Bring on the bright lights!

by Bill Cutler, SHHH-BAM Coordinator

Many hard of hearing persons have a handicap they sometimes overlook: the inability to hear a fire alarm. Especially when asleep without their hearing aids - or a hearing companion. While most of us are blessed with the latter when at home or, if alone, have provided some form of alert in case of fire. This is not likely to be the case when traveling and sleeping in a hotel or motel.

As noted below, there are smoke/fire alarms available on the market which are equipped with high-intensity strobe light. But the unit is bulky for packing and requires plug-in for power, rather than batteries. So we probably end up with no protection while on the road.

The obvious answer is for the hotel to provide a visual alarm to those who require it. Sounds simple, doesn’t it? But the California deaf community has been trying since 1980 to persuade the State Fire Marshall to add this requirement to the Health and Safety Code without success. SHHH California joined the fray 4 years ago, and, working with the deaf representatives, we negotiated an agreement that 4% of guest rooms would be equipped with visual alarms (based on half of the hearing impaired guests having a mild loss or a hearing bed partner).

To date, the Hotel and Motel Association has successfully blocked its passage. Fortunately, the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requires “reasonable access” (which includes proper fire alert and protection for us as well as those who have vision and mobility impairment) to all public and private facilities by January, 1992. California regulations will have to conform by that time and the Office of the State Fire Marshall advises that they "are studying the proposed regulations," published in late January.

But don’t hold your breath! In the meantime, it is up to us to put the pressure on the hotels and motels we patronize to provide visual alerts. Several hotel chains are in the vanguard in offering this service. Many are loaning at registration a clever "black box" unit called the VAS (Visual Alarm System) which not only flashes a strobe light when it "hears" the hotel audible alarm, but also when the phone rings (you can use wake-up service again!) or someone knocks on the door (and room service!!). Others, upon request, deliver a plug-in smoke alarm with strobe light attached which you simply set on a surface within view of your bed.

The list is growing rapidly and varies with individual properties, so it would be unfair to name specific chains already complying. Rather, we urge you to request a visual fire alarm whenever you sign in for lodging. (Don’t forget to ask for closed caption TV and TDD service at the same time.) This will accomplish several objectives: (1) if you are lucky, accommodation with either a portable alarm or assignment to a room with a permanent visual alarm; (2) make management aware that some guests need such services; (3) opportunity to educate desk clerks about hearing impairment. When I’m not lucky (i.e., no visual alarm is supplied), I follow through with the critical step of requesting personal attention — not just a phone call — in case of emergency (required under present California law).

(Continued on page 6)
Psychosocial factors and hearing loss - Part II

by Dana Mulvany, Deputy State Coordinator - SHHH Northern California

In my last column, I remarked upon the variety of psychosocial factors we hard of hearing people need to manage when trying to improve communication with others. I suggested trying to examine "difficult situations to see where change is needed." In this column, we'll examine a difficult situation and consider possible solutions.

Let's consider some of the conditions which affect people. Most important are:

- the systems in which they participate;
- the quantity and quality of information the person has about certain subjects;
- their own psychological issues;
- the physical environment;
- the state of their own physiology;
- and their interpersonal relationships with other individuals.

One or more of these conditions may hinder a person's ability to respond effectively to another person's needs. Careful evaluation is needed to determine which condition is creating a problem for the person we are dealing with. Correct analysis of the problem can prevent us from blaming ourselves and from withdrawing from others out of a sense of helplessness. It also can help us to tackle problems with other people in a different, more effective way.

Let's consider an example of a problem that could initially be viewed as an interpersonal nature problem. Upon further investigation, however, we see that the problem could be of an entirely different cause and nature.

EXAMPLE:

You, a hard of hearing employee of a large company, request a TDD to help you communicate with others more effectively over the telephone. The department manager resists accommodating this need. He takes the viewpoint that the employee is demanding special treatment without justification.

ANALYSIS:

System. While there is a chance that the employee is somehow being offensive in requesting accommodations, the manager may be unaware of his responsibility to provide those needs. The "system" (i.e. the upper level management) may not have provided the manager proper training on his legal responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations. There are other "systems" as well, which do not provide adequate education on reasonable accommodation. For example, graduate schools often do not educate their students about the ramifications of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Information. The manager probably lacks enough information about reasonable accommodation. This may be his first experience with the situation and something he has not heard about before.

Psychological issues. The manager may have personal psychological issues clouding his relationship with the employee. For example, he may be under a great deal of stress on his job and resent going out of his way to relieve the stress of a new employee. He may also resent self-assertive behavior on the part of a new employee because his own father insisted on blind obedience. His father may have believed in punishing assertive behavior and displays of emotion. This, then, provokes intolerance of other people's assertiveness and emotion.

Environment. If the manager is in a physically unhealthy environment, this can affect his physiology harmfully, making him less likely to tolerate frustration.

Physiological state. The physiological state of the manager would depend on how rested he feels. This would include how physically stressed he is, whether he is well-nourished, what his health status is, and the quality of his mental processes. It also would include his psychiatric status, and the effect of any drugs he uses, including medication and illicit substances.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES:

System. Suggest arbitration at the system level so all managers become trained in how to work with disabled employees. This will require strong support and caution, since systems resist change and try to expel these agents of change. The advantage of this approach is the far-reaching ramifications if it succeeds.

Information. Expose the manager to information about reasonable accommodation. This might change his attitude. Again, this requires care to avoid causing loss of face for the manager.

Psychological issues. Try to compensate for some of the manager's psychological issues by building a rapport with the manager. Address other psychological needs, such as the need for affirmation, understanding, and playfulness. This may not always be possible. But if achieved, the manager may feel more motivated to help meet the employee's needs.

Environment. Try commenting on how the unhealthy physical environment takes a toll on people. This might help other people like the manager recognize their own physiological responses and be less controlled by them. The manager might also improve the physical environment.

(Continued on page 8)
Elderhostel rewarding experience

by Gladys Dickboltz

I was a first class citizen in a hearing world, for one week at least!

Last summer, I attended an Elderhostel at Feather River College in Northern California. From the moment I arrived and was loaned a FM receiver, I was very happy being there, even with a severe to profound hearing loss.

The instructors handed the FM transmitter to each person as they introduced themselves the first evening, and I was so happy to hear everyone speaking -- even from far corners of the room. By using the FM receiver, I could enjoy, for the first time in many years, lectures, class jokes, and tour directors and museum guides as we traveled the Gold Rush country. It was a marvelous experience!

I wrote to thank the college and Elderhostel after I returned from my trip, and asked that they make more hearing impaired classrooms available in the many colleges around the United States. But they responded they have very few requests for the equipment.

If you are 55 or over and would like to attend an Elderhostel, send for their most recent catalog by writing to: Elderhostel, 75 Federal Street, Boston, MA 02110. Presently, they have classrooms for hearing impaired people at only seven colleges, in Arizona, California, Georgia, Maryland, New Mexico and Tennessee.

For those interested in attending the Elderhostel programs, this is your chance to ask for assistive listening systems in the school you want to attend. Speak up and ask. Numbers count. The more who ask, the greater the chance of having more classrooms equipped with assistive listening systems.

And if you do have a satisfactory experience at a campus that provided an assistive listening system, be sure to write to Elderhostel and the college to thank them!

EMBARRASSMENT AND HEARING LOSS - an editorial

Not too long ago, I had a chat with my co-workers at the office and explained some of the details of my hearing loss. One thing I explained was how I came to have a hearing loss and how it affected me and my work.

One of my co-workers later thanked me for explaining the details of how I lost my hearing. She said she had often wondered about it, but was too embarrassed to ask.

This brought to mind similar responses and statements made by others, both by those interested in my hearing loss as well as by some people who also had a hearing loss. Hearing loss was an "embarrassment" and they were reluctant to talk about it. They felt "uncomfortable" discussing such a very personal and sensitive subject.

That is unfortunate. With noise increasingly becoming the major source of hearing loss for people of all ages, it is particularly important that hearing loss be talked about. Only by creating an awareness of hearing loss and the things that cause it can we help prevent or reduce the decline of our population's hearing capabilities. We cannot afford to be, nor should we be, embarrassed about having a hearing loss. It is an ill-fated disability that we must all learn to adjust to and go on with our lives. Trying to hide it or denying it doesn't help, even for those who are lucky to get away with it now and then. Somewhere down the line, they will stumble, and then that will indeed be an embarrassment!

"We each have a responsibility to make our needs known and practice what we preach."

We each have a responsibility to make our needs known and practice what we preach. Only then will we help bring an end to this "embarrassment" and make hearing loss an issue of national concern.

Don Senger, State Coordinator
Remembrance of things past

by Leo Maggio, Deputy State Coordinator - SHHH Southern California

As editor of the SHHH Valley Hear-say, I encourage members to send in their autobiographical sketches for inclusion in our newsletter. These sketches enable chapter members to learn about one another. They are a brief summary of the writer's life as he or she perceives it. Usually, but not always, they focus on how hearing loss affected that person's life and how it was dealt with.

In one way, the stories provide another way for chapter members to learn more about each other in or outside of our meetings. At the same time, the sketches furnish the writer with an opportunity to select and reflect on relevant items and perhaps learn something more about himself/herself that he or she may not have been aware of before.

Over the years many autobiographical stories have crossed my desk. The same can be said of letters and telephone conversations from hard of hearing people and their relatives and friends. Now and then they contain variations on the following statement: "Sometimes I wonder how my life might have been if I had normal hearing."

Perhaps many of us, at some time or another, have pondered that provocative thought or one similar to it. Before going any further I believe it is important to clarify how I interpret the feelings, the emotional tone behind the statement. It never seemed to be a lament or a form of self-pity. Rather, one might describe it as conscious daydreaming or fantasizing.

Years ago, I remember wondering what my life might have been like if I had remained in my home town of Boston instead of moving to Los Angeles. Quite different, I'm sure. Better? Worse? In my opinion, answers to most questions of this nature are speculative, unverifiable and probably of little pragmatic value. Unless . . . .

". . . . the sketches furnish the writer with an opportunity to select relevant items, reflect on them and perhaps learn something about himself/herself that he or she may not have been aware of."

In the following story, Puay-Ng, a chapter member, reports on the State Convention in Long Beach. All of us have heard about the variety of valuable information packed into a SHHH convention. This story illustrates how job performance, communications access, and National's strategic plans all come together in our convention workshops and seminars.

"My main reason for attending the convention was to get an update on the state and federal legislation affecting hard of hearing people. As it turned out, I got a lot more.

In the course of my employment, I have had problems getting the Federal Court to accommodate me in an upcoming trial in which I will be assisting an attorney. The state law that went into effect January, 1991, requiring at least one State Court in each county to equip the courtroom with ALS or CAT does not carry over to Federal level. That is why I found the workshops on the State and Federal legislation very informative. I was impressed with the state workshop presenter, John Darby, of the Bay Area Hearing Society. Everyone in the workshop wanted to share their ideas on what other state legislation we would like to see enacted in the future. The establishment of a State Commission for the Hard of Hearing, the issue of whether we should have the words "hearing impaired" included on our driver's license, and the degree of hearing aid compatibility of ALS in public places, all were passionately discussed.

At the Federal legislation workshop, I had my first opportunity to hear Rocky Stone speak. Even though I had trouble hearing him (due to hearing fatigue in the late afternoon), his commanding, authoritative and riveting presence was felt by me, and I believe everyone else in the room. Rocky talked about the ADA and asked that we write down everything we want to see implemented by this new Federal law. I definitely will ask that the Federal Court in each district be equipped with ALS/CAT. Although it will be too late for me to benefit in my court work this September, it may benefit others seeking similar accommodation in the future.

This did not start out to be, nor is it intended to be an autobiographical sketch. However, this episode in my life illustrates the self reflection that takes place in writing one and the value it may have on the writer (and the reader?)."

A message to our readers

We have received several letters from our subscribers, concerning late or non-delivery of the SHHH Californian. As previously noted, the SHHH Californian is mailed at a non-profit bulk mail rate. This particular class of mail has low priority at the post office and each postal location has its own rules for delivery. In some cases, delivery of the newsletter is accomplished within a week from the date of mailing. For others, it can take up to 4 weeks.

The SHHH Californian is mailed to subscribers during the months of March, June, September, and December. If you do not receive your copy, please let us know.
Telephone Pioneers offer low-cost TDD device

Do you have a TDD (telephone device for the disabled)? If you don’t you are missing out on a handy gadget for communicating with others over the telephone. That’s because most hard of hearing people with severe or profound deafness have great difficulty understanding speech. Especially over the telephone. With a TDD, you communicate by typing messages to others who also have a TDD and read your message on their electronic display. They in turn type their message to you and you read it on your TDD display.

Many of those we communicate with, however, do not have a TDD. Enter the California Relay Service (CRS). By calling the CRS, you bring in a CRS station operator who reads your TDD message and voices it to the person you are calling. When the other person responds by voice, the operator types the message so you can read it on your TDD. This can take time, however, typing back and forth. Some people whom you may need to call do not enjoy the lengthy process of communicating this way. And some hard of hearing people don’t know how to type well. So they don’t use a TDD.

Recently, the CRS began offering a new service -- “voice carryover.” This system allows you to call the CRS and have them place your call for you with one BIG change: you talk directly to the person you are calling! You don’t have to type a word, other than the first few words to tell the CRS the number to call and who you are calling. Once connected, you talk directly to the person, and when that person responds, the CRS types the message back so you can read it on your TDD. It’s fantastic, and a real time-saver.

But it has one draw-back. If you are using a TDD furnished free from a local telephone company, you soon discover that you must lift the phone from the TDD to listen, then put it back on the TDD to read the TDD message. Back and forth. It can be a real nuisance. And if you have a direct connect TDD, if you pick up your telephone handset separately, you may find that the person at the other end can’t hear you. This is because you are in sense using 2 telephones on one line at a time. (Sometimes there isn’t enough power in the line to amplify the voice well enough when 2 phones are in use.)

Lou Marracci, member of the Telephone Pioneers and 1991 winner of the SHHH California Outstanding Service Award, and Don Senger, SHHH California State Coordinator, researched this problem to find a better way. The result? A simple, inexpensive gadget that at a flip of the switch allows you to speak into your phone or read the TDD display -- without the inconvenience of removing the telephone handset from the TDD.

The George S. Ladd Chapter of the Telephone Pioneers is offering these devices to hard of hearing people wishing to use the CRS “voice carry over” feature more effectively. The Pioneers are contributing 20 of these devices FREE on a first come, first served basis. After the first 20 are gone, there is a charge of $10.00 for each device to cover the cost of parts and shipping.

There are 2 devices available. The “VOCO A” is used with acoustically coupled TDDs. Normally, the telephone handset is placed in the rubber cups of the TDD. When it’s your turn to talk, you have to pick up the handset from the TDD and return it when receiving messages. The VOCO A comes with its own handset which is permanently placed in the rubber cups of the TDD. You use the telephone handset to talk on. When it’s your turn to talk, you operate a switch which disconnects the TDD. You operate the switch again when it’s your turn to read the message returned on the TDD. The VOCO A eliminates the need to continually pick up the receiver from the TDD.

The “VOCO D” is used with direct connect TDDs. Some direct connect TDDs experience transmission type problems and the hearing person cannot hear you well. This unit uses a “T” jack to connect the TDD to the phone line. You operate the switch when it’s your turn to talk. This removes the TDD from the line. When it’s your turn to receive, you operate the switch again and the TDD is reconnected to the line.

To order, write to: Telephone Pioneers - G.S. Ladd Chapter, Attn: Lou Marracci, 180 New Montgomery Street, Room 810, San Francisco, CA 94105.

For more information, call Lou Marracci at (415) 935-4626, voice or TDD.

GEORGE S. LADD CHAPTER
180 New Montgomery Street
Room 810
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415)542-7053
DMV license stickers.

You may have seen or heard about the stickers that a hearing impaired person can get from a local Department of Motor Vehicles office. The sticker, about 2 inches by 6 inches, is placed in the lower corner of the windshield. If a police officer requests the driver to pull over, the sticker helps inform the officer that the driver is hearing impaired.

Some people like this idea and have obtained the stickers for their cars. Others don't like the idea. They feel this method is an invitation for muggers and others to take advantage of a handicapped person, so they don't wish to advertise their disability.

Don Senger, State Coordinator for SHHH California, has discussed this issue with SHHH California chapter leaders, the Hearing Society in San Francisco, the DMV, and Senator Milton Mark's office. The consensus was that we should change the driver's license to allow a sticker to be placed in the top corner saying "DEAF," "Hard of Hearing," or "Hearing Impaired." Not as a requirement, but as an option that those who suffered from hearing loss could choose if they wished. The DMV said they had received some requests to that effect, but it would require legislation. John Darby, Executive Director of the Hearing Society, thought it would be a good idea and also could be used by those who obtain identification cards from the DMV. But there were others who did not like the idea of displaying anything. They preferred to be vocal and simply say they are hard of hearing.

At the SHHH California State Convention in Long Beach, this topic was discussed at the President's Workshop. Again there was division.

After further research and discussion, the Oakland Police Department was approached to inquire whether local police department stations could place these stickers on a person's driver's license. The Oakland Police Department advised that the back side of the driver's license was available for writing in changes of address and other important information about the driver. There was no reason a person could not place this sticker on back of the driver's license himself or herself.

So, if you would like to place a sticker on your driver's license that states you are hard of hearing, you may do so. The stickers available from the DMV are too large to place on the diver's license. SHHH does not, at this time, have such small sticker available either. Some hospitals carry them for placing on member's cards (Kaiser) or medical records. You might inquire at a local hospital if they have any they could give you. If any SHHH California chapters have a supply, we will share the information in the next SHHH Californian newsletter.

Bright Lights - Continued

But, being conservative, I always carry my Silent Page which "listens" (at home or abroad) for an extraordinary sound (fire alarm, telephone, door bell or knock, alarm clock, etc.) and vibrates on my wrist. To illustrate range of cost, this unit sells for $350, but I've ordered for testing an apparently similar product advertised for just $35.

For most people, however, their home alarm system is not so portable -- but far more important, in terms of frequency of need. There are many smoke alarms available, either stand-alone or integrated into a bigger system. Some use an extra loud horn, others a strobe light (or vibrator or fan alternative). Be aware that the optimum high-intensity strobes will not operate on battery power. For shopping, check with your audiologist/dispenser, or get their new very complete catalog from HARC Mercantile, Ltd. (p.O. Box 3055, Kalamazoo, MI 49003; phone (800) 962-6634 voice or (800) 445-9968 TDD.

The bottom line on this is to acknowledge your limitation and do something about them. In the process, be an advocate for access of all hearing impaired people to all activities taken for granted by the hearing community.

Handi-hints

Make your own visual alarm clock

Although there are a number of visual, "flashing" alarm clocks on the market, most sell from $29 to $75. Some people may feel this is too much to pay for a simple flashing alarm clock. But they need one and have little choice. Here's a way out -- make your own!

An inexpensive alarm clock can be made very easily from the following materials: a lamp of your choice, an automatic timer of the type used to turn on and off the lights while you are away from home (they sell from $1.95 to $8.95, depending on how fancy you want to be), and a flasher plug which you can buy at most hardware stores for about $2. Or, instead of a flasher plug, you can use a flasher button which you drop into the socket of the lamp before screwing in the lampbulb.

To use the flashing alarm, set the automatic timer for the time you want the alarm to go off. Then set the timer for the correct time of the day, as per the instructions that come with the timer. Plug the timer into an electrical wall outlet, the flasher plug (if used) into the timer, and the lamp into the flasher plug. If you use the flasher button in the lightbulb socket, just plug the lamp into the timer. Be sure the lamp switch has been turned on so that even though the lamp is not on at this point, it will go on at the set time.

When the automatic timer reaches the set time for the alarm to go off, the lamp will begin to flash. To stop the flashing, simply turn the lamp switch off (you may be surprised to see how fast you do that!). To reactivate the alarm, turn the lamp switch back to "on" before retiring for the evening.
Letters to the editor

Dear Editor:

The DMV has auto stickers available for hard of hearing people. I do not understand the rationale of its advisability. Should an accident occur because we did not hear the horns or emergency sirens, would we then have an acceptable explanation for the accident? Or would we assume liability by displaying our disability?

Martha Ogata, Sonoma

The auto stickers provided by the DMV are merely to assist you in identifying yourself as hearing impaired to a police officer who may stop or approach you in your car. It puts no liability on you, nor does it absolve you of any liability. It's simply a means of alerting a police officer that you don't hear well and that he or she must take that into consideration when communicating with you. See our article elsewhere in the issue about the DMV stickers.

Gentlemen:

We would like to have information in the next issue showing research on the preferred methods of battery disposal, since it has been ecologically inappropriate to throw dead batteries in regular garbage dumps.

Sylvia Blumberg, Los Angeles

We are not aware of any research going on regarding the disposal of hearing aid batteries. Some hearing health professionals will accept dead batteries for disposal. But there is little dollar value in extracting the heavy metals from these batteries. If you can't find a local dispenser willing to take them, consider saving them for periodic pickup by your neighborhood garbage collections when they have special pickups for toxic waste items. Or take them to a toxic waste center yourself, if you know where one is. But you are correct, they should not be thrown in your garbage can for disposal. If anyone out there knows of a better solution for disposal, we'd like to hear from you. . . . We also call your attention to the May/June 1991 Shhh Journal, page 31, which has an article on hearing aid battery disposal.

Dear Editor:

Recently, I had a beautiful experience about SHHH. . . . Being hard of hearing but not a member of your organization, I found out about SHHH in a newsletter from an Independent Living Center. It mentioned your State Convention in Long Beach, so my husband and I decided to attend.

From that convention I came away walking on a cloud of happiness. It has been a positive experience for me. I met great persons at that convention. Also, it was a surprise to see them all wearing hearing aids. We were treated with courtesy. For the first time in my life, I was accepted as a person with my physical limitations. My husband received an awareness when he met other couples with communications problems like us. It is perhaps a well-known fact that many persons don't like to repeat themselves to a hard of hearing person. Often my husband had felt tired of repeating words to me. Thanks to this convention my husband has found new ways to make his conversation more understandable for me.

I would like to be a member of SHHH....

Estela Escamilla, Oxnard

It's wonderful letters like yours that help us know we are doing the right things and doing well at it. We are all pleased with the happiness you found with SHHH and wish you many more years of such happiness.

Dear Editor:

The SHHH Californian is great! Enclosed is my check for subscription.

Somewhere, it is difficult to get a chapter started in the Manteca/Stockton/Modesto area. Hopefully, with assistance from Dana Mulvany, it will come to pass.

Florence Krize, Manteca

We had a group meeting in Stockton a few years ago, but over a period of time it fell through the cracks. Later, the Fresno Chapter offered to help set up a group in Manteca if there were enough people interested. Again, it fell through the cracks. The cracks in that area must be very huge!

Hopefully, as the word and works of SHHH continues to spread, the cracks in that area will be filled and a group started. Dana Mulvany is one of our best workers in advocacy and getting groups started and operating. If there's a way, she'll find it.

Hey Kids!

We'd like to put in a special column here for the youngsters. To do this, we need some input from the younger generation and their parents.

From the kids, we'd like to hear about what problems they face in their daily lives. What kind of situations do you come across where you'd like more help or advice, or can offer suggestions. Some things require only a little common sense, like take your hearing aid off when taking the White Water Rapids rides at the amusement park. Put it in a water tight container or have someone not on the ride keep it for you until you are off the ride. Wearing the aid, or putting it in your pocket will get it all wet and damage the internal parts.

Other things may be common-place for us "oldsters" but less widely known to the younger folks because of our years of experience with hearing loss. On the other hand, younger people tend to want to try new things and know more about many new gadgets that the older folks know little about.

We'd like to learn and share with each other. So write and tell us of your problems, ideas, needs, or experiences you'd like to share.
Psychosocial factors - continued

Physiological state. Consider the physiological state of the manager before deciding to approach him. It is better to wait if he appears stressed and tired. If the manager takes the initiative to meet with the employee and is in an unfavorable physiological state, the employee could remark what a bad day it has been (for the manager) and offer to meet at another time.

This is a very condensed and incomplete sketch of how to assess and develop strategies for dealing with interpersonal problems. We haven't discussed interpersonal relations partly because there is considerable literature available on how to improve relationship and communication skills.

Many people blame themselves or the other person if there is an interpersonal conflict. As I've pointed out, it can be much more helpful to recognize the effect of other important factors to find better ways of resolving problems. This also can help prevent making unfavorable judgements about people. Hearing loss unfortunately creates a distance in our relationships with other people. It also can challenge us to develop new skills and perspectives to compensate for this disability. As a result, it is possible that our hearing loss could help us to learn new ways of dealing with people. And that could lead to more satisfying relationships. Ironic, isn't it?