

## My Story

Ray Piesse and Elizabeth Mathias

**Elizabeth Mathias is the winner of the 2014 Libby Harricks Achievement Award. She was nominated by Ray Piesse**

### Ray says:

Lizzie, as she is known to her friends and family, was born in 1961. Soon after birth, she was found to have a profound hearing impairment, which was thought to be due to her mother having a viral illness of unknown aetiology during the pregnancy. She was fitted with hearing aids and has constantly used them throughout her life, although she has always had great difficulty with oral communication.

Her mother was determined that Lizzie would be successfully integrated with the hearing world and, particularly when she was young, always insisted she maintain a close association with normal hearing people. She attended Monte Sant' Angelo College and passed the HSC. On leaving school, after working in her father's newsagency in the city for a while, she undertook courses in computing, secretarial and business administration. Ultimately, she obtained a position in word processing and desk-top publishing at the Sydney Stock Exchange and worked there for eight years, until her section was moved to Brisbane. Then, for 15 years she worked for a firm of consulting engineers at North Sydney, supporting three teams in daily secretarial and administration. She says "It wasn't easy when I first started, because the company and my work colleagues didn't know how to communicate with a deaf person like me! It took them a while to accept me as a normal person and I had to prove that I am capable of doing anything (except for phone work- I do have a TTY phone on my desk). It was very challenging. Now I have a challenging job working for a law firm, learning a lot about IP and trademarks".



Close-up on swing –note the CalAid battery box

then she has travelled to Perth and Ireland with friends. She likes to socialise with her deaf and hearing friends and studied Auslan so she can communicate more easily with some of her primary school friends, who cannot

Lizzie loves sport. At school she was involved in many swimming and netball competition successes and since then has, over many years, continued to play netball and ventured into softball, volleyball, touch football and bike riding for fun and charity. She also loves photography and travel. When younger she went to Europe, Great Britain, America and Ayers Rock on her own, with Contiki Tours. Since

talk very well.

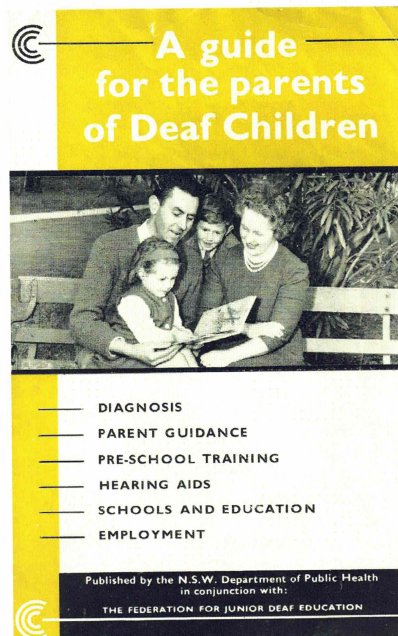
Some years ago Lizzie was asked to give a talk to the Shepherd Centre about her experiences growing up and working with hearing people. She says "My hearing will never stop me from enjoying life in its fullness and participating in sport or travelling etc".

### Lizzie says:

First may I thank Mr Ray Piesse for nominating me for this award. I'm humbled and surprised! Why me? Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would win this award. I am thrilled to be receiving the Libby Harricks Award. I admire Libby Harricks. She was a great inspirational woman. I am honoured and proud to receive this award.

I don't think I am special because of my hearing impairment since birth, or who I have become today. Who I am today is because of my mother's love and devotion and hard work. She was a great inspiration and a great role model to me while I was growing up and she taught me so many things in life, such as teaching me to talk without the use of hands. And I grew up in a family of seven and was encouraged to not let my hearing affect what I did or enjoyed.

Why should my hearing affect the way I enjoy life, such as playing various team sports and seeing live bands (boy, back then they were very loud!). When I was playing netball, the most annoying thing was when I had this old hearing aid battery pack like a small box in front of me, the one with cord around my neck to my ear and the hearing battery box was bobbing up and down, while I was shooting the goals as a goal shooter. Mum had to make me a hearing aid holder to be strapped around my chest and neck to stop it from jumping up and down. It



**A Guide for the Parents of Deaf Children produced by Dept of Health in the 1960s. The photo shows Lizzie, her parents and her older brother**



**Netball practice**

worked. What a clever Mum she was!

When I went travelling overseas to London and Europe on my own about 25 years ago, I went on a few tours and there were lots of challenges. I was independent and I have met so many amazing people on my travels. Their accents were always a problem for me, but once I got used to the accent I could understand some or most of it. Not easy! While I was staying in Germany on the tour in a caravan park, I took my vibrating alarm clock to wake me up in the morning. It woke everyone up at the same time and they all bolted for the showers. There was no hot water left for me. It was hilarious at the time. We had a lot of fun and I had lots of adventures.

While I was very young my mother and I went through so many challenges about my hearing loss, such as whether or not I could hear music, by playing the piano and radio, conversations or television. Mum always translated the conversations to me to make sure I didn't feel left out. She made my speech lessons fun and I was fascinated to hear so many sounds. When I was a kid I remember hating the sound of chalk scratching on blackboards made by the teachers and the sound of the saucepans falling out of the cupboards. Those sounds were horrible!



Lizzie in Dublin

Life has many challenges. I have always had this motto: "Nothing is going to stop me from enjoying life and in what I do in life". If I can't do something one way, I will find another better way to do it. We hearing-impaired people go through life with challenges and we have to overcome these problems. We have to work twice as hard as the hearing people. This makes me more motivated to learn and study hard to get a good job. I have been studying part-time at TAFE while being out of work for two years. It was really difficult to find work without any phone work. The agencies and some employers are not interested in people who are hard-of-hearing. Lucky I was registered with a disability job employment agency, Job Australia, who has supported and gave me some confidence in settling in my new job. I'm grateful that I have now got a good interesting & challenging job with a large law firm who care about my needs, such as TTY phone and the Microsoft Lync (Communicator) for communication with my team members and I have the National Relay Service on the Internet. I wish I had these technologies years ago. It would have made my



Lizzie with David Harricks

life easier to communicate and watch TV and movies in captions.

I would like to thank Ray Piesse for his advice and support to my mother when I was very young. It was difficult to get assistance back then, as the technology was limited, as were support groups in the 1960s. Nowadays there are a lot of deaf community groups and better technology, like the internet, TTY relay services and mobile phone for sms messages.

I am very grateful to my mother who passed away five years ago - I really missed her fun-loving support and advice, my family, and my best friends here today for their support over the years. Without them I would have been lost. Also, I wish to thank the Speech and Hearing Clinic at Macquarie University - Audiology Department. They have been very supportive while dealing with my hearing aids and fittings. Also I would like to thank TAFE NSW at St Leonards Campus - Disability Support Officer - Bruce Morgan and his team for their encouragement and support during my studies over the last seven years! I have finally graduated with Certificate IV in Business Administration!



Lizzie and her Mother