



# Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

## North Shore Branch

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Tel: 604-926-5222 Fax: 604-925-2286 email:chha\_nsb@telus.net  
Charitable Registration No. BN 89672 3038 RR0001

Editor: Hugh Hetherington

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## Mountain Ear

### President's Message Have Hearing Loss; Will Travel?



Have you wondered if traveling abroad is for you, now that you have a hearing loss? A hearing disability does have its challenges when you're in a foreign country, but it should not stop your desire to explore and appreciate other lands and cultures. My husband Doug, our younger son Nathan and I visited three of the Scandinavian countries this summer.

Traveling with these wonderful hearing companions did make things much easier for me. However, with or without a hearing companion, I am convinced that we should not let our hearing loss be an obstacle to becoming a traveler.

Let me tell you why, and throw in a few pointers for your trip.

Traveling is a feast for the eyes. Wherever you go, you will see beautiful sights, unique cultural activities, stunning scenery, ancient historical sites and artifacts, diverse architecture, and different ways of doing everyday activities. My hearing companions did not have a greater advantage when we were in a foreign land; we all enjoyed the sights together. It

was a pleasure to experience the fiords of Norway, the Old Town in Stockholm, Sweden's archipelago and Helsinki's architecture.

Now for a few pointers to make your trip more worthwhile:

- A traveling companion is a very good idea! Sharing memories with someone else makes one's trip even more special. He or she can help you if you are having difficulty hearing the travel agent. If you are considering a group tour, you may still wish to take along a companion with whom you can enjoy 1 to 1 conversations.
- Read as much as you can about your destination before you arrive (e.g., Internet and travel guides). You will then be much more familiar with the names, places and events you will be seeing.
- An assistive listening device is a worthwhile investment, especially on tours. On my trip, the tour guides had no qualms about wearing my ALD, and I was able to hear as well as anyone else!
- In places of interest such as museums, look for the brochures and material that is available in English.
- Although most people in the tourist industry speak English, their accents may make them difficult to understand, especially if they

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speak quickly. Don't hesitate to ask questions that may require them to repeat themselves. In a tour group, for example, many of your fellow travelers will be grateful that you asked.

For our family, traveling has been a great "equalizer" in the sense that I have not been left out in any way because of my hearing loss. Each trip has become a special gift that I tuck into my memory chest.

Now, enjoy your trip! When you get back, will you tell me all about it?

Til next time,



Flo

## June Meeting Report

By Andrea Gauthier

At our June meeting held on June 18th at the Summerhill in North Vancouver, Flo, Doug, Justin and Nathan Spratt made a family presentation entitled "I Know Someone With a Hearing Loss. How Do I Help?"

The evening began after the usual credits to our sources of funding with the viewing of a DVD entitled "Hearing Loss" created by Nathan Spratt as part of his assignment in a Media class at Carson Graham Secondary School. The video is very professionally done and Nathan put in many hours, adding captions to it for our hard of hearing audience. This gripping film is mainly aimed at an audience of normal-hearing people, to help them to understand what life is like as a hard of hearing person and what hard of hearing people need for successful communication to take place.

While we on the Board sometimes wish we could reach all hard of hearing, we are thrilled when one or two new people find us. Each of us is an ambassador for the cause. Copies of the DVD were available for purchase at the meeting for \$2.00 so that others could help to spread the message. Congratulations to Nathan, whose teacher was so impressed with his work that he has entered it in a competition.

During their captivating presentation, the Spratt family touched on many aspects of their lives together. When Flo and Doug met in College, Flo already had a severe to profound hearing loss that has been with her since early childhood. Doug has never known Flo as a normal hearing person and from the start accepted the hearing loss as a joint problem. Together, they have raised two sons, Justin and Nathan, who are now in their teens. Some of the points made by them include:

1. All the rules of good communication have to apply all the time.
2. Verbal humour is based on processing speed and hearing loss slows it down. Timing is an essential element of a good joke and a punchline when quieted can more often than not be missed by the hard of hearing person. This leads to a feeling of being excluded.
3. Doug mentioned that he always sort of introduces the subject when he speaks to Flo. He knows if he doesn't do that, he'll have to repeat everything again.
4. As a family, they often feel more isolated than they would like to be. Flo accepts that there are times and situations when it is impossible for her take part in conversations. During these times she is glad to sit back and allow her family to enjoy their social time without her.
5. Acquiring an FM system helped Flo to get back a degree of normalcy in her life. This assistive listening system allows her to communicate in situations previously impossible, such as riding in the car, in restaurants, or even just out walking with others.
6. When renovating their kitchen recently, they incorporated an induction loop system into the ceiling. The system, which works throughout the house, allows Flo to listen to the stereo system and television with greater ease.
7. There were many frustrating times for the boys when they were little and Doug was called upon to mediate and explain. All four made it clear that there still is some conflict on a daily basis because of the

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situation.

8. Hearing conveys a lot of “relationship” information. We see this in the theatre where two actors might play the same part, say the same words, but one is convincing, while the other is not. This gets lost in communication with someone with a hearing loss and they need to be reassured of their connection to you.

The Spratt family takes a “disability” perspective, whereby one takes into account the needs and one modifies one’s behaviour, rather than a “handicap” perspective, where one considers the hearing loss a handicap and that there is nothing one can do about it. For example, Flo can’t hear so that’s something we’ll never share.

While there were many strategies described, the underlying theme was one of love and caring. While obviously moved by the thought, Doug said that it has been very challenging but they have all become better people as a result and that it has been a good thing.

The most wonderful and informative evening ended with refreshments for the social time afterwards. Our thanks to Joan Gouws for providing the refreshments, to Rosalie Williams for helping at the sign-in desk and to Hugh Hetherington, Rick Waters, and Nathan Spratt for coming in early to set up our loop system and projector.

## Social Service Grants

**CHHA – North Shore Branch acknowledges with thanks the following grants and donations**

**District of North Vancouver \$1100**  
**City of North Vancouver \$1100**  
**District of West Vancouver \$ 600**

**We also gratefully acknowledge generous donations from the Howe Sound Lions Club, West Vancouver Kiwanis Club, and the North Shore Community Foundation**

## High Frequency Hearing Loss

By Hugh Hetherington

High frequency hearing loss is probably the most prevalent type of hearing loss in the adult population today. It certainly would not surprise me if up to one third of the adult population suffered from some degree of this type of loss. Because of its insidious nature in the way that it creeps up on us slowly, it can go largely unrecognized in most people for many years. In many instances, it is not even a case of denial. People are just unaware that they have hearing loss. In fact, when it is recognized, it is usually a family member or friend who first recognizes it.

It has two major causes. The first is called presbycusis, or age related high frequency hearing loss. This happens naturally in many people as they age as the very fine hair cells in the cochlea that sense the high frequencies die off and thin out. At one time, this was considered the major cause of this type of hearing loss. The second significant cause is from prolonged noise exposure either in the work environment or other leisure activities. Over many years, the world has become a very noisy place and its population is subjected to high levels of noise either purposely or inadvertently. This is starting to take its toll, especially in the youth.

Hardly a week goes by without some article appearing in the news media about the epidemic proportions of hearing loss being detected in young people through the use of walkmans and other types of music players or by regularly attending rock concerts. With the current knowledge about how loud sounds can affect our hearing, it is about time we learned how to practice “Safe Listening.” Even in industry, hearing conservation is not universally practiced. I have witnessed many instances of employees potentially damaging their hearing through lack of knowledge or caring by themselves or their employers. The sad thing is that once the hearing loss is recognized, it is permanent and there is no going back.

I personally have had this type of hearing loss for many years and have come to understand the way it affects us as individuals. It all started over 50 years ago. Noise related hearing loss was not yet on our radar screens. Even though we didn’t have portable

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music players in those days, unfortunately, employers were not aware that subjecting their employees to high levels of noise on a daily basis would come back to haunt those employees many years later. I don't remember hearing protection being anywhere in sight until the 1970s. Even then it wasn't universal and it still isn't today.

One of my earliest recollections of a hearing aid was a neighbour who wore a Zenith body aid in the early 1940s. He was employed in a boiler factory and at one time told me that he was able to turn off his hearing aid while at work and was not bothered by the noise. Today, I just wonder if the nature of his work caused his hearing loss in the first place. I don't think this thought occurred to me at that time.

It wasn't until after I retired from the workforce that I recognized my hearing loss. I know it was probably known about through hearing tests conducted at work in later years, but ironically this was long after I had ceased to work in a noisy environment. Nothing was ever mentioned about it either.

I think I first became aware of my hearing loss through my wife, although not in the way that you would suspect. When she would ask me something, often without context, I would have to ask her to repeat the question. However, before she got the first word out in repeating, my mind had already worked out what she had asked and the repetition became unnecessary. Humorous as it is now, this only led to accusations that the only reason I asked her to repeat was so that I had time to think up the answer to her question.

There is a very interesting thing about hearing loss. Hearing takes place in the brain and it is capable of filling in sounds that are not heard. For example, with high frequency hearing loss the letter "s" is one of the sounds that is not heard distinctly. Since this letter forms the plural of most English nouns, the subject of the sentence indicates to the brain when this "s" sound should be present even if it is not heard distinctly and causes us to think we heard it. This phenomenon also happens with other high frequency sounds that are difficult to distinguish, such as, "f", "th", "sh", "ch", etc. The brain can become very adept at making us believe we heard sounds that weren't there simply because context dictates that they should be. Unfortunately, this doesn't work

100 percent and we do get things wrong occasionally. If it did work, perhaps we wouldn't need hearing aids.

It is this characteristic of high frequency hearing loss that makes it difficult to accept that there is a loss. It can be further compounded when a hearing professional advises you that you are not ready for a hearing aid just yet. I spoke to one person recently who has been complaining for some time that he can't hear in noise or in group conversations. Although he was ready to do something about his hearing loss, an audiologist told him that his hearing wasn't bad enough to warrant a hearing aid. If hearing loss is causing you problems in your daily life, it is time to do something about it. It is definitely a quality of life issue.

Another incident that helped me realize that I had a hearing loss happened while I was out walking in Capilano Canyon near the Cleveland Dam on a rainy day. I was carrying an umbrella and while observing the water flowing over the dam from a viewpoint in the woods I noticed that when I tilted the umbrella back behind my head, the noise of the water rushing over the dam became significantly louder. The umbrella acted as a reflector to capture more sound. This incident convinced me that the sound I was hearing was subdued and muffled.

Of course the classic symptom that left me with no doubt that I had a hearing loss was the significant difference in the volume setting for the television set that my wife and I needed. Added to this were the numerous times I was told, "turn it down." Getting myself a pair of earphones for the television easily solved this problem.

Although at that time I felt that my hearing loss did not have significant impact on my ability to communicate, I did realize that doing something about it would have a great impact on those who were trying to communicate with me. What I underestimated was the tremendous improvement in the quality of my own life that took place because of my decision finally to do something about the hearing loss. I have since become a strong advocate for using hearing aids and assistive listening devices even in the early stages of hearing loss.

Mind you, that is only part of the story. Going out

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and getting a hearing aid to suit my hearing loss presented a whole series of other problems. Even in the mid 1990s when this was happening, the technology available was not ideally suited to treating high frequency hearing loss. I found that even some of the hearing professionals did not understand this type of hearing loss the way I was beginning to understand it. I did find, however, that being a member of CHHA was very helpful since I was in contact with other people with hearing loss and was able to learn a lot from their experiences, as well as my own.

After my first hearing test I was told that I really didn't need a hearing aid, but if I wanted to pursue it, they could help me. I inquired as to what type of hearing aid they would prescribe for my loss. I was told that a deep insertion canal aid would be best. From my own research, I knew that this was wrong since all of the sound would have to go through the hearing aid. Not only would I have total electronic sound, but also my ear canal would be occluded with all of the additional problems that brings on. My low frequency hearing was fine. I just needed a boost for the high frequencies.

After my next hearing test, a different audiologist was reluctant to provide any amplification, especially in my better ear, because she felt that my hearing would be further damaged. I managed to talk her into ordering me a pair of open ear molds to try with a pair of Unitron BTE (behind the ear) hearing aids. These were for mild hearing loss and with the very open molds, the low frequencies were bled off and not significantly increased. While not the perfect solution, these did work reasonably well. Unfortunately, the molds were far to open and didn't stay in my ears very well.

A few years later I was given a pair of Widex Quattro Q9 hearing aids that had belonged to someone who had passed away. The Q9s were digitally controlled analogue aids manufactured just prior to the advent of digital hearing aids in the 1990s. With the help of my audiologist, we had a new pair of molds made and I personally modified these into a well fitting pair of open molds. This solution was very successful for my hearing loss, especially since the Quattros were capable of providing four separate programs for different listening situations and could be programmed using the remote control with a special key. The Quattros were exceptionally good for

high frequency hearing loss because of the low cut and inverse presbycusis filters that could significantly reduce the low frequency amplification. With the open molds, the amplified low frequencies were bled off and the natural low frequencies could enter my ears through the open molds. The high cut filter also proved advantageous for the noise program. In addition to all of this, the Quattro Q9s had directional microphones that further improved the listening situation.

Now you might be wondering why I am telling you all of this experience with different hearing aids. The reason is that today there is no reason why anyone should have to struggle to get their high frequency hearing loss treated. Finally, technology has caught up with what I effectively had to pioneer for myself. In just the last two to three years, two new types of hearing aids have been introduced to the market, "open fit" hearing aids and receiver in the ear (RITE) hearing aids. Both of these types of hearing aids are tiny BTE aids that use micro tubing or an actual receiver in the ear canal to deliver a high frequency boost without occluding the ear canal and with such total comfort that you can be unaware that you are even wearing a hearing aid. All of this has been made possible by the digital technology that has largely taken over from the older analogue types of hearing aids. These new aids are now produced by almost every hearing aid manufacturer and make it possible to treat a type of hearing loss that was problematic with the older analogue technology. Many also feature directional microphones, noise reduction, feedback suppression, telecoils and other marvelous features. There are also models that will connect wirelessly to your cell phone or MP3 player.

The important point is that open-fit and RITE hearing aids leave the ear canal unoccluded, providing a more natural sound quality to the user's own voice. For high frequency loss, the unoccluded ear will hear low frequency sounds naturally through the ear canal, offering a more natural sound quality than a hearing aid that fills the ear canal.

The appearance of these modern highly sophisticated marvels of technology would seem to be just in time to help with what is now being called an epidemic of high frequency hearing loss. Mind you, I still maintain that hearing loss prevention is still the better course of action. Noise induced hearing loss is preventable. It can't yet be cured. Be warned.

**Managing Your Hearing Loss Course**  
**Eight Mondays Beginning September 17, 2007**  
**1:00 PM to 3:00 PM**

(Exception: Course will be held on the  
**Tuesday Oct. 9 the day after Thanksgiving)**

**West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre**  
**695 – 21st Street, West Vancouver**  
**Course Fee \$36.75 includes Text Book**  
**For Registration contact West Vancouver**  
**Seniors' Activity Centre 604-925-7280**

**A Global Community of Communication**  
**Sheraton Wall Centre**  
**Vancouver, B.C.**  
**Wednesday July 2nd to**  
**Sunday July 6th 2008**

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People invite you to attend the first International Congress for Persons with hearing loss to be held at the Sheraton Wall Centre in downtown Vancouver.

Programs will be of interest to all persons with hearing loss, and for those who live, work and are part of the lives of persons with hearing loss. This Congress is a must to attend if hearing loss has touched your life.

**CHHA – North Shore Branch**  
**Annual General Meeting**

**Monday, September 17, 2007 Time: 7:00 PM**  
**Place: The Summerhill**  
**135 West 15<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**North Vancouver**

**Guest Speaker: Jason Gordon**  
**Business Development Manager/Audiologist**  
**Oticon Canada**

**Topic:**  
**Current Developments in**  
**Hearing Aid Technology**

Meetings are Hearing and Wheelchair Accessible

Refreshments will be served  
 Members of the public welcome  
 No Admission Charge



**Sound Advice**

**Presented by:**

**The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association**  
**North Shore Branch**

**The group meets on the first Friday of each**  
**month from 10:00 AM to 12 Noon**

(Holidays excepted) at the West Vancouver  
 Seniors' Activity Centre's Learning Studio,  
 695 21st Street in West Vancouver.

**(No Meeting in July and August)**

When we meet, we discuss topics and issues  
 dealing with hearing loss.

We look forward to seeing you there.  
 Bring a friend, a family member,  
 they are welcome too.

Subjects to be addressed will include:  
 Technology; Coping Strategies;  
 Improving Relationships;  
 Improving Hearing Environments

**For Information call: 604-926-5222**



**Canadian**  
**Hard of Hearing**  
 Association B.C. Chapter

2007 Annual General Meeting

**CHHA - BC: A community at work**

Location: BC Family Hearing Resource Centre  
 15220—92nd Avenue, Surrey, BC  
 Please register by October 12th  
 Email: chha-bc@telus.net or call 1-866-888-2442

Community participation. . . is critical to community success.  
 How can we, as citizens with hearing loss, influence our communities towards hearing accessibility? How can we inspire each other? What can CHHA do for you? What can you do for CHHA?

Panel discussion will address the dynamics of a community at work towards making a difference. Guest panel member will be Karen Taylor, Provincial Outreach Consultant with the B.C. School for the Deaf. Other panel members will include representation from CHHA National, active B.C. Branches and the Young Adults Network.

**Saturday**  
**October 20, 2007**

**10:30 Coffee**  
**11:00 Annual General Meeting**  
**12:00 Lunch**  
**1:00 Panel with Karen Taylor**  
**3:00 Adjournment**

All opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association or CHHA – North Shore Branch.