



The newsletter of the Hearing Loss Association of America, Albuquerque Chapter

# WIRED FOR SOUND

## Self-Advocacy: my Bumpy Journey

*Dr. Norm Dawson, HLAA Albuquerque*

I was told I was completely and totally deaf at age 27. It was a shock, but it was not. I had been wearing hearing aids since I was 15 years old.

At about age 5, my parents discovered I had a mild hearing loss. They took me to a doctor in Chicago, and he confirmed their suspicions that I had a mild hearing loss. He predicted that by age 15 I would need hearing aids. My parents asked what they should do to help me. He gave them two choices: 1) put me in a state school for the deaf, or 2) wait until I was a young teenager and then get hearing aids. My mom chose to work with me at home instead of a school for the deaf. She would read to me every night and make sure I pronounced all my words properly. This was even after her full-time job as a secretary and taking care of my three siblings and my father's needs. When I was in third grade in Kansas City, Missouri, a speech pathologist must have discovered I had a hearing loss. She pulled me out of class a couple of times per week and helped me with lip reading. That was very helpful. I could read lips so well that most people never detected my hearing loss. That therapy served me very well in later years and still does.

Often, though, I missed many things. For example, my last name is Dawson. During class roll-call the teacher would go thru the alphabet and when she called my name I did not answer. But when she called Johnson, I answered, incorrectly, and she admonished me for it. Some teachers knew I needed to be placed at the front of the room. I often felt embarrassed because they put



me up front, out of alphabetical order. Back in those school days we sat alphabetically.

As I got older and moved up in my grades in school, I was aware that I was missing too much information from the teacher and my grades were suffering. I finally told my dad I was not going to go back to school in the 7th grade without a hearing aid! That was when I became my own self advocate for hearing. When my hearing aid didn't work right or the ear mold did not fit, I hauled myself into the hearing aid office and told them it was not working or did not fit. They fixed it. I spent many hours in hearing aid offices, and they all got to know me. I advocated that if my parents were going to buy my hearing aids, they need to make them work.

I got bullied and was made fun of because I had this large bulky device hanging off the back of my ear. On several occasions I was forced to defend myself in school yard fights. I was seen as weird and different, plus I missed out on casual conversations. Some students may have thought I was rude or indifferent, even snobbish. I just did not hear them when some people spoke to me. What was I to do?

My hearing continued to degrade, and by the time I was in high school, I needed two hearing aids. Again, I told my dad that I need another hearing aid. He got another one for me. His remark was, "how can you stand to have both ears

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**18 Feb Meeting** 10:00 AM To Noon—**Hybrid****Hearing Loss and Dementia  
—The Connection**

Have you ever wondered how hearing loss might affect your brain? Maybe even dementia or Alzheimer's Disease? If so, then our February presentation is for you and the people in your life.

Our speaker will speak on his personal journey of deafness for most of his life and how he discovered the lifestyle choices he made to prevent dementia including hearing devices. He will also discuss some of his personal advocacy for equal access as a deaf person.

Dr. Dawson, a retired chiropractor of 24 years and now a community health educator, will provide invaluable information about dementia. The HLA ABQ Chapter looks forward to this presentation and hopes you will join us this month.

The front-page article by Dr. Dawson may help you get to know him a bit beforehand.

**Hybrid meeting!**

This will be our first hybrid meeting since the pandemic forced us to Zoom only. We had many challenges attempting to get our audio-visual system ready for both live and Zoom audiences. A successful January dry-run convinced us we are finally ready. See the article on page 4.

Zoom is not going away. Nearly everyone uses it, and many actually prefer it—for health or for convenience. We even have some regular attenders who live far from Albuquerque.

However, we have heard from multiple members who are anxious to meet in person again. We just miss the in-person human interaction! We hope to see a good group of you at Los Altos Christian Church. There is a map on page 6 showing the location. Park on the east side, and come to the Fellowship Hall.

The HLA ABQ Chapter is always looking for volunteers. You can man a special project. You can help us out for a few months, or consider a longer-term commitment. "Try us out" for a month or two. We will provide orientation for working on a nonprofit board, share our chapter's mission and goals, and discuss topics we can use your help with. If interested, contact any board member (contact info at left), or use the chapter email [hlaabq@gmail.com](mailto:hlaabq@gmail.com).

plugged up, (with ear molds)?" Nevertheless, I wore them both.

I graduated from high school with an average GPA. I wonder what kind of student I would have been if I had heard all that the teachers had said. I enrolled at University right out of high school. The classes in those days were huge, because of the huge number of baby boomers. Some of my classes had 300 students. I just could not keep up and have often wondered why I dropped out. I figured with two hearing aids, I should be able to hear just fine. Plus, I was in denial that I couldn't hear well.

I did manage to find a good job for awhile. After seven years in the same clerical position, where I worked mostly alone or with just a few of the same people, I wanted to move up. I again self-advocated for a change in positions. I wanted to be a telephone sales person in the company. So my boss gave me a chance to take orders on the phone from regular customers. I lasted only one day because most of the orders I took over the phone were wrong, because I took orders that I thought I heard instead of what was ordered! The boss moved me back into my old position, since the sales job was on a trial basis.

I did not see a future for myself in that job, and I finally figured out how to get back to University. I failed miserably on my first attempt at University after high school. I did not attend classes, and I got mostly D's and F's in school. That's when I was told I was completely and totally deaf. Hearing aids were no longer effective. I was able to learn sign language very quickly and enrolled full time.

But I wanted to do more than just attend school; I wanted to be fully engaged in all the things that university had to offer. I became involved in student government. Of course, I needed sign language interpreters in non-academic activities. Thanks to federal equal access laws, the school had to provide me with sign language interpreters. The university did not want to follow the law, so I

again became a self-advocate and complained loud enough to the right people, and they eventually complied with the law. I also had the support of several organizations to help me in my quest for equal access under the law.

Fortunately, I attended a number of seminars and trainings for people with disabilities on how to be a self-advocate. These were events offered by the federal and state government. There are a number agencies that provide this information now at the local level.

I got my first cochlear implant at age 53 after hearing no sound for 25 years! I got my second one at age 67. What a difference they make! I can now hear on the phone and enjoy many social events with the assistive listening devices I use.

Moving ahead 45 years later, Zoom technology came along. At first Zoom did not provide closed captioning. Eventually the main rooms were captioned so the viewer could choose to see the captions, but the breakout rooms were not captioned. In order for me to see the captions when folks were sent to the breakout rooms, I asked to stay in the main room with some other folks. It was messy at times, but it worked thanks to my self-advocacy.

I began to attend many Zoom conferences for my business and social activities. I literally trained every organization I worked with on how to set up the closed captioning on Zoom. Now, almost all of them provide captioning without me having to ask. I even talked to the sales reps for Zoom and complained that the breakout rooms were not captioned and asked why not. Finally, since the end of last year, Zoom now captions the breakout rooms.

I now wear 2 cochlear implants and have no hair. At my age, 75, I don't care what people think when I am in public. Really, with all the electronic gadgets that people use today on their heads, who cares what the gadgets are for?

It has been a long and bumpy road and I am still advocating for change for people with a hearing loss. And I will continue to advocate for myself and others.

**Smith's Community Rewards** Shop at Smith's with their Rewards card, and Smith's will make a donation to HLAA Albuquerque chapter. You get your usual rewards points.

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The HLAAAbq NPO number for Smith's is NC419.

**Amazon Smile** You can donate to the Albuquerque Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America every time you make a purchase of most of the products from Amazon.

Go to <http://www.hlaabq.com/amazonsmile.html> for more information and detailed instructions on how to designate HLAA-ABQ Chapter as your charity of choice when you make [amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) purchases.

Once you have set it up, always log into [smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com) to purchase from amazon. 0.5% of the purchase price is automatically donated to HLAA Albuquerque Chapter—at no cost to you.

## Loop People; Loop Places

*Ginevra Ralph*

### Looping Your Computer

When Zoom became the go-to means of group communication during Covid, our Loop Committee hit a major stumbling block. Our Chair, who has severe hearing loss, simply could not effectively use her computer as an audio source—not Zoom, not YouTube, not anything with sound.

Connecting through Bluetooth meant a delay in pairing, having speech out of synch with lip reading, experiencing significant battery drain, and a frequent “drop” in her connection. A highly literate woman, she nevertheless simply never listened to podcasts, YouTubes or any form of video conferencing.

After a little research, we realized that a portable loop would work if we had the right cable to

plug it into the computer's headphone output. It needed a cable, however, that would “step down” stereo sound to mono. We located a fellow in Tennessee who was willing to customize a cable for portable loop use to patch into television, computers or other sound sources. He now sells them on line for \$30-45 depending on length.

Our leader now keeps a portable loop constantly plugged into her computer to be able to jump on Zoom calls. The sound is instant, in synch with the person speaking, and there is no battery drain when using her telecoil! Another great use of a personal loop!



## Hybrid Meetings—Finally!

In January, we did a dry run of a hybrid meeting, with just a few people in person at our traditional venue—Los Altos Christian Church. It was a smashing success! If you joined us on Zoom, you were probably blissfully unaware that it was a test. And we passed the test!

A laptop on the podium ran Zoom. Audio from that laptop (Zoom participants talking) was sent to our in-room loudspeakers, and audio from every in-room microphone went to both the Zoom audience and to the room loudspeakers with no electronic feedback. There was some *acoustical* feedback. Some echo is unavoidable whenever a loud-

speaker is in the same room as a microphone. However, we minimized the echo by controlling the volume (enough for those in the room to hear, but minimum sound picked up by the microphone).

If you have been looking forward to meeting fellow HLAA members in person again, we invite you to join us on February 18. (Just don't bring your device to also connect to Zoom. Your speaker and microphone can cause awful feedback.)

It's been a long time coming, but we think we're ready. Maybe we'll have a little celebration!

*Laissez le bon temps rouler!*



**Wired For Sound**

**Thanks to those listed below for their generous donations.**

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The Hearing Loss Association of America is a volunteer association of Hard of Hearing people, their relatives and friends. It is a non-profit, non-sectarian educational organization devoted to the welfare and interest of those who cannot hear well. Membership in the national organization is by annual dues, which are separate from the annual Chapter fee paid to your local chapter. National membership includes a subscription to the bi-monthly publication Hearing Life.



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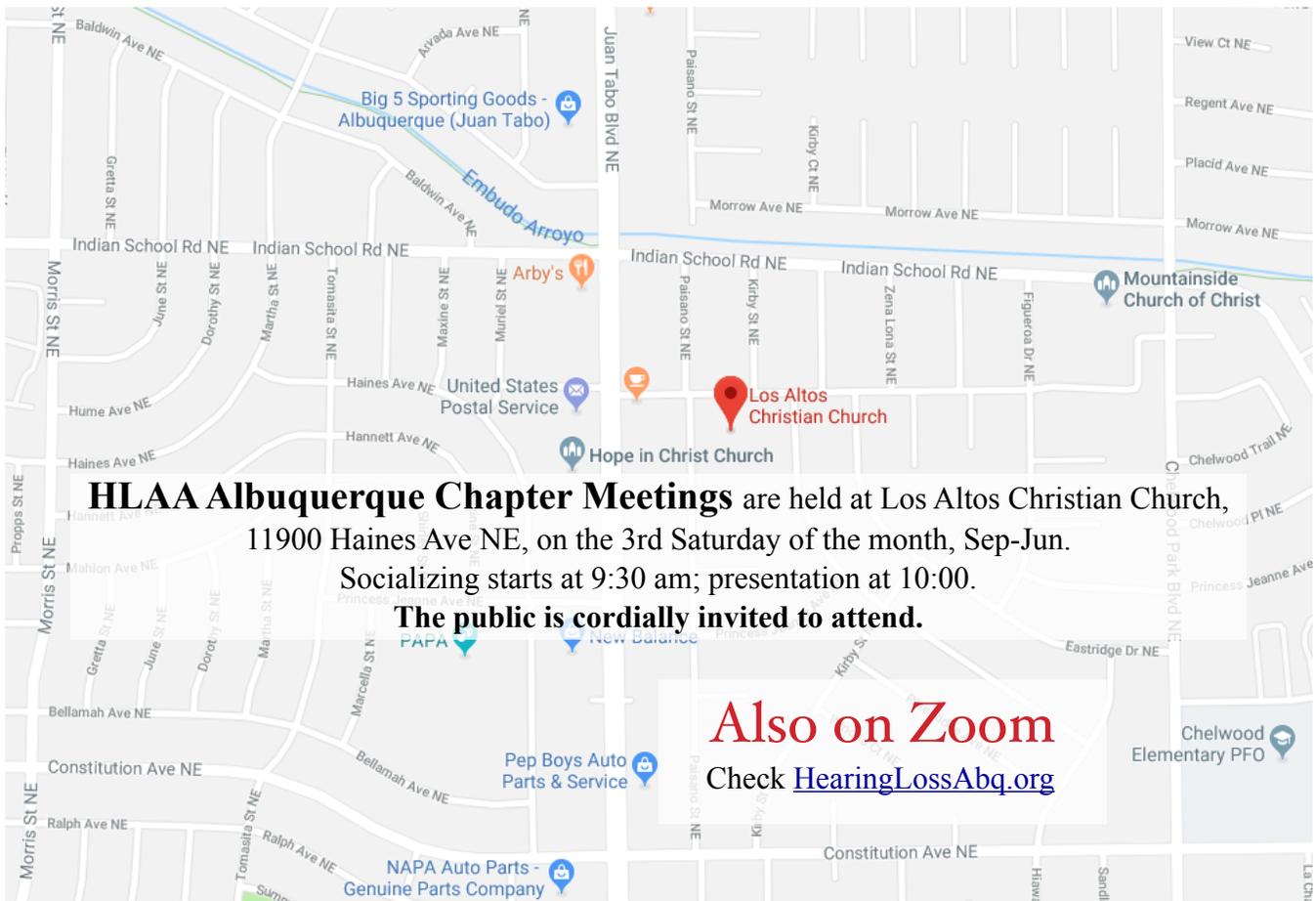
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## Wired For Sound



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**HLAA Albuquerque Chapter Meetings** are held at Los Altos Christian Church, 11900 Haines Ave NE, on the 3rd Saturday of the month, Sep-Jun.

Socializing starts at 9:30 am; presentation at 10:00.

**The public is cordially invited to attend.**

**Also on Zoom**  
Check [HearingLossAbq.org](http://HearingLossAbq.org)