



BY KAY TYBERG

After I was diagnosed with a hearing loss in first grade in the 1950s, all through elementary school I felt alone because I was the only student in the school with hearing loss.

When my hearing loss became profound in 2008, I made the decision to get a cochlear implant, which was implanted in 2010. Up until then the cause of my hearing loss was unknown, but after the surgery the doctor told me I was born with two defective cochleas. Did it make a difference knowing the reason? No.

My older brother Clayton also has a hearing loss from his involvement in the Vietnam War when he was in the Army. In the spring of 2017, Clayton sent me an email asking, "What's the best hearing aid

to buy?" I was shocked, but I had known for a couple of decades—and through his own admission—that Clayton was another statistic we at HLAA hear frequently about people who delay getting treatment for their hearing loss. Mind you, how many older brothers would ask their younger sister for advice?

I responded to his email by saying, "Hold on, let's back up and start over again." At the time I happened to be in the middle of the HLAA N-CHATT (Network of Consumer Hearing Assistive Technology

Clayton said he loved what he was experiencing [with his new hearing aids]. The excitement was beyond words. I choked up and tears of happiness were streaming down my cheeks.

Trainers) program so I instantly went into my “HAT” mode. I began by having him complete a listening assessment needs chart along with asking him some questions, such as when he last had a hearing test.

I went over everything with him, including causes of hearing loss, types of hearing aids, how to select an audiologist, warranties, follow-up visits, etc. I even asked Clayton’s wife, Pam, to get involved and try to learn what he was experiencing and what she was observing. Since Clayton and Pam live in another state, our correspondence was by email or through FaceTime.

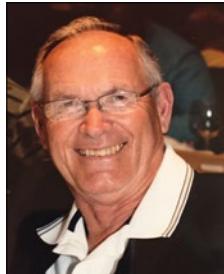
Taking Action

Clayton found an audiologist and was fitted for hearing aids. When I received that message from him, I was elated to tears. Clayton was wondering why I was crying. I am no longer the only member of our immediate family with hearing loss, and I knew there was still a big difference in being born with hearing loss and a person becoming a late-deafened adult.

So why the tears? After years of talking about his suspicion of having a hearing loss, Clayton decided to do the right thing—seek treatment for it. That was the reason for my tears.

Even after Vietnam Clayton experienced noise-induced hearing loss over the years from being around guns, farm equipment, lawn mowers, hunting, and his occupational environment. Along with hearing loss, he remembers having tinnitus when he was a kid, but he didn’t realize what it was.

Subsequent emails went back and forth as I checked up on how things were going and if Clayton had any questions for me. I knew I needed to take one step at a time so Clayton and Pam wouldn’t be overwhelmed. This is critical when working with any consumer, whether it’s your brother or not. In addition to our email correspondence I sent Clayton and Pam information by mail related to care and hearing assistive technology for their reading enjoyment.



Kay's brother Clayton is smiling from ear to ear since he got his new hearing aids.

The Big Day Arrives

That July Clayton received his hearing aids. I am not sure who was more excited—Clayton, Pam or me. All I could think about was whether I had followed all the right protocols that I had learned up to that point on hearing assistive technology devices, in addition to hoping the hearing aids would meet his needs.

When I finally got the email, Clayton said he was wearing his new hearing aids and loved what he was experiencing. The excitement was beyond words and I wanted to jump up and down from sheer joy. When we ended our correspondence, I choked up and tears of happiness were streaming down my cheeks.

I have met so many people with hearing loss who give up or believe they can overcome the hearing loss on their own. What many people with hearing loss often overlook is how the whole family is affected. Pam has noticed a significant difference around their home and out in public.

My brother is adjusting quite well. He always has some great stories to share. On Facebook one morning he posted that he was trying to turn up the volume on the hearing aids only to hear his wife say, “Clayton you don’t have your hearing aids in your ears!” We chuckled, because these things happen. There are times I put my cochlear implant on and I forgot to put the battery in. It’s nothing to be embarrassed about.

It is a joy when anyone with a hearing loss takes a positive step to improve their quality of life. It’s never too late; no matter what age someone is they can embrace the need to socialize and still be an active part of the family and community.

Thanks to the N-CHATT program and its facilitators for teaching me and my colleagues the importance of consumer training. HLAA has benefitted thousands of people with hearing loss and changed my life forever. **HL**



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