EVERYBODY IS SOMEBODY

Ruth D. Bernstein

Everyone who has a hearing loss has a list a mile long of “somebody shoulds.” How often have you, someone you know who has a hearing loss, a relative or friend said “somebody should”? “Somebody should do something about captioning movies. Somebody should ask restaurants to have written lists of specials. Somebody should make sure doctors, nurses, and administrators use assistive devices so patients who are hard of hearing or deaf can understand what is being said.”

People who have a hearing loss seldom acknowledge their disability. It’s easy to hide the fact you can’t hear, especially if you have a spouse, relative, or friend who is willing to be your “ears.” Very few people find the courage to be a “somebody” and say I have a hearing loss. Please make sure you make eye contact with me when you speak and talk a little slower than you usually do.”

I’ve been an advocate for people with hearing loss since 1992, first as a *founder of advocates for better communciation, a.b.c*., the advocacy group allied with the Center for Hearing and Communication, and now as a Board member of the Hearing Loss Association of America, New York City Chapter. HLAA’s mission is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support, and advocacy.

Advocates can be faced with a Catch-22 situation. It’s hard to talk to people when you are not sure you understand their questions or answers. We seldom know if what we say makes a difference in people’s lives. Then, suddenly, we discover we *have* made an impact. I remembered this when I met a woman who said she heard me speak about using assistive listening and alerting devices when I travel. She has been profoundly hard of hearing all her life. On a trip to Hawaii she used an FM unit for the first time and was thrilled to discover she could hear the guides. “At the beginning of the trip it was really hard for me to ask each guide to use the FM mike. As the trip progressed and I realized I could hear what was being said, it became easier and easier. Using the FM made an enormous difference. I relaxed and enjoyed the scenery AND the verbal explanations, something I was never able to do before. What a treat.”

For information about assistive devices read https://www.hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/hat/ and http://chchearing.org/technology/assistive-devices/assistive-listening-devices/

The work of the “somebodies” who are HLAA NYC members has produced large and small triumphs that touch all our lives. These include: captioning on TV, at the movies and at Broadway shows; access at Lincoln Center and museums in New York, health care and hotels. HLAA NYC volunteers are working on audio looping theaters, museums, cultural, city government, and medical facilities throughout the city.

Sometimes, when I am feeling tired at the end of a long, frustrating week, I ask myself “Why I am I doing this?” It would be easy to retreat into my world of silence and forget the endless daily explanations of what I need to be able to communicate. Then someone says, “Thank you. You really made a difference in my life,” and I remember that “everybody is somebody.” Each time “somebody” speaks up and explains their needs or does something to make their own lives easier, they help other people who have hearing loss.

Be a “somebody.” You will be surprised how easy it is and how much you enjoy the feeling of satisfaction it brings. To learn more about how to be a “somebody” and cope with your hearing loss, come to our Chapter meetings. We look forward to greeting you in 2019!

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