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Self help for Hard of Hearing People

Hearing Matters

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*2013 Libby Harricks Achievement
Award Winner*

Lyndal Carter

All about me



Lyndal and her Calaid V in 1988

In March this year I was very surprised to learn that I was to receive the Libby Harricks Achievement Award. Knowing the calibre and achievements of others who received this award before, and of Libby herself, I felt extremely honoured – but actually a bit of a sham. When I was presented with the certificate at the SHHH AGM and heard the kind words that were said about me I was, for once, pretty well speechless.

Our good president invited me to make up for my reticence by writing a bit about my life with my hearing loss. My first draft was rejected on the grounds of “insufficient detail”. So if this seems like too much, blame the president. I couldn’t argue. He is a lawyer after all....a very persuasive man. So here goes:

I have a moderate, sensorineural hearing loss and I wear two behind-the-ear hearing aids- nothing fancy. I don’t use a lot of technology but I do LOVE captions for TV-wish there were more at the movies.

I am pretty sure I had “normal” hearing until my senior high school years. As my hearing was never tested before that I can’t be 100% sure, but it seemed that my hearing difficulties occurred quite suddenly – at the time of a run of other health troubles. I have clear memories of things that I was able to hear before my hearing loss - rain outside, whispers in the dark, the high-pitched hum from the back of the telly. My hearing deteriorated a little over the years. Best medical advice is that I have a form of “hydrops” (a particular cochlear problem, like “Meniere’s”) but although I have had some hearing fluctuations and have tinnitus, I fortunately don’t suffer with vertigo.

My hearing loss was first identified when I was 17 years old.

As Laurie Eisenberg said in her recent Libby Harricks Oration – it is “all about the mothers”. My mother noticed my hearing loss first. Like many good mothers, she shared her concerns with our local doctor. After checking my ears for wax on several occasions (there was none) he dismissed the “problem”. Sometime later, a new doctor sent me off to the kind and helpful Audiology team at the Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Hospital (it is a great shame that wonderful service is no longer available to the local community). I like to joke that it

was Ann Austin who “made me deaf”. Ann confirmed that I had a hearing loss and referred me to NAL at Parramatta (now Australian Hearing) and I was fitted with my first binaural hearing aids at the age of 18 years.

I was less than delighted. My hearing loss back then was only mild, but the hearing aids seemed very substantial – a good friend called them my “chubby babies”. Evidence shot provided (this photo was taken by a fellow audiologist a few years later, in order to show clients how discrete and attractive a behind-the-ear hearing aid could look). Seriously, it wasn’t the look of the devices that bothered me most. The hearing aids were helpful, but they were LOUD. The older “peak clipping” type. Everything seemed such a terrible din. It’s 30 years ago this November, but I still remember the first night I wore the hearing aids at home – the sound of the fridge motor coming on was an unidentifiable roar. Rather startling. At that time I was also very bothered by tinnitus and terrified that my hearing would become even worse. I avoided any noisy situations, including the things others my own age were doing, like going to pubs and seeing bands. I think the fact that my hearing loss was initially dismissed by professionals was also a barrier. I somehow didn’t feel ‘legitimate’ about wearing a hearing aid.

I had just started university - with the idea of becoming a high school English teacher. After getting my hearing aids I was told by the student “support” person at Uni that the Education Department did not employ people with hearing loss. I don’t remember getting much in the way of advice about how to deal with it. It was another downer. However, my very considerate Ear, Nose and Throat specialist (Dr Ted Beckenham) made the helpful suggestion that I pursue an alternate career - in audiology. The rest, as they say, “is history”.



Class of 87 at Greville Street L to R James Cantrill, Margot McLelland, Ingrid Yeend, Kay McIntosh, Lyndal

I set to, and worked my way through my undergraduate degree with audiology as my burning ambition. I was “gonna show ‘em”! I found my undergraduate years quite hard, particularly socially. I didn’t say much. I learned (long afterwards) that wearing two largish hearing aids

made me look “very deaf” and thus I was avoided due to a fellow student’s (now friend of almost 30 years!) concern they may not be able to communicate with me verbally. An esteemed colleague in the hearing sciences also revealed (again, much later) that he thought I was “weird” – because of the way I looked so intently when he was giving us a lecture. He mustn’t have noticed my chubby babies! He found out later that I had a hearing loss. Apparently he still thinks I’m weird, “but knows why now”! Oh well. Perhaps my hearing did cause some social isolation? I don’t know. I really was very shy and retiring in my tender years. I realise some may find this hard to believe. It has been more recently said (by a fellow audiologist) that I’d “go to the opening of an envelope”- mmm very social. Invite me, I’ll probably say yes!

However, I made it into the post-graduate audiology program at Macquarie. The teaching staff and many of the audiologists I encountered in my training were very welcoming, helped me “lighten up”, and helped me to develop the confidence I needed to communicate effectively, particularly with other people with hearing difficulties. Unfortunately, I also encountered strong negativity from other quarters. Few audiologists (and no teachers!) had hearing aids back then. I think that maybe, as a hearing aid wearer, I challenged an invisible “us and them” boundary. It seemed that everyone had their opinion about what I should do about my “problem”. I laugh about it now, but to this day I am regularly asked questions like, “what are you wearing? Or “why don’t you wear this (or that) ‘whizz bang’ hearing aid”? I used to mainly wear only one hearing aid, but now I always wear two, so at least I no-longer get nagged about that.

In my student days I was introduced to SHHH. My first visit to Hillview was during ‘Deafness Awareness Week’ as it was then known, probably in 1987. Under Dr Jenny Rosen’s stern and watchful eye we students screened the hearing of unsuspecting locals. At the recent AGM Charles Jones remembered meeting me for the first time on that occasion. Charles obviously has a good memory – I hope our meeting was memorable for the right reasons!

In January 1988, like my father before me, I proudly joined the Australian Public Service. My first “proper” job was at the Sydney Hearing Centre which was on the 9th floor at 175 Castlereagh Street. It was a different time! Girlie calendars were still de rigeur in the male domains of the work area, and smoking had only just been disallowed on the job - the diehards hung out the window for a ciggie (yes, you could actually open the 9th floor windows)!

As new ‘recruits’ we tested the hearing of many young children and fitted hearing aids to older people. Home visits were another regular activity, and working in the

inner city some of these house calls were a bit of an eye-opener for the young and naive.

There were not so many country audiology services in the 80’s, so we also were rostered to ‘sojourn’ from the city on a regular basis – to country towns all over NSW. These country trips were a lot of fun and a good way to meet other audiologists, as you were paired up with someone from another centre. Dinner each night at the local RSL or Bowlo was a given.



Inverell country visit 1989

The hearing aids we fitted to most of our adult clients back then were pretty basic. Mostly they were exactly the same behind-the-ear hearing aids I wore myself. The wonderful, NAL designed, Australian made, Calaid V. By then, the Calaid had progressed from the loud “peak clipping” I was first fitted with to compression. I loved that aid! A few people still wore the body level aids – a box with a cord attaching the aid to a chunky mould in the ear. Even fewer people wore spectacle aids, which were very bulky and always seemed troublesome. The hearing aid prescription for each client was worked out using a cardboard slide rule. There were NO computers! All the adjustments were made to the controls inside the aid using a little screwdriver. The equipment we used to measure the hearing aids recorded the results with little texta pens with actual ink! Reports were typed on a typewriter (by a clerical assistant) and there was a carbon copy for the file. We had “minutes” from our managers (no emails kids!). The public service really did have red tape.

While the equipment and hearing aids may have been basic, the senior audiologists provided a wonderful and comprehensive rehabilitation programs to the clients - particularly those with severe or profound hearing loss, or with other disabilities. Programs included rehabilitation group activities and regular communication training. As young audiologists we were very fortunate that we were encouraged to observe, assist, and then later learn these skills from a team of very experienced senior colleagues. There were also many training courses in

which we learned all the skills we needed to broaden our horizons. At the same time, I was completing my Masters Degree part-time.

I was fortunate to have tutors including Denis Byrne and Geoff Plant, and Harvey Dillon supervised my first attempt at hearing aid research.

At Sydney Hearing Centre in those days, some clients were also seen for worker's compensation (for noise-induced hearing loss). This involved an opinion from an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist. Dr Albert ('Bertie') Khan came to our centre every week for these assessments. He was an unassuming man who arrived each time in his white terry towelling hat. Dr Khan was also very kind and patient, and always very prepared to give information and medical advice – including reassurance about my own 'condition'. I remember that he kept some human temporal bones (the ones that include the cochlea) in the drawer which he used to give an explanation!



*Sydney Hearing Centre party at the Spanish Club 1990
L to R David Hartley, Lyndal and James Cantrill*

After several years in Sydney, I worked in a number of other centres in the metropolitan area, mainly seeing adults with more complex hearing needs, and later doing some supervision of audiology students. In the early 90's I transferred to a permanent position at Chatswood Hearing centre, where I started to work with younger hearing aid wearers. At that time, I visited the St Gabriel's school for hearing impaired children every Tuesday which I still look back on as one of the most rewarding parts of my audiology life. I also went to Wagga Wagga hearing centre on a regular visiting schedule to see the families down there. Children tell it how it is – and I have found that there is much to learn from them, and their parents. At Chatswood, an integral member of our paediatric team in-centre, and another wealth of information and experience, was our teacher-of-the-deaf. For many years this was Margaret Colebrook, who is still a powerful advocate for young consumers and is to be congratulated for her dedicated

striving for extended hearing services for young adults.

Further down the track I found myself "acting" for the Audiologist-in-Charge at Chatswood. I must have been a good actor because I eventually became the full-time "Hearing Centre Manager". It was a big centre in those days. We had around 14 audiologists on our books (which, by the way, were actual books). Eventually we got one computer.

The demand for services was very high and the work could be quite pressured, but there was always a great sense of camaraderie and great support from our leaders. Margaret Dewberry was my direct supervisor and absolute rock for the next nine years. The team spirit existed not just within our own centre, but in our hearing centre region, and also with our professional colleagues in broader community health. Our local consumer groups were integral. For a number of years a SHHH volunteer visited clients at our centre on a regular basis. We worked together, and we celebrated together. I remember a very enjoyable afternoon tea back in Archer Street, to celebrate 50 years of Australian Hearing Services. Ah, the parties in the good ol' days....!

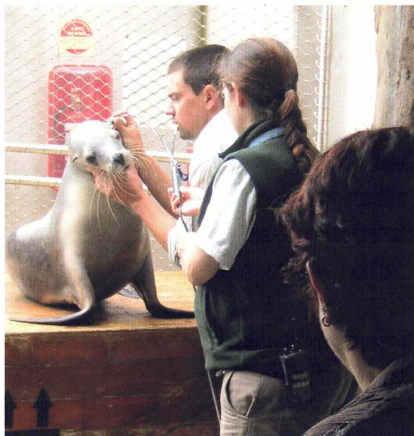
Towards the end of my time as manager at Chatswood we moved to a brand new centre- one block away in Spring Street. The centre was opened with due pomp and circumstance – attended by the local member, mayor and the managing director of Australian Hearing, and of course, representatives from our consumer groups. But in 2002 I moved on - to the National Head Office of Australian Hearing in Greville Street. While seconded to work on a training and development program for audiologists, one lunch time I met up with Gitta Keidser who lured me into the secret world of the National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL) - into the dark, cavernous depths of the anechoic chambers, with little hope of release. After a year on 'probation' at NAL my fate was sealed and the move became permanent. I spent the next few years conducting various hearing aid experiments (and being a guinea-pig for a number of hearing aid experiments myself!). All above board and very ethical however- rest assured.



AHS Hurstville 1991

Who said you should never work with children or animals? As I mentioned, I think working with children is great and I have continued to do so in my time at NAL. After working with Gitte's hearing aid team I worked a while on a project investigating the long-term outcomes of babies with hearing loss. Following on from that, the next several years really did pass by virtually in the dark - recording cortical evoked auditory potentials (CAEPs) which are brain responses to sound - from babies and young children. Many happy hours of Wiggles and Teletubbies, blocks and blowing bubbles. The best part of audiology of course is playing with toys - sometimes we even let the baby have a turn. I did see some big people as well as the smaller ones- Richard willingly subjected himself to electrodes in these experiments!! He didn't watch Tellytubbies by the way.

Ad break: The CAEP experiments were part of the development of HEARLab - a portable machine that allow CAEPs to be measured in babies and young children wearing hearing aids. Even the youngest babies fitted with hearing aids in Australia can now have an assessment of their hearing, while wearing hearing aids, using HEARLab. I feel very privileged to have had the chance to help in this advance. HEARLab also won a prize recently - for excellence in innovation.



Seal Research at Taronga Zoo in 2010

Animals? Well, only very briefly. I had a delightful opportunity to provide some information to a scientist studying the hearing of seals. Apparently marine mammals have hearing problems too. The highlight was a trip to Taronga zoo to meet the seals in person (?).



*St Pat's races Broken Hill 2008
Lyndal and Jenny Rosen*

In 2009 I moved into NAL's Hearing Loss Prevention team. I've been running a study to find out whether loud sound during recreational activities (e.g., iPods/MP3s, rock concerts, motor sports etc.) is really affecting the hearing of young Australians. Five truly dedicated audiologists tested, interviewed and surveyed 1400 young people in workplaces and schools. One of the very first schools we visited was Willyama High in Broken Hill. Retired audiologists never really retire.

Jenny Rosen became an active supporter of our project and came with me on the first foray. What a great town. We were initially attracted to it by the local events- for example the legendary St Patricks Day races - where I helped Dr Rosen place her first bet. Actually, it was the folk at the hearing resource centre - Cath Bonness and Anne Woods- that drew us out West- they made wheels turn when we needed a school to help us get started and had trouble getting in the door - strong women.



ASA Conference Brisbane 1996 L to R Lyndal, Joyce Emmerick, Ingrid Yeend, Paul Hickey, Margot McLelland

That brings my work story back to the here and now- I'm still working on that project. We've extended the survey to find out more about the hearing issues and everyday leisure activities of young people who wear hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Apart from my day job, I've been involved in my professional association, the Audiological Society of Australia (ASA), and have had various roles on the NSW committee of the ASA. I've also done a bit of time on the SHHH Board. Many meetings. I think I have a secret mark that says "committee member" tattooed right in the middle of my forehead. However, I do believe it is important to be active, particularly in the workplace -whatever it is. I have been a workplace delegate representing other staff for many years now. Not bad for a shy girl.

Hobbies? According to a very dear 92 year old friend of mine - not enough time spent on hobbies. I love music, but looking back I let it go to some extent when I developed my hearing loss.



International Choral Festival of Santiago di Cuba 2009

More recently, I have taken up singing (only in groups!) which is a fantastic community activity I would highly recommend. My hearing loss doesn't seem to be a barrier in enjoying this to the full. I have been as far as Cuba, and even had a television

appearance in my choral capacity. I haven't actually watched the episode in question but I believe I have quite a prominent role in a certain ABC comedy series-for a second anyway.



Illawarra Music Festival 2010

My work forces me to think constantly about hearing but these days I don't think about my own hearing loss all that much. Apart from when my hearing aids are mucking up, or like recently when I managed to lose an earmould out the window (was it a bird?). Maybe that's why I felt such a fraudster receiving the

award? Over the years I have met so many people who have faced far greater challenges because of their hearing loss than I have.



Interview with student at Farrer HS Tamworth - 2009

I've heard Richard talk in public about the positive side of acquiring a hearing loss. I truly agree with him there are some definite pluses. My hearing loss opened up the 25 years of working life which I've now realised is hard to sum up in a few paragraphs. From being too nervous to make a single comment in an undergraduate class, I have given many public presentations – to doctors, nurses, teachers, parents and, most frightening of all, my peers in audiology. I've travelled to some interesting places and met interesting people. In the last 25 years there have been incredible technological developments in the hearing world, including the advent of the cochlear implant- the very first children were receiving cochlear implants at about the same time I started my working life. As NAL is co-located with the local Australian Hearing paediatric centre (formerly Greville

St, now Macquarie University) I've had the pleasure of seeing young people that I've worked with grow up, get married, have children of their own, and go on to many different careers, including becoming audiologists too. I'm also fortunate to have be back at Uni now - studying for a PhD.

This is preaching to the choir, but there is still much to be done. Hearing aids help, but they can't change the behaviour or attitudes of our communication partners. I totally believe in self-help, but at the end of the day other people have to do their bit. It is very frustrating that there is still little attention to the acoustics of our environment. Architects still seem to think about the visual, not the auditory experience.

In conclusion, I think my own experience of disability, and the experiences of others that I have shared over the years, have given me a broader understanding of a lot of different things everyone goes through - and the ways we can manage. Not just hearing loss, or other disabilities, but the challenges of life in general.

Last, but not least, Audiology has given me the most wonderful friendships – the type you hope will last a lifetime. It was one of my audiology classmates of the class of '87 who nominated me for the award by the way for which, I must say again, I am honoured and very grateful.



*Presentation of Libby Harricks Achievement Award 2013
L to R – Ingrid Yeend, Richard Brading, Lyndal Carter, Emma Scanlan*