

Celebrating 45 Years of Community

BY BARBARA KELLEY

Where were you in 1979? Some of you weren't even born yet. Maybe you were a young parent or starting your first job or in mid-career. No matter where you were in 1979, if you had hearing loss, there was nowhere to turn. You had no voice and no support.

In 1979, Howard E. "Rocky" Stone founded our organization to fill that void and help people who weren't totally deaf but weren't totally hearing, who were essentially forgotten. The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) began as a community of support for this group, and 45 years later, we've worked together to find solutions to the complex problem of hearing loss. Our important work now touches millions of lives, so no one has to face hearing loss alone.

We've taken the lead on all issues affecting people with hearing loss—nationally, locally, in workplaces, public venues, on boards and committees—and our voice is stronger than ever. In fact, HLAA has been a part of every major piece of hearing health and communication access legislation for the last 45 years. Our voice is now regularly heard in the media as a trusted hearing health advocate, and access to care, treatment and accessible listening options are increasing, thanks to our work.

But HLAA is much more than a strong voice, more than a source of information, more than a policy-affecting body and more than an agent for change. We have a vast, far-reaching community of support that continues to change lives after four-and-a-half decades, where everyone is welcome, and where new people are turning every day. Our community is a beacon of hope for the increasing number of people facing hearing loss, who now have somewhere to turn.

Our community knows that hearing loss isn't just something shown on an audiogram, or measured in decibels, or demonstrated by how many times you asked someone to repeat something. It reaches deep into our lives. It impacts our emotions, our relationships and our well-being. HLAA's community eases that impact and inspires change—one person and one life at a time.

This connection that HLAA inspires is evident in HLAA Chapters, during our online events, at conventions and in our stories, both spoken and written in our publications. People make themselves vulnerable by sharing their stories with all the twists and turns, often showing weakness, and eventually perseverance and strength. We share connections and we inspire others around us to do the same. That truly is the biggest strength of the HLAA community, as we find solutions together through our shared experiences. HLAA is your place to find that life-changing connection.

Whether you're a volunteer, a donor, a Walk4Hearing participant or someone who turns to HLAA, it's our time to say thank you and wish you a peaceful and joyful holiday. Stay connected to us as we look to 2025. Tell someone about us and share our new website—hearingloss.org—so even more people find the path to living their best life with hearing loss. **HL**



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