

MEETING NOTES: OCT 2011 HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA



Carolyn Ponder has a long history with the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) for which she currently serves as the Austin Chapter President. Carolyn lives in Elgin with her husband Eddie. In response to our invitation to speak to our group she wanted to know more about Sun City and our group. After a tour of Sun City and learning what our group is all about she accepted our invitation to tell us about HLAA and why she is so passionate about it. During her preliminary visit it became known that she had a life long hearing problem she was asked to share her story with us.

Carolyn's first memories relating to her hearing problem began as a child when she noticed when playing with neighborhood children that their lips were moving and was curious about what that meant.

She did the normal things children do: riding bicycles, roller skating, playing jacks, hop scotch, a lot of other things not centered on communication.

Her story was interrupted by a dead battery in her implant hearing aid which, to the delight of the audience prompted a show and tell about the size, shape and how her rechargeable batteries worked.

Resuming her story, Carolyn talked about her first hearing aid in the first grade. Eddie circulated a picture of Carolyn wearing that first aid as she mentioned that the aid had two batteries and a receiver, and they were huge. Her mother made a pouch to wear around her neck that held the receiver. She also wore a bag at her side to hold the batteries.

That was the way she heard sounds until high school at which time a one-piece hearing aid was devised with sufficient amplification. Garters were frequently used in those days and served as a handy place to store the batteries out of sight under her skirt with the connecting wire up under her dress to the receiver. It was quite a contraption, but it worked. "It gave her voices – sound".

Elementary school in Houston was easy for her because she only had one teacher, her classes were small and she was with the kids with which she had grown up. During this period in life Carolyn learned several valuable principals to guide her through life.

One day a lady came to her school and taught LIP-READING which was a tremendous help at the time and has continued to be a benefit throughout her life. Carolyn will never forget the gift Mrs. Putnam gave to her that she still uses with implant. The most important thing in lip-reading is to focus on the lips of the person doing the talking.



Another lesson was to have a POSITIVE ATTITUDE. Carolyn believes your attitude can help you, or it can stop you. You have to work at BELIEVING IN YOURSELF. Many things are not easy in life and you must learn to FACE YOUR PROBLEMS. You have problems when you hear, and you have other problems when you don't hear, but you don't want to let your problems control you. Don't have a bad attitude. You must accept those things you can not change and deal with them in a positive manner.

Middle School was a challenge because all the teachers and kids came from other schools and she no longer had small classes.

In High School there were new lessons to learn. Carolyn always loved to dance and there were the school dances after football games for which she always had a date.

Upon graduation from High School she qualified to attend UT. This was a difficult time as she lost her support group of family and friends. Although she learned that she could do things on her own she was faced with being number 266 in a class of 300 students and sitting in front where she had a chance at hearing some words and could use her highly developed lip-reading was impossible. There were no sound amplification systems to provide help. She resorted to reading the text book and discovered tests were taken from lectures. She needed smaller classes to have a chance.

On a blind date the summer she was home from college, Carolyn met Eddie. Most blind dates – not so good but this one was different. Eddie had never been around anyone that was hard of hearing and Carolyn remembers on that first date he reached over to hug her and the response was eekkkkkkkkkkkkk! He said “What’s that?” She explained it was merely feedback from her hearing aid that makes the noise when a vacuum is present.

Her parents worried about her future, but they never let her know. Would anyone want to marry their daughter who had a very profound hearing loss? She could have gone to deaf school, but her folks didn't know about it.

Carolyn got married at 19 after a whirl-wind courtship. Yes, to Eddie who had become accustomed to her “eekkkkkkkkkks”. In 2000 she got her implants and quit squeaking. Eddie developed a hearing loss and now wears aids but as he points out-only when he wants to hear. Now he squeaks.

While Carolyn and Eddie were raising their four (hearing) children they encountered new challenges. Marriage and being a mother of “hearing” kids was different from the typical marriage. One challenge was she doesn't use the phone. Her husband and her children served as her answering service. At work a fellow employee took her phone calls. Her husband was an auditor and traveled. When he needed to send a message to her it was

through their children. She and Eddie used the universal sign for love and sign language a lot to communicate, because there was no way to have verbal (pillow talk) conversation.

Carolyn shared a DVD to the group about HLAA which is the nation's leading national non-profit educational organization founded by Howard "Rocky" Stone in Maryland in 1979 when he first introduced the induction loop to Washington D.C..

HLAA is a major advocacy group for equal political empowerment for 36 million Americans with hearing loss. They have/are active advocates for:

- HR 1479 Hearing Aid tax legislation
- Captioned Radio Pilot Project
- Hearing Health Care
- National Walk 4 Hearing
- Movie captioning
- Classroom acoustic standards
- CapTel
- Hearing Aid Compatibility Act of 1988
- Outreach on Cochlear Implants
- Hearing Loss Magazine
- Cell phone compatibility
- Looping America
- American Disabilities Act
- Video Accessibility Act of 2010
- Stop tax on hearing aids

<http://www.hearingloss.org/>

Carolyn's advice to all:

LIFE IS A CONSTANT SERIES OF CHALLENGES AND NEW EXPERIENCES.
THINK POSITIVE, BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, MAKE THE NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS
AND IT CAN BE A WORTHWHILE VENTURE.

Gary Shepard