

HLAA 2023 Impressions by Andy Chandler

(Opinions are my own, and not those of HLAA Maine, HLAA National, or my employer.)

The last convention I attended might have had the initials SHHH instead of HLAA.

Why so long? It's expensive. And one only has so many vacation days to use.

For the 2023 convention, however, my employer, Tyler Technologies, Inc., sponsored my attendance to present a workshop on *Cybersecurity and Hearing Loss*.

I am grateful to my employer as attending the HLAA Convention reminded me what it's like to go home to "my tribe".

My impressions:

Caption Technology

Dr. Tina Childress, Au.D., presentation on the numerous tools and services that enable captions, was an eye-opener. I thought I was up to date on apps and services that provide captions. Ha! Dr. Childress website has a treasure trove of information. Be sure to check it out: <https://tinachildressaud.com>.

Lisa Hamlin of HLAA discussed the progress of the *Communications, Video, and technology Accessibility Act (CVTA)*. Ready for a mouthful? "CVTA is designed to ensure that people with disabilities have full access to information communications and Technology (ICT) that are necessary toward digital inclusion including in employment, educational, recreational, and civil contexts."

If this Act becomes law, it'll make a significant improvement in our access to captions. HLAA will let us know when it's time to call our Senators and Representatives to champion for this act.

Loops and Auracast Bluetooth

Long-time followers of HLAA know that HLAA has been a champion of telecoil hearing loops. But there is a new technology on the horizon called Auracast Bluetooth Audio. This technology promises to provide telecoil-like access to *any* device that can receive Bluetooth signals, including our hearing aids. (Before one gets too excited, there are technical hurdles Auracast needs to overcome before it becomes widespread.)

I am particularly excited about this technology because, shame on me, I've given up on hearing loops. Why? Because hearing loops are rare and few between. And when I find a "Hearing Loops" sign, it often isn't working.

Since I use Bluetooth all the time to “hear” my smartphone, it’s a simple transition to tuning to a Auracast broadcast. “But, Andy, won’t you have the same ‘broken / not working’ issue with hearing loops?”

No, and here’s why not: Auracast will be available to *anyone* who wears a Bluetooth device, including those who wear AirPods. Our young people have readily taken to captions, and I can see them readily taking to Auracast. That means by sheer numbers alone, this technology will be widespread.

Access to Music

Once I got my CI, I pretty much gave up on music.

Thankfully, I’m the exception. There are many, many people with hearing loss who insist on access to Music. I was heartened by the stories of musicians and music lovers who do not let their hearing loss keep them from their beloved music.

HLAA hosted a two-hour research symposium titled, “Joy of Music / Love Your Ears.” Karen Chan Barret, Ph.D. so loves music she pursued an academic career to research the “neuroscience of creativity, complex sound perception in cochlear implant users, as well as the impact of music on the aging brain.” <https://karenchanbarrett.com>

Wendy Cheng’s story was particularly inspiring. “Two years after starting piano lessons at age 7, Wendy was diagnosed with a significant bilateral hearing loss. She is a passionate amateur musician who wears bilateral cochlear implants and plays viola, piano and handbells.” https://www.hearingloss.org/presenter_bios/wendy-cheng/

Outreach to Spanish Speakers and the African American Community

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the workshop, “Advancing the Narrative of Haring Loss to Support the African American Community.”

Please don’t lambast me for this, but until I saw this workshop title, it never occurred to me how cultural, racial, and economical experiences can create different experiences of hearing loss. I’m sorry I missed this workshop. This is an area in which I really need to educate myself.

I was able to attend the “El Estigma En La Perdida Auditiva (The Stigma of Hearing Loss)” Bilingual Workshop. Again, I was ignorant of the impact of language on hearing loss. If one is a Spanish Speaker, is their experience of hearing loss different than me, an English language speaker?

Roxana Rotundo and Holly Cohen spoke in Spanish and English, while the CART captions were displayed in English. I laughed when Roxana, whose native language is Spanish, mentioned it’s hard for her to slow down when she speaks in English. My wife also speaks Spanish, and I have no idea when one word ends before another begins.

Roxana, Holly and others created a wonderful, award-winning bilingual documentary called “We Hear You / Now Hear Us.” Check out their website at <https://www.we-hearyou.com>

Cybersecurity and Hearing Loss

That was the title of the workshop I presented. Nothing special, but the audience was welcoming and kind to my presentation. I learned two things:

There is fraud - (well, there’s fraud everywhere) – related to video relay services. This is an area I need to spend some time researching. Maybe next year, HLAA willing, I can give a workshop on fraud related to accessible technology.

The second thing I learned is a lesson I’ve taken back to my community of cybersecurity professionals:

My biggest takeaway: Consumers are eager and hungry for cyber education. And they are fearful. Yes, as cyber professionals, we preach “security awareness training”. But what consumers need go beyond our annual reminders. They need education that speaks to where they live, and assurance that the Internet CAN be a safe place to visit with friends and conduct business.

Finally, consumers need the truth: despite doing everything they can to practice “safe cyber”, much of what happens to their privacy and security is dependent on the organizations that hold their sensitive data.

Our Tribe

I heard this mentioned several times during the convention: “We are among our Tribe.”

Among people who understand what it’s like to live with hearing loss in a hearing world.

Which creates a feeling of “Coming home.”

How silly I was to forget this lesson in all the years I skipped attending HLAA conventions.

(That said, attending a HLAA convention is no minor expense. Between convention fee, airfare and hotel, it adds up to a four-digit figure. More if a partner joins you. Not to mention it takes up to 4 days of precious vacation time.)

But if one has the means, attendance is awe-inspiring. For me, that means drinking coffee at home, skipping the next iPhone, and dropping a few streaming subscriptions to attend the 2024 HLAA convention in Phoenix (June 26-29). Hope to see you there!