

SELF HELP FOR HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

SHHH AUSTRALIA INC.
1334 PACIFIC HIGHWAY
TURRAMURRA NSW 2074



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The Libby Harricks Achievement Award for 1999

To Achieve - vt - *to bring to a successful end by effort*
Achievement - n - *something accomplished by valour, boldness or superior ability*

This annual award was established by SHHH Australia to honour the memory of former SHHH President, Libby Harricks who died in August 1998. It was named the **Libby Harricks Achievement Award** for good reason.

Libby was a very real person who through her own courageous effort and determination was able to rise above her profound hearing loss to live a full personal and family life on the one hand while becoming a respected public figure speaking on behalf of all hearing impaired people.

The present strength of SHHH Australia as an organisation dedicated to assisting hearing impaired people; the increased public awareness of the frustrations of hearing loss and the greater acceptance of technology by both those who have a hearing loss and society generally all stand as testimony to Libby's public achievements.

But 'effort' and 'valour' can take many forms. 'Achievement' can be both a public statement or a very private victory.

The Libby Harricks Achievement Award will be given each year to a hearing impaired person who can inspire us yet again by demonstrating that self help underpins all achievement. The award is not limited to members of SHHH Australia.

The inaugural winner of the Libby Harricks Achievement Award is

Sr Cecelia Creigh

This is her story - a story which in the words of her nominator is a "miracle" as she turned her own life from one of despair to one of quiet achievement.

Cecelia was born in 1937, the fourth of five children of a English miner living in West Wallsend, New South Wales.

There were three girls whom their father described as Norah, the *happy* one, Margaret, the *quiet* one and Cecelia, the *mischievous* one.

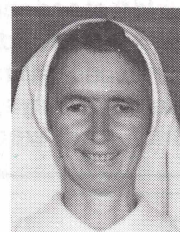


The family was poor, but thanks to opportunities offered by the small local school and later by high school in Lochinvar, the girls were able to study music. Cecelia excelled on the violin and in singing with the choir. She also was an all-round sportsperson who became sports captain of the school.

She was a bright girl, interested in everything including being a ringleader in school pranks. She was healthy and happy. Her life was before her as she won a scholarship to Teachers College in Newcastle with the goal of becoming a primary school teacher.

At 17 years of age she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph Lochinvar, a teaching order, as had her oldest sister Norah four years previously.

Cecelia completed her teacher training within the order and after her Profession in 1957, she was moved around the Newcastle/Hunter area working in various Catholic schools.



During school holidays at the beginning of 1963, she had her tonsils removed in what should have been a simple operation. Unfortunately she developed an ear infection which went untreated until the May school holidays. A stapedectomy on her right ear was deemed necessary even though it was a relatively unusual operation at that time. It left her with a hearing loss and tinnitus.

The May holidays of 1965 saw her back in hospital for a third operation on the right ear; this time she lost all hearing on that side permanently. She also lost her sense of balance, had Menière's episodes and continuous headaches which did not respond to any remedial efforts. A doctor told her that her hearing would only get worse.

At 27 years of age, devastated by the loss of hearing and still trying to carry out her teaching duties between periods in hospital, she just could not cope. She slipped into severe depression. She began a cycle of prescribed medication by one doctor for the extreme pain caused by a damaged trigeminal nerve on the right side of her face and by another doctor for depression. Work became almost impossible.

**“I do feel more normal now.
I'm ME who happens to have a hearing loss.”**

In 1976 she had several shock treatments to try to block out and overcome the continual pain and depression after which she became a resident in the congregational nursing home with only elderly Sisters. In 1979 it was a brain operation to sever the balance nerve and trigeminal nerve. By now her hearing on the left side had also deteriorated. She had no interest in anything. She tried to avoid all efforts by the family to include her in their activities and draw her out of her own misery. She was exhausted because she could not sleep. Despite efforts to control it, she came to rely on her medications.

But all was not lost!

One of the sisters in the convent told her in exasperation that she was just too 'stubborn' for her own good. She had enough inner fight left to resent being told that and she decided to show them what she could do. She went off all medications. At first it seemed easy. But after a few days, she was still not sleeping and went into serious

withdrawal. She spent a considerable period in a rehabilitation centre where she saw the effects of drugs and alcohol on people from every walk of life.

She was almost 50 years of age and had been in and out of hospitals since her early 20's. But she made yet another effort by promising herself that she would follow through on trying to do things despite her complete lack of self confidence and her continuing ill health.

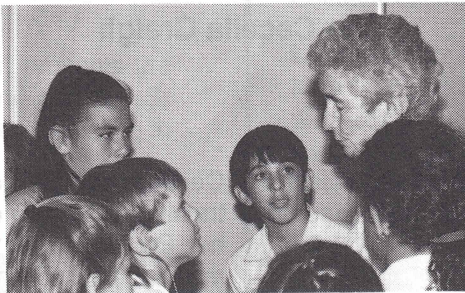
She thought she could agree to visit elderly or sick people who would not demand much of her. She had to learn to cope with public transport to get where she had promised to go. She found that helping these people made her feel much better about herself. Then

she thought that her own hearing loss might help her to help the children at the school for the Deaf run by the Dominican Sisters. She worked as a volunteer there three days a week for 8 years.

At first she sought only to do as she was told without any active participation beyond her agreed task. Gradually she became much loved by the children, parents and staff not only for her understanding of hearing loss, but for her emerging sense of fun, her responsibility and expertise.

Meanwhile, in 1988, she made her way to SHHH and volunteered to help at the Turramurra Resource Centre one day a week despite a train journey of several hours just to get there and back.

She first heard about SHHH through the Australian Hearing Services audiologist from whom she got her hearing aids. She went along to a public meeting organised by SHHH and heard Libby Harricks speak; she was very impressed and motivated. A general call for volunteers led her to



HOW HEARING LOSS

This is a transparency which Cecelia uses in many of her Outreach talks for SHHH.

LOSS of my SELF ESTEEM, my SELF WORTH.

LOSS of my CONFIDENCE.

LOSS of my CAREER - TEACHING.

LOSS of being the PERSON I WANTED TO BE.

LOSS of my GOOD HEALTH.

LOSS of my HEARING and ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH EASE.

LOSS of my BALANCE & FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT.

LOSS of enjoying SPORT e.g. tennis, swimming etc.

LOSS of CERTAINTY - felt I couldn't be depended upon - could no longer plan ahead.

"Today I accept I have a disability but try to make the most of my life."

Turrumurra where according to then Co-ordinator Charles Jones, her self esteem was so low that she almost entered 'under the door' rather than through it.

At SHHH she slowly gained confidence and as with all SHHH volunteers, she was asked to fill in on a variety of tasks when the occasion arose. She not only coped, she did very well. She surprised herself and everyone else.



loss can have on a person and all aspects of their life."

Today Cecelia is a bright, competent, funny and compassionate person. Her health is much improved. She says that she has learned to laugh again, including being able to laugh at herself. And she has started to play the violin once again as seen here with sister Norah at the piano.



Cecelia's story is one of a young and promising life which was sidetracked and cannot be relived. However, now she encourages other hearing impaired people by her own example because she knows only too well what she lost and the value of what she has been able to regain by faith, great effort and maybe just a tiny bit of *stubbornness*.

Now Cecelia is one of the most active, versatile and admired volunteers working for SHHH. She is a senior volunteer in the Turrumurra Resource Centre, having a special rapport with some of the more 'difficult' clients who do not want to admit to a hearing loss and prefer to blame the rest of the world. She is responsible for a range of administrative duties. She has overcome her shyness to the point where she is sought after as an Outreach speaker to audiences ranging from audiology students to medical staff to residents of nursing homes to Aboriginal social workers.

She has been an important asset to the Chatswood SHHH Group and now fills the same role with the Newcastle SHHH Group which she founded.

When Cecelia accepted her Libby Harricks Achievement Award from Libby's mother, Betty Heath, she said "I can honestly say I've done some jolly hard work on myself. It has been a huge and constant effort on my part, and in order to achieve it, so much of it was a real 'go it alone' job because people just do not understand the effects a hearing

& MENIERE'S AFFECTED ME.

It serves to remind us all of what is at stake if we do not make the effort to help ourselves.

LOSS of my INDEPENDENCE.

LOSS of SILENCE - Tinnitus always there.

LOSS of my MUSICIANSHIP - was a good violinist - used to sing well and in choirs.

LOSS OF FEELING NORMAL.

LOSS of COMPANIONSHIP OF MY PEER GROUP.

LOST YEARS OF MY YOUNG LIFE REALLY - could no longer socialise with my AGE GROUP because my interests became very different - I became elderly 40 years too soon

LOSS of CHEERFULNESS - My depression, anxiety, isolation made me withdraw from participating fully in life.