

CATCHING UP WITH...

BY MARK BROGAN

Mark Brogan

A Heart for Advocacy

Mark Brogan, a veteran of the United States Army, was our cover feature, along with his wife, Sunny, in an interview by Barbara Kelley for our September/October 2009 issue of *Hearing Loss Magazine*.

It's hard to believe that it's been 11 years since I was featured in the September/October 2009 issue of the HLAA *Hearing Loss Magazine*. Time goes by so fast! I have had many exciting things happen, as well as some setbacks. One major development is that I lost all hearing in my right ear only a month after the 2009 HLAA Convention. I already had moderate-to-severe hearing loss from the blast I survived in Riyadh during Operation Iraqi Freedom, but when I dived into a swimming pool back home, the pressure was too much for the traumatic damage I already had. Unfortunately, it resulted in profound deafness. I have been learning

since then to live with hearing in only one ear, and even that one has moderate-to-severe hearing loss.

Fortunately, I had already established a hearing loss community to help me through my latest adjustment to a new hearing reality. Due to my national exposure as a veteran with hearing loss, I was able to link up with a group called Heroes with Hearing Loss, sponsored by Hamilton CapTel, a company that manufactures solutions for the hearing loss community. My wife, Sunny, and I attended veteran/military and audiology conferences across the U.S. to discuss veterans' and their family members' experiences with hearing loss.

Speaking Up and Reaching Out

We spoke to veterans about communication techniques, along with current technologies they may not be aware of and are entitled to receive from the Veterans Administration (VA). Through a fellow Purple Heart recipient and official in my county, I was asked to be part of a disability advisory board for the mayor of Knoxville, Tennessee, where Sunny and I live. Knox County has been tasked with bringing the county up to 100% compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Despite the fact that the law was enacted 30 years ago, it was surprising how much work is still needed in the area of compliance. I was saddened to see how low hearing loss was on the list—even asking for captions at our meetings was an unheard-of request. I believe people may be too afraid to request, or unaware of, hearing loss concessions and accommodations. These should be made readily available, just as ramps, Braille and automatic doors are universally provided for people with other disabilities.

Most of the people I speak with have never heard of hearing loops or other technologies available to individuals with hearing loss. I am working in my area to ensure that we are included in the ADA plan. This should be something to which we all hold our officials accountable. No one should have to fight for accommodations in order to appear in court, serve on a jury or attend a public forum. Access ought to be provided at no cost and without stress: it's a right assured by law.



Body Language and Baby Talk

On the personal front, I've acquired a few new hobbies in the last several years. I picked up skiing once again through a Disabled American Veterans (DAV) program and horseback riding through a local veterans program. I've been able to overcome hearing challenges with my instructors by using an earpiece microphone set under the helmets. I enjoy being around the horses the most. They communicate with body language, and have helped those of us with hearing loss to learn how we can be more perceptive to body language.

The most exciting, challenging experience has been becoming a parent. Sunny and I welcomed Connor, an energetic young boy, in 2016. I'm sure many other parents with hearing loss out there can relate—learning to adjust to life with an infant/toddler and manage hearing loss at the same time can be a wild ride. We are adjusting as a family, though. Connor is learning to be patient and is becoming adept at finding synonyms when I don't understand what he is telling me. We have to laugh when I repeat the word he's trying to say to me, and he excitedly says, "You got it!" I'm not sure I've got it—parenting, that is—all figured out, but I hope he continues to think I do—at least until he's a teenager, anyway. **HL**



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Sunny, Mark
and Connor

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