



My Story...

By Gerry Gordon-Brown

I was born hard of hearing 74 years ago in Pulaski, TN, a small city located 71 miles south of Nashville. As far as my parents could tell, my hearing loss is due to their RH blood factors (one parent is positive and other is negative), hereditary factors from my grandparents on my father's side and birth factors of an unknown cause.

The city's economy at that time in the 1940's was based on farming and other small businesses. Our city was also well known for its show horses, the Tennessee Walking Horses. I was taught at an early age about all aspects of farming because we raised or grew everything for our dinner table. My mother was a seamstress and she made majority of our clothes. My parents did not attend college, but they worked hard and instilled in us the value of an education. Throughout my growing up years, my parents always encouraged me to accept my disability and to speak up on my behalf. I was the product of a very protective environment both at home and in college. My college advisors were very supportive and any time I had problems I could feel comfortable discussing my problems/concerns with them. This is not to say that I did not have any problems, hearing loss is an **unseen disability** and to some degree that is a disadvantage. We must at all times be willing to become self-advocates and speak up.

In later years, my mother became seriously ill with tuberculosis and that is how our family relocated to Louisville so she could receive major medical treatments for her lung disease. I successfully completed elementary school, junior high in my day (known as middle school now) and high school in Louisville, KY and four years of college, all without hearing aids. At that time I had a great deal of residual hearing and there was no hearing aid on the market available for my hearing loss. I am the oldest of four children and the only one with a disability. After graduation from

Central High School in Louisville in 1959, I became a client of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation as it was known at that time and I became a student at Kentucky State College which is now a university. I received a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. After the birth of my daughter Carla I started wearing an aide in my left ear and then later on due to a decrease in my overall hearing levels I began to wear aides in both ears. On November 19, 2014 I received two new digital hearing aids and a conference mike for use with my many group meetings related to my job.

In 1994 I received my Master's degree and accepted the job as consumer advocate for the Kentucky Client Assistance Program where I became that director in the year 2000. Since graduating from college I have worked in the human service field in three states- Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky. On June 1, 2014 I successfully completed the requirements for the Peer Mentoring Professional Studies Certification Program at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. This program allows me to be a peer mentor and advocate for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind seeking services and adaptive devices to have a better quality of life. I have worked with a consumer in Richmond who had a successful operation for a cochlear implant and two senior citizens in Louisville who are adjusting to wearing hearing aids.

On a personal note, I have a wonderful daughter, Carla Elizabeth who is married with three sons whom I call "my three wise men": Jerrin, Jalen, and Javon. Jerrin is married and I have a wonderful granddaughter, Lindsey and they are expecting their first child. I am looking forward to being a great grandmother in June, 2015. Jalen is a college freshman at Kentucky Wesleyan College in Owensboro, KY and Javon is a high school senior at Butler Traditional High School in Louisville, KY.