

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

WIRED FOR SOUND

Musicians with Hearing Loss!

This month, we feature three musicians that appeared in the Spring issue of *Hearing Life Magazine*. We hope you find their stories inspiring. Check out other stories in [<https://www.hearingloss.org/news-media/hearing-life/issues/>]

Charles Mokotoff

I experienced a sudden onset of hearing loss in both ears at 15 years of age. It left me with a severe-to-profound loss, which thankfully has not worsened significantly over the years. I had already been playing guitar in some local rock groups with friends and decided to continue playing despite the hearing loss. When I got to college, I met someone playing classical guitar and was completely hooked. I was totally awed by it. I picked up a classical guitar somewhere and just kept on working at it with the help of several very good and understanding teachers.



Besides the beguiling beauty of the guitar music, the other thing that really attracted me is that it was a predominantly solo instrument. I did not have to worry about communicating with other members of a band or ensemble. I graduated *cum laude* from Syracuse University with a bachelor's degree in music, concentrating on classical guitar and then went on to Ithaca College, where I received a master's degree in the same field. I was immediately hired to teach in the music department at Ithaca and began a performance career that went on for about 15 years.



I made my Carnegie Hall debut in 1987 and in addition to performances on the East coast, played several concert tours in the Far East, including stops in Singapore, the Philippines and Hong Kong. Communicating overseas with many for whom English was not their first language was a particular challenge. Despite all the difficulties I overcame, in 1992 I decided to stop playing. It seemed I had reached as far as I could go, and wondered what it would be like to live life where I didn't feel my hearing loss would be seen as something peculiar. Along the way I studied Information Technology, got several jobs in this field, married a deaf woman, had two beautiful children, got divorced and started to play again.

When I picked up the guitar again in 2006 after a long hiatus, I was wearing digital hearing aids; the sound of the guitar was different than I recalled from my old analog days, and it took a few years to adjust. Around this time I met Wendy Cheng and got involved with her Association of Adult Musicians with Hearing Loss. There is a wide variety of skills, ages, styles, instrumentation and motivation, but we all share a desire to continue our involvement with music despite hearing loss. Without a doubt the greatest gift of AAHML is the fraternity we share with each other. I have met some extraordinary souls and I will always cherish their friendship.

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HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER
Providing support and advocacy for
people with hearing loss

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 **Hearing Loss Association of America – Albuquerque chapter**

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affiliated with the



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15 May Meeting 10:00 AM - Noon On Zoom

Our Web Page (HearingLossAbq.org) will have the link to join the Zoom meeting.

The Technology equipment distribution program by NMCDHH

Dennis Stidham is a Community Advocacy Specialist in NMCDHH's Albuquerque office. Dennis has 14 years of experience working with Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing throughout the Albuquerque, Los Lunas, Belen, and Santa Fe areas. Dennis is originally from Arizona but has been a resident of New Mexico since 2003.

Dennis is married and they have four children. His wife, Suella, is also Deaf.

Join us Saturday, May 15th at 9:00am to learn what NMCDHH can do for you and to learn what equipment NMCDHH provides.

Upcoming programs:

Hearing Loss Challenges Don't Stop at the Ears

Some Take-Aways From Elaine McCaffrey's "Hospital Safety for Those With Hearing Loss" (April)

Bobbi Rodríguez, HLAAbq

We need to hear the questions being asked, instructions and information given us. This is no time to fake that you understand. This is a situation where being clear is necessary.

Be assertive. Let medical personnel know you have a hearing problem. Bring a pen and pad. A smart phone with a voice recognition app can be used. Repeat what you thought you heard, and ask if it is correct. Always ask for clarification if uncertain.

When going to a hospital, take a personal hospital bag with all you need to communicate, labeled with your name, birthdate and phone number. Don't leave your hearing devices at home, and remember batteries and chargers. Bring a sign to put over your bed telling everyone that you have a hearing loss.

HLAA has a Communication Access Plan (CAP) to give any provider complete details about your hearing loss and how they can work with you to communicate. It can be downloaded from HearingLoss.org.

Any visit to the doctor or hospital can be nerve-racking, but with some preparation you can ease some of the uneasiness. Be assertive and don't fake it!



Dawn Molenkopf



I was born with bilateral moderate to moderately severe hearing loss due to Branchio-Oto-Renal Syndrome. It did not become progressive until my 30's, and currently, my hearing loss is severely-profound to profound. As a child I was always drawn to music and made my debut early one morning when I was four by turning on my mother's electronic keyboard to full volume, putting my ear directly to the keys and picking out the tune "Mary Had A Little Lamb." I started piano lessons at age eight and violin at age 13. I continued with both instruments through college and performed in the orchestra.

I experimented with becoming a music major in college, with piano as my major instrument, but my piano teacher at the time was strongly unsupportive because he felt that my hearing loss would prevent me from performing "naturally". Frustrated, I switched majors and kept up with music on my own for a while, performing the first movement of the Greig Piano Concerto in A Minor at my grandmother's nursing home. Soon after, life factors got in the way, and I discontinued both instruments.

Up to that point, I had not really done anything vocally except to sing with friends in small groups or perform in choirs. My primary challenge was that I could hear myself but could not hear anyone else or any accompaniment, so I tended to under-

sing, which affected voice tone. However, I moved to a new town to start my doctoral degree and joined a tiny synagogue desperate for a musician. Because the music was *a capella*, I was in control and could easily solo. Within a few years, I became the lay musician people relied on when they could not get a cantor or rabbi.

By this time, my hearing loss had progressed to the point that I could no longer hear myself effectively, and I was concerned I would not be able to continue to perform, so I talked to my audiologist, who told me that hearing aids were for speech only and I couldn't expect any support for music. Frustrated, I did an Internet search and stumbled upon the Association of Adult Musicians with Hearing Loss. Wendy was very supportive in my journey, and soon, with new hearing aids, a responsive voice teacher and a very understanding pianist, I was back to performing. Wendy invited me to perform in their open mic event, and this encouraged me to push my vocal performance. I have continued to perform regularly with my colleagues in AAMHL, and in the summer of 2019, I performed the National Anthem at HLAA's annual conference [<https://youtu.be/EqFsAUcKcH8>]. I gave my first full voice recital soon after, singing in four languages, and I am now preparing for a future full recital in a couple of years. I believe the encouragement, camaraderie and support that I have with all of my friends with AAMHL has been invaluable in my musical journey, and Wendy has done an outstanding job conveying the message that a loss of hearing does not have to be a loss of music.

The HLAA ABQ Chapter has openings for several roles. 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.

Blue O'Connell

Many years ago, a musician friend invited me over to hear his new piano composition. After waiting for what seemed a long time, I finally asked, "When are you going to play me your new song?" He was stunned. "I just did—didn't you hear it?" I didn't. That was how I learned that I had a severe hearing loss. I was 25 years old. Doctors believed I was born with some hearing loss that was further complicated after a case of mononucleosis in my early 20s. For years I was able to hear well enough with hearing aids, but at the age of 50, it was suggested that I consider a cochlear implant.

I have learned a lot from my journey with hearing loss and music. Regaining music perception took months of persistence, concentration and patience. I worked with a music teacher who drilled me with pitch perception, interval recognition and sight singing exercises. Musical intervals are like what the alphabet is to language. In speech recognition exercises, first we focus on one-syllable words, graduate to small phrases, then on to sentences and stories.

My music rehab followed this same logic. First I focused on intervals (distance between two notes), graduated to melodies and on to complete songs. I worked with a music teacher who used her piano to play common intervals found in many melodies. (Examples: an octave is the first two notes in "Over the Rainbow." A perfect fourth is the first two notes of "Here Comes the Bride.") By isolating these pitches, just as I isolated the alphabet in words, it helped me regain the perception of these sounds. Much of our work in CI rehab involves a something called "neuroplasticity," which is a process where the brain reestablishes connections we had before onset of hearing loss. My 30 plus years of musical training, beginning with percussion in high school band and later classical guitar, prepared me well for my CI auditory rehab as



the same tools are needed to succeed in being a good CI user.

I also gained inclusion into a caring community of others like me who have hearing loss. Considered an "invisible" disability, hearing loss can be quite isolating. It is a wonderful experience

to go from feeling left out to being welcomed into a supportive fellowship with others who have walked the same path.

Since my implantation in 2009, I contributed to CI university research studies around the U.S., participated as a panelist in the Symposium for Music and Cochlear Implants in Montreal in 2016, and I was a two-time finalist in the Beats of Cochlea Festival in Warsaw. How my life has been greatly enriched since becoming a bionic woman!

Two years after implantation, I left my office job of 14 years and became a professional musician. I am a Certified Music Practitioner, playing therapeutic music on my guitar for hospital patients, people with disabilities and nursing home residents. I am also a singer/songwriter and released my first CD, "Choose the Sky," in 2011. The recording took five years to complete. (I had to take a break during my CI surgery and rehab).

In 2020, I released an ebook (pdf), "Seven Songs of Solace, for solo guitar, and donated proceeds to Doctors Without Borders and the Association of Adult Musicians with Hearing Loss (AAMHL). You can learn more about this project and other things I am up to by visiting my website: www.blueoconnell.com

Do you have a personal experience relating to hearing loss that would benefit your fellow HoH readers? It could be something practical or a warning of something to avoid or even something humorous. If you don't mind sharing a short note, send it by email to:

EditorHLAAbq@gmail.com

Hearing Loss Basics

Mary Clark, HLAABq

Now that I am unable to continue with being involved with the HLAA ABQ Chapter, I have also given up teaching with the Osher Lifelong Institute through the UNM Continuing Ed Program.

I'm writing some articles that have been derived from my teaching, in an effort to continue with my passion for helping those with hearing loss. This is the first topic of what I hope will become a series.

The path to better hearing is confusing enough without having to deal with questions like:

- Ads in the mail with amazing promises
- On-line hearing tests and hearing aids
- Full page ads in the paper (How can they afford that?)
- Who can I trust?
- Does untreated hearing loss really lead to dementia?
- Big Box stores that sell hearing aids
- What is a “locked” hearing aid?
- Some insurance ads are advertising they cover hearing aids – what’s the catch?
- Can you really “lease” a hearing aid?

Let's start with hearing loss basics.

- Hearing loss affects nearly 48 million Americans.
- People with hearing loss will retire on average about 4 to 7 years earlier than their contemporaries.
- The average time between someone knowing they need a hearing aid and when they actually GET one is as much as 10 years!

The New York Times published a story in March 2021 about the dilemma over buying hearing aids in 2021 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hearing-aids-iphone-apps-and-new-tech-mean-more-ways-to-deal-with-hearing-loss-but-same-old-anxiety-11616850000>

The opening statement of the article says so much: “Many people believe wearing a hearing aid is an advertisement for being old.” The stigma is real, and the hearing aid manufacturers haven't helped dispel that when they focus on “so small, no one will know,” so depending on where you are in your level of acceptance, you will have to navigate the level you are willing to go for hearing better.

There are several types of hearing loss.

Conductive hearing loss occurs when sound is unable to travel within your ears correctly. There are more likely to be medical solutions for this type of hearing loss than the others, although it is less common than the next type.

Sensorineural hearing loss is due to damage to the nerve cells that provide the messages to your brain that convert sound to something our brains comprehend. Often called “nerve deafness” this is also the most common type of hearing loss that people experience as they age, also known as presbycusis.

One sided vs. bilateral simply means that both ears are not affected the same way, and one ear may suffer a lot more hearing loss than the other.

Gradual vs. sudden reflects a sometimes mysterious experience when someone loses their hearing very suddenly, versus the more typical experience of losing one's hearing gradually. Not all hearing loss is progressive, but that is very common. It is not uncommon for someone with a gradual hearing loss to be in denial about just how much loss they really have, since it has happened over time.

Once we understand and accept that we have a hearing loss, there are classifications of hearing loss based on testing results from an audiogram. My next column will cover “mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe and profound hearing loss”. The solutions for each level can be different, but all of them involve both behavioral adaptations, as well as technology adaptations. The technology in hearing aids has exploded in the last few years,

Yearly dues are \$15 per household. They are due in January. If you missed it, see page 7.

with artificial intelligence (AI), rechargeable hearing aids, Bluetooth connectivity that is vastly improved over early Bluetooth features on hearing aids, and cell phone apps for hearing aids that allow the user to adjust their own responses based on their environment.

Don't worry, I will also cover the options for people who are not technically savvy, who might find a smart phone a challenge, and all of these features to be too much to absorb. Hearing aids do not require you to have a degree in technology!

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.

Call 1-866-4141 to sign up or re-enroll.
The HLAAbq NPO number for Smith's is 14881.

Loop People, Loop Places

Ginevra Ralph

Celebrate New Loops

Today in Eugene, OR, the City is ribbon-cutting 24 newly installed hearing loops at each of the ticket, gate and rental car counters. This exciting development came about after a couple of years of gentle advocacy, regular publicity about hearing loss and loops, and timely testimony at City Council when the new airport master plan was presented. So telecoil users are showing up today, celebrating, liberally thanking city officials and underscoring how important loops are for safe, stressless, equitable, and accessible travel.

But the thanks can't stop today. Until loops become as ubiquitous as elevators and ramps, it is important to actively thank every looped business we come across.

Consider these stories: A Eugenean in London told the looped taxi cab driver how amazing it was. He said "You're the first person to comment. I didn't think anyone used it." When we placed a loop at a drug store, the pharmacist predicted that

Yes, patience will be required, and you will need to be open to learning new things, but not everyone is at the same level of tech savvy, so I'll be covering ways to work to get your best options, even if the bells and whistles are overwhelming to you.

I'd really like to know what other topics you might be interested in, so if you'd like to contact me, please reach out to me at a special email I've set up for this purpose: frozsquash@yahoo.com If you don't have email, you can call me at 505-553-2638 and leave me a message about topics you would like me to cover.

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 purchases.

Once you have set it up, always log into 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.

"a couple of their customers have hearing loss and might use it."

Remember, no one can see you using your telecoil, and therefore the likely assumption is that no one is using the loop. It can be a leap of faith for a business to install a loop, as well as a modest cost. Let them know that their "return on investment" is worth it by expressing your appreciation.

If you missed our poll at our last Zoom meeting, please take the poll at HearingLossAbq.org, or text or call 505-220-5526.

Attending future HLAA Abq meetings:

- Zoom is my only option
- Zoom is my preferred option
- Zoom is OK, but I prefer in-person meetings
- In-person meetings are my only option

Assuming we can do hybrid meetings, when are you likely to come back in person? (Choose the closest.)

- September 2021
- November 2021
- January 2022
- I will not do in person meetings

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.



Albuquerque Chapter Membership

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Dues: \$15 per household per calendar year (Includes newsletter subscription)

Online: <https://www.hearinglossabq.org/electronic-pay>



P.O.Box 36792, Albuquerque, NM 87176

A map of Albuquerque, New Mexico, with a red location pin marking the meeting site at Los Altos Christian Church, 11900 Haines Ave NE. The map shows surrounding streets like Indian School Rd NE, Haines Ave NE, and Constitution Ave NE, and nearby businesses like Arby's and Big 5 Sporting Goods. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the map, containing the following text:

Meeting
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.
on Zoom