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## From the Executive Director's Desk

HLAA Executive Director Anna Gilmore Hall talks about hearing loss and its impact on family and friends. “The hearing loss doesn’t change the person you love, it changes the way you communicate.”

# Remembering Dad

**W**ith the holidays approaching it’s often a time when we think about our families and remember happy times from our childhood. We know that hearing loss not only affects the person with the hearing loss, but it’s something the entire family deals with daily. We also know that hearing loss *never* takes a holiday.

I’m writing this for those family members and friends as I reflect on my own experience growing up with a dad who had hearing loss. Even though he has passed away, his influence, and the memories of his hearing loss and its impact on my life, are still with me. I didn’t think much of it at the time because he was my dad who just couldn’t hear well. But, now, when I remember him, I realize how hearing loss was a big part of our day-to-day routine. Maybe it’s the time of year, or maybe it’s because I’m now immersed in the topic as the new executive director of HLAA, but I’m more sensitive to the impact that hearing loss has on families and what we might do about it.

I had a wonderful father growing up who continued to be a great supporter of me as an adult. We think his hearing loss resulted from long-term exposure to noise while working on airplanes in the service. He then sustained more loss from his job as an airplane mechanic. No real hearing protection was ever provided. His hearing loss didn’t get to be a real problem for him and us until I was in my early teen years. My friends thought Dad was mean and angry because he talked loudly; it was all because he couldn’t hear. But, he was just the opposite. Underneath his gruff exterior was a gentle bear. He loved “his girls” and we knew he shouted because he couldn’t hear his own voice or anyone else’s.

What are some of the lessons that I learned growing up?

- ✓ Never eat and talk at the same time (Mom said that as well, not just Dad).
- ✓ Face someone when you talk to him or her.
- ✓ Speak clearly.
- ✓ Don’t talk so fast but get to your point (I still struggle with that from time to time).
- ✓ Take your hand down away from your mouth so the person can read your lips.
- ✓ Turn down the volume on the TV—“No one can hear when that thing is blaring!” (How many times did I hear that? Or how many times did he have the TV blaring in hopes he could hear it?)

As I think about some of these lessons, I realize that these practices are good for everyone. Wouldn’t it be better if we actually paid attention to the people we are trying to communicate with—face them and not be emailing or texting while we are talking? I would love my kids to turn the TV volume down (better yet, turn it off). Speaking clearly and distinctly is a skill we should all practice.

Our website has information for family members about how to adapt to your family member’s hearing loss, so that both you and that person can communicate successfully. Please check it out at <http://www.hearingloss.org/content/understanding-hearing-loss>.

In the meantime, here are a couple of tips you might find helpful:

- ✓ Get educated. It is important that you understand what has happened to your family member’s hearing—become educated about the cause and all the options that are available.

*continued on page 8*

## Executive Director

*continued from page 6*

- ✓ **Be patient.** Remember that communication is changing and might become more of a challenge so everyone is relearning how to talk and listen to each other.
- ✓ **Accept reality.** Hearing loss changes your life and is not likely to go away.
- ✓ **Explain hearing loss to other family members and friends.** We need everyone to better understand this critical public health issue as a whole and what it means to us personally.
- ✓ **Use communication strategies.** Face people when you talk. Maintain eye contact. Facial expressions and body language add vital information to the communication. Repeat and rephrase. Be a role model for others.
- ✓ **Relax.** Give yourself and the person with the hearing loss a break. This is going to be frustrating. The hearing loss doesn't change the person you love, it changes the way you communicate.
- ✓ **Encourage.** Try to get the person with hearing loss out to socialize and not stay home and become isolated. In fact, you and your loved one with hearing loss can join one of our 174 HLAA Chapters.
- ✓ **Use technology.** Find out more about hearing assistive technology and equipment, such as doorbell, phone, alarm clock and other alerting devices, captioned telephones, and personal communication devices as well as hearing loops, FM and infrared systems. Be willing to learn about them along with your loved ones.

### Let's Hear From You

I would love to have a dialogue with you about how HLAA can provide more support and information to families. Please join me on my blog <http://hlaaexecutivedirector.blogspot.com/> where we can talk about these kinds of issues.

There are few blessings more important in life than family and communicating with people we love. We stand ready to help you and your family members live successfully with hearing loss. I am confident that HLAA can help open the world of communication to people with hearing loss and their families—in fact, we are already doing that for many.

This November HLAA celebrates its 34th anniversary of its founding in 1979 by Rocky Stone. It is going to be a great new year as we head toward our 35th anniversary. Happy holidays and best wishes for 2014. **HLM**

*Anna Gilmore Hall is executive director of the Hearing Loss Association of America. She can be reached at agilmorehall@hearingloss.org.*

## Coping During the Holidays

*Hearing Loss Magazine* articles to look for on [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org). Search for the titles:

"Holiday Madness: Tips from Arlene," by Arlene Romoff, November/December 2008

"How Were Your Holidays?" by Sam Trychin, January/February 2011

"Easy Entertaining for People with Hearing Loss" by Meredith Low, March/April 2012

## Memo to Members

HLAA Webinars are back! There's something for everyone. See the schedule at [www.hearingloss.org/content/webinars](http://www.hearingloss.org/content/webinars).

### We Want to Know You Better

Take the HLAA member survey. Look for it on [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org). In addition, you will either receive an email from us or a hard copy in the mail. We know your time is precious, so we will only take a little bit of it by asking you to tell us about yourself and what you consider important as a member of HLAA.

### Hearing Loss Support Training Specialist Program

You've been patient while we've been revising, updating and putting the online course on a more user-friendly platform. We're going to present all the classes at once; however, you can take one or all of the classes, in any order. You decide what works for you. Hearing Loss Support Specialist Training provides core knowledge and understanding for individuals who work with, or wish to work with, people impacted by hearing loss. It is not restricted to any one profession or discipline. The program is beneficial to professionals or volunteers who provide support for people with hearing loss. Coming soon.

