



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

North Shore Branch

Published four times a year on the 15th of March, June, September and December by CHHA – North Shore Branch, 600 West Queens Road, North Vancouver, B.C. V7N 2L3.
Tel: 604-926-5222 Fax: 604-925-2286 email:chha_nsb@telus.net
Charitable Registration No. BN 89672 3038 RR0001

Editor: Hugh Hetherington

Issue 49 June 2005

Mountain Ear

President's Message

What comes first: friendship or giving of one's time and efforts?

Sometimes we hard of hearing people can be a little stubborn, don't you think? We say our hearing loss prevents us from making friends because we can't hear, and that we are lonely or there's no social life left after hearing loss.



But the rule in life is the same whether we have a hearing loss or not. That basic rule is: give of your time and talents to others and you will reap rewards that are truly satisfying.

For people with hearing loss, the methods for interacting with others might change. Maybe one has to invite one or two persons over for a quiet visit rather than to a party of twenty, or go for a hike in the woods rather than a walk at the mall. Maybe to volunteer where the task is to help one person in their home, rather than helping where there are many people involved.

Maybe our stubbornness has more to do with griev-

ing our past life style or perhaps being angry that our hearing loss has sabotaged our preferred way of socializing. Or maybe we think our hearing loss has changed our identity, and that we are no longer the people we used to be. Rubbish, I say.

We need to get past our "reasons" and move on to giving ourselves to others. The rewards are certainly waiting for us!

Till next time! Flo

F.K. Sprain

June Meeting

Monday, June 20, 2005

Time: 7:00 PM

Place: The Summerhill
135 West 15th Street
North Vancouver



Guest Speaker:

Rick Waters

Head of Communication Aids Dept.
Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Assistive Devices

for Hearing and Safety

Meetings are Hearing and Wheelchair Accessible
Refreshments will be served
Members of the public welcome

Donations

CHHA – North Shore Branch acknowledges with thanks generous donations from the Following:

Howe Sound Lions Club

West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre

Hearing Accessibility

By Hugh Hetherington

Accessibility is a word we hear a lot these days. Let's try and see what it means when it is connected with hearing, ie. "hearing accessibility." The dictionary defines accessible as, "readily approached or reached." However, that doesn't seem to fit that well when we are talking about being able to hear. If we look a bit further and check the synonyms, we find that some of these are: easy, feasible, practical, within reach, manageable, convenient, handy, and, nearby. Some of these words might fit, but thinking about it, the word "accommodate" comes to mind. Some of the synonyms here seem to fit the bill a bit better: aiding, helpful, supportive, charitable, friendly, amicable, neighbourly, and well-disposed. Well, you can take your pick.

To cut to the chase, when we are talking about "hearing accessibility" we probably have in mind the idea of making it possible, or easier to hear and understand. This concept does not only apply to the hearing impaired, but also to those who have relatively good hearing. That is why we have public address systems and loud speakers in theatres, churches, halls, airports, auditoriums and even some outdoor locations. I guess most of us are not old enough to remember the days of the town crier bringing the news to the residents of the town. I imagine that the candidate for that job had to have a loud, clear voice to qualify. Do we know that everyone always heard what he was shouting, especially if they were in the house with the doors and windows closed?

Let's take a more serious look at what we are trying to get at here. What is it that is needed to provide hearing accessibility for those with a hearing loss. The answer is certainly not the same for everyone with a hearing impairment. In some cases, a hearing aid might be all that is needed to accommodate the person. This puts the onus directly on the individual to take the appropriate action. Unfortunately, for many of those who wear hearing aids, satisfactory

hearing is still not achieved in many situations. Background noise, distance, and echo or reverberation, while annoying to people with good hearing, make it extremely difficult or even impossible for most people with hearing loss to hear with understanding. Hearing accessibility requires that the interfering sounds be eliminated or reduced while the speech sounds are brought to the ears with clarity.



There are a number of ways of achieving this goal in public places. To accommodate those with hearing impairment, there are commercial systems available that increase the signal to noise ratio bringing the sound source more directly to the person's ear while diminishing background noise and other unwanted sounds. The three most commonly available systems are:

1. Inductive Loop Systems (IL)
2. Infrared Systems (IR)
3. FM Systems (Radio Broadcast)

An Induction Loop System (IL) consists of a wire running around the perimeter of a room or other area into which an audio signal is delivered from an amplifier. This creates a magnetic field around the area. This can be picked up by hearing aids that are specially equipped with a telecoil (T-switch). Because the signal is picked up by the telecoil and the hearing aid microphone disabled, background noise is greatly reduced or eliminated. It is estimated that about 30% of people with hearing aids have this feature. Loop receivers are also available that can be used with earphones for those without a telecoil. An IL system can be installed in almost any size room. Smaller systems, referred to as counter loops, can be used in one-to-one situations, such as at bank teller counters, reception desks, or airline counters.

An Infrared System (IR) is a means of transmitting sound by infrared light transmission. The most common application for IR systems is in theatres, auditoriums or churches. Smaller systems are also available which can be used at conference tables. The IR system requires the person to use an infrared receiver unit, usually with earphones, available from the loca-

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tion in which the system is installed. Special receivers can also be fitted with a personal neck loop if the person is wearing hearing aids with a telecoil. Infrared signals are line of sight and do not travel through walls. This is an important consideration if privacy is of concern.

An FM system, while used similarly to an IR system, transmits the signal by means of radio waves. FM receiver units are made available at the location where the system is installed. FM signals are not restricted by walls and should not be used if privacy of the transmission is an issue. Individual FM systems are also available for the hearing impaired individual to use in classrooms or at lectures. The speaker wears a small microphone with an FM transmitter and the hearing impaired person uses an FM receiver unit fitted with earphones or a neck loop. Many hearing impaired people also utilize these same one-to-one units in social situations such as parties, meetings, and restaurants.

All of these systems, especially Infrared and FM are also available for home use with your television or stereo system. They are marketed under many brand names and may be called infrared or 900 Mhz wireless headphones. They are readily available in consumer electronic stores, such as, London Drugs, Radio Shack, and Future Shop. They are also available in the Communication Aids Department of the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. You may also ask your hearing professional if they carry such units in their practice. For more information you can contact CHHA – North Shore Branch at 604-926-5222 or attend one of our Sound Advice workshops on the first Friday of every month at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre.

Donations to the CHHA – North Shore Branch are always welcome.

All donations are Income Tax Deductible

Send your donation to:

CHHA – North Shore Branch

Attention: Treasurer

600 West Queens Road

North Vancouver, B.C. V7N 2L3

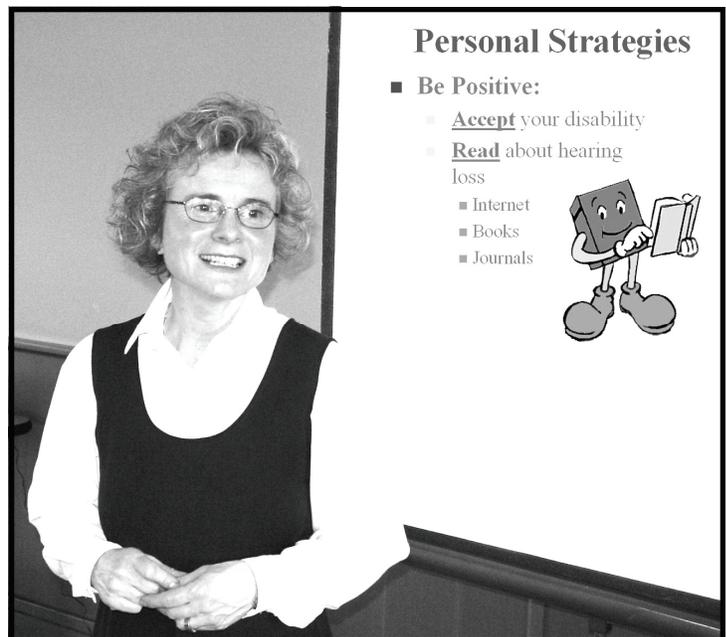
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April Meeting

Living With Hearing Loss In Your Family Are You Coping? Are You Helping?

Report by: Andrea Gauthier

Our President, Flo Spratt, was the speaker at our April 18th members' meeting with a talk on the subject "Coping and Helping with Hearing Loss." The fact that Flo is a teacher explains why her presentation was chockful of specific strategies for dealing with personal, interpersonal and group situations. Along with extensive notes, attendees went home with a two-page handout of suggestions for family and friends.



Flo brought her usual very positive approach to us. She read part of a favourite children's book called The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein, the lesson being that "life is not about losing but about giving, no matter

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Managing Your Hearing Loss Course

The next MYHL course is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, October 4th, 10 AM to 12 Noon at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre. For information call CHHA – North Shore Branch at 604-926-5222. Registration for the eight week course will begin in September.

what losses have happened." Flo lost her hearing at the age of six and talked about the comfort books have provided her throughout her life.

While it is impossible to repeat all that was said, I will try to give you a sample of the information received. In talking about having a healthy perspective on hearing loss, Flo began by defining hearing accessibility as "insuring communication is at a level that is satisfactory to all who are involved, including hearing people." She then talked about thinking about hearing as a privilege rather than a right and how that changes the way we feel about things. The third point was about teaching people that our not being able to hear is "our" problem and not "my" problem as communication always involves at least two people. We people with a hearing loss have to teach others and we also need help from them. The fourth element in having a healthy perspective on hearing loss involves developing the gift of patience, patience with ourselves and patience with others.

Personal strategies emphasized by Flo included being knowledgeable, consider sharing your audiogram with others, use it as a teaching tool. Be realistic, know your strong and weak areas, live within your boundaries (e.g. size of group, time of day, off-limit locations). Be positive, accept your disability, seek counsel and support, use your disability for good, try humour as a stress reliever. Keep a positive attitude toward others and give others grace in their forgetfulness or misunderstanding.

Regarding interpersonal strategies, Flo emphasized being proactive whenever possible, explaining your disability and needs beforehand, starting the conversation to gain some control and being well-read. Many strategies were offered to encourage the speaker to help you, e.g. moving away from background lighting or noise, looking towards you when speaking. Develop a strategy on the phone, perhaps repeating what you heard and asking, "Is that correct?" (Yes/No), especially with appointments and places to meet.

Being proactive is an important group strategy as well. Consider advocating for everyone, changing the lighting or closing the door, asking the presenter to repeat questions and comments from the audience. Ask the speaker to face the group, if possible.

The handout of suggestions for family and friends is available from the Vancouver Hearing Centre and contains seventeen ideas to help make communica-

tion go more smoothly, ranging from speaking in a normal voice at a moderately slow rate to giving the hard of hearing person a clue to the topic of conversation.

Thank you, Flo for a very worthwhile evening.

CHHA National Conference and AGM 2005 – Natural Sounds

Report by: Hugh Hetherington

The CHHA National Conference was held on June 2nd to 4th 2005 at the Grand Okanagan Hotel and Conference Centre in Kelowna. This lakeside hotel and resort situated on Okanagan Lake made a wonderful venue for the conference. Reportedly, there were over 300 delegates in attendance and it was encouraging to see the large number of youth and young adults in attendance. These young people represent the future of CHHA and their active participation in the conference was wonderful to see.

The conference truly had something for everyone with the many workshops and presentations that one could choose from depending upon their interests. These workshops were not only informative and entertaining, but gave us an opportunity to provide input on the many areas of concern to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. With many of these events happening concurrently, I was only able to attend a few that peaked my interest and I can say that I was not disappointed.

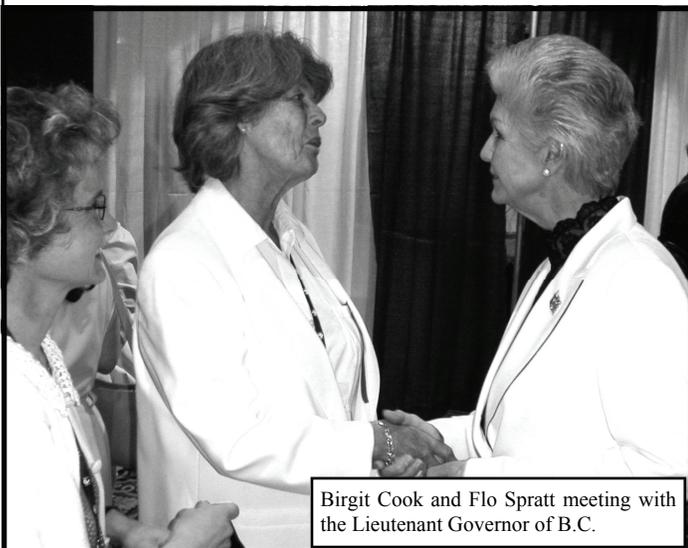
Other features of the conference included a Silent Auction and a very extensive trade show featuring booths representing hearing aid and cochlear implant manufacturers, social and medical groups, suppliers of assistive listening equipment and other organizations with products, services and information for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The official opening ceremonies took place on Thursday, June 2nd with a wine and cheese party and an opening welcome by the Honourable Iona Campagnola, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia.

The guest speaker for the opening plenary session on Friday was Dr. Mark Ross. Dr. Ross is Professor Emeritus of Audiology, University of Connecticut, and has served as Vice President of the SHHH Board

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of Trustees. He is now retired from the university and writes a regular column, "Developments in Research and Technology", for *Hearing Loss - The Journal of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People*. He has published and lectured extensively on topics dealing with hearing loss. As an individual who has worn a hearing aid for almost fifty years, Dr. Ross speaks and writes with great authority on hearing loss issues and many of his articles are available on the website www.hearingresearch.org. In his presentation, Deafness and Hearing, Dr. Ross discussed the terms "Deaf" and "Hard of Hearing" and the confusion that exists with these terms in the general public and medical profession, and the contrast between the social and audiological status of the two groups.



Birgit Cook and Flo Spratt meeting with the Lieutenant Governor of B.C.

On Saturday morning, Peter Julian, Member of Parliament for Burnaby – New Westminster spoke to the membership on his work as a Member of Parliament and his work on the Federal Disability Agenda. Mr. Julian is working towards a Canadians with Disabilities Act similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the U.S. He discussed the issues involved and the differences in Canada that come about because of the Federal vs. Provincial jurisdictions in the Canadian political structure. He invited CHHA to participate as an advisor in this important document. Peter Julian may be contacted at Julian.P@parl.gc.ca, by mail at: House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6 or by phone at: 613-992-4214.

On Saturday afternoon a townhall meeting gave the delegates the opportunity to voice their concerns to CHHA on many issues relating to the hard of hearing. At the end of the conference the CHHA Na-

tional AGM was held to make some minor amendments to the National bylaws and to approve the annual report and financial statements.

The conference ended on Saturday evening with a large banquet and awards ceremony. At this ceremony, Maggie Dodd, Past President of CHHA – BC Chapter was awarded the Community Development and Community Relations National Award. As Maggie was unable to attend the conference, the award was accepted by Marlene Witzke on Maggie's behalf. Congratulations Maggie! This is well deserved.

Whether your interest lay in new digital technology, cochlear implants, bone anchored hearing aids (BAHA), American Sign Language, mental health, accessibility in the classroom, hearing dogs, life skills for Hard of Hearing youth, computer assisted real time captioning (CART), peer mentoring, assistive listening equipment, or a wide range of other topics for children, youth and seniors, there was something at the conference for you.

In the limited space here, I would like to report on one workshop that I was glad to have attended. The workshop was a two-part presentation on Assistive Devices for the Hard of Hearing given by Dr. Ted Venema, Assistant Professor of Audiology at the University of Western Ontario. Dr. Venema has a B.A. in Philosophy, an M.A. in Audiology and a Ph.D. in Audiology. Dr. Venema captivated his audience with a very authoritative and entertaining presentation given with humour to enliven the subject.

In the first part of his presentation, Dr. Venema talked about the organ of hearing and the public's great misunderstanding about hearing loss. In using the analogy of the eye, he said that everyone understands blindness and how the lens in the eye focuses light on the retina to create a visual image for the brain. When the light doesn't focus on the retina we wear eyeglasses to correct the focus and thus restore the image. Hearing, on the other hand, is a much more complex sense and the ear is a very wonderful and complicated structure. The majority of hearing losses are caused by damage to the cochlea. He stated that the "cochlea" is like the "retina" of the ear. It is the part of the ear that conveys the message to the brain. In impaired vision, the retina is not usually damaged and corrective lenses are able to correct the problem. In hearing loss, the cochlea is

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damaged and hearing aids cannot generally correct for that damage. The cochlea once damaged, cannot be repaired.

To illustrate his point, Dr. Venema took us on a virtual tour through the ear using PowerPoint slides to illustrate how the ear works and why hearing aids don't give us back perfect hearing. He said the outer ear is the largest part of the ear. It captures the sound waves and channels them to the eardrum. As another function, this resonant cavity tends to emphasize the middle and high speech frequencies over the lower frequencies. The middle ear, which starts at the eardrum, amplifies the vibrations hitting the eardrum through the three smallest bones in the body, the malleus, incus and stapes. The vibrations on the relatively wide area of the eardrum are channeled through these connecting bones to concentrate and intensify the sound pressure at the much smaller stapes. The stapes transfers this much-amplified energy to the fluid filled cochlea, the inner ear. The waves created inside the cochlea stimulate the hair cells to produce electrical stimulation to the hearing nerve thus providing the sensation of hearing to the brain.

When the hair cells in the cochlea are damaged, the damage is permanent and frequencies that we were once able to hear can no longer be heard distinctly or at the same level as before. The result is that the cochlea becomes unable to distinguish between discrete frequencies and the frequencies close by. This accounts for the fact that for a hard of hearing person, background noise cannot be separated out in the brain to enable the person to focus easily on the speech signal. Amplifying the sounds with hearing aids does not improve the situation and can often make it worse.

In the second part of his presentation, Dr. Venema spoke about hearing aids and assistive listening devices and how different features can help overcome the problem of background noise and the resulting distortion of speech sounds. In this part of the talk he covered the different styles of hearing aids and their strong and weak points, multi-channel versus single channel hearing aids, compression, directional microphones, digital noise reduction, and using FM systems to overcome the problems of background noise.

When the ear's ability to distinguish between adjacent frequencies becomes impaired, the offending

Sound Advice

A monthly series of informal workshops and discussions around issues affecting the hard of hearing.

**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 at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre's Learning Studio, 695 21st Street in West Vancouver.

Come and join us and other Hard of Hearing people who get together to share and discuss.

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.

**For Information call: 604-926-5222 or
Fax: 604-925-2286**

background sounds that distort the speech have to be diminished. Speech in noise plus hearing aids equals problems in noise. Hearing aids make soft garbled sound into louder garbled sound. What are the solutions? Presently in hearing aids, there are two. Directional microphones that objectively improve speech/noise performance and digital noise reduction that subjectively enhances comfort in noise. FM systems can also provide an effective answer when the problem is severe. These assistive devices bring the speech sounds closer to the ear while moving the background noise further away.

This brief outline of Dr. Venema's presentation only scratches the surface of the full extent of the talk. His humorous approach and authoritative knowledge on this subject made this one of the most enjoyable presentations I attended at the conference.

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.