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Peter Lindley -
Libby Harricks Achievement Award Winner

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By Jill Lindley

Peter Lindley is a person who has achieved personal success despite many challenges. He became profoundly deaf at the age of 7 as a complication of mumps. This was devastating to his family.

The choice presented to his parents at that time, during the 1940's was either to send him to the deaf school for an education or to the normal school so he could learn to socialise. Sadly in those times it was an either/or situation.

So off Peter went to school with a 'button thing' in his ear, linked to a power pack strapped to his chest. He had to cope with being 'different' – and its consequences, in a way most of us could not begin to imagine. One story of his attempts to fit in with his peers is of a time when he was with a group of young lads behind the school toilet block, talking and laughing. He hadn't a clue what the laughter was about, having learnt early the strategy of 'bluffing'. He found out later, when, with the group, he was given a dose of the cane for telling dirty stories!

His formal education stopped from that time because there was no specialist specialist teaching support in those years. Peter was not able to sit for the scholarship examination that was considered the basic level of education. The lack of that particular piece of paper affected all future prospects. In later years, Peter attempted to gain access to further education as a mature age student, but without success.

His education was gained through reading. Highly intelligent, his interests are broad. General history, anthropology, Australian native flora, antiques, to name just a few. However, again he was different. Widely read and articulate, he gained a broad vocabulary. Unfortunately he was not able to hear how words are pronounced so he developed what his family call 'Peter speak', or pronunciation according to Peter. This is often incomprehensible to others.

Whilst much of his learning came from being a committed reader, he also wanted to learn about the world through travel. He spent some time in New Zealand in the 60's, taking a variety of jobs to pay his way. He returned to Brisbane to support his invalid mother until her death in 1977.

Discrimination, intended and unintended, was a constant in his life, particularly in his work. Peter worked in a job at a basic wage level in the rehabilitation section of a large hospital. He was popular with the patients who knew that he understood disability and he often spoke up as their advocate. He was not so popular with many of the professional staff who thought it impertinent for an employee at the bottom of the hierarchy to speak out. There was also discriminatory behaviour in relation to his hearing loss.

That advocacy role is one which Peter has espoused all his life. He speaks out about the need:

- For more understanding of the implications of hearing loss
 - Of the need for communication access
 - For preventative action by Governments in relation to noise induced hearing loss
- To address understanding of hearing impairment within the health care system, being involved with the University of Queensland's education of medical students.

Peter has been a member for many years of the Brisbane branch of Better Hearing Australia and was on their Board during the 1990's. He currently has a role there as an advocate. In 2001, with 4 other people he was a founding member of a local support group in the Redlands Shire and currently also acts as their advocate.

Brian Rope, past CEO of Deafness Forum Australia, recognised the passion and commitment which Peter brought to the role of advocacy. He asked him to take on the role of the Chair of the National Hearing Health Advocacy Committee of Deafness Forum, a role to which he remains committed, seeking to address needs at a political level.

He also acts as a representative of people with a hearing impairment on Queensland Rail's Disability Discrimination Act Reference Group, Tourism Queensland and Redlands Disability Network – and wherever he finds the opportunity to speak out.

It would have been so much easier for Peter to sit back and expect others to speak up, but like Libby Harricks he saw a need and brings determination and commitment to addressing the need.