

In the Beginning

BY DAVE HUTCHESON

In November 1979, Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH) was founded by an ex-CIA operative named Howard E. “Rocky” Stone. Even though the name changed to Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) in 2006, one thing remains constant—Rocky’s vision:

I established SHHH as a membership organization run by people with hearing loss. We provide information necessary for them to make choices, but emphasize the choice must be theirs. The challenge is to develop togetherness within diversity.

Eight months after the inception of SHHH, the first issue of the *Shhh* journal was published. Even though it has gone through a few name changes since then, the magazine you are reading is the very same one that has been published continuously since July 1980.

Rocky penned a column for every single issue of the magazine during his 13-year tenure at the helm of SHHH. In honor of our—*your*—organization’s 40th anniversary, we’d like you to get to know Rocky a little better by publishing a selection of his columns in each 2019 issue of *Hearing Life*.

For the first selection, we thought what better place to start than the beginning. The following is Rocky’s very first column, which appeared in the July/August 1980 issue of *Shhh*.

The Beginning

The most pervasive physical handicap in America today is an invisible condition—hearing loss. Because it is invisible, it affects us in varying degrees of severity. The ability to deny it is enhanced. The smaller the loss, the more we or our parents are able to deny it, to conceal it, and to delay efforts to cope...to face the fact that adjustments must be made. The greater the loss, the more we or our parents are compelled to recognize it and to do something about it.

SHHH was founded for all of us—hearing and hard of hearing alike. It was founded because of my conviction that little progress toward prevention, detection, management, or possible remedies, can be made until we all better understand the reality of the situation.

Hearing loss is about communication. It is involved with the problem of listening and trying to understand what is being said rather than just hearing noise and isolated words. Amplification on the telephone permits me easily to hear the sound of another voice. My trouble is I can’t understand what the voice says.

Along the spectrum of hard of hearing people, there are many different problems, and the method of alleviation may vary. What works in one case may not work in another.

But there is one common denominator. Hearing loss affects human beings. Being human is both unique and precious. As we expound our philosophy in these pages, you will see that belief as the foundation of thought and uppermost in our minds in what we advocate. Being human is both unique and precious.

“Rocky speaks of hope, someone to love, and the dignity of work. He cites great minds, but also knows the fears, the hopes, of all of us. When he writes or speaks, he doesn’t teach or lecture, he transforms.”

—Pat Vincent, Grove City, Ohio



In succeeding issues of this Journal, I will develop the philosophy of SHHH. It is your organization. We will attempt to make the invisible visible; to examine all aspects of this complicated problem to permit you to cope better; to show you how you can make a difference; to enter the consciousness of our society and develop a position in it equal to non-disabled people.

In the process, we will invite our members to share their experiences with us. Articles about individuals; about families; about our elderly and their special problems; about our children, all will attempt to capture the richness of spirit which characterizes hard of hearing people. Articles by professionals will appear, and while they may advocate one course of action or another, our philosophy is that each person must think through his or her particular situation and determine what is best in their specific circumstances.

We believe one should do whatever possible to communicate more effectively. We recommend that you use whatever methods are most suitable to your style, comfortable with your personality and compatible with your values. We will not argue whether sign language or speechreading or Cued Speech is better. We will examine all of them and let you decide. Because we believe we can arrive at “better communication through better understanding.”

The cover of the very first issue, along with the masthead of *Shhh* (now *Hearing Life*) published July 1980. The original version of Rocky's column is reprinted here.

An Invisible Condition

If you want to learn more about Rocky Stone and read more of the columns by this remarkable man, they have all been compiled into a single book, *The Invisible Condition—The Human Side of Hearing Loss*, available for download on our website. Go to hearingloss.org/about-hlaa/our-founder and scroll down until you see “Download Rocky's Book.”

In order for us to make SHHH truly representative of your wants, needs and aspirations, we must know what they actually are—not what we think they are. You must tell us. The more we hear from you, the better we will be able to serve you.

And now, let us begin...

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