to take additional college classes, adding the area of “Hearing Impaired” to my teaching certificate. After completing the classes, I began a gratifying new teaching career. I wrote Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for each of my deaf and hard-of -hearing students. As I wrote, I thought about how fortunate these students were to get the support they needed.

My enthusiasm for helping students to do their best must have been evident. In 2001 I received the “Teacher of the Year” award at the school in Durham where I taught. As I accepted that honor, I thought about the barriers that I encountered in my quest to become a teacher. Instead of being sidetracked, I hurdled those obstacles and threw myself wholeheartedly into a teaching career that spanned 42 years. HLAA-Wake Chapter has played a significant role in helping me lead a productive life among friends, who, like me, live with a hearing loss in a hearing world.

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Helping Others with Hearing Loss

Steve Latus, President, HLAA Wake Chapter

How can I help others with hearing loss?

Talk about a question that's overlooked in the hustle and bustle of daily living. These past few days, however, answers to that essential question have been easy for me to find.

I represented the Wake Chapter at the recent NC Coalition on Aging Annual Meeting and Luncheon. Everyone at the event wore masks except when eating or presenting. The host of the event was constantly taking off and putting on her mask as she spoke and then handed the microphone over to another speaker. At one point as she removed her mask, a look of dismay crossed her face and she raised her left hand to her left ear.

As someone who wears two hearing devices, I had a hunch as to what had occurred. In removing her mask, the strap around her left ear had dislodged her hearing aid. She handled the situation deftly, briefly explaining to the audience what had happened and then continuing the program. Only when she handed the mic to the next speaker did she search the floor and find her aid.

Following the program, I introduced myself to the host and complimented her poise during that unsettling moment. She told me that she had only recently begun wearing a hearing aid. I explained that I knew of many people with hearing devices, including myself, who had popped out and even broken a device when removing a mask. I then demonstrated to her the simple $2 solution (called a strap extender) that I use that connects my mask straps together below – rather than behind – my ears. When asked where I purchased my strap extender, I told her that various versions were readily available online. I think she's interested.

My sister Pat has helped people with hearing loss in a far different way. She is a retired high school teacher in Michigan who now works part-time as a presenter at the planetarium in the Grand Rapids Public Museum. To benefit planetarium visitors with hearing loss, she has advocated for the installation of a T-coil loop in the facility. She was making slow progress convincing the powers-that-be of the need until I connected her with the leader of the Grand Rapids chapter of HLAA. The HLAA leader must be a persuasive salesperson, because he recently met with museum management, and this week Pat's boss told her that the planetarium would be looped by the end of the year. I'm proud of both Pat and HLAA.

One final suggestion as to helping others with hearing loss. Support the NC Walk4Hearing as a walker or donor. Funds raised through the annual October event support our chapter and so much more. Learn more about participating in the NC Walk4Hearing see the NC Walk4Hearing Press Release.

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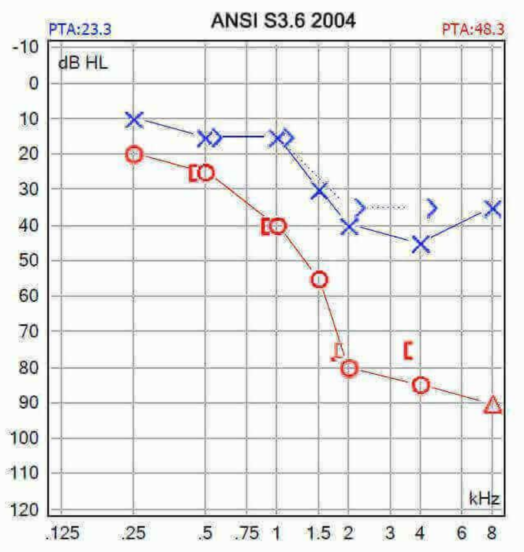
HLAA 2022 National Convention

The HLAA 2022 Convention is June 23-25 in Tampa, Florida! HLAA is very excited to be hosting an in-person Convention again. This year the exhibit hall, workshops, demo presentations, plenary sessions, social events and Research Symposium will all be held under one roof at the brand new JW Marriott Tampa Water Street. When you aren't learning and networking at the most communication accessible convention for people with hearing loss, you can explore Tampa's new Sparkman Wharf area or cruise down the local Riverwalk. Start planning your trip now!

Convention registration will open on Monday, November 29. Visit the Convention page (hearingloss.org/programs-events/convention) for more information. Be sure to register by March 4, 2022 to receive early-bird rates!

Focus on Tech: Hearing Loss and Sound Intensity



The graph on an audiogram can be a little confusing. It measures, for each ear, how loud a sound has to be at various frequencies for you to hear it. A jet engine is so much louder than a whisper, that a mathematical trick is used to fit the extremely wide range of sound intensity onto the left axis of a graph.

Sound intensity is measured in decibels (dB) which can be thought of as the sound's 'loudness'. But it gets tricky because the left axis of your audiogram measures the intensity in dB required for you to hear at each frequency. A 60 dB loss is only half way down the chart, but it's a LOT WORSE than a 50% loss!

The problem is the dB scale is not linear; it's logarithmic (based on a factor of 10). A person with normal hearing can hear a very quiet sound (of about 20 dB). But a person with a 30 dB loss needs a sound to be 10 times louder to hear it. A 40 dB means the sound needs to be 100 times louder. It's easy to see that further loss in 10 dB increments mean you need sounds to be 1,000, 10,000 and 100,000 times louder before you can hear them.

Hearing loss often happens gradually, so it's easy to think your loss is not as bad as it really is. Don't let the logarithmic scale of the axis on an audiogram fool you. Your wife and co-workers aren't mumbling.

HLAA Wake Chapter Contacts

Steve Latus (President)	slatus@comcast.net
Steve Barber (Media)	steve.barber@earthlink.net
Janet McGettrick (Member Outreach)	jmcgettrick106@gmail.com or 919-469-0924
Susan Goldner (Treasurer)	goldaub1@aol.com 630 Upchurch St, Apt H Apex NC 27502

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