

HAAA member John Bradshaw was born and raised in northern New Jersey. He's the youngest of eight children. He graduated from Rutgers University and in 1999, he moved to Washington, D.C., to work for Goldman Sachs. Bradshaw lives in the Georgetown area in Washington, D.C. with his wife Angie and three children—Cami (9), Aly (7) and Jack (6).

HAAA Board Member Mark Spradley pitched John some questions for *Hearing Loss Magazine*.

By Mark Spradley



# Giving Up His Vanity

## **What's your earliest memory of hearing loss?**

I woke up July 4, 2002 with no hearing in my right ear. At first I thought I had an ear infection and my hearing was just impaired, but as the day wore on I realized I had no hearing at all.

## **What medical treatment did you receive?**

I was born with a 30 percent loss of hearing in my left ear so as a child I went for regular screenings at Rutgers University so they could study the progression. I am unsure of the actual decibel level, but I would describe the hearing loss I was born with as mild. All of the males in my family (my four brothers and my father) have hearing loss in their left ear. My hearing loss level is about the same as my brothers and father. No member of my family received

genetic testing when I was young. As far as I know, either it didn't exist or it wasn't an option for my family.

## **What treatment have you received as an adult?**

After I discovered the sudden loss of hearing, my ENT prescribed cortisone shots through the eardrum. This worked fairly quickly and I regained my hearing. Unfortunately, we didn't know at the time it was an acoustic neuroma. The cortisone shrunk the tumor enough for me to get my hearing back but it was a temporary gain. An MRI discovered the neuroma.

It was decided that the best course of action was to remove the neuroma and I was told there was a decent chance I would lose my hearing in the right ear again. By not removing the neuroma, I would almost certainly lose my hearing

and I would likely lose the control of some of my facial muscles and have significant balance issues. After surgery, I did, indeed, lose my hearing in the right ear but I have had no issues with either my facial muscles or balance. Fortunately, no one else in my family has had an acoustic neuroma.

## **Do you wear hearing aids?**

Yes. At one point I used an in-the-canal hearing aid which was hidden in the ear canal and was very discreet. However, I gave up my vanity and chose a larger one that can be seen but offers much better sound and noise reduction. It was the right choice.

## **What accommodations did you receive in high school?**

None, since my family didn't ask and the school was unaware of my hearing loss.

### **What accommodations did you receive in college?**

None. Again, somehow I managed to cope with a 30 percent reduction in hearing.

### **Did you experience social isolation because of your hearing loss?**

Not at all. People were always surprised and curious to see someone in his 30s and 40s wearing a hearing aid. It was more of a topic of conversation.

### **What jobs did you have after college?**

I have worked exclusively in financial services. For 15 years, I worked at Goldman Sachs. My last job there was running a sales force. I communicated with the firm's clients on a daily basis. While at Goldman Sachs, I went out of my way to let people know I had a hearing loss because I was fearful people would think I was rude or ignoring them. I often used humor to put people at ease about it. I also tried to compensate for my hearing loss by selecting a seat in a conference room or at a restaurant that strategically positioned my good ear toward everyone else. Often, I had to ask people to switch seats with me (politely, of course) so that I could hear them better. People have always been happy to accommodate me. My hearing loss was often a nice icebreaker with people I was meeting for the first time.

### **Why did you decide to change careers?**

I reached a point in my life where I wanted to do something more interesting in my community. Because of my personal experience with hearing loss, I believed I could help other people. The foundation of my business plan was I had empathy for others. I decided to start a business that allowed me sit on the same side of the table with a family and provide a solution for an anguishing problem.

### **What inspired you to start Affordable Senior Home Care of the Nation's Capital ([www.ashcnc.com](http://www.ashcnc.com))?**

In 2004, my own father's health began to deteriorate. My family is spread across

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the country and we all felt helpless. My father retired to San Diego and none of us lived particularly close to him. Even if we did, it would have been difficult to provide the help he truly needed. At that time, there were few companies helping families in this situation; especially those with a more profound loss of hearing. Over the years, the more I thought about it the more I wanted to help families that faced the same challenges as my family. Thus, Affordable Senior Home Care was born.

### **What's the demographic profile of the people you serve?**

Affordable Senior Home Care of the Nation's Capital provides private duty nursing to seniors in their home. We primarily serve seniors who, due to failing health need help but do not want to go into a nursing home. I recently read an AARP article that stated 92 percent of seniors' greatest fear is the loss of independence. We are committed to helping our clients stay in their homes and remain independent. I want the same thing for my clients that I want for my parents. An opportunity to age graciously in the best possible environment in which to live their lives.

### **What is your service area?**

We serve the greater Washington, D.C., area including Maryland and Virginia. Our sister company, Affordable Senior Home Care in New Jersey, is run by my brother Tim, who also has a hearing loss.

### **Have you hired people with hearing loss?**

Yes, I am happy to do so at every

opportunity that I can. I want to accommodate prospective employees with disabilities. To date, we have not had anyone with a severe hearing loss apply for a position. I would certainly use all possible means to make him or her comfortable at work including the use of CART and other assistive devices.

### **What advice would you give people caring for family members with hearing loss?**

For both younger and older people I would advise patience. Throughout my life, my family and friends have been remarkably patient with my hearing loss. It's helped me avoid social isolation.

### **What should local governments do to help people with hearing loss?**

I believe hearing loss is a public health issue. That said, there's a role for local governments to play. For example, looping public facilities and training staff on the frontline with the general public to better accommodate those with hearing loss are important issues for local governments to address.

### **You seem to have been inspired by your hearing loss to help others, what advice would you give people with hearing loss interested in starting a business?**

In my line of work, seniors love to see someone 40 years younger than they are wearing the same hearing aid! It is often one of the first things we discuss. I believe in most lines of work that if you're committed to helping others, you'll look for the best way to communicate. In the case of people with hearing loss, that mostly likely will require more patience and understanding of their challenges. I would advise anyone interested in starting a business, to make sure they are passionate enough to put in the long hours needed to start a business. I would also recommend discussing the details of your business plan with friends and family for honest feedback on your concept.

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### **Do you have any future plans to become involved in advocacy on behalf of the 48 million Americans with hearing loss?**

I am currently involved in advocacy with Georgetown Audiology. I help make sure seniors are properly tested and fitted for devices. Because many seniors on fixed incomes want to buy the least expensive device they can find, they often settle for something off the shelf. I help counsel their families to take a more vertically-integrated approach to treating hearing loss. I suggest spending some extra time doing research on websites such as HLAA's before making a buying decision.

New companies continue to enter the market and rollout new products to help the 48 million Americans with hearing loss. A small investment of time can make a big impact on the quality of life of someone with hearing loss. In fact, it's an investment with daily dividends.

### **Any final words?**

Overall I'm happy because I have managed to navigate life with hearing loss that affects both ears. In fact, my good ear is now my bad ear because of the acoustic neuroma. Yet, I have three healthy children. I'm also optimistic that in my lifetime medical researchers will find new ways to help people with hearing loss live their best life. ■■■

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*founded in 2004. Mark is in charge of developing new business opportunities in the Middle East and North Africa for Mazao Capital's portfolio companies. He has an MBA from the University of London and an MBA from the TRIUM Program which was jointly issued by New York University's Stern School of Business, London School of Economics, and HEC, Paris. His commentaries have appeared in the Washington Post, Financial Times, Black Enterprise, Washington Times, Baltimore Sun, Chicago Times and the Chronicle of Higher Education. He lives in Bethesda, Maryland and can be reached at mark.spradley@mazao.com.*



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