

## **When Someone Close to You Refuses to Admit They Have Trouble Hearing, What Do You Do?**

*By Brenda Battat*

An estimate 37,000 people came to the Washington D.C. Convention Center for the AARP Life@50+ Convention on September 3-6, 2008. HLAA staff worked in shifts at the HLAA exhibit booth in the huge exhibit hall with more than 4,000 exhibits including travel, health, technology, government agencies, and non-profit organizations.

Hundreds of people stopped by our booth to get information about hearing loss. Some people had specific questions about hearing aids and where to get a hearing test. But, by far, the majority were family members who expressed frustration because their husbands, wives, mothers, or fathers were refusing to admit they may have some trouble hearing.

They spoke of their frustration with TVs blaring, phones unanswered, not being able to hold a conversation on the phone, and having to repeat conversations again and again. "How do I get my wife, husband, mom, dad, to do something about their hearing loss? They refuse to admit they have a problem and its driving me crazy."

### **D-E-N-I-A-L**

One of the most common reactions of people when they develop hearing loss is denial. This denial can be the result of many things but one key reason is that in our society hearing loss is seen as a sign of getting old and confused.

Being hard of hearing or deaf comes with heavy historical baggage, from stereotypical usage such as "deaf and dumb" to putting deaf people in institutions because they were considered uneducable. This is reinforced by the media making fun of the mistakes people make not hearing what is said. These negative associations have gelled into a stigma that has proven hard to eradicate.

### **Younger Adults with Hearing Loss**

However, there is also a positive generational component. Today younger adults are more likely to admit their hearing loss, seek help and move on. Younger adults tend to be more comfortable with technology, have grown up with disability rights laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and have never known TV without captioning.

When people of any age with hearing loss find HLAA and our chapters, they let their hair down, learn self-advocacy and take advantage of technology and communication strategies that when



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used together, are life changing. By taking action to manage their hearing loss they in no way can be seen as old and confused – they are in the game.

To learn more about hearing loss and denial and for helpful hints on what to do when someone refuses to admit they have a hearing loss go to [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org).

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