

# *My Story* .... By Katie Robertson

My name is Katie Robertson and I live in Bardstown, Kentucky. I recently retired last year due to reasons other than hearing problems, so I'm happy that I could work as long as I could. My husband, Dave, gives me all the support a person could ask for and then some. He's asked me to share a little about my struggles with being hard of hearing.

In order to share my story, I must tell you about my family. Out of my growing up family, the ones I am sharing about are my brother and six sisters, my dad, and my paternal grandfather. I only go back that far because I don't know specifics about hearing loss for anyone further back. At the time that I could have gotten that information, it didn't seem pertinent to my life. But things change, as we all know.

My Grandfather Wehling had hearing problems and I remember him wearing hearing aids when they were useful but far from what they are today. He got the whistling in the ears that all could hear and he would give funny looks, disgusted looks and sometimes unaware looks from those irritating high-pitched whistles. All in all, though, he must have felt they were worth it because he wore them just the same.

Now my dad, however, resisted hearing aids for the longest time, and he was not only a certified family doctor, but an anesthesiologist as well, so should have been more attune to helping his life circumstances. But, he would tell us, "If you would just slow down!" ...or "Quit mumbling and I could hear you!" This frustrated and angered him some, not to mention our own frustration at having to repeat things over a lot.

Well, I don't know why I hadn't thought about it affecting any of us "children", but boy, did it ever. We are living proof that hearing disability is not only caused by decibels in the surrounding environment, but heredity. Out of the eight of us, four of us have hearing aids - two of us with very profound, increasing hearing loss. Of the four that don't wear aids, I suspect that at least one of them should and just doesn't for her own reason. Only time will tell if it ends up affecting us all.

Age-wise, the youngest of our family is 53 and the oldest 74. I'm 66 and have been wearing hearing aids since 1999 (16 years) at which time, my hearing was bad enough that I KNEW I needed to have some help in hearing if I was going to continue work.

When I was diagnosed with hearing loss (I was around 48 I think), my family doctor put it this way, "Don't invest in any real good sound equipment for records or tapes, you wouldn't be able to appreciate it." Funny way of putting it, but I guess it described the severity well enough. Besides having hearing loss in my ancestry, I also remember a time in kindergarten of falling off of a teeter-totter and getting a bloody nose requiring my mom come to get me. Whether that had any bearing on it, I'm not sure but it has been suggested that it might have. Then, nothing stands out in my mind until I went to a

neat Christian concert with my kids and I “manned” a table selling t-shirts afterwards. The concert was awesome, but loud. I didn’t realize how loud until I was at that table and couldn’t hear a word, and then still couldn’t hear until the next morning. Now, that very easily could have contributed to the hearing problems I already had.

So here I am in 2015, trying to keep my quality of life standards up, and as I struggle to hear, I realize my dad was right – funny but true. People talk too quickly and some of them don’t enunciate well enough. In fact, I think I may even do that myself sometimes. But, now when I realize that someone else is having a hearing problem, I purposefully slow down, and rather than talk loudly, I enunciate the words I say. But still, I find myself saying my dad’s words to my own family, to my kids, who will undoubtedly say them to their children, “Slow down...enunciate your words!”

And thinking about my own kids, their cousins and then **their own** kids, I have no disillusion that the up and coming generations will have even more hearing problems with all the loud music, the ear buds and the cell phones that our ears are being subjected to, unless this generation discovers some awesome way to replace those hairs, or how to make an instrument that will give us not only better hearing of noise, but diction and interpretation.

In closing, my story isn’t a remarkable one, or special, or even unique. My story is like so many others that have this same problem, some really trying to make it better and some just submitting to the disability and withdrawing. My greatest gift is to help those striving to find all that’s available and/or to encourage those who might have given up, to try – pointing them in the direction of finding the help that is out there just for the asking; and then, to give support and friendship to those with similar circumstances and frustrations. I have learned a lot from HLAA at the Kentucky Home chapter in Bardstown. If you are ever inclined to help yourself or someone you know, to improve their lives concerning hearing, and want to know more, come to a meeting on the last Monday evening of each month, held at the Nelson County Library in Bardstown at 6:30 pm – all is welcome! OR, visit the website which is [www.hearinglosskyhome.org](http://www.hearinglosskyhome.org).