

Joan Kleinrock Leaves a Legacy of Support in HLAA Chapters

BY CARLA BEYER-SMOLIN

I have to dedicate this chapter column to the memory of Joan Kleinrock, who passed away in November. Joan was one of the original volunteers who helped Founder Rocky Stone develop and grow Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc. (SHHH), known today as the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). Joan became the first chapter development coordinator for SHHH and helped build the chapter network that we know today. When Joan retired after 17 years, Rocky Stone said, “Her place in HLAA history is unrivaled.”

I had the pleasure of working with Joan after I graduated from college. I interviewed with Rocky Stone and was hired to be Joan’s assistant chapter coordinator. It was such a learning experience and a very exciting time. Joan had worked hard to grow the chapter network and I remember at one point in time, SHHH had over 250 chapters and groups. She loved meeting new people and making local connections that would nurture the development of chapters that would eventually help people with hearing loss in their communities. Joan was a great listener, teacher and coach. She encouraged personal growth to all, passing on the support and care that she received when she joined HLAA.

Joan enthusiastically believed in the support that HLAA could provide people with hearing loss, and truly cared about the HLAA Chapter network. After retiring, she was ever curious and thirsty for news from HLAA, and always asked, “How are chapters doing?” “How is Barbara and the staff?”

Joan was a lovely, generous lady, a second mother to me and a caring and sage advisor for chapter development. She will be missed very much. I pray we can carry on her passion and enthusiasm for HLAA and see soaring heights to HLAA’s efforts. —Carla Beyer-Smolín, HLAA Chapter and Membership Coordinator

These were her words in her final column when she retired and they bear repeating again:

“Thank you for the privilege you gave to me. I shall miss you, but am confident that you will continue to do your part as individuals and as HLAA Chapter organizations to make the world a better place for people with hearing loss.” —Joan Kleinrock

Joan Carlucci Kleinrock, 86, passed away peacefully at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, on November 9, 2021, after being admitted for pneumonia. Joan, along with Rocky Stone, built the HLAA Chapter network we know today. She started as a volunteer with Founder Rocky Stone after seeing a newspaper notice about a new organization called Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, known today as the Hearing Loss Association of America. She literally knocked on the door of the Stone family home and, like so many people, she needed information and support, which up until 1979 nothing was available.

Joan wrote in a memoir about Rocky Stone:

I was searching for meaningful work that could make a difference. Out of the blue, I saw a newspaper notice of an initial meeting of a chapter for an organization for people with hearing loss. I’d never had anyone to share my hearing loss with. The founder Howard Stone would be there. I could barely wait for that day to come.

The greatness of HLAA today and the differences we now enjoy as people with hearing loss is largely because SHHH/HLAA, founded and influenced by Rocky, continues to grow through empowered people. Today, Rocky would remind us that we did this together, and together we will move on. Personally, I am still in awe of the privileged opportunity I had to be a small part of making a difference.

Joan began as a volunteer in 1980 in the Stone family home in Bethesda. In 1982, she completed the first “chapter manual” to assist 25 chapters. SHHH held its convention in Chicago and a large number of attendees returned home committed to starting chapters, so by November, SHHH had 122 chapters. In 1983, Joan became one of the early board members, and later became one of the first paid staff until her retirement in 1998. Joan continued as the HLAA professional adviser for chapter development until her death.

Joan traveled the country finding people who wanted to start chapters, people hungry for information and to meet others with hearing loss. She wrote



thousands of letters, later emails, and influenced the peer-to-peer support network we know today. She kept a map of the United States in her office and when a new group or chapter formed, she excitedly put another pin on the map. We can say Joan put SHHH/HLAA Chapters on the map! Her contribution to our organization was formidable.

In 1992 she received the Rocky Stone Humanitarian Award given to a former board member. This prestigious award, established in 1990 by the Board of Trustees (now known as Board of Directors), honors an outgoing or past trustee for his or her extraordinary contributions toward the furtherance of the objectives and personal exemplification of the philosophy envisioned by Howard E. Stone, founder.

Joan formed personal connections wherever she went. She probably knew more members than any other staff with the exception of Rocky. Long-time member and former board member, Wayne Roorda, from Voorhees, New Jersey shared this:

When I saw a blurb in the NAD Broadcaster paper about a new organization for hard of hearing people and that the dues was \$7, I immediately sent in a check and wrote on the note, "Where have you been?" Joan was working in Rocky Stone's family room "office" and wrote back to me, "Where have you been?" That started my introduction to Joan and her family. So many memories and stories.

Joan is survived by two sons and two grandsons. If you would like to send a card, please address it to her eldest son, Jeffrey Kleinrock and Family, 9708 Parkwood Drive Bethesda, MD 20814.

Contributions can be made to HLAA in Joan's memory to the Hearing Loss Association of America. **HL**



Full time volunteers who helped SHHH start from 1981 to 1985—left to right: Pat Clickener, Joan Kleinrock, Rocky Stone and Carol Lingley

Tributes to Joan Kleinrock

I'm so saddened to hear about Joan. When we first started our chapter, she was my source of motivation, inspiration, education and excitement. I can still remember opening the mailbox at the end of our driveway and being excited beyond words to see a handwritten letter from Joan Kleinrock....I can feel that thrill as if it were yesterday.

I remember her hosting informal board gatherings at her home after an all-day board meeting at the national office on Battery Lane. We would sit around on her living room floor and talk for hours.

I would always search for her at Conventions and what fun we would have, reminiscing about those early days of SHHH. I have held her in my daily prayers since hearing of her son passing on.... I can imagine they've had a wonderful reunion today. Thanks so much for writing this beautiful tribute to her...I will miss her, indeed. – Sue Miller, NY

Please accept my donation in memory of Joan Kleinrock, a great friend. – Molly Corum, FL

She was precious! Gave so much of her time to help build this amazing organization. She will be missed! – Kim Brownen, TX

She was my first connection to SHHH back in the day. Lovely lady. – Teri Gerson Wathen, TX

A lot of memories now. Joan was a dedicated believer in helping everyone with hearing loss. My condolences to her family. When I think of my own journey through my communication issues Joan will be there, never forgotten. – Joan Black, NC

So sad to get this news. Joan was such a good person and a great asset to HLAA causes and its members. – Paul Silverman, MD

So sorry for her loss and my condolences to her family. I will miss her. Rest in peace. – David Sherman, PA

Thanks for letting me know. Meg and I are so saddened that another hero of ours is gone. She will live in our memories forever along with Rocky. – Joe Duarte, VA (after receiving an email notice from HLAA)

Joan and I worked together on the first one-day New Jersey State Conference on December 7, 1991, where 125 people attended. I was lucky to have her help, knowledge and support. – Sandy Spekman, NJ/MA

Joan was a wonderful lady. I corresponded with her for many years and met her at my first convention in Bethesda [1989]. Enclosed is a chapter donation (Charlotte Chapter, NC) in her memory and my personal check is in her memory. Thanks for all you do. – Myra White, NC

On behalf of the New York City Chapter, I am enclosing a check in memory of our beloved Joan. She was a great help to me when I was named secretary more than 30 years ago! She was never too busy to answer my questions about organizing and keeping things orderly in our then-infant SHHH Chapter. SHHH/HLAA truly owed her our sincerest gratitude. May she rest in peace.

– New York City Chapter via Mary Fredericks