

HLA-NJ News and Views

A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of NJ

By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ

HLA-NJ Awards \$1,000 College Scholarships To Three Outstanding Students With Hearing Loss

HLA-NJ's college scholarship winners have fascinating stories to tell, about coping with serious hearing loss, succeeding in high school and winning admission to top colleges. The three are Christina Rizzetta of Egg Harbor, David Manis of Long Valley and Amy Schwartz of East Windsor. Their courage, and the support they received from family members and their school system inspired me. I think you may feel the same.

- Christina Rizzetta, 18
Egg Harbor Twp., NJ

Christina Rizzetta overcame many challenges on her way to graduating at the top of her class from high school and earning a place in the freshman class at York College in York, Pa. Not being able to hear teachers and classmates was just the beginning. "The hardest of all was being stigmatized as 'the deaf kid'," she says.

Determined not to let the naysayers grind her down, she graduated with a grade point average above 92 percent, near the top of a large and competitive class of 633 students. She was elected to the National Honor Society despite a course load studded with Advanced Placement and College Preparatory courses. Perhaps because she had cochlear implant surgery at 15 months, she focused on courses such as anatomy and physiology. At York College in York, Pa., she plans to study nursing, with a specialty in nurse anesthesia. "I let my hearing loss be a teaching lesson in my life," she says. "It is a part of who I am, but not to be mistaken for just who I am."

- David Manis, 19
Long Valley, NJ

David Manis paints a vivid picture of his life until the age of 8. "Imagine a dark room with no sound. Now place everyone you know in this room. They are communicating: speaking, laughing and interacting with each other. You, of course, want to join in, but you can't." It was quite a journey from that silent room to Tufts University, where he plans to study public policy focusing on diversity. There were hearing aids he says were ineffective, then sign language that opened a door to learning. At the local library he sometimes checked out a dozen books at a time. At age 14 he had to learn yet another way to communicate, by using a cochlear implant. Finally he could absorb the best his teachers had to offer. "They ignited a fire within me I never knew existed," he says.

He got straight A's and B's for all four years at Mountain Lakes High School, and was elected to the National Honor Society. "I hope never to stop learning and lose my inner passion," he says.

- Amy Schwartz, 19

East Windsor, NJ

Soon after Amy Schwartz was born, doctors told her parents that she was profoundly deaf and unlikely to hear or to speak intelligibly. Her parents tried first hearing aids, then cochlear implants. Within a few years, specialists at the Center for Hearing and Communication in New York were introducing her to parents of children newly diagnosed with serious hearing loss, to show what could be done. At Hightstown High School, she carried a heavy load of honors classes and volunteered with her local emergency rescue squad. In 2009, she was certified as an Emergency Medical Technician. When she wasn't saving lives or studying, she played on the varsity golf team.

Admitted to the College of New Jersey in Ewing Township, she plans to study critical care nursing and devote her career to helping others. "Some people think of my deafness as being a disability," she says. "I consider it a great life challenge; one that I have faced and conquered."

To learn more about HLA-NJ and our scholarship program, please contact HLA-NJ President Arlene Romoff at info@hearingloss-nj.org. We also invite you to visit our www.hearingloss-nj.org, or to attend one of our local chapter meetings in Bergen, Monmouth/Ocean or Middlesex County, and our newest Morris County chapter. Dates, places and times for chapter meetings are available from info@hearingloss-nj.org.