

## **“Lessons from Rocky”** (A Collection of Memories from Members)

### **Amazing Voice Recognition**

*Hollace Goodman, Mount Kisco, NY*  
*HLAA National Volunteer*

**B**ack in 1989, I wanted to meet others who have a hearing loss, so I planned to attend a deaf conference (not realizing the mode of communication would primarily be sign language.) My audiologist at that time explained to me that since I do not sign, it was not the right group for me. She told me about SHHH. Therefore, I took her advice, became a member, and attended my first convention in Bethesda, Maryland. What a find! I have attended every single one since, making Nashville my twenty-first!



My association with Rocky was such that he always remembered me when I was at a convention or other HLAA event. I would approach him to say “Hello,” and even when his vision became poorer, he recognized my voice right away. I was quite amazed at that. I had the honor of picking him up at the airport when the Westchester Chapter invited him to be a speaker at an event held in my home town of Westchester. It was amazing how much he was talking to me while I was driving – but I could not respond to him because I needed to read lips to understand what he said. He did not realize that I could *not* hear what he was saying without looking at him, so I had to tell him to wait until we got to where we were going.

At the Iowa Convention in 1992, I believe I was one of just five SHHH members who signed up for a cruise being planned but never materialized due to not having interest from enough people. When Rocky had his book signing in San Diego [1993], “*An Invisible Condition: The Human Side of Hearing Loss*,” he wrote: “With fond memories of our missed boat ride. Warm regards, Rocky.”

I learned from SHHH/HLAA not to be ashamed of having a hearing loss, and to advocate for your needs and be who you are. My confidence, as my family had told me, began to grow and strengthen in the early part of my involvement with SHHH/HLAA. I feel very fortunate to be a part of this wonderful organization; it is one big happy family; just witness all the friends that are made! I hope we see many more years that are wonderful.

## Julie Finds Her Personal Mission

*Julie Olson, Appleton, WI  
Rocky Stone Humanitarian Award 2000  
SHHH Board of Trustees 1984-1998  
Past President 1994-1996  
Founder, Fox Valley WI Chapter*

**I**n a lifetime, a person has only a few real heroes. Rocky Stone was one of mine. Rocky gave me the “tools” I needed to pick myself up and learn to enjoy life again in spite of early adult onset hearing loss.

I met Rocky in person in 1984 at the first National SHHH convention in Chicago. I talked to him on the phone before that; at least I thought I did. I sure heard him! I learned later that someone else was doing his listening...but he never missed a beat! I had reluctantly registered for that first convention. He called to tell me that if I didn't have a T-switch in my hearing aid I'd better go borrow one from my dispenser because I was in for a big surprise! I didn't have a clue what he was talking about, but I did as he suggested. I was surprised my dispenser, who had just sold me a new hearing aid, agreed to loan me a hearing aid with this “thing” in it that Rocky said I needed. The dispenser also made a point to tell me “this thing” was something that was “kind of old fashioned and unnecessary.”



*Julie, on right,  
with staff member, Nancy Macklin*

Rocky also sent me a handwritten letter telling me they were going to elect a board of trustees at the convention, and that I ought to run for election. I was terrified to attend this convention where I was sure I wouldn't be able to hear anything. Running for the board seemed even crazier. I was still trying to figure out if I really wanted to drive in Chicago! I had taken early retirement from my teaching job at age 35...because of my hearing loss...now I should run for a National board? I thought Mr. Stone was joking. Had I known Rocky better then, I would have been sure he was teasing me. But he wasn't, and I did what he asked of me.

That was the beginning of my “new” life as a person who learned not just how to live with hearing loss, but to live *well* with this invisible disability. It was also the beginning of a personal mission I never expected to have; to reach out to others to teach them what Rocky had made possible by founding Self Help for Hard of Hearing People. In 2009, hard of hearing people have advantages and opportunities never thought possible when SHHH was founded in 1979, and that would not exist today if it were not for Rocky Stone's vision.

Rocky was a jokester. Over all the years I knew him, I don't remember a time when he didn't have a joke he absolutely had to share with me...about something, usually golf or tales of the “frozen north country.” And he never let me forget his trip to Wisconsin in 1990.

That year, our Chapter held a conference on Mother's Day weekend. Rocky accepted our invitation to attend. May is a lovely time in Wisconsin; at least it's supposed to be. As luck would have it, Rocky arrived in Chicago where he would transfer flights to Appleton, Wisconsin, and got stuck at O'Hare Airport because Appleton was having a blizzard and our smaller airport was under 10 inches of wet snow! He missed the Friday evening event we had so carefully

planned and arrived mid-day on Saturday in time for the banquet where he was the featured speaker. It was a short stay but we all made the best of it. I never heard the end of living in the frozen tundra! It was a very special event. My Mom and Dad, and my husband and daughter all got to meet Rocky, so I had all of my heroes and heroines in the same place at once!

## **From Despair to a New Focus and Meaning**

*Ann Liming, Lansing, MI*  
*Rocky Stone Humanitarian Award 2009*  
*SHHH/HLAA Board of Trustees 1998-2004*  
*Past President 2002-2004*  
*Former MI State Chapter Co-coordinator*  
*Co-founder, MI-SHHH/HLA-MI*  
*Co-founder HLAA Lansing Chapter*

**W**hen I first learned about SHHH I was at the lowest point in my life. My hearing had gone from mild to severe, leaving me with some very difficult challenges. I lived in fear of losing my job, as well as my family and friends, because of my communication difficulties. I was trying to learn sign language but did not know anyone in the deaf community and truly felt I was falling between the cracks. I must have cried straight for six months.



A friend told me about SHHH and encouraged me to attend the 1989 National Convention in DC. I shied away from the Chapter development room. I didn't want anything to do with starting and leading a Chapter. This friend also pointed Rocky Stone out to me but it meant little and I wasn't impressed. He was a little overweight, balding and dressed in a cotton short-sleeve shirt with a floral design. However, in spite of where I was at emotionally at that time I returned home ready to start a Chapter and became the Chapter's first president.

Several months later, a non-profit organization in Lansing hosted a lip-reading workshop and brought in a nationally known presenter. They also invited Rocky to give commentary. I was contacted to see if our Chapter would like to host Rocky. I was totally intimidated at the thought. I tried to get the vice president, who was a man, to do it but apparently he was intimidated too. In the end, I nervously trudged off to the workshop and introduced myself to Rocky. Within five minutes I felt like I had known him for a lifetime. I remember that Rocky asked me if I had a hearing loss. He said I didn't have the creases on my forehead that so many people with hearing loss have from straining to hear.

This first meeting with Rocky was the beginning of a friendship that I will cherish forever. I learned so much from listening to and watching Rocky and my life took on a whole different focus and meaning. As I became more and more involved in SHHH at the local, state and then the national level I enlarged my "family" of friends and gained confidence and skills. Eventually, I began to see my hearing loss as a blessing and I have often told people that if God were to ask me if I would like my hearing restored that I would tell Him, "only a little bit." Due to my hearing loss and SHHH/HLAA I have many treasured friends; I have traveled places and done things I probably would not have done otherwise; and, I am a far better person than I would

be without a hearing loss. I owe so much to Rocky for his vision and wisdom in forming SHHH and for his devotion and compassion to what he often referred to as the “human condition.”

So many of us experienced Rocky’s friendship and love. I like to think that in giving his love away that Rocky experienced his life as it was meant to be. Think of the love that he received in return! Perhaps Rocky’s secret was that he knew that his genuine love for each of us was helping us to find our true selves and to experience our lives as they were meant to be as well. What an example he set for us. Can we do any less?

## **A Compassionate and Careful Leader**

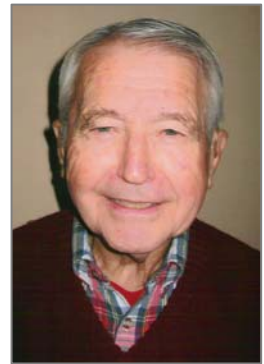
*Bern Klein, Napa, CA  
Napa Valley CA Chapter*

**I** never met Rocky, but, I saw him at the National conventions and at our state conferences. He impressed me as a compassionate and careful leader. The name *Self Help for Hard of Hearing People* has always impressed me in the “Self Help” portion. The message was clearly, “It’s up to you.”

That together with the enormous amount of information of all kinds collectively made available through *Hearing Loss Magazine*, national conventions, state conferences and local Chapters gave me a feeling of great empowerment. Here was an organization that encouraged me to explore and to realize my own potential for improving my ability to communicate.

The notion of “self help” let me pick and choose according to my needs and according to a rate, fast or slow, that was rewarding to me. I jumped in with both feet and with vigor! What I grew to realize was that HLAA functions as a continuous, ongoing aural rehabilitation course for all of us if we pay attention. I became aware that most of what I will ever need to know about my hearing will be found through the resources associated with HLAA, and that thought is powerful.

This is Rocky’s gift to all of us with hearing loss.



## **There IS Something You Can Do About It**

**Joan Haber, Sarasota, FL**  
*HLAA Board of Trustees 2002-2005  
FL State Board Member*

**I**t is because of Rocky Stone that I am where I am today, doing what I love, which is advocating for myself and others with hearing loss. I travel around the state making presentations to HLA Chapters, civic groups, businesses and serve on the Florida Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.



I met Rocky in 1998, shortly after I discovered SHHH, and through his mentorship, I came to understand Rocky's vision and the philosophy of "self help" – education, advocacy and support.

Today I was making a speech at a Chapter in central Florida and instead of launching into my usual prepared remarks about how important HLAA is and why the Chapter members "should" belong to HLAA, I asked if anyone in the room had ever heard of Rocky Stone. Only two people out of the 50 people there had heard of him. I knew then that I needed to start over at the beginning and share with them who this remarkable man was and why he was and still is important to our lives.

This organization that we have become has to survive after all of us who actually knew Rocky, are gone. Rocky's philosophy was based on empowerment of the individual, not the victimization of the person as "disabled." When I told Rocky my story of how I lost my job because of my hearing loss and complained that "There was nothing I could do about it," he said, in his straightforward yet gentle manner, "Yes, there IS something you can do about it – you can try to make sure that never happens to somebody else with hearing loss." I served on the National board during the year that Rocky died and I will never forget the sadness that we experienced in losing him. He is the part of our history that needs to live on in this organization.

## **He Recognized My Bounce**

*Jim Montgomery, Bethel Island, CA  
CA State Board Past President  
Co-founder, Diablo Valley CA Chapter*

I began going to Chapter meetings when the Diablo Valley Chapter in Walnut Creek, California started – over 20 years ago. I was one of the charter members of that Chapter and many of the members are still my close friends. I was not around other people who had a hearing loss until I joined SHHH in 1980.

In 1986, the SHHH National Convention was at California's Stanford University. It was here that I realized my calling to help others who have a hearing loss. Like Rocky, I am a people person and really enjoy helping others out. I can say Rocky and his talks had a lot to do with this. Many, many times we two just sat and talked even if only for a few minutes between meetings or a breakfast get-together – we always took the time to visit with each other to share laughter and our love of people.



After he lost his sight he always knew when I was in the room regardless of which side I'd sneak up on him. I could swear that my hearing aid was giving off a unique sound and he could hear me coming. He never did tell me how he knew that! Later a friend commented that each of us walks differently and Rocky most likely picked up the way I walk. He called it my bounce!

Rocky always encouraged and enhanced me to do my best. Receiving the Keystone and Spirit Awards from Rocky were two of the best things that ever happened to me. Today he is

very much with me in spirit. Of the many things I've done in my life, helping people is the most rewarding of all.

## **She Was a Closet Hearing Aid User Until...**

*Nancy Landrum, Oklahoma City, OK  
Past President Oklahoma City Chapter*

**I** met Rocky Stone at the Texas Conference in Amarillo in 1999. I had heard so much about him, how he started SHHH in the basement of his home, how the organization filled such a need for hard of hearing people, how he was now coping with not only deafness, but blindness as well.



I was thoroughly excited about the prospect of meeting this great man at the Conference. We had just gotten settled in our room and were on our way to the hotel restaurant when whom should I see coming down the walkway but Rocky himself. I recognized him immediately by the big black cowboy hat. Forgetting all I had thought I would say upon meeting him, I rushed toward him and introduced myself. He was so very gracious. He responded as if my name was familiar to him (although I'm sure it wasn't), and seemed to be as glad to meet me as I was to meet him. I later came to learn that this was the real Rocky – always ready to meet a new friend, always taking the time to make one feel special, always gracious. I continued to seek him out at successive conferences, and he always greeted me warmly and enthusiastically.

The last time I saw Rocky was at the Convention in Omaha in 2004. As he presented the Rocky Stone Humanitarian Award the evening of the banquet, he delivered another outstanding, impromptu tribute, not only to the recipient but to SHHH members and people who are hard of hearing in general. I felt inspired and re-energized to go back home and work even harder to fulfill the purpose of our organization.

After being a “closet hearing aid user” for many years I learned, through SHHH, that it is okay to be hard of hearing, and that I certainly was not alone in my feelings. SHHH gave me the courage to face my disability and information on how to cope with it. I became proactive for the first time, and have thoroughly enjoyed the thirteen years of volunteer service I have given through SHHH/HLAA. I have served in each office of the local Chapter, as State Coordinator, participated in the first Leadership Conference, volunteered in our demonstration room of assistive devices, and attended as many national and regional conventions as possible. All this has been the result of Rocky's foresight so many years ago. I am truly indebted to him.

## Person with a Hearing Loss, Not a Hard of Hearing Person

*Rebecca (Becky) Chester, Sweetwater, TN*  
*Former Tennessee State Chapter Coordinator*  
*Co-founder, ETSHHH of Knoxville Chapter*

**R**ocky is the one who let me know I was a person with a hearing loss, not a “hard of hearing person.” He gave me the courage and self-confidence to wear whatever it took to help me hear well.

I joined National SHHH in January, 1989 and went to the 1989 convention in Washington, DC and attended as many workshops as I could. After gathering extensive information from workshops and the exhibit hall, I came home and helped to start the East Tennessee SHHH Chapter (ETSHHH) in Knoxville.



Rocky and the SHHH organization have helped thousands of people with hearing loss. I do not know where we would be now if it were not for Rocky and the organization. When I go to the convention, my family, friends with hearing loss and audiologists can’t wait until I get home to share the materials that I collect there.

Rocky called me the “Tennessee Farm Girl.”

## He Listened With His Heart

*Lynn Gainesville, FL*  
*President, Gainesville FL Chapter*

**I** DO have wonderful memories of Rocky Stone. They are fresh in my mind and yet every time I think of sending something to this committee, I get busy doing my volunteer work for HLAA!! (Rocky would love to hear that!!)



I keep seeing the never ending twinkle in this eyes and a smile for everyone he meets, as though they were long lost friends. He never hesitated to listen, not just with his ears but with his heart.

I am so happy to be part of this organization and I express over and over how much it made a positive impact on my life and lead me to achieve my dream of helping people – and helping myself at the same time, building more and more confidence in myself!

Writing this memory is emotional for me because Rocky IS the reason I became so involved. I was so shy in school that I was asked NOT to give a report in class and just keep quiet. That changed when I met all of you, who cared about what I had to say and wanted to hear it. Who would have thought I’d lecture to a college class, or speak at a well-known club in town, or speak before the county commissioners? Not I!

Thank you all...for helping me achieve the “almost” impossible goal of reaching out to others.

## Life Became So Enriched

*Sue Miller, Victor, NY*

*Rocky Stone Humanitarian Award 1993*

*SHHH Board of Trustees 1984-1998*

*Former NY State Chapter Coordinator*

*Founder, Rochester NY Chapter*

I have so many memories of Rocky...where can I ever begin! I remember the first time I met him: Monday, September 19, 1983. Rocky was the keynote speaker for the Regional Council on Aging here in Rochester. I was attending the luncheon, and of course, since back then, there were no assistive listening devices, I never actually heard his luncheon talk. But I had never heard any speeches, so it was nothing new.



In the afternoon, individual workshops were held and I attended the one that Rocky was conducting. Near the end of the presentation, he asked if there were any questions. I raised my hand and he came over to stand in front of me and asked, "Is your name Sue Miller?" Well, he scared the living daylight out of me. Now I realize he had the CIA-stare because he couldn't see well...but I didn't know that. I nodded and he asked to see me after the meeting adjourned. We had a nice chat and he asked if I would like to attend a board meeting in October in Bethesda. I went to Bethesda, and the rest is history.

My life is so rich because of my experiences with SHHH/HLAA. I've traveled to cities all across the country to attend the conventions...places I never would have seen. I've met wonderful people from all over the USA, again, because of SHHH/HLAA.

I can now hear when I go to places of worship, the theater, a court room, because of Rocky and his vision. My life has such meaning and purpose...all because of Rocky.

I could spend the rest of my life talking about him...he was incredible and there are no words to describe how blessed I feel, because of Rocky's vision. Interesting that I use the word, "vision" when near the end of his life, he was legally blind.

I can remember what fun we would have in the early years at trustee meetings in Bethesda, eating dinner afterwards, then sitting around the living room...many of us on the floor...talking about hearing loss as though there was "no tomorrow."

Thanks for letting me relive such happy thoughts about you, Rocky, and what you accomplished.



## He Made Everyone Feel Important

*Raegene Castle, Rosewood City, CA  
President Peninsula Chapter  
CA State Board Member/Past Vice-President*

I was fortunate to have met Rocky and I was very happy to be able to have a few conversations with him before he died. Because of Rocky Stone and HLAA, I have a very productive and meaningful life. What he envisioned has bettered the lives of tens of thousands of hard of hearing people worldwide. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without all the help and vision of HLAA.



My first introduction to Rocky Stone and his influence was at the first state conference I attended in Ontario, CA. We met again at my first National convention in Seattle. Later on I had a conversation with him at the Leadership Training in Bethesda. The value of the leadership training and my involvement in HLAA, along with others, is directly attributable to the visionary leadership of Rocky Stone.

Rocky's ability to make everyone feel important was unique and much appreciated. Six months after the Leadership Training, Rocky attended the state conference in Oakland, CA, and we had another conversation. He remembered me and the details of our previous conversation six months ago. Amazing!

He set the standard of good leadership. It taught me the importance of listening and remembering and how important that makes other people feel when they are remembered. To me he is a rock star.

In remembrance of him, and with the blessing of his wife, Ahme, we have set up a monthly exhibit and demonstration to help the hard of hearing community in our area. We have named it "The Rocky Stone Hearing Device Exhibit," this program continues to be a huge success. We demonstrate 20-30 assistive listening devices to local people who are hard of hearing. We keep a picture of Rocky and his biography central on our display table.

I wish I had known him better and I'm glad I have the opportunity to thank him for what he accomplished. I know that this organization will continue to grow and prosper because of the foundation he established.

## Helen's Metamorphosis

*Helen Fleming, Lynn, MA  
Founder, North of Boston MA Chapter  
Former MA State Chapter Coordinator*

I'm a long time member of SHHH/HLAA. In fact, I have been a member since its infancy. I am presently [2009] the facilitator of HLAA at North of Boston. Previous to this, I was a long-time member and president for two years of the Greater Boston Chapter. Still, earlier, I was a member of the Lowell Chapter and for several years I was State Coordinator of Massachusetts.



Over thirty years ago, after teaching school for 28 years, I asked for my very first ever personal day of leave. The school district I worked for was not very generous about granting such requests. Through the years I have looked on their affirmative response as an act of providence.

I had made this request because I wanted to attend a luncheon at the Harvard Club in Boston that was being sponsored by the Boston Guild for the Hard of Hearing. The Guild had set up an Audio Loop system and this was a real godsend to someone whose hearing was as bad as mine. At this luncheon the guest speaker was a gentleman I had never heard of. His name was Rocky Stone who happened to be hard of hearing. To say I was impressed by his talk is putting it mildly. The thing that really grabbed my heart was that Rocky was so upbeat in telling about some of his life experiences as a hard of hearing person.

There was humor in every story he told. I was soon to learn this was typical of Rocky. Also typical was his lack of egotism, and his optimism.

Until I heard Rocky speak, my disability was like a black cloud over my life; socially, professionally and business-wise. At work I was waiting for the hammer to drop and receive my walking papers. Socially it was difficult to accept the fact that some friends didn't invite me to socials because as one said, "Oh, she can't hear so don't ask her." Business-wise I couldn't perform the simplest tasks over the phone. Making a doctor's appointment, talking to the insurance company, or making a call to city hall were ordinary tasks for the majority of folks, but insurmountable to me. At least insurmountable until I heard Rocky speak.

After the meeting wound down, I approached him and told him I didn't believe him. When he asked what I meant I told him that with his disabilities, both auditory and visual, he couldn't possibly be as upbeat as he presented himself. I laugh now when I think of his question to me. "Why, aren't you upbeat?" My reply was, "Oh God no. I'd like to buy a deserted island, take up residence and threaten anyone that came close to my island." His following words made me rethink a lot about my attitudes when he told me he didn't understand my way of thinking because I had a strong face. With that I thought maybe Mt. Rushmore would be more appropriate than a deserted island.

Because others were waiting in line to talk to him he broke our conversation short by handing me a card with his name and address on it and told me to contact him whenever I wanted to.

I brought the enthusiasm of this meeting home with me. My husband was always extremely supportive of me. For this reason I was surprised at his reaction when a few months later, I came home and blubbered about a set-to I had with my superintendent. His reaction was to remind me that someone had offered me help so if I was truly sincere, I should write to this Rocky Stone.

I did and the rest is history. In the past 30 years I have been engaged in all things pertaining to helping hard of hearing people; things that I would never have dreamed in a hundred years to be possible.

Each time I attended the annual convention I would be overcome that Rocky would remember me. Not just the bitter woman who spoke to him at the Harvard Club, but the woman named Helen, the woman he later tagged "Irish." The friends I made through my association with SHHH were also amazed that he could call them by name even if he had only met them once before. He was always available to give his opinion and support.

It is because of Rocky Stone that I have been able to work tirelessly, even as an octogenarian, so that hard of hearing people could have the same advantages as hearing people. Having said, or written the words hard of hearing people, reminds me too, that Rocky felt the word people attached to SHHH was important because it reminded others that we are people first, and second, people who just happened to have a hearing loss.

Later, as a member of the board of directors for the Boston Guild for Hard of Hearing it was my pleasure to nominate Rocky Stone for the Clare Kennedy Award given each year to a person who has worked tirelessly for the benefit of hard of hearing PEOPLE. At the same time I also nominated the love of Rocky's life, his wife Ahme, for an award given annually to a person with hearing who has worked unstintingly to better the lives of hard of hearing PEOPLE. I am happy to say that both Rocky and Ahme were approved unanimously by the board.

Thank you Rocky. We the PEOPLE who are hard of hearing owe so much to you.

## **In Helping Someone Else, You Help Yourself**

*Kit Case, Napa, CA  
Napa Valley CA Chapter*

I've been hesitant in writing anything because we didn't know Rocky personally and didn't really have any specific memories of him. The overwhelming thing is just our eternal gratitude to him for founding SHHH. My mother, Lucy Case died almost seven years ago. In trying to find when she joined SHHH, I found her pile of old journals (we never throw anything away), and they go back to 1983. So she was a member for 19 years. Rocky's timing could not have been better for my mother. SHHH came along just at the time when she was starting to have trouble coping with her progressive hearing loss. It was truly a godsend. Comradeship, assistive devices and Dr. Sam Trychin's coping strategies in particular were lifesavers for her and our whole family.



To us, SHHH and Rocky were pretty much synonymous since the organization seemed to reflect his gentle and supportive attitude. It seems to me his personal story was an inspiration to everyone with a hearing loss. My mother would quote Rocky saying that in helping someone else you help yourself. To that end, she founded our local SHHH Chapter, remaining involved with it until her death. She worked on the California State Board and became the Northern California Coordinator. She gained so much from the information SHHH opened up to her and she wanted to help others discover it.

SHHH became so important in our lives that I don't know what we would have done without it. We are indebted to Rocky and SHHH.

## **Rocky Stone – A Trusted Leader**

*Louise Cremeen, Maumee, AR  
Former AR State Chapter Coordinator*

**A**t age 20, I experienced a sudden and profound hearing loss caused from a single injection of the drug, Streptomycin, given by my family doctor for a minor infection. For thirty years, my family and I lived with my hearing loss with no real help as far as rehabilitation or support of any kind. Of course, this touched all family, friends and others in the small community in which we lived. We also had three children whose mother never heard their voices and this reached to our first two grandchildren.

In 1989, our family moved to Little Rock, Arkansas and I discovered SHHH and became president of the group just in time for the 10th International SHHH Convention held here in Little Rock.

Of course, Rocky's fame and people's love for him preceded my first meeting with him, but from that time on, he never failed to encourage me and to teach me the possibilities of life with hearing loss. At that convention, I saw successful, happy, enthusiastic people who were living their lives by Rocky's example by giving help and hope to all they met.

I served as Central Arkansas Chapter President for several years and from 1991 to 2007, served as Arkansas State Coordinator for SHHH/HLAA. During that time, one Chapter and four Groups were organized. Sadly, today while none are still active, I do know that those of us blessed by "The Rocky Ethic" continue to contribute and give hope and help wherever we can.

I always say that Rocky saved my life, not once, but twice. The first was in establishing SHHH, and secondly his influencing me to have my first cochlear implant in 2003.

When Rocky was in Little Rock for the A.G. Bell Convention in 2001, we had a good, personal visit and of course, his one big question for me was, "Louise, when are you going to get a CI?" I began to share all my worries and concerns with him but made the statement that I just didn't want to lose what I had. In a look and laugh that we all remember so well, he replied, "Oh, Louise! What do you mean? You don't have anything!" All at once, I realized that I had trusted his leading all these years and now, again he was trying to show me where to find help.

My husband and I attended the Convention in Seattle right after that and the decision was made there to go for it. Not only did my life change dramatically, but it was so wonderful that I

had a second one a year later. Now, I still see improvement on almost a daily basis and the quality of my life is truly better than I can ever imagine.

Yes, Rocky with his humor, his intelligence and his caring saw just how to reach another soul on the journey over which he triumphed.

## **He Saw With His Heart**

***Betty Coombs, Banning, CA***  
*Founder, Beaumont CA Chapter*

**I** have three wonderful memories of Rocky Stone. The first one was during the Awards Ceremony in Little Rock, Arkansas. It was my first Convention and I was the only one from my Chapter attending. The trip there with Jazz, my hearing dog, was traumatic as he was frantic on the airplane and ended up riding in the wheelchair that was intended for my use.



Not knowing a soul there, I had to go up to accept two awards at the awards reception. Rocky was handing out the awards and giving some of the awardees a hug along with their plaque. The first award I went up for in the wheelchair brought a huge laugh from the audience of people who had seen me in the airport following the wheelchair on foot while my dog reclined in the wheelchair. Rocky joined the laughter and gave me a big hug even before he handed me the award. Then after the second award, I got a second hug from him. He made my day. That was the first time I had ever seen Rocky. He put me at ease right away.

Another time, I had been elected to the California State Rehabilitation Advisory Board. I had not attended any meetings of this board before I went to our convention. I found Rocky and told him my worries about being on the board and he gave me the best advice I can ever remember having. "Betty, go to the meetings for six months and keep your mouth closed but listen very carefully; then when you feel sure you understand the problems being discussed, give them your opinion with a smile." Works for me every time!

We were told that Rocky was losing his eyesight and he was walking with a cane. I was at our National convention when I discovered Rocky sitting on a bench in the corridor talking with a member. I was delighted to see him but didn't want to intrude on his conversation. I had just decided to walk on past him and look for him later when he spoke up and said, "That's Betty Coombs walking by. Come here Betty, I want to talk to you." I was flabbergasted. How he knew I was walking by when he couldn't see I don't know but thinking about it later, I thought, "Oh, of course, he saw me with his heart!" He was such an extraordinary person in so many ways. I dearly loved him.

## **A Forceful, Yet Gentle Giant**

*Margaret Azcona, Piedmont, CA  
East Bay CA Chapter*

**I** certainly have wonderful memories of Rocky. To me he was an inspiration. I always looked forward to his wonderful talks. They always were always inspiring. I would take copious notes.

He was a forceful, yet gentle giant who lit a spark that moved me and others to action in raising awareness of hearing loss and its effect in daily living. I remember how he took a special interest in each person he met. We were each “special” to him.



## **Rocky Saw the Big Pictures**

*Diana Bender, Phoenixville, PA  
HLAA Board of Trustees  
PA State Office Director*

**I** didn't know Rocky well personally, but was always amazed by what he had accomplished in life. I had been proud of my own accomplishments as a hard of hearing person, but Rocky's story just “blew me away.” How could anyone have succeeded as a spy while having a hearing loss? I frequently saw Rocky at conventions, and I have a story to share from the Omaha Convention.



At the Omaha, Nebraska, National Convention in 2004, I was manning the donation table when Rocky came in and sat down next to me. Many people were at the table, filling out the forms to donate, so both of us were busy with others and had no time for conversation. Shortly after Rocky sat down, a long-time HLAA member and activist came up to me and asked whether I had any aspirin. I said I might and started to rummage through my rather full handbag looking for an aspirin packet. As I was rummaging, the member told me that she was experiencing some pain and was afraid that she might be having a heart attack and wanted to follow appropriate guidelines on what to do first. This caused me to rummage even more furiously and when I couldn't find anything, ask others nearby if they had any aspirin.

Rocky at first was busy talking to another donor, and, as with all hard of hearing people, hadn't heard what we were discussing nearby. But apparently he noticed my frenetic actions sufficiently to ask me what the problem was. When I told him that we were in desperate need of aspirin for the woman standing across from me because she might be having a heart attack, he immediately said, “Well, the first thing to do is have her sit down.” Rocky then got up and made sure she was seated.

While I had been concentrating on a small immediate problem, Rocky saw the big picture and recognized what should have been obvious to the rest of us aspirin seekers. The story has a happy ending: eventually aspirin was found, the hotel called an ambulance, the HLAA member

was taken to the nearest hospital to be evaluated, checked out and fortunately found not to have suffered a heart attack.

## Emulating Rocky

*Maurice Wilson, Houston, TX*

**R**ocky made a huge difference in my life even before I met him. My Ear, Nose and Throat doctor told me about SHHH and I was a National member when my hearing suddenly started suffering a “new big loss.” I was told that the time had come for me to get a cochlear implant. I had heard of cochlear implants but I had never met anyone with one. I started going to the local SHHH Chapter meetings and met two people with implants.



*Maurice with Les Callaway (left)  
and Max McCarthy*

My husband was frantic with disapproval until he read an article in the SHHH Journal written by Rocky about the success of his implant. His words gave my husband hope that I would be successful too. The cochlear implant gave my life back to me. One month after my implant was activated I went to the SHHH Convention in Dallas and met Rocky for the first time. I was so impressed with him and his wife Ahme and how much they and their family did for all of us.

Over the years at conventions and state conferences, I really got to know Rocky and Ahme and witnessed their dedication to making hearing loss a matter of national concern.

I will never forget the last time I saw Rocky at the Omaha Convention when he greeted me by name. I asked him how he knew it was me and he said, “I recognized your voice.”

How lucky those of us with hearing loss were to have him. I try to be as much like him as I can. I will always take the time to tell the story about my implant to people who need one. I give as much as I can afford of my time and my money to help keep Rocky’s vision alive: To make hearing loss an issue of national concern.

My husband was so grateful to Rocky Stone for his mission, that I requested donations to the Rocky Stone Endowment Fund instead of flowers when he died. My husband always helped me much the same way Ahme helped Rocky.

People come into our lives and make a difference. Rocky and Ahme made a difference in my life. They helped me learn to live with a hearing loss and give back to others what they had given to me. Because of them, we all have learned to live with hearing loss.

## **The Confidence to Advocate for Myself**

*Hermine Wiley, Columbus, OH  
Former Ohio State Chapter Coordinator*

**I** remember Rocky Stone for what he accomplished for people with hearing loss who wanted to use their remaining hearing. I saw Rocky many times at conventions and he was always friendly to everyone. He gave me the confidence I needed as a person with hearing loss to advocate for my accommodations. I will share his memory with people who are hearing and hard of hearing who have not yet recognized the invisible disability of hearing loss.



## **Hearing Loss Had Become a Prism Through Which I Saw Life**

*Bonnie O'Leary, Fairfax, VA  
Nova One Chapter*

**M**y fondest memory of Rocky Stone was when he and Ahme visited my home. We had a surprise party for two sisters who had been very active in SHHH and were long time volunteers at the National office. Marjorie Boone and Betty Bonvillian were visiting Northern Virginia after they had retired to Charlottesville, Virginia. It was wonderful having the chance to spend more than two minutes with Rocky.

Previous attempts to speak with him at length had been trumped by the adoring crowds at SHHH conventions, a Say What Club convention, and a Nova One meeting. I think I had Rocky all to myself for almost ten minutes at my party! That was the last time I saw him.

As a late-deafened adult, Rocky was the inspiration I needed to realize there was life after hearing loss, to look up and not down, to focus on hope, not despair. My hearing loss had become the prism through which I saw my whole life. Listening to Rocky gave me the opportunity to become grounded in my new life and gave me the confidence that I needed to resurrect that life and dedicate myself to helping others who have lost their hearing.

I believe that Rocky's message is in every kindness I bestow on people who are new to hearing loss, in every gesture of help and encouragement I give them. I will never forget him.





## SHHH Will Help You Cope

*Joseph Gordon, New York City, NY  
Former NY State Chapter Coordinator*

**I** met Rocky at my first SHHH Convention in 1986, in Palo Alto, CA. It was a workshop/meeting for first-time convention attendees. Rocky came to my side, put his arm on my shoulder and with great confidence said to me, “SHHH will help you cope with the challenges of hearing loss.” Rocky was so right. He was a brilliant visionary.

