



We all met in the same small, virtual room where you knew you weren't alone with your hearing loss.

# The World Got Smaller in 2020

BY BARBARA KELLEY

This issue brings us stories of veterans with hearing loss. We have members whose service dates back to World War II, as well as those who served during wartime in Iraq and Afghanistan. I imagine that back in the 1940s and even now, as our veterans serve in foreign lands, the familiarity they left at home seemed like a world away. Many returned home with injuries that included hearing loss and tinnitus. My heartfelt thanks go out to all of our veterans as we celebrate Veterans Day on November 11 and dedicate this issue of *Hearing Life* to them.

Much of what we were doing in January of this year is not what we are doing now. Life has changed with the global pandemic. COVID-19 became the dominating worldwide health issue. All of a sudden, everyone in the world was in the same boat together. Much like when we fought in world wars, we have a common cause globally as we fight a virus that has taken over our way of life.

Hearing loss is a primary health concern in the United States, where about one in seven people has some level of hearing loss. Hearing loss doesn't go away when another major health issue arrives on the scene. Our work here at HLAA didn't stop. We sustained our mission to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss through information, education, support and advocacy, yet we had to evolve to keep our HLAA community together during a global pandemic.

The world became smaller this year. Thanks to living in an age of technology, we were able to meet and share information virtually through online meetings, Walk4Hearing celebrations, a mini-convention and webinars. You brought value to our events by sharing your stories, adding your comments and joining together in a virtual room where you knew you weren't alone with your hearing loss. Some of our HLAA Chapters quickly evolved into online support groups. Yes, there was pain involved in adapting to technology, but your efforts were selfless and tenacious, and people appreciated getting together online.

## On the World Stage

This year, HLAA became a member of the World Health Organization's World Hearing Forum (WHF), as we contribute to a global advocacy initiative. The WHF is a global network promoting hearing health care and is committed to the prevention of hearing loss. Its mission aligns with ours: "The World Hearing Forum will galvanize action toward 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." HLAA is pleased to have a seat at this table, The WHF will issue its report on global hearing loss on March 3, 2021, World Hearing Day. For more information, go to [who.int/deafness/world-hearing-forum](http://who.int/deafness/world-hearing-forum).

The International Consensus Paper on Adult Cochlear Implantation was published in *JAMA Otolaryngology* on August 27, 2020. The paper is the first international consensus publication following a Delphi Consensus process in which HLAA participated. For more information about this paper, why it's important, and the role of HLAA, go to [hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/cochlear-implantable-devices/international-consensus-paper/](http://hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/cochlear-implantable-devices/international-consensus-paper/).

Denmark brings us to the Patient Centered Hearing Network, where members of academia in audiology programs, professional organizations like the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and “patient groups” like HLAA met for its second meeting after working for more than a year on tools for patient-centered hearing health care. Our collaboration is highlighted in the article, “Making Communication Clear When Your Face Mask Isn’t.” (See page 22.) The world has gotten smaller thanks to technology, but as the Ida Institute’s article suggests, with the barriers of face masks, it’s also a world where it can be harder to hear and interpret.

In September, we attended the virtual 2020 M-Enabling Summit, which is usually held in person in the Washington, D.C., area, with more than 50 countries attending. The timely topic was “A New Reality for Digital Accessibility.”

Hearing loss is increasing in America and people with hearing loss are facing new communication

hurdles each day. Seniors, children, veterans and especially underserved communities need our help. We must do more. There are people who’ve never heard of HLAA, and when someone finds us, they feel like they’ve caught a lifeline. We know that the way to reach more people is through the online world. Our future is before us and, together, we can get there.

We will sustain HLAA’s mission to educate, support and advocate for people with hearing loss. We will evolve our programming to a robust digital platform, and we will grow our outreach, strengthening HLAA Chapters across the country and invigorating our advocacy network.

I wish everyone a safe and healthy holiday. It’s going to be different this season, but I’m optimistic for HLAA as we head into the new year. **HL**

*Barbara Kelley is executive director of HLAA. Reach her at [bkelly@hearingloss.org](mailto:bkelly@hearingloss.org). Follow her on Twitter @Bkelley\_HLAA.*

## Hearing Life, the HLAA Magazine, to Publish Quarterly in 2021

HLAA’s award-winning magazine will be published quarterly in both print and digital format starting with the Winter 2021 issue. The winter issue will be in your mailboxes in February 2021. Quarterly issues of our magazine, *Hearing Life*, will still provide the helpful and up-to-date content that traces back to the first issue in July 1980, seven months after the organization was founded in November 1979. For members, you can also read all issues of the magazine online as soon as the magazine is published.

### We Asked and You Told Us

More than 50% of HLAA members read the frequent *Hearing Life e-News* and other messages online. We have 58,000 people in our online HLAA community. You told us in a survey that you want more digital content that you can easily read from your computers, smartphones and devices such as iPads. This means that you have access, anywhere, anytime, to trusted information to make decisions about your own hearing loss and get the support you need.

### Sign Up for the Free Online *Hearing Life e-News*

If you don’t already receive it, you’re missing the most current news we can bring you—right to your email with no special login required. Sign up for the free *e-News* at [hearingloss.org/news-media/e-news/](http://hearingloss.org/news-media/e-news/).

### Giving Thanks

We are thankful, especially during this holiday season, for all of you who are part of the HLAA community. During this 41st anniversary month, we can remember what Founder Rocky Stone said, “This organization doesn’t do things *for* people. We do them *with* people.

