

By Barbara Kelley



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## As Archimedes once famously exclaimed— **Eureka!**

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**W**e have all had a “eureka moment” at least once in our lives. It’s that sudden, unexpected realization to the solution of a problem. Maybe your eureka moment came when you switched your hearing aid or cochlear implant to telecoil mode and heard clear, direct sound through a hearing loop? Or when you got a cochlear implant and had the first sense of sound in many years? Perhaps it was when you got a captioned phone and realized you could follow the conversation? Or how about the first time you put a hearing aid in your ear and realized there would be some hope for getting back into the world again?

We live in the age where the Internet of Things—connecting one’s physical world to the digital world—rules the day. Today, more often than not, it’s technology that lets people with hearing loss experience those eureka moments.

But technology becomes more powerful when everyone has access to it.

In January I was honored to participate in the hearing access group at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. With more than 3,800 exhibitors and 175,000 attendees CES is the largest technology show in the world. It was their 50th year of gathering the most influential, inspiring and disruptive technology visionaries from around the world.

Thanks to the Consumer Technology Association (CTA) Foundation, HLAA attended CES 2017 as one of the accessibility participants, which also included a vision group. The hearing group—in its fifth year of participation—consisted of myself, Brenda Battat (former HLAA executive director), Richard Einhorn (composer, HLAA Board member, hearing loss advocate and consultant), and Linda Kozma-

Spytek (HLAA technology advisor and research audiologist at Gallaudet University).

We were there at the invitation and sponsorship of CTA, who said, “We bring leaders from the disability and accessibility communities to CES to build relationships and highlight opportunities for technology to enhance the lives of people of all disabilities. Each participant brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise in their respective fields.”

We engaged with technology leaders and exhibitors about making products accessible at the design stage rather than retrofitting them to be accessible at a later stage. We heard leaders from Facebook, IBM, AT&T and other major corporations talk about making all their product teams understand accessibility, as well as getting to engineering students and teaching them about accessibility. There are many companies who feel they have a social responsibility—and that it makes good business sense—to develop products accessible to people with disabilities.

Visiting the CES show floor was intriguing. I was able to see the latest in wearable devices to enhance hearing as well as traditional hearing aids. A few of these companies will also be at the HLAA2017 Convention this June.

A few innovations caught my eye on the show floor. The first one was a polished stone worn as a pendant or in a bracelet and described as, “Senstone—a stylish wearable for instant note-taking.” It captured one’s voice and turned it into text to be used for dictation. Our group shared with the company how it might have another application for people with hearing loss for real-time text translation.

A second one was a robot maid. As I was imagining a future with no

housework, I asked the company rep, “What can she do for me?” The rep replied, “Nothing yet, she is still a prototype, but she will talk to you while she responds to your commands.” I replied, “If I have a hearing loss, I am going to need some text display of what she is saying.” I got a eureka-type response along with thanks for bringing that to her attention.

After five years of attending CES, other members of both the hearing and vision access groups told me that there was more openness to access for hearing and vision—when you mention it, they get it. Eureka!

### Experience Your Own Eureka Moments

Come to HLAA2017 Convention in Salt Lake City this June. Explore the Exhibit Hall where the latest technology will be there for you to try. Go to a workshop and learn something new in a communication-accessible room. Meet others like yourself and realize you are not alone in facing and living with hearing loss. Everyone can “hear” at an HLAA Convention. Eureka! **HLM**

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I identified with Gael Hannan’s article, “Hearing Loss Isn’t Funny,” in the September/October 2016 issue of *Hearing Loss Magazine*—especially her comments on water problems. I live alone, and do not hear a tap running unless I’m right over it. I recently installed new low-flow toilets. Instead of the usual chain and plunger in the tank they have a large round container with a valve inside that hides the flushing mechanism. It’s not only very quiet, but unlike the traditional kind, does not have any water movement either in the bowl or in the tank. So if it is continuously running due to a malfunction, there isn’t even a visual clue.

Sure enough, one of the ones I purchased had a faulty valve. I didn’t know it until the city came around to read the water meter. They immediately telephoned me, telling me that instead of the usual 16 or so gallons, I used 55,000 gallons that month! My water bill, instead of less than \$20, was \$800! I live on Social Security, so this was devastating. Lowe’s (where I purchased them) honored their guarantee by replacing both toilets (with American Standard) and also tried to negotiate with the manufacturer on my behalf to get at least some compensation as the fault was obviously theirs, but they refused.

We desperately need some device, perhaps a unit with a blinking light, to warn people when water is running. Hearing dogs will not help because they don’t know when the water should be running. But a blinking light would be unobtrusive yet visible. I’m just desperate about this as so many times I leave a tap running even though I do everything I can think of to be constantly aware. Perhaps you could offer a prize or some other incentive for someone to come up with a solution to what is apparently a common problem!

Teresa Wofford  
Hung Out to Dry

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