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My Initiation

I got a crash course in all things hearing loss and what it means to get peer support, good information and to help others live well with hearing loss.

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I met Manell in February 1986. We were both in town for a funeral the following day. In a noisy room full of people, she was sitting alone reading a newspaper when I noticed the hearing aids behind her ears. I was instantly drawn to her. Manell lost her hearing gradually later in life until she was profoundly deaf. She used powerful hearing aids and lipreading to communicate. Struggling through our conversation, we hit it off—maybe because she was also a journalist or maybe because in a room full of people, we needed each other. This began our 25-year friendship that lasted until her death in 2011.

Do You Have Time for a Story? It's a Good One, I Promise.

Manell Patricia Brice was born in Wheeling, West Virginia, on Flag Day, June 14, 1924. Her parents emigrated from Lebanon through Ellis Island and ended up in Wheeling. Manell earned her bachelor's degree in journalism, English, and education from Mount St. Joseph's College in Ohio. She taught school for a while but like many from that part of the country, she came to Washington, D.C., during World War II in search of a government job.

Manell eventually landed what was to be a dream job. She worked directly for the Marine Corps Commandant as a civilian public information officer.

General P. X. (Paul Xavier) Kelley, Commandant of the Marine Corps, was her boss. She wrote his speeches and he made sure anything he wrote or spoke first passed by her editorial eye. However, there was one stumbling block; she began to lose her hearing. Even with hearing aids, she was having a hard time in meetings, on the phone, and the usual problems faced by those who lose their hearing mid-career.

Back then, there was no Ameri-

cans with Disabilities Act, no support from others, no assistive listening devices, no awareness that people other than older folks could have hearing loss, and nothing to assure her that her life wasn't over. She thought the only thing to do was take an early retirement. She approached Gen. Kelley and told him she had to retire because she couldn't hear well anymore and couldn't do her job. He refused to accept her resignation and told her, "Even if you have no hearing, you are worth more to me than five people who have all their hearing."

It was settled, no retirement for Manell. She continued working with the support of the general and her colleagues, albeit with a lot of stress and frustration, but always loyal to the Marines and the task at hand. Manell was a perfectionist and her work showed it.

The Bombing of the Marine Corps Barracks

In 1983, the Marine Corps Barracks in Lebanon was bombed during the Lebanese Civil War. Suicide bombers killed 221 U.S. Marines and other servicemen. It was the deadliest single



Manell Brice and Barbara Kelley in 1988.

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attack to date since World War II on Americans overseas. Manell's heart was broken, not only for the country from which her parents emigrated, but for the U.S. Marines who died. Their families called her office and Manell answered the phone. She couldn't hear well enough to console them, to get their names right, or to get back to them with information. She couldn't give comfort. She felt she had failed the families of the men who gave their lives. Not only were Marines killed, but so was her spirit. She retired early from her 30-year career in defeat.

Gen. Kelley reluctantly accepted her resignation. She was made an "Honorary Marine" at the conclusion of her career—an honor bestowed on only a chosen few.

When I met her on that February day she was enjoying retirement and volunteering at the HLAA

national office in the D.C. area. She said if she knew then what she eventually learned about hearing loss, she would not have retired so soon.

**My Second Initiation:
The Chapter Meeting**

The following year, in 1987, Manell invited me to accompany her to an SHHH Chapter meeting. (Back then we were known as Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, SHHH). I liked her, so I went. Little did I know my fate was sealed. When I arrived at the Northern Virginia Chapter meeting, I was duly impressed. Here was a room full of people, some young adults, about half still in the working world, and some retirees. It was a place where it didn't matter that you couldn't hear well. People were using good communication strategies, a hearing loop, and oral interpreters for those who needed to lipread. This was long before CART, but they were getting the job done.

The speaker was Dr. Sam Trychin, a psychologist who was talking about the breakdown of relationships, isolation, and anxiety due to hearing loss, and offering insightful

copying skills. I saw people building each other up, sharing stories and technology tips, and saw many people pushing the tiny microphones from their personal assistive listening devices in front of each other's faces. A few people got their wires tangled while trying to communicate, resulting in a lot of laughs.

Why Wait? Find an HLAA Chapter Near You

While the names, places and technology have changed, what goes on in HLAA Chapters hasn't. People come to HLAA Chapters to find support, get all the information they can about hearing loss, and turn around to help others. Self-help is not part of our name anymore, but it's the philosophy by which our Founder Rocky Stone built our organization, and it remains a backbone for our chapters.

Thank you to all the volunteers across the country who make HLAA Chapters meaningful groups within your communities. You are a critical part of the mission of HLAA, and for some people, critical for their survival. *HLM*

Online Learning

Registration is open for the HLAA Hearing Loss Support Specialist Training (HLSST)

HLSST is an online, self-paced training program which provides core knowledge for individuals who work with people with hearing loss. The training consists of four classes with as many as fourteen lessons in each class. Lessons are composed of multiple readings and captioned videos.

The classes are:

Class I: Hearing Loss: The Basics

Class II: Coping with Hearing Loss

Class III: Hearing Assistive Technology and Services

Class IV: Advocacy, Resources and the Law

You may register for one class at a time or register for the entire program at once for the discounted price of \$225. For complete details, table of contents, and registration information, visit hearingloss.org/content/hlsst. Questions? Email Nancy Macklin at nmacklin@hearingloss.org.