

By Erin Mirante

# Self-help Begins with Mutual Support

## *The Value of Chapters to Rocky Stone*

**N**o one believed in the camaraderie and support that HLAA Chapters offer more than SHHH/HLAA Founder Howard E. “Rocky” Stone. Rocky knew that people could live more successfully with hearing loss if they reached out and shared their experiences with other people with hearing loss. Self-help began with mutual support and understanding.

Rocky felt so strongly about the value of chapters that he made it one of his top priorities. The first chapter was chartered in Gainesville, Georgia in 1980, less than one year after SHHH (Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, as the organization was known until 2006) was formed. By 1984, there were 122 chapters.

Another important milestone in the history of HLAA—which also occurred in 1980—was the publication of the first issue of the *SHHH Journal*, a bimonthly magazine dedicated to people with hearing loss. (Nearly 38 years later the *SHHH Journal* continues to thrive, although today we know it as *Hearing Loss Magazine*.) Rocky wrote a column for every issue of the *SHHH Journal* from the very first one in July 1980 until the May/June 1993 issue when he, as he says in that column, “Passed the torch...to you.”

In 1993 an effort was made to capture Rocky’s extensive writing for the *SHHH Journal*. The result is the book, *An Invisible Condition: The Human Side of Hearing Loss*, which is a collection of every column he wrote for the publication.

Rocky talked—and wrote—extensively about the value of chapters. Here we have collected snippets about chapters from his columns in *An Invisible Condition*. We hope you enjoy them.

*Personal interaction, the pleasure of being with other people—particularly people who understand your situation—the re-establishment of confidence, shared projects, creative input, accomplishment, dignity restored—these are things that happen in chapters. (November/December 1980)*

*Hope flourishes in community, not isolation. That is why the concept of chapters at the local level is so important. We are becoming more aware that diversity is our strength. So, as we organize chapters we must understand and accept diverse interests, points of view, and lifestyles. But all these differences can be united around our belief in the basic principles of human dignity and the justice we all seek. (March/April 1981)*

*We see it happen at chapter meetings. “I have a severe hearing loss. It continues to be a problem, particularly at home and at work. But in our SHHH meetings I have met others with more severe hearing impairments. By sharing my own problems and experience with them, by helping in small ways, by showing a genuine interest in them, I have contributed to a lightening of their burden and an improvement in their situation.” Sharing. Helping. The beginning of a dialogue and a new relationship. It brings hope and leads toward happiness. Think about it, all you SHHHers—you can be healers! And, in the process, you heal yourself. (March/April 1985)*

*Ambiguity, uncertainty, confusion, all create anxiety. When we are anxious, worried, concerned about our situation, we are usually on the defensive. Even the most positive among us can have doubts. That is why it is so constructive to meet in community—at chapter or group meetings of SHHH.*

Reassurance, affirmation, encouragement, are all wonderful tonics for the hard of hearing person who has yet to work through the problem and establish a niche. We need to find the place where we are comfortable. (July/August 1985)

When we celebrate our birthday at the end of November, we can take pleasure in the realization that an effectively organized constituency is well underway; a constituency which can have great influence on the lives of millions of hearing impaired persons. While we have been doing that, a direct personal impact on thousands of hearing impaired people has occurred every day throughout 145 chapters and groups. The little things...a smile, a kind word, an explanation, a touch, a demonstration, sharing experience, caring, all things that affect the human spirit. (November/December 1985)

To overcome fear, we have to move from loneliness to solitude—from that which is imposed on us to that which we seek. This requires a searching of our innermost being and an ultimate realization that we are never alone. (January/February 1987)

A little effort from each one of us can add up to a quantum leap in doing what we do best—helping people. (September/October 1987)

Cooperation, working together to achieve a common result, takes many forms but requires specific attributes. (March/April 1988)

In our chapters and groups as well as in our casual encounters, we are helping develop that socially creative and inventive society of which our forefathers dreamed. (May/June 1989)

We urge you to join a SHHH Chapter whenever possible. There you will enjoy a similar experience of caring, friendly and empathetic people. Self-help is rapidly becoming the primary treatment of choice for any number of personal problems. (September/October 1989)

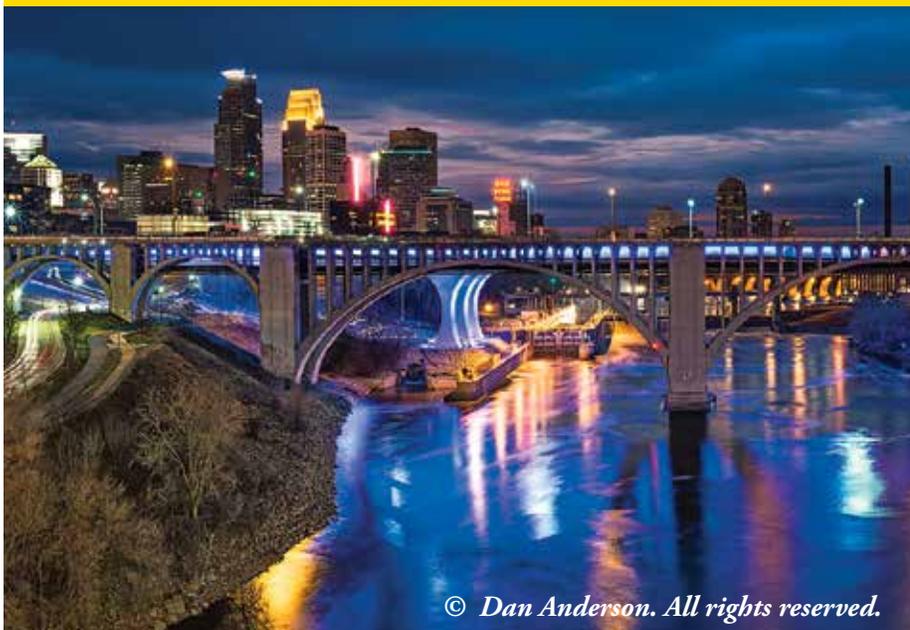
What makes SHHH so remarkable, at least to me, is that thousands of people who have never known one another can move the concept of family into such broad dimensions. (January/February 1990)

SHHH helps by giving you options, by showing how you can improve your life with a hearing loss, and, very importantly, by bringing you into contact with role models and others with hearing loss. (May/June 1992)

And so, instead of saying goodbye, I'll simply say, 'The torch has been passed to you. Run as hard as you can.' (May/June 1993)

You can find *An Invisible Condition* on the HLAA website at [hearingloss.org/about-us/founder](http://hearingloss.org/about-us/founder), along with a short biography of the remarkable Rocky Stone. **HLM**

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