



AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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HEARING LOSS

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CARM'S COMMENTS - Carmen Schacht

This month's theme is hearing loss. It seems that this is something that everyone has to deal with at some time during their lifetime. Some people are born without hearing. I think this would be hard to have to deal with on an everyday basis. However, as with any disability they learn to compensate. My niece has a very good friend who has been deaf since she was very young. If you didn't know she can't hear, you would never know it. She does wear two hearing aids and she reads lips and does a fantastic job of it. Our son has a loss of hearing in one of his ears due to a burst eardrum when he was about three. We dealt with many surgeries, etc. I have a couple of friends who have lost hearing in one ear and you always have to be sure and talk to them on the side where they hear best or they don't hear what you say. Everett is losing his hearing. He tried a hearing aid once and the road noises bothered him so much that he gave up on

that. I applaud anyone who was born deaf or has lost hearing for some reason. They deal with something every day that most of us take for granted. (CS)

BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER – Brenda Reeves

There's no greater joy for a grandmother than to hear the voice of her grandchild over the telephone. Until last year, however, this was not possible for Ann Sanson.

Growing up on a farm northwest of Shannon City, Ann knew that her chances of losing her hearing were high. Almost everyone on her father's side lost their hearing later in life. Her grandmother couldn't hear at all without hearing aids, and Ann's father and all five of his siblings wore hearing aids as they grew older. Still, it was an emotional time for Ann when she first realized that she was having difficulty hearing.

She was in her mid forties when Ann first noticed that she was missing out on pieces of conversation with others. She also became aware of a ringing in her ears. At the time when Ann's hearing loss became noticeable, she was much younger than any of the members of her family had been when they first experienced problems with their hearing.

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After visiting a hearing specialist in Omaha, she was referred to an audiologist. During her visit with the audiologist Ann was informed that she only had 30% hearing in her right ear and 40% in the left. In addition, she learned that the ringing in her ears had a name - tinnitus. It was at this time when Ann was fitted for her first pair of hearing aids.

Even with the hearing aids, Ann still had difficulty communicating with others. In Ann's words, "I became depressed and withdrawn when I began having problems with my hearing. I used to belong to several social groups and eventually dropped out because I couldn't hear well enough."

As Ann's hearing deteriorated over time, it became increasingly difficult for her to engage in meaningful conversation. "The worst part of all," she said, "was when my own family would call me on the phone to talk and I couldn't understand them."

Sadly, Ann realized that individuals with hearing loss are susceptible to being labeled by those who do not understand their impairment. She recounted a story of a neighbor who mentioned that a woman in the community thought that Ann was "stuck-up." It turns out that she had come up behind Ann on the street and had greeted her and asked her a question. Ann didn't hear her and continued on her way without responding.

Ann was completely deaf in her right ear by 1998. Even with the assistance of a hearing aid, she was unable to understand telephone conversations with her left ear. It was at this point that Ann began to seek out other options.

In 1999 friends of Ann returned from a visit to the University of Iowa Medical Center. With them they brought information about cochlear implants. A cochlear implant is an

electronic device that restores partial hearing to the deaf. It is surgically implanted in the inner ear and activated by a device worn outside of the ear.

After reading over the information, Ann emailed the medical center to ask if they could help her. That same day she received a response and scheduled an appointment.

When Ann arrived at the center she was given a thorough hearing test. She was placed in a soundproof room and was told to repeat words that were spoken over a speaker. She was unable to understand and repeat the majority of them. It was at this moment, Ann says, that her husband Ron, a former Page County Extension Director, truly realized how bad her hearing was.

On June 1, 2000, Ann underwent surgery for a cochlear implant. The implant was placed under the skin behind her right ear. After staying overnight in the hospital, Ann returned home. She says that although she experienced a lot of swelling on the right side of her face, there was very little pain involved with the procedure.

She returned four weeks later for the finalization of the implant - the moment of truth. This is when a device with a small microphone is attached behind the ear with the implant. The microphone attaches to a speech processor, which translates sounds into distinctive electric signals. These "codes" travel up a thin cable to the headpiece and are transmitted across the skin via radio waves to the implanted electrodes in the cochlea.

The four-hour drive to Iowa City was nerve-racking for Ann. She didn't know if the implant would work or not. After all this, would she finally be able to hear again?

When Ann's doctor attached the outer piece and speech processor, Ann's fears instantly

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disappeared. She could hear the voices of those present in the room. She had been warned that voices would initially sound mechanical to her, but this was overshadowed by the fact that she was able to hear all of the sounds that she had missed for the past 15 years.

Although the results of a cochlear implant are astounding, the surgery is not inexpensive. The cost is generally estimated to be between \$30,000-40,000. Most insurance companies provide benefits that will cover at least a portion of this expense.

The main piece of advice that Ann offered to people who are experiencing hearing loss is "swallow your pride." She says that this was a major obstacle for her to overcome. For years she kept her hair long to conceal her hearing aid. She admitted that although it was difficult to accept at first, most people who know her say that they don't even notice her hearing devices. The bottom line, Ann says, is that "if it helps you hear, do it!" (BR)

FAST FACTS – Brenda Reeves

Did you know . . .

- . . . that about 28 million people in the U.S. have some degree of reduced hearing sensitivity? Of this number, 80% have irreversible hearing loss. (<http://www.asha.org>)
- . . . that the noise levels of a jet airplane and pig squeals are approximately the same (135 decibels)?
- . . . that the noise levels of chickens inside a building and a table saw are the same (100 decibels)?
- . . . that listening to continuous sounds of 85 decibels or higher is considered hazardous to your ears? (BR)

TIPS:

The following tips for assisting people who lip-read were obtained from <http://spot.pcc.edu/osd/hearinfo.htm>:

1. Try to speak slowly and clearly. Enunciate each word without force or tension.
2. Use facial expressions and gestures to help convey your message, but don't exaggerate your mouth movements.
3. Try not to turn your face away while you are speaking.
4. Get the person's attention before beginning to speak. This may necessitate physical contact, such as a tap on the shoulder.
5. Try to avoid standing in front of a strong light source (such as windows) - the glare from behind you makes reading lips and other facial features difficult.
6. If the person has difficulty understanding something you've said, try repeating the phrase. If your message is still not understood, try to rephrase your thought rather than repeating the same words. (BR)

RESOURCES:

If you would like more information about cochlear implants, contact the Cochlear Implant Association, Inc. (CIAI). The CIAI is a non-profit organization for cochlear implant recipients, their families, professionals, and other individuals interested in cochlear implants. Cochlear Implant Association, Inc. 5335 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Suite 440 Washington, DC 20015-2052 (202) 895-2781 Internet: www.cici.org

In addition, Assistive Technology Partners has hearing-related information and tips for farmers on its website. The page, which can be located at

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http://www.uchsc.edu/atp/library/fastfacts/farming_hearing.htm, provides information about preventing noise-induced hearing loss and offers work strategies for farmers who are hearing-impaired. (BR)

The following organizations can provide more information about deafness and hearing loss:

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
3417 Volta Plalce, NW
Washington, DC 20007
Voice: (800) 432-7543
TTY: (202) 337-5220
Email: info@agbell.org
Internet: www.agbell.org

American Society for Deaf Children
P.O. Box 3355
Gettysburg, PA 17325
Voice/TTY: (800) 942-2723
Email: asdc1@aol.com
Internet: www.deafchildren.org

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
10801 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852
Voice: (800) 638-8255
TTY: (301) 897-0157
Email: actioncenter@asha.org
Internet: www.asha.org

National Information Center on Deafness
Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue NE
Washington, DC 20002-3695
Voice: (202) 651-5051
TTY: (202) 651-5052
Email: nicd@gallua.gallaudet.edu
Internet: www.gallaudet.edu/~nicd

Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH)
7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200

Bethesda, MD 20814
Voice: (301) 657-2248
TTY: (301) 657-2249
Email: national@shhh.org
Internet: www.shhh.org

The following vendors sell products made for individuals with hearing loss:

HARC Mercantile, Ltd.
P.O. Box 3055
Kalamazoo, MI 49003-3055
Voice/TTY: (800) 445-9968
www.harcmercantile.com

Harris Communications
15155 Technology Drive
Eden Prairie, MN 55344-2277
Voice: (800) 825-6758
TTY: (800) 825-9187
www.harriscomm.com

Ultratec
450 Science Drive
Madison, WI 53711
Voic/TTY: (800) 482-2424
www.ultratec.com

Williams Sound Corporation
10399 West 70th Street
Eden Prairie, MN 55344-3459
Voice/TTY: (800) 328-6190
www.williamssound.com (BR)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Brenda Reeves is the new AgrAbility Program Specialist at Iowa State University. She replaces Lorrie Long, who is now teaching at Graceland College. Brenda recently moved to Iowa from Chicago, where she helped to develop volunteer-based programs for socially isolated elders.

National 4-H Week is October 7-13. 4-H sponsors activities in each of Iowa's 99 counties. Over 135,000 youths and 16,000 adult volunteers participate in Iowa 4-H.

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For more information about 4-H, contact your local county extension office.

On Saturday, October 6, the office of the Secretary of State, in co-sponsorship with the Iowa State Association of County Auditors and the Iowa Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council, will conduct a statewide Voter Registration Day. Opportunities are available for Iowans with disabilities to serve as volunteers at their community registration sites and to assist with the effort to promote voter registration among individuals with disabilities. For more information call Ann Clary in the office of the Secretary of State at (515) 281-8367 or email her at aclary@sos.state.ia.us. (BR)

AGRABILITY FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Freewheelers AgrAbility Friends and Family:
--November 10, 1 p.m., New Hampton Library

Southeast Iowa AgrAbility Friends and Family:
--October 6, 1 p.m., Tipton Pizza Hut

Find the AgrAbility Friends and Family leader nearest you and give him/her a call if you would like to offer your support or share informally with other farm families with disabilities: Call Carmen Schacht, 563-547-2932, or access: www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/friends-and-family.html

IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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TDD: 1-800-854-1658.
Web site: www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/

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