

Attending the Fabulous 2011 HLAA Convention

By Carol Granaldi

This year's HLAA Convention which was held at the Hyatt in Crystal City, Arlington VA was the best SHHH/HLAA convention I have ever attended. Some years ago, the Self Help for Hard of Hearing (now HLAA) held one of its earliest conventions in Washington, DC which I attended. To make comparisons between that one and the 2011 convention is like comparing apples and oranges. I have since attended a number of SHHH/HLAA conventions over the years, and I'm amazed at the accessibility for hearing loss that is available today which didn't exist 20 years ago. All the 2011 workshops and presentations were captioned, with assistive listening devices and sign language interpreters available, so all of us with any form of hearing loss could understand what was said and enjoy the information. Most of us attended the show, *Wicked* at the Kennedy Center which was looped, with captioning and sign language interpreters, so everybody could fully understand the script. There were 10 busloads of HLAA members, and before the show, we all enjoyed eating at the center's dining room, where the food was excellent and upscale.

In particular, at the banquet, I was deeply moved by the presentation of Chris Artinian, who owns Morton's Restaurants, and grew up as a normally hearing member of a mostly Deaf family. Chris' own son was born deaf, and his struggle to decide on an implant for him was documented in the film "Sound and Fury." Portions of the film were shown about the conflict between his Deaf family and Chris' own desire for his deaf son to be a part of the hearing world. It was an emotionally charged event, but Chris made the decision to have his infant son implanted, first one ear, then 10 years later, the second ear. Chris tells us that it was the best decision he ever made. I have suggested to HLAA that the videotape of this presentation be made available to all HLAA chapters to show to their members, and give a perspective into Deaf culture and their pride. Such a videotape would erase preconceived notions and bias against culturally Deaf persons.

In addition to the many informative workshops, the exhibit hall was filled with vendors of tools and services available for assistive technology, education, telecommunications and demonstrations. I can say that I had incentive to visit all the booths, use some of the equipment, pick up some "freebies," confer with the cochlear implant manufacturers about my concerns and just plain have fun talking and catching up with some members I haven't seen in many years. It felt like being on another planet --most of us have some form of hearing loss, use hearing aids, use cochlear implants, communication strategies, and we are all in the same boat. The contrast between the first Washington DC and the 2011 DC conventions would make the late Rocky Stone, founder of SHHH/HLAA very, very proud of the impact his organization has made on hearing loss during the past three decades. The 2012 HLAA convention will be held in Providence, RI, and hopefully I will repeat this enjoyable, informative, and satisfying experience.