

HLA-NJ News and Views

A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of NJ

By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ

Ask Arlene:

An interview with author and advocate, Arlene Romoff

Arlene Romoff, HLA-NJ president for the past five years, author of two books on hearing loss, and ardent advocate for people with hearing loss, has extensive knowledge on hearing loss and related issues. She gets so many inquiries; she admits she could probably fill an on-going “Ask Arlene” column. I had the privilege to interview her with my own questions.

How did you get started in this “Ask Arlene” role?

I was involved with advocacy in both New York and New Jersey for many years, so I became known for my expertise on hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive listening devices (ALDs). People also got to know me from my first book, *Hear Again: Back to Life with a Cochlear Implant* and through my involvement with the DDHH Advisory Council, HLA-NJ, and the Center for Hearing and Communication. Speaking engagements and book signings for my second book, *Listening Closely: A Journey to Bilateral Hearing*, gave me an even wider audience.

Has it evolved with the Internet and social media as well?

Yes - definitely! With the HLA-NJ website (www.hearingloss-nj.org), my own website (www.arleneromoff.com) and blog - and now through Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, I get communications from all over the world. I'm easy to find (aromoff@aol.com) and get inquiries just about every day.

What are the most frequent questions you get?

Locally, inquiries about hearing aids, about elderly parents who can't hear the phone or doorbell, and questions about cochlear implants, their benefit and how to get them. Also, I refer people to the DDHH when they are the appropriate agency to handle an issue.

Was there one inquiry that stands out as being especially sad or disturbing?

Yes – from a woman who wanted to know how to optimize communication with her dying mother who was deafened from the drugs used to treat her. I discussed

possible solutions with her, and three weeks later, she contacted me that her mother had just passed away, and my help had made all the difference.

What are the hardest problems facing people with hearing loss?

Hearing loss is the most misunderstood of disabilities, is often considered “no big deal” until it is experienced firsthand, and impacts virtually every aspect of daily living. The result is a lack of insurance coverage for hearing aids. Also, people are not aware of the assistive devices that can enable them to remain active socially and in the workplace. And there’s a behavioral trait not to call attention to their hearing loss or communication needs, even if it means not understanding what’s going on.

Do you think it’s hard to get information about hearing loss?

Most people tend to think that hearing aids are all that can be done for hearing loss, even though hearing aids are just the start. Doctors and audiologists don’t usually focus on practical life aspects of functioning with a hearing loss. Also, the general public still doesn’t know much about cochlear implants, which are medical miracles for people with severe to profound hearing loss. I wrote my books to educate about these devices.

How can a person with hearing loss learn the best ways to cope with a hearing loss?

Join the Hearing Loss Assn. of America at www.hearingloss.org to become a member of the NJ affiliate, HLA-NJ. Attend chapter meetings and events, if possible. Ask to be put on the HLA-NJ email contact list at info@hearingloss-nj.org for the latest information. And, of course, if you have any other questions, don’t hesitate to “Ask Arlene”!

Thanks for your help with this, and for all your hard work to keep people informed. We also invite readers to visit our Web site at www.hearingloss-nj.org , or to attend one of our local chapter meetings in Bergen, Monmouth/Ocean or Middlesex County, and our newest Morris County chapter. Dates, places and times for chapter meetings are available from info@hearingloss-nj.org.