

## MARCH 2012 MEMBER STORIES-REVIEWS

### Member Stories-Reviews

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#### POCKETALKER

- Mose Blaine shared his thoughts on his PT by citing its versatility and indicating the most useful feature he found was for noisy restaurants where he could place the speaker in the middle of the table and by using his neck loop and hearing aids could pretty much eliminate competing noise from other areas of the room and hear the table conversation.
  - Tommy Judson was scheduled to describe the success he and his wife, who has perfect hearing, achieved for TV listening, but was unable to attend the meeting.
  - NOTE: VISIT THE FORUM OR AUG 2011 FOR A FULL REVIEW OF POCKETALKER.
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#### SAD STORY

- I reported a member's story of HRI going out of business, being referred to Jones Hearing and making the first and last trip to Jones. The visit was for a routine cleaning but resulted in (1) the loss of the volume control program settings (2) the hearing aid specialist using another person's file records and (3) the subsequent discovery that a wrong size tube had been inserted in one of the aids.

#### MY FIRST AIDS

- I told the story of the four year life of my first real set of hearing aids by presenting my four page chronological log.

To summarize, I began with a free medical exam by a prominent surgeon whose written report indicated I was not a candidate for surgery and recommended a hearing loss evaluation by a clinic he owned. The clinic tested my hearing and recommended a pricy set of ITE aids. There was no charge for the evaluation or a copy of my Audiogram.

A few days later I was intrigued by a full page ad in the KC Star advertising the latest Starkey CIC premium model at \$1,000 (for two aids) below other prices so I scheduled a free consultation with the owner audiologist. Having a sales background, I recognized and enjoyed witnessing him apply sales techniques on me. Maybe the sales techniques worked because I purchased the aids, but I would rather think I was impressed that he had a profound hearing loss and wore the same aids as a preference over all other brands available. I inquired as to how he was able to discount the aids and he told me that he had a huge volume of sales enabling him to negotiate maximum purchasing discounts with all the manufacturers he represented. He indicated he was able to sustain the high volume by doing franchises where he would train and provide capital to hearing aid specialists to open their own shops with all purchases going through him.

The discounted purchase price of the aids included servicing for life of the aids many years before this became accepted practice.

At that time (December 2003) I was employed by a large national company offering a “cafeteria plan” where I could elect, at the beginning of a calendar year, to have a predetermined amount of my gross salary before payroll taxes deducted to use for medical expenses (a use it or lose it deal).

I enrolled in the plan for 2004 and arranged a purchase date after the first of the year. The audiologist allowed me use of the aids at no charge until the January purchase date. The plan provisions enabled me to withdraw the full price of the aids before my first monthly payroll deduction. I retired several months later and according to the terms of the plan I was not required to reimburse my company for the majority of the cost of the aids.

I then started a four year learning process about hearing aids that I believe all of us go through such as:

1. With ITE and CIC aids occlusion (barrel sound) is bothersome and after numerous complaints you finally learn that it's something with which you have to live. I noticed my Doctor had drilled air holes in his aids to lessen occlusion and I talked him into doing the same with mine but the effect was nominal.
2. Competing noises that you are not used to hearing are troublesome and in spite of technological advances it still remains a problem.
3. With CIC's it is not unusual to have pain and sore ear canals which you have to work through. I experienced headaches and swelling before the Doctor reshaped the aids using a hand sander as my ear canals were getting used to the aids.
4. I used size 10 batteries at what seemed like a quite rapid pace and started internet purchases in bulk at an average price of 50 cents/battery (bargain in those days). The batteries were a major manufacturer but not Ray-O-Vac and I learned from the Doctor that they caused unusual wear and tear on the compartment of my aids due to not being rounded on one edge as the Ray-O-Vac batteries were. The Doctor then agreed to sell me batteries at the same 50 cents. (I now get batteries with my latest aids free for life. I think I know why but that is another story).
5. After a certain time you can expect to get reassigned from the Doctor to one of his/her hearing aid specialists. In my case the specialist's office was much closer, I could get unlimited appointments in a matter of days and I liked the specialist.
6. I learned that the motivation behind service for life of the aids was just good business practice. First, aids don't last forever; second, technological changes encourage a shorter life and finally who has the best opportunity to get your next purchase-someone you like and trust or someone you have never met before.
7. Aids are designed so that the volume cannot exceed a dB level at the ear to avoid possible increase in hearing loss.
8. Wearing aids actually stimulate the hearing hair particles remaining and serve to maintain your current level of loss.

My log contained details of all the frequent visits over the four years as I attempted to get the aids to address my hearing issues. I had nominal success.

After relocating to Sun City and finding myself without a provider, I visited West Lake Hearing at the Sun City Market for an advertized free hearing test and was told I had wax blockage. West Lake unsuccessfully attempted to reprogram the aids for additional volume and finally suggested I pay \$200 per aid to have the factory recondition them since they were not in warranty. This resulted in no change in hearing. West Lake stated the manufacture settings were correct and concluded the aids were just “maxed out for volume”. I lost the plastic liner in the air hole on the

right aid which I believed to be the cause of whistling. West Lake stated they did not have a replacement liner and the person I had dealt with before was gone. The replacement person took some paper tissue and pushed it down the air hole as a solution. West Lake lost their lease and moved from Sun City. The left aid quit working and after a long time setting in my dresser I donated the aids to charity.

**FINAL EVALUATION: I CONSIDER THE AIDS A POOR VALUE BASED ON PRICE TO BENEFIT. ALTHOUGH I LIKED THE TWO AUDIOLOGISTS AND ONE HEARING AID SPECIALIST I HAD NO WAY TO PROVE THEIR COMPETENCY AND PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE NOR WAS I ABLE TO CONFIRM IF THE AIDS WERE CAPABLE OF MORE THAN I RECEIVED. I LEARNED NOT TO EXPECT AIDS TO PERFORM WELL IN NOISY SITUATIONS EVEN WITH ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY. I LEARNED THAT OCCLUSION CANNOT BE ESCAPED WITH CIC'S AND/OR WITH A PROFOUND LOSS. I LEARNED THAT PROVIDERS TOUT MANUFACTURER'S TECHNOLOGICAL CLAIMS BEFORE A SALE AND CAUTION PATIENTS NOT TO EXPECT AIDS TO PERFORM WELL IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS AFTER THE SALE. I LEARNED THAT THE TIME FROM WHEN ONE NOTES A SITUATION THAT NEEDS ADDRESSING UNTIL PROGRAMMING ADJUSTMENTS ARE MADE AND FURTHER EVALUATION COMPLETED CAN COVER 30 DAYS TO 6 MONTHS DUE TO ONE THING OR ANOTHER. ACTUALLY IN ONE CASE TWO YEARS DUE TO AN AUDIOLOGIST'S OVERSIGHT. I LEARNED THAT ONE PROGRAMMING ADJUSTMENT CAN AFFECT ANOTHER AND AN UNENDING CIRCLE IS POSSIBLE. I LEARNED THAT MOST OF THE COST OF A HEARING AID IS TESTING, FITTING AND SERVICE AFTER THE SALE AND THE BUNDLING APPROACH CREATES A FINANCIAL LOCK ON THE ABILITY TO GET SECOND OPINIONS ON PROVIDERS AND AIDS AND IN THAT WAY IS COUNTER PRODUCTIVE. I LEARNED THAT WHEN YOU MOVE OR YOUR PROVIDER GOES OUT OF BUSINESS OR MOVES YOUR "SERVICING FOR LIFE" GOES OUT THE WINDOW. I CONCLUDED THE AIDS HAD A COST BENEFIT VALUE OF ABOUT \$300 FOR THE PAIR. AFTER DONATING THE AIDS TO CHARITY IN 2010 I STARTED ALL OVER BUT THAT IS ANOTHER STORY FOR ANOTHER TIME.**

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#### HAPPY STORY OF NEW AIDS

A member finally listened to his wife who was constantly reminding him he had a hearing loss.

The member went to Jones Hearing for an advertised free evaluation and was satisfied with the evaluation given. The member obtained a copy of the test at no charge.

The member then went to Costco who did another test and again, was not charged for a copy of the test. There was no discerned difference in the two tests.

The member ended up purchasing from Costco simply because the aids were deemed adequate and exactly half the cost quoted at Jones. The member was impressed with the thoroughness of the evaluation and concluded he would see how the aids perform over the long haul.

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#### FREE HEARING EVALUATIONS-A DISCUSSION

Since there no time for that portion of the meeting intended for a group discussion on the subject of free hearing evaluations it will be the subject of some future meeting.

As an interim measure the Discussion will be posted on the Hearing Solutions Forum under the topic of "Audiograms (Tests)".

(NOTE: When visiting the forum check the box at the beginning "subscribe to the forum" so you will get an email alert each time a new post is made.)

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All members were reminded to have their T-Coil's activated for the Looping Demonstration at the April meeting.