

## *My Story...* by Bob Stuckey

My hearing loss began at birth because my mother had contracted German measles during her pregnancy. My hearing loss was not discovered until I was three years old due to my slow progress of acquiring spoken language. I was given hearing tests in New York City where my mother's parents lived nearby in New Jersey. It was noted that I had not only hearing loss in both ears, but sensory aphasia which is a type of speech disorder consisting of a defect of power of expression of speech, writing, and signs in understanding of language. This means that if I hear something said to me, I would have the tendency to misinterpret what the person might be saying.

At age 3, I was placed in the Lexington School for the Deaf in New York City, but I didn't stay there very long. I transferred to New Jersey School for the Deaf where I stayed for three years. At the mandatory age of 6 years old, I transferred to Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis, Mo. While I was a student at C.I.D, I had to learn speech and lip-reading for next 7 years. I did not get my hearing aid until I was 9. I realized years later that my ability to acquire language had been long delayed.

When I was 12 years old, I attended a local private school in Knoxville, TN which had a college preparatory program. I realized that I was far behind when I came to grade 7 due to lack of solid academic background. However, I was very lucky to be associated with many of my friends who were very bright and very helpful during my trying times. I still stay in touch most of them even today. In order for us to improve our reading skills, we were required to read at least 5 books during summer months and we took tests later in the fall. That was the beginning of my lifetime hobby in reading. During that time, I had several tutors to cover both reading and math. I had found that using one on one instruction was very effective in that I could learn one task at a time.

I went to several hearing colleges where the classes were pretty large. Although, I had made many hearing friends, only a handful of them really understood my hearing loss. At one point, I decided to apply for admission to Gallaudet University. My parents were rather skeptical by pointing out that I could not comprehend language spoken by hearing people, and may not comprehend sign language (ASL) as well. I suggested that I can give it a try.

I went to summer school at Gallaudet University to take up English as required. During that time there were a lot of hard of hearing students just like me; it was easy for me to hang around with them. However, fall semester rolled around, there were many deaf students who used ASL and came from residential schools for the deaf. It was a tough

adjustment for me to make because there was a lot of resentment between hard of hearing and deaf students regarding methods of communication such as (ASL vs. Oral ) are concerned. So, I decided to approach my adviser and request that I take some consortium courses offered at American University. He asked me about my grades and I admitted that they were not great. However, I convinced him that I need a balance between the hearing world and the deaf world. In fact, I continued to attend both Universities for the next 2 years. It really paid off for me in the long run. With all this, I did not have note takers, or interpreters.

As far as my professions are concerned, after my brief career with the federal government, I got into a Life Insurance Company where I sold insurances to the deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing consumers in Washington, D.C. area. I had a hard time passing state licenses. After several attempts I finally passed those tests. I had difficulties understanding the questions on the tests. My trainers apparently felt that I had missed a lot of what was said at training sessions without benefits of interpreters or even note takers. When I met a lot of clients, I usually ended up listening to their life problems and their difficulties in communicating with hearing people in different situations. That was beginning of my interest in counseling.

I later moved to Nashville, TN where I worked as Interpreter Coordinator/Case Manager for the deaf, and hard of hearing people in a community center for the hard of hearing. It was rather a challenging position to deal with people who had been strong advocates in oral only method of communication. I taught ASL classes. During that time, I had been able establish a very good relationship with both the deaf and hard of hearing communities.

I moved to Louisville, KY as a vocational rehabilitation counselor where I dealt with a wide variety of issues such as hearing aids, academic needs, etc. as requested by the clients. I later met the Self Help for the Hard of Hearing Kentucky Founders Virginia Mason and Melanie Magruder. (Editor's Note: Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, SHHH, is now known as Hearing Loss Association of America, HLAA.) I had the opportunity to attend several meetings but was not so much involved in their activities. I also met the SHHH Founder, Rocky Stone, while attending Southeast Regional Conference for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in South Carolina in 1991. He was a very interesting person to get to know. I saw him again several years later in another conference. During 1990 to 1998, I served as an officer with Kentucky Registry of the Interpreters for the Deaf and the Kentucky Association of the Deaf where I had the opportunity to learn more about deaf culture.

When I joined Kentucky Relay Service in 1998 as an Outreach Coordinator in 1998, I also joined SHHH Local Chapter in Louisville, KY and became more active. I served as a chapter President, Treasurer, and Outreach Person. My association with the Hearing

Loss Association of Kentucky has given me the opportunity to gain more insight with hard of hearing people.

I returned to the Kentucky Relay Service in 2012. I have more opportunities to work with late deafened consumers and have become more active than ever before. It is challenging to bring deaf groups and hard of hearing groups together to reach a common goal of providing more outreach and education to the general public.