



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

North Shore Branch

Published four times a year on the 15th of March, June, September and December. Your submissions are always welcome. Please Contact the Editor: Hugh Hetherington
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Mountain Ear

President's Message

"Honey, why don't you just go to the lecture? I'll stay home. I know I won't hear anything, so it's not worth it for me to go."

I really cannot count how many times I have said something like that to my husband. What is wrong with me? Have I actually given up? Do I really believe there is no chance for the hearing impaired to have access to a lecture, movie, drama or event that is open to the public?

At times, I envy people with mobility impairments. No, I don't want to be confined to a wheelchair. I just really admire their incredible determination to get what they need. No doubt it took a lot of energy, patience and perseverance to accomplish their goals. And just think, there are now sloping curbs and ramps everywhere, automatic door openers, accessible washrooms, special parking spaces, access to public transit and public housing available for people with mobility impairments. What a feat!

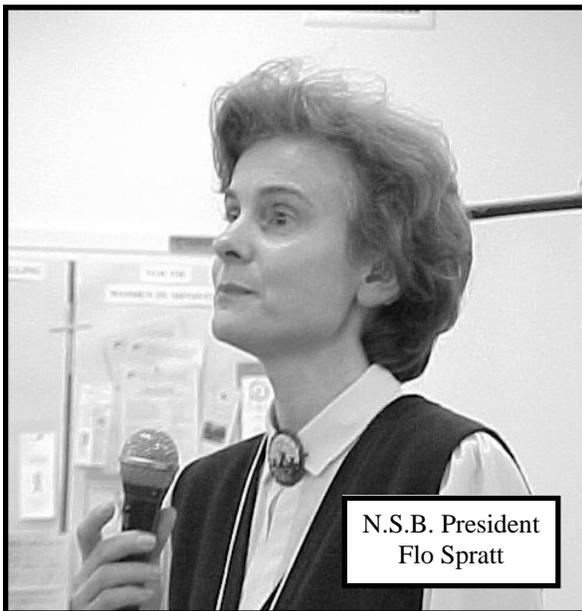
In some ways, we hearing impaired persons are in the same position that those with mobility impairments were in at least 20 years ago. Now that they have excellent access in our communities, I am convinced that we could use some of their

strategies.

It is time to become visible as a community. We need to be seen and we need to be heard. In the end, everyone will benefit - both the hearing impaired and those with hearing. Ramps were built for wheelchairs and scooters, but now bicyclists, skateboarders, mothers with strollers and the elderly also benefit from them. In much the same way, society as a whole will also benefit when

our needs are met. At the very least, people will become more sensitive to our needs, and learn how they can be more caring.

Our editor has provided a wonderful summary of our February meeting. If you didn't make it, I would encourage you to read his article. The evening nicely tied together both personal and community-



N.S.B. President
Flo Spratt

level challenges.

I look forward to meeting with you at our next meeting in April. In the meantime, I'll ask about a loop system at the lecture hall I wanted to go to...

EARS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BUT IT'S THE HEART THAT MATTERS

This was the topic for the February members' meeting held on February 25, 2002 at St. John's Anglican Church. The meeting was attended by about 33 members and guests. Those attending were treated to a wonderful and informative talk by Doug Spratt, the husband of our Branch President, Flo Spratt.

Doug and Flo have been married for 18 years and have two young sons. Doug is an Engineering Manager with a multi-national engineering and construction company, and holds Master's Degrees in Business Administration and Science. He is also a Certified Toastmaster with Toastmasters International. Doug and Flo are both involved in the home schooling of their children in what is known as the classical method.

Doug and Flo met 18 years ago when they were both students. Flo had a severe hearing loss, while Doug was also experiencing hearing problems caused by Meniere's disease which resulted in severe tinnitus at the time. It was through their mutual hearing problems that they were brought together.

Doug explained how his wife, Flo's hearing loss is about 80 dB which puts her in the Severe Loss category. He went on to explain, from a technical perspective, how sound is measured in decibels (dB) and how this differs from frequency or pitch, the measure of how low or high a sound is. With Flo's hearing loss of 80 dB, she is unable to hear normal conversations without her hearing aids on. He also explained that sounds of a level that Flo could hear without her hearing aids would be potentially damaging to the ears of a hearing person.

Doug also explained a bit about sound distortion

and how normal sounds are distorted even in traveling through the air. Amplifiers, such as hearing aids, can unfortunately emphasize or create additional distortion. This further impedes the hard of hearing person's ability to interpret sounds. Many persons with severe hearing loss, when caused early in life, speak with some degree of impediment. Flo lost her hearing at an early age, but this was after she had learned to speak, and this explains why she is able to speak so clearly.

Following this technical introduction, Doug went

on to share their family experiences with improving the quality of life - for both the hearing family members and the member with a hearing loss. He stated that it was necessary to start with the prerequisite attitude that it was necessary to bring joy into your home. "As one ad' proclaims - perspective is everything." The three perspectives that Doug covered in his talk were: (1) I need to be my wife's ears; (2) I need a sense of humour; (3) I need to see beyond the loss.

The following are the thoughts expressed by Doug on the three perspectives:

I am Flo's ears. The easiest attitudes to get a handle on are those that simply reflect reality. There is no denying that between the two of us, there are only two fully functioning ears. A wedding ceremony highlights the unity of the husband and wife - the two shall become one. For Flo and I, this is the prevalent attitude that we try to foster. There is only one of us - and only one pair of ears. I just happen to be the part of the unity that is wearing them. Let's talk about some examples of how this works for us. Flo can't hear the alarm clock. When we go to bed at



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night, Flo sets the alarm. I hear the alarm and awaken Flo - then I go back to sleep. When it comes to phone calls, I am the default receiver and caller. I make the outgoing family calls. I take calls at work, when necessary. At parties, I am Flo's ears. I need to keep an eye on her to make sure she can hear what is being said. When necessary, I hear conversations and tell her later what was talked about rather than interrupt the natural flow of a conversation.

We need a sense of humour. This is a very important perspective and can be important in maintaining your sanity. A little story I heard was about three women on a train, all hard of hearing. One said, "It's windy out today." The second one said, "No, it's not Wednesday, it's Thursday." The third one said, "So am I, let's go have a drink."

On a more personal note, there was a time when I was ill and suffered a temporary loss in one of my ears. This was possibly due to the Meniere's disease. I said to Flo, "We only have one good ear left." Fortunately, it got better and we got our two ears back again.

See the Person and not the Loss. We may advocate the acceptance of people with disabilities, but it is far more effective to demonstrate this in our lives. It's important to meet and accept the person, loss included and the problems that come along with it, just as we are accepted with the failings or disabilities we may have. People learn a lot about living with those who have a hearing loss by observing. Let me speak directly to those of you who are living with someone who has trouble hearing: we need to be honest - our patience sometimes doesn't work as well as our intentions. After living for 18 years with a spouse with hearing difficulties, I know there are times when my character is put under the spotlight, and blemishes show up. Anyone who lives with someone with a disability will experience more stress.



Members' Meeting Audience February 25th

Our character and attitude will be amplified, just like the hearing aids amplify sound - the imperfections will become more visible. One example I can give you is singing off key. When a person's hearing is impaired and sound is distorted, it may be difficult to carry a tune. It's not the singing off key that's important, it's the joy in the activity.

Consider the Benefits. Flo has become expert in reading lips. This can bring rewards, for instance, sometimes when watching a movie on TV, Flo can read the lips of someone in the background and add something that goes unheard by a hearing person. When Flo needs some peace and quiet she can just take her hearing aids out. At night I can make all the noise I want and Flo will not be disturbed. I don't even know if I snore.

What about the day-to-day issues you and I face with a hearing-disabled spouse? Beyond having the right perspective, what can we do to make life a bit easier for everyone? What has worked for us? Let's start with the essentials:

Always face your partner. It's like those bumper stickers that say, If you can't see my mirrors, I can't see you. Instead, it's if you can't see

my eyes, I can't hear you.

(To demonstrate this, Doug faced the audience and spoke the number '147' which he had written down. He then showed the number and asked how many heard the number correctly. Almost everyone in the audience heard the number correctly. He then turned away from the audience and spoke the words 'it's fun to say five.' Many hands went up in the audience showing that they did not correctly hear what was said.)

Another one to avoid is don't talk with your mouth full. This might not be too important for hearing, but it sure looks gross.

It's important to get feedback. I ask Flo if she's

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heard me. I don't know about you, but I can usually guess when someone has not heard what I have said. I see this glazed look, in effect saying, "I think I know what you have said, and that's good enough for the moment." But often it isn't.

Devote your full attention to the conversation. Don't multi-task. I can do all sorts of things while Flo is talking, but it's better for her if I stop and just listen and watch for feedback on how she is hearing. Eliminate background noise. Turn off the

radio or television. Re-phrase or say things another way. Don't have a conversation that goes like this: Me: "What would you like for dinner?" Flo: "What do you mean I'm a sinner?" Re-phrase the question to: "What would you like to eat tonight?" or "Any suggestions for Supper?" Provide signals when changing topics. Just like you would signal when turning while driving a car. When all else fails, use email instead of conversation.

We all have disabilities. Remember, living together means living with less than perfection. Living together inevitably involves facing real people - people like you and me who have imperfections. For some, this involves a hearing loss. For others, it will involve some "noise" in their character - perhaps impatience. The reality is, we can make the lives of our family members more enjoyable when we have an attitude that sees their loss as our loss. For those of you with a hearing disability, you can be your spouse's eyes if they lose something. You see, while ears make a difference, it's the heart that counts.

This ended Doug's talk and Flo took over to MC the discussion with the audience. Many ideas, problems, and solutions were discussed. The following is a brief summary:

Many people experience difficulty with messages left on answering machines. Callers don't speak slowly and clearly, and don't spell out names or repeat phone numbers. Solution: change your outgoing message asking people to speak slowly and

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clearly, etc. State your disability. When you are having difficulties hearing what someone is saying to you, give them a clear message of what you need. Say, "I can't hear you." Or better, "I need to see your face, watch your lips as you speak." Learn to get past your dislike of exposing your disability. When encountering annoyance when you ask someone to repeat - it helps to remember and perhaps remind them that it takes a Hard of Hearing person more time for the brain to interpret the spoken word than for a normal hearing person. (On average 3 seconds more). A Hard of Hearing person relies on more than just the sound to interpret what is being said. Such things as lip movement, facial expression, body language, context of the conversation, etc. become very important.

Another difficulty is with calls to multiple mailbox answering systems: Press 1 for "this", press 2 for "that", etc. Solution: Don't panic. Stay on the line as many will route call to a person if no number is pressed. Try pressing '0' as this often routes to an operator or attendant.

Another area of discussion revolved around "What can the North Shore Branch do to make a difference in the community for the Hard of Hearing?" There are people out there who need our help and support. How can we help them? How can we reach them? It was pointed out that there are other disability groups who have made their

voices and needs heard. Much has been done in the community for mobility, blindness, etc., such as, curb cuts, ramps, accessible toilets, audible traffic signals, disabled parking stalls, etc. What do we the hard of hearing need? Firstly, we must get over the tendency to want to hide our disability. If we don't make our needs known in the right places, we won't get the help we need.

Two areas, where we are trying to make a difference, are on the Tri-Municipal Advisory Committee for Disabilities Issues (ACDI) and the North

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Shore Health Region's *People with Disabilities Advisory Group*. We have members on both of these committees at the present time. There are a number of Municipal developments underway or proposed on the North Shore and we will be providing our input on the need for assistive listening systems, loop systems, acoustical room treatment, etc. One meeting has already taken place with the architects for the Aquatic Centre in West Vancouver where it is now proposed to pre-prepare all areas for eventual loop systems where needed. Another area where we will be providing input is the Lower Lonsdale and Versatile Shipyards developments in North Vancouver.

On the People with Disabilities Advisory Group a new protocol is being developed for admission to hospital services. This will provide a generic bed and chart logo using new protocol designed to help those with disabilities in getting their needs met. We need you, the Hard of Hearing, to declare yours needs and insist that the protocol be followed. State that you are Hard of Hearing and ask the health care provider to speak slowly and clearly and to face you when they speak. In the final analysis it is up to us as individuals to take responsibility for our difficulty in hearing.

The meeting ended with a Social and refreshments. Members were on hand to discuss hearing difficulties one to one and to offer help and technical suggestions to those who enquired. There was also a display table with brochures and library materials from our office on display.

A Little Bit of History

The Hearing Aid pictured below was made by Amplivox and purchased by a lady in Blackpool, England in 1948. The cost was £24 13s 6d which would have been about \$75.00 at the time. For your amusement and possibly education, the following is from an instruction sheet given out with the hearing aid. How little things have changed in the last 50 years!

YOUR HEARING AID

May we remind you of these points, so that you will get the best possible use from your hearing aid?

1. Your instrument has been supplied to suit your deafness - other people may not be able to hear so well with it.
2. Take as much care of it as you would an expensive watch.
3. Be sure to switch it off if you are not using it.
4. Disconnect the batteries at night
5. Keep it away from damp or excessive heat.
6. Do not be in a hurry to hear perfectly - you must practice hearing in easy stages.
7. Never use a battery for more than a few hours without retesting it.

THE FIVE STEPS TO GOOD HEARING

FIRST STEP

Converse with only one person at a time. Listening to one at a time makes hearing easier, and permits you to separate the different voices. Remember that different persons have different qualities of speech - some speak clearly, some more rapidly than others; some drop their voices at the end of a sentence, etc. Watch the speaker. At first have him or her read or speak slowly - in a normal voice. Your ability to understand readily will gradually improve - and with it your self confidence. Radio - music only. Radio speeches are too rapid to be understood easily at this stage. Practice before trying:

SECOND STEP

The listening distance may now be increased. You



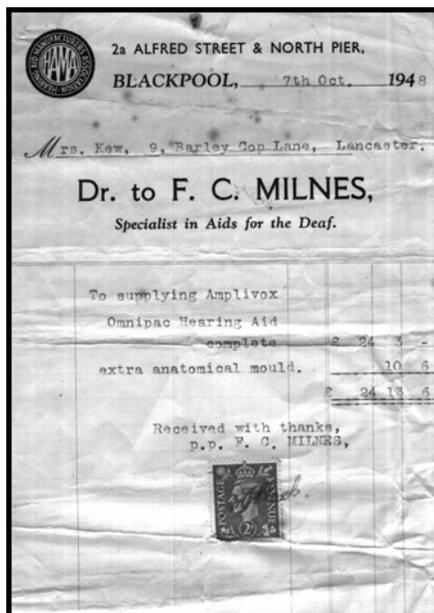
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may try small group conversations with two or three friends. Let us emphasize that in groups you should listen to one person at a time, as do those with normal hearing. You may find this difficult at first. Do not become discouraged if you do not hear everything that is said - it will come with practice.

THIRD STEP

The preceding steps of home practice with various voices at distances will have given you the opportunity to prepare for business and social activities outside. Therefore, seek opportunities for discussion among friends, paying close attention to what is said and learning to distinguish the different voices. If your visits are extended, rest yourself at intervals by shutting off the instrument. Under no circumstances permit yourself to tire or become nervous.



FOURTH STEP

Not all hearing aid users can hear perfectly in church, due to the nature of their impairment. We hope, however, that you are one of the fortunate number for whom this is possible. Sit on the centre isle, not more than six or seven pews from the front. Do not worry if you do not hear all the first sermon. Remember, also, that your ability to hear at a distance depends not only on the instrument, but on the amount of your residual hearing. In some cases the loss is so great, or it is of such a nature, that only limited distances can be obtained. Be grateful for what you get. Remember, too, that a person with normal hearing does not always hear every word. This is due to (1) poor acoustics in the hall, (2) the fact that the speaker may not talk distinctly.

FIFTH STEP

If you have followed the previous steps carefully, with adequate practice, you may be ready to try the final step - hearing in theatre or picture house.

Hearing in the theatre is more difficult than in church, because there are a number of people on the stage, moving about and talking in different voices with different speed, pitch and volume. Furthermore, as in church, the acoustics may be bad. Sit about four to six rows back, in the centre of the theatre.

At the Movies sit eight to twelve rows back, or try other sections of the house. Never sit under a Balcony. In the Movies the sound comes from an amplified loud speaker, and is then amplified again by your set. For that reason it may take you time to get used to understanding the talkies.

Great progress has been made in talking pictures, yet sound reproduction is by no means perfect - and varies from theatre to theatre. You will soon learn in which houses you can hear best and where to sit.

Do not be discouraged, keep at it, and you will find your patience and efforts well rewarded.

REMEMBER. WE CANNOT JUST PUT ON A HEARING AID, FORGET ABOUT IT AND WALK AWAY . . . MOST AUTHORITIES CLAIM WE NEED A MINIMUM OF TWO MONTHS TO ADJUST OURSELVES TO AN AID; TO RE-EDUCATE OURSELVES TO SOUND; SO THAT WE CAN SECURE THE FULLEST MEASURE

Next Members' Meeting.

The next members' meeting will be held on Monday, April 22nd at 7:00 PM at St. John's Anglican Church, 220 West 8th Street, North Vancouver.

Our Speaker for this meeting has not yet been confirmed, so we will be sending out a meeting notice closer to the date advising you what we have arranged.

The meeting will be followed by the usual social with refreshments. Members will be available to discuss your hearing concerns. An information table with brochures and books from our library will be on display.

Please mark April 22nd on your calendar now.