

## *My Story...* by Carlene Ballard



Carlene Ballard is a board member and founding member of Kentucky Home Chapter. She is also an active member of Kentuckiana Chapter, on the Kentucky Conference Committee. She is married and has two daughters and seven grandchildren. Carlene and her husband have horses and are involved with grandchildren showing reining this year. She hopes to do more traveling, and she enjoys exercising and seeing her grandkids.

I did not have a hearing problem while I was growing up. However, no one could ever understand me when I entered the first grade. So I decided to enter speech classes and had many hearing tests carried out throughout my grade school years. One of my speech therapists was a lady called Ann Brussell, who is now a member of our Kentucky Home Chapter!

As a young mother and wife, I was working as a sales correspondent at a local factory when I noticed I was having a problem hearing on the telephone. I seemed to be getting sounds mixed up, and after a while I decided to consult an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) doctor about it. At that time the doctor said my hearing was not bad enough to be prescribed hearing aids. As I continued over the next five years to have greater problems hearing conversations, I decided to go back to the ENT doctor. This time the doctor told me hearing aids would definitely be of benefit to me.

It is interesting to note that nobody else in my family has a hearing loss other than my Dad, who although much older has far better hearing than I do.

It did not take me long to decide to go and see about getting myself some hearing aids. I still remember having to push myself forward and taking a deep breath before stepping into that office to get tested for hearing aids. I was only in my thirties and I felt I was not old enough to need to be wearing hearing devices, which I felt were only for “old” people.

When I eventually received my hearing aids, I did as I was told and kept them in constantly. I admit it was not always easy, but I really did like being able to hear better now. I chose the Completely In Canal hearing aids (CIC) and loved them from the start for now I was able to hear on the phone in the same way “normal hearing” people could.

As the years passed by, my hearing loss progressed. I now have been wearing hearing aids for 24 years and have severe hearing loss. I have a flat across hearing loss on my audiogram and I now feel

completely deaf without my hearing aids. Two years ago I purchased my first Receiver In Canal (RIC) hearing aids and was able to get 4% better understanding with them.

As part of my hearing loss journey, I started going to HLAA (Hearing Loss Association of America) Kentuckiana Chapter in Louisville about 12 years ago. I immediately enjoyed learning about hearing loss products and what others were doing to help with their own personal hearing loss. I also met and made many new friends who were experiencing issues similar to mine. The people I have met through the Hearing Loss Association of America are people who really know what it is like to live and deal with hearing loss issues daily. I attended most of the monthly meetings and am still today a member of that same chapter as well as the Kentucky Home chapter in Bardstown.

This now leads me to explain how the Kentucky Home chapter started. Five years ago four members (including myself) from Kentuckiana Chapter, who for years had been driving regularly from Bardstown and Springfield to Kentuckiana Chapter meetings in Louisville, decided to form a more local chapter, called Kentucky Home Chapter, here in Bardstown, for the purpose of helping others in our local communities with their hearing loss difficulties. Today, this chapter is very active, constantly reaching out to help those who are dealing with hearing loss. We are all still active on the steering board although others have stepped up to leadership roles. I still learn something at every meeting, and with one out of five people in America with hearing loss, we still have many people to reach out to!

I have been married to my high school sweetheart for 39 years and I know my hearing loss has often been very hard on him too. It has certainly been hard for us both to communicate at times. However, I feel we have adapted pretty well. My two daughters grew up knowing I would not be able to hear them if they went into another room and now my grandkids know they must look at me so I can hear them. I have even learned some sign language and have tried to teach them some. The grandkids think its sorta fun to do!! Yes, sometimes my family still seem to forget that I cannot hear well. Hearing aids do help me but I definitely still have to deal with some hearing and understanding issues.

My mantra is "Everybody has something going on. Hearing Loss is mine." I have grown to accept it and to move on. I may have lost a lot of my hearing but I have certainly gained many special friends who I may not ever have known otherwise.

I would like to encourage you, if you have a hearing loss, to take that first step and come to one of our regular chapter meetings which is held at 6.30pm on the last Monday of every month at Nelson County Public Library, Bardstown. You will always be made most welcome and will receive the support you need to help yourself or to help others with hearing loss. People at these meetings are just like you, some with more hearing loss than others, but with a common interest to help each other and create a greater awareness about hearing loss and all that it entails.