



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

North Shore Branch

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Mountain Ear

President's Message

Mirror, Mirror...

What does looking into a mirror have in common with responding to a hearing impaired person who has just asked you to repeat what you said for the third or fourth time? Any guesses?

These two activities have to do with seeing ourselves as we truly are. In both instances, we see a reflection of ourselves. In one, the reflection is our external features; in the other, the "reflection" is our internal character features. Who we are on the inside often shows up in the way we react to others who are not at the same ability level as we are. Some possible reactions are repeating with a smile, repeating what was said using different words, writing down the word(s). Other reactions are speaking loudly with exaggeration, anger or even ignoring the request for help.

Now what do we do when we see our reflection? In both mirror looking and helping a hearing impaired individual, (or anyone with a disability or need, for that matter), there are at least two choices. One may look and do nothing or one may decide to make some changes or improvements. Doing nothing could mean one is pleased with the reflection and does not need change, or it could mean that one is not willing to make any changes.

Let us assume the reflection begs for improvement

and the person wants to make some changes. What is the next step? What does he or she do?

In the case of helping a hearing impaired person, this next step is critical to the relationship of the people involved. Fortunately, it is not difficult. This step involves getting information from the person with the hearing disability. Some examples are: "What do you need?" or, "What is the best way I can help you?"

People with hearing loss have very different needs, depending on their degree of loss, their coping strategies and the context of the conversation. I believe most people with hearing loss could tell you what they need. For one person, help may mean simply to look at the person and speak a little slower, while for another it may include finding a quieter corner or room, away from the voices and noises that are interfering.

Our reflections, both external and internal, are important to most of us. For different reasons, we want to "look good". While our physical, external reflection will affect our feelings about ourselves, our internal reflection actually affects our relationships. It may take a little extra work to improve that internal reflection, but I can assure you, it is well worth the effort.

Til next time,
Flo Spratt.

Sound Advice

A series of month sessions to discuss issues of concern to the Hard of Hearing. These sessions are being held on the first Friday of each month throughout the year and are open to all hard of hearing persons and family members or friends. **The next gathering will be on March 7, 2003, 10:00 AM to Noon in the Learning Studio at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre.**

By Andrea Gauthier

Our first monthly *Sound Advice* get-together was held on Friday, February 7th. Fourteen people attended.

Our Branch President, Flo Spratt, led the meeting, emphasizing the importance of having every single person in the room hear. The acoustics in the room were helped by the carpeted floor. We appreciate the Seniors' Centre providing us with this wonderful space.



This being the first meeting, we wanted to know what kinds of needs the attendees had and what kinds of questions they would like to have addressed at future sessions. Marion Ladkin, our Vice-President, explained our lending library and profiled some material she had brought with her. Hugh Hetherington, our Secretary and techno-wiz spoke with his usual breadth of knowledge. The people who attended seemed very relieved to find such a resource of information. A short break for coffee provided us with an opportunity to mix and meet others. The informal process of the get-together also allowed people to get to know a little about each other in a way our larger

meetings do not permit. We hope these monthly gatherings will provide opportunities for hard of hearing people to learn more about their disability

Members' Meeting

Our February Members' Meeting was held on February 24th 2003, 7:00 PM at The Summerhill in North Vancouver. There were 45 people in attendance. Jennifer Shifrin, B.Sc., M.Ed., M.A. was the guest speaker. As a Registered Clinical Counsellor and Speech Language Pathologist, Jennifer always brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to our group. The topic for her presentation was *Taking Charge of Your Life* and covered such subjects as discovering effective coping strategies, improving relationships, and finding out how to minimize stress.

Jennifer uses a method that models how to take charge of your life as a hard of hearing person. She teaches by using our own experiences, analyzing them and finding ways to make things work better for everyone and for us in particular. We looked at some of the different scenarios we all encounter in our daily lives starting out with our usual concern: *can everybody hear?* We looked at the various features of the room to see what hinders and what helps, bringing to mind our needs whenever we go into any new situation.

We talked about stress, what it is and various methods to reduce or eliminate it in our lives.

We talked about noticing what beliefs we have and changing some of them to be easier on ourselves. Jennifer questioned the idea that we should always "*do our best*". She said there are times when doing our best may be too much to ask. Can we expect to perform at the same level in circumstances that differ as to noise level? If we expect this of ourselves, we may feel bad and our self-esteem might plummet. If we think we did very well, considering the challenges the environment presented, we will feel better about ourselves.

Jennifer said the healthy person chooses when to do their best and doesn't require oneself to do so all the time.

What about the situation where you have repeatedly asked people to speak one at a time but they continue to speak at the same time? Why does that hap-

pen? We role played ways of dealing with this situation in an assertive way. Jennifer always comes back to the idea: *Do You Matter?*

Sometimes, people say they care about us but they don't behave as if they care. It's important for us to express our feelings and needs. Also, there are times when communication isn't working and it has nothing to do with one person being hard of hearing. Jennifer said sometimes people can harbour a grudge for thirty years and because of this, they will not accommodate the other person's needs. Just because we are hard of hearing, it doesn't mean we don't still have to deal with the ins and outs of communication in long-term relationships.

Why do people continue to mumble and speak quickly after being asked to slow down and speak clearly? This requires a big change in habit for the hearing person. When making a presentation to the hard of hearing, Jennifer adjusts her speech to speak mindfully for her presentation to us. She said she can do it for a couple of hours but it would be difficult to sustain it for a full afternoon. Sometimes, people feel criticized. Jennifer said this happens when people don't have a solid sense of self but pointed out that there are also different ways of criticizing, the difference between criticism from the heart and criticism that is a putdown

Sometimes, we feel we cannot do as much as others



or we plan things and then find them very tiring. Jennifer says this happens to everybody. We can't do everything. She made the distinction between "giving up" and "taking a rest", saying these are different ways of talking to oneself. If you are taking a rest, you're in charge of yourself and you will feel better.

We all know that being hard of hearing involves

coming to terms with loss and we must acknowledge and feel that loss. Jennifer said that the psycho-spiritual task of life is to *make what is, Okay*. We don't need to cry specifically and it is okay for men as well as women to cry, but it's important to feel the pain inside and have it witnessed by someone who cares about you.

I am already looking forward to our next visit from Jennifer. She is a true advocate for the hard of hearing and supports us in getting as much of what we need as we can.

By Andrea Gauthier.)



Processing Speech

(Editor's Note: At the CHHA BC Conference held in October 2002 at the Sheraton Guildford Hotel in Surrey, one of the speakers spoke on a subject that explained much of the difficulty hard of hearing persons have in understanding spoken language. This article, which was originally published in the B.C. Chapter's December 2002 newsletter *The Loop*, captured the essence of the talk so well that I thought I would reprint it here for our readers.)

Dr. Jeff Small, Ph.D., Professor of Acquired Language Disorders and Language Processing at the University of British Columbia explained some of the complexities of how speech is processed and why a hard of hearing person can understand some things that are said and not understand others.

The demands of understanding spoken language are both linguistic and cognitive, and the extent of the demand on these functions determines how much energy is used.

A hard of hearing person gets tired more often than a hearing person in the same situation.

When listening to someone speak, just one word sets off a chain reaction of possible ideas and other words. The listener's brain then continues to select other likely ideas and words, depending on the next

words he hears.

Each new word he hears has a role in the sentence. The grammatical structure of the sentence also aids understanding.

The process of listening to speech is complex, requiring the brain to perform an explosion of functions simultaneously.

Other demands are made on the brain at the same time, such as background noise, more than one person speaking at the same time, whether the listener is tired or in pain, whether his interest level is low or high, and whether he is able to handle the distractions.

Time and energy is expended.

Then there are the linguistic challenges, such as like-sounding words, (pat, bat, mat) and ambiguity of meaning (line, straight line, drop a line, line of work, out of line, feed one a line).

Dr. Small showed this cartoon to illustrate how the brain chooses the most likely meaning when a sentence is heard.

As each word sound comes to us, the whole range of possibilities are activated and our brains line them



up, sorting them out as more sounds are received.

Time and energy is expended.

If a hard of hearing person mis-hears even one word, his brain sets up a different chain of possible ideas and words to come.

Another word or two are spoken, and the listener

finds that his possible ideas don't fit.

At the same time, additional possible meanings are being activated by the sentence structure.

We hear, "Mary knew the answer. . . .," and two of the possible endings come to mind: "to the question," "was correct."

Minor connecting words, like "that," when not heard properly are often replaced by the word "and." This affects the meaning of the sentence.

If a sentence is spoken with mis-used words, or ungrammatical structure, this will cause more brain work for the hard of hearing listener.

Great demands are placed on a listener through memory, attention, and processing speed.

He has to remember what went before to get the meaning and to know what might be coming next, and he has to focus on what is being said.

Difficulty in hearing slows up the processing speed, and the speaker's rate of speech increases the demand.

Added to this, a hard of hearing listener has more difficulty coping with the additional demands of noise, etc.

Dr. Small iterated that understanding the difficulties makes it possible for a hard of hearing person to gain more control over a listening situation, and gave these suggestions.

- Choose your battlefields carefully. Always maximize the surroundings in your favour.
- Exploit the surrounding context. Make sure you know the topic.
- Be aware of the demands. This is achieved by understanding what is happening when you listen.
- Make efficient use of resources. Use hearing aids, assistive devices, and any strategies that help.
- Exercise language. In a word, READ. Reading stimulates all aspects of processing and builds a knowledge base; therefore, less energy is required.

A person with a rich vocabulary has a greater range of language knowledge to draw on, which speeds up the processing activity.

Dr. Small noted that older people often have richer vocabularies and this compensates for their slower processing.

Next Members Meeting Date

April 28th, 2003, 7:00 PM

Place: The Summerhill

135 West 15th Street

North Vancouver

Hearing Loss

A Trip Back in Time

(Editor's note) As somewhat of a hearing aid historian, I sometimes come across writings that while written many years in the past still have some direct pertinence to today's hard of hearing persons. Such is the case of a book I came across recently entitled "Handbook of Hearing Aids" by A. F. Niemoeller published in 1940. While it was written over 60 years ago when the transistor had not yet been invented, carbon hearing aids were at their peak and vacuum tube hearing aids were not yet entirely wearable and had to be carried around like box cameras or strapped to the body, I found that the introduction contained much information that is relatively timeless in its application to the Hard of Hearing and demonstrated insight into the plight of the Hard of Hearing by the author. The following for your education and enjoyment is an extract from the introduction to the book. Take yourself back in time and ponder on what it might have been like to be a hearing aid user in the 1930's.

HEARING is certainly not a "luxury" sense. It cannot be lightly regarded or dispensed with save at the expense of much of the balance and fullness of human life. It is a necessity than which there are few more vital, playing as important a part in an individual's physical well-being as seeing, eating, walking, purposeful occupation, or any of the other functions, faculties, or activities normal to the average healthy person. To be sure, life may be maintained though some of these (as walking, artistic enjoyment, etc.) be entirely absent from the individual's scheme of existence, but his life and general outlook are certain to be affected by the lack. And this is especially true in the case of hearing. Not only will the absence of this sense warp his existence by curtailing his powers of experience, instruction, pleasure, social intercourse, economic independence, and the like, and visibly affect and alter his life in all its aspects that these matters touch, but in addition his bodily health is likely to be adversely influenced. The ever-present consciousness of the handicap and the constant strain of attempting to compensate for the missing faculty will wear and weary a person, induce various forms of nervousness, and frequently result in the production of unwholesome mental states and attitudes. Of a certainty, the auditory sense cannot be taken from a person without consequences more far reaching than those stemming merely from the loss of actual hearing.

If any one could be truly happy without hearing, it could conceivably be only a person who was born deaf or became so very early in life – such a person never having known at first hand the beauties and benefits of hearing might fashion himself a tolerable

existence without it. But for the deaf or hard-of-hearing person whose affliction comes upon him in later life, the loss is irreparable. He is faced with the almost impossible task of halting a mode of life in midstream and attempting to fashion a new one on an entirely different basis.

For such a person, hearing – in any degree, amount, or in any fashion – is invaluable beyond belief in counteracting the above-mentioned pernicious effects and in facilitating this necessary re-adjustment. Overtime medicine can do much to restore ailing ears and no wise person will passively accept hearing impairment without first putting himself in the hands of competent doctors or otologists to find what science can do to halt or remedy his defect.

But is he whose hearing is defective to the point of handicap and to whom medical science can at present offer no hope, to resign himself despairingly to his fate? By no means, and he who does so can do it only through ignorance of the means available for his aid, or through indifference and laziness keeping him from availing himself of these means. For there is the whole broad field of hearing aids, growing almost daily toward perfection, to be taken advantage of, and it is to help the afflicted of the present category that they are pre-eminently suited. Lack of knowledge of this matter may keep many from enjoying its benefits. Any indifference or inertia that prevents a hard-of-hearing person from making the most of the many possibilities in this direction can be overcome only by himself.

It goes without saying, of course, that in order for a hearing aid to be of any service there must be *some* hearing left for it to aid. That is to say, it is helpful only to the hard of hearing; to expect one to be of use to a totally deaf person would be as futile as putting spectacles on a blind man to help him see. However, since the hard of hearing outnumber the deaf a great many times, this limitation affects only a minority of the auditory handicapped. Also, numerous persons who have been accepted as being stone deaf have of late been shown to be suffering only from extreme impairment which, despite its degree, can be made serviceable with a suitable instrument and proper training. Indeed, there are some authorities who maintain that, save in those relatively infrequent instances of complete destruction or absence of the auditory nerves, that there is no such thing as thorough-going deafness, that there is almost always some hearing response left if only it can be reached

and utilized. With the finer hearing aids of the future, it is conceivable that lack of all hearing may be restricted to those comparatively few who have no active hearing nerves of any sort left to be reached by one means or another.

As things stand at present, the range of applicability of instrumental help for the deafened may be determined more handily if more roughly: any hard-of-hearing person who can understand speech shouted slowly directly into his ear has an excellent chance of being able to be fitted satisfactorily with a hearing aid.

Now, hearing comfortably with an aid is no simple matter of merely buying an instrument, putting it on, and then going blithely about enjoying good or improved hearing with no further bother. *Much* care is requisite for good results: care, first of all, in the selection and purchase of an outfit suitable to the individual and to his peculiar type and degree of impairment; then in the proper use, maintenance, and care of the instrument; in overcoming personal vanity and sensitivity in using it publicly; and above all in *learning* to adapt oneself and one's residual hearing to the aid in order that one shall again become able to handle the mass and jumble of sounds that the instrument brings to the unaccustomed senses and make them intelligible.

This last is usually the most difficult of all and calls for patience, persistence, and determination. Often a hearing aid will at first seem to make matters worse instead of better for the user by bringing to his ears a din and hodge-podge of sounds of a sort to drive him mad. But he can conquer this if he will. He must *learn* to hear again, much as a young child must, by finding out how to pick the pertinent sounds from the noise, distinguish one sound from another, and to link the various sounds together in the manner necessary to get sense from them. If this seem difficult it should be remembered that thousands have already found it quite feasible and have had notable success with it – and what one man has done another can do. And certainly, the reward of serviceable hearing is worth almost any effort.

However, in order to prevent possible disappointment from the dashing of too high hopes and expectations, let there be no confusion between “serviceable” hearing and “perfect” hearing. Aids will frequently permit a person to achieve the former, but rarely, if ever, the latter. Though hearing aids have today reached a state of efficiency undreamed

of ten years or less ago, they are still by no means ideally perfect and the user must expect and allow for certain limitations in their employment. But, on the other hand, perfect hearing is had by very, very few persons, with or without aids, and is not at all indispensable to a full and enjoyable life; serviceable hearing will suffice for this purpose and this in the majority of instances can be supplied through the medium of a properly selected instrument.

The most notable achievement in the hearing aid field in recent years has been the introduction and improvement of vacuum tube models. The specific advantages and disadvantages of these will be considered in later chapters. The chief practical disadvantage of the vacuum tube aid is its size and weight – they are as yet in the main “wearable” only in something of a relative sense. However, marvels are every year being performed in condensing these sets while increasing their power, efficiency and clarity and cutting down their battery consumption, so it is not at all beyond probability that the time will come when the vacuum tube aid will be truly wearable.

But though we devote our present book to hearing aids, let a solemn warning be issued: Do not permit the growing perfection of hearing aids to cause the value of lip reading to become minimized. Not only is each of these, aids and lip reading, most serviceable when used in conjunction with the other, but there is also potential danger of future embarrassment, discomfort, and handicap in one's permitting himself to become *wholly* dependent upon his instrument. For there are times (and if the time be in an emergency the consequences will be much worse) when one may not have his aid available – it may become damaged, a mechanical defect crop up, the batteries may fail, etc. – and then he would suddenly be left entirely helpless should he not have his lip reading to fall back on.

The hard of hearing must, in order to enjoy the best hearing possible, solve their problem through three measures: medicine, hearing aids, and lip reading. To pursue exclusively any of these and ignore others is to court the possibility of sacrificing much that is helpful, and even necessary, to a full life.