



Barbara at last year's fall NYC Walk4Hearing. This year, the Walk4Hearing celebrates 15 years of creating awareness and bringing people together.

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Riding the Wave

BY BARBARA KELLEY

There are many forces at work this year pushing hearing health to the top of the list. It's what we've all worked decades to accomplish. I'm an optimist, but I really believe this is the year to ride the wave for a future of more good things to come.

January 1, 2020

American Girl unveiled its 2020 Girl of the Year—the Joss Kendrick doll. A fiercely competitive surfer and cheerleader, Joss' debut couldn't have come at a better time: Surfing will make its own debut as an Olympic sport at Tokyo 2020, and 17-year-old surfing prodigy Caroline Marks, with whom American Girl has teamed up, will help make history as a member of the first-ever U.S. Women's Olympic surfing team.

By the way, this American Girl doll happens to have hearing loss and wears a hearing aid in her right ear. American Girl has partnered with HLAA. Read more about that on page 41.

March 3, 2020: World Hearing Day

The World Health Organization (WHO) has established the World Hearing Forum (WHF) as a global advocacy alliance to promote action for hearing through multi-stakeholder engagement. WHF is intended to fill a critical gap and galvanize “action towards a world in which no person experiences hearing loss due to preventable causes and those with hearing loss can achieve their full potential through early identification and appropriate management of their condition.”

The WHO paying attention to hearing is a very good thing. Last December, HLAA staff traveled to Geneva to participate in the WHF's First Membership Assembly. An important focus of the forum will be to disseminate and promote the recommendations to come out in the “World Report on Hearing,” which WHO expects to launch in May. HLAA2020 will feature a presentation on the report, and we'll share information in this magazine.

March 3 is World Hearing Day, an advocacy event to raise awareness on how to prevent hearing loss and promote ear and hearing care around the world. This year's theme is “Hearing for Life: Don't Let Hearing Loss Limit You.” HLAA is collaborating with the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) on a digital campaign to advance the WHO's vision. Check out who.int/world-hearing-day.

Last year, we partnered with the Hearing Industries Association (HIA) and other organizations on the campaign “Hear Well. Stay Vital. Preserve the Passion”—as the WHO theme for 2019 was “Check Your Hearing!” You can still view these compelling public service announcements at hearingloss.org/preserve-the-passion. Send them to friends and family to encourage them to check their hearing. We continue to work with HIA to expand this campaign.

Technology

The Consumer Technology Association (CTA) and the CTA Foundation brought leaders from the disability community to CES 2020 in January, in Las Vegas, to build relationships and highlight opportunities for technology to enhance the lives of people of all ages and abilities. CES is the world's gathering place for technology business and innovation. I was pleased to represent HLAA and the 48 million Americans with hearing loss as an accessibility leader. Having participated in the CTA Foundation's hearing accessibility group for a few years, we see accessibility in general gaining ground—and hearing access most specifically. There's a lot of attention being given to sound quality in products and new electronic devices entering the market—either to help people hear or to enhance their hearing experience.

There was one session at CES themed, “humanizing technology.” I enjoyed it, but as much as we depend on technology—either to hear or to make our lives easier—we are the humans, *it* is the technology. At the time of this writing, we're still waiting for the Food and Drug Administration's proposed rules for the new category of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids to be marketed to adults with mild-to-moderate hearing loss. Technology equals innovation, and we hope that when the OTC hearing aid market opens up, we'll see innovative products at an affordable price for a specific group of people who might benefit from taking that step to hearing care. From what we saw at CES, there are products already poised for market entry.

Research and Medicine

Research is revealing potential pharmaceutical treatments of hearing loss, genetic treatment, and compelling information on the link between hearing loss and cognitive decline. HLAA is part of a process for standards of care for people receiving cochlear implants and for how to create awareness about implants as an option for people who are candidates. We've launched a new section on our website on genetics and hearing loss—born out of HLAA2019's Research Symposium. (See hearingloss.org/genetics-and-hearing-loss.) And at this year's convention, the symposium will be on tinnitus. There's a lot going on, and we're very hopeful.

People

Humans are the keys to riding this wave. We benefit from progress in technology and medicine. But we also need

to help push it forward by advocating for public policy, creating awareness and asking for what we need. Here's where we all can come together to do that.

- **HLAA Walk4Hearing:** It's in its 15th year, creating awareness, bringing people together, and encouraging hearing screenings. And it's fun! I hope you'll find a Walk near you. (See page 38.)
- **HLAA2020 Convention in New Orleans:** Here's where people meet others with hearing loss and learn about the science and technology. The program offerings will be rich and in a hearing-accessible place. Learn more on page 23.
- **Public policy:** Important issues that will impact you are taking center stage this year, and HLAA is there. Captioned telephone service, hearing-aid-compatible cellphones, Medicare expansion to include hearing aids, and quality TV captioning are just some of the public policy issues we're working to advance.
- **Person-centered care:** This concept—that the individual should be an equal partner in their health care and that decisions, planning and monitoring should take into account the whole person, including the individual's wishes, values and life circumstances—is gaining ground. Person-centered care is especially important for people with hearing loss. We need to make sure we get the care we need from our health professionals.

There's an old joke: The optimist sees the light at the end of the tunnel. The pessimist sees the dark tunnel. The realist sees the freight train. And the train driver sees three idiots standing on the tracks.

I tend to be the optimist. I see that what HLAA has worked for hard and long is finally happening. Many factors are coming together in our favor. Our work is by no means done, but let's all ride this powerful wave together and see where it takes us.

Capable, confident, energetically motivated Joss—the American Girl doll creating awareness in places we never dreamed possible—just happens to have hearing loss. It's a timely reminder: We all are people first. **HL**

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