



The newsletter of the Hearing Loss Association of America, Albuquerque Chapter

WIRED FOR SOUND

Flying With Hearing Loss Can Be Challenging

*Lise Hamlin, HLAA Director of Public Policy
in HLAA blog¹*

Planning Ahead and Knowing Your Rights Can Help

A recent news story about a senior woman's air travel nightmare highlights problems many of us with hearing loss may experience when we fly. Often announcements and even safety information aren't accessible. How can we stay safe, remain informed and minimize issues while traveling?

Airport Nightmare in Austin

According to the Austin Chronicle, Karen McGee, a 71-year-old woman with hearing loss flying alone for the first time last September, missed her connecting flight during a layover at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in Texas when she didn't hear a gate change announcement. She reportedly became agitated when airline personnel couldn't communicate with her.

Austin news station KXAN reports that police were called but had trouble communicating with her. The details aren't clear, but in the end, McGee was apparently arrested for trespassing, handcuffed, taken to the local jail, detained for two nights, and ended up with a broken wrist.

What happened in Austin brings up some of our worst fears as travelers with the invisible disability of hearing loss. Regardless of the details in this particular case, we can learn from this case and make our own travels less distressing with a bit of preparation.



Discrimination Against Travelers With Disabilities Is Illegal

The Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) of 1986—predating the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by four years—makes it illegal for airlines to discriminate against passengers because of their disability. The Department of Transportation is responsible for enforcing the ACAA, which applies to all flights to, from, or within the United States.

One of its provisions is that anyone self-identifying as a passenger with a disability, who needs additional time or assistance, must be allowed to board the airplane before other passengers. Hearing loss is considered a disability under the ACAA, just as it is for the ADA.

Self-Identifying Can Help

I once almost missed a flight because I did not hear the boarding announcement at a very busy area with multiple gates at Reagan National Airport. Another time, I missed an important safety announcement about the plane's potential landing gear issue during a flight descent. Luckily, in both cases, I was able to avoid serious complications, but since then, I have self-identified at every point in the travel process: when purchasing my ticket, at the ticketing counter, at TSA security, at the airline gate, when boarding the plane, and if needed, at baggage claim.

¹ See full article at <https://www.hearingloss.org/flying-with-hearing-loss-can-be-challenging/>

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15 Jun Meeting 10:00 AM To Noon—**on Zoom****Top 5 Problems With Hearing Loss In A Hospital**

Most of you are already familiar with June's speaker: our own Mary Clark.

Dealing with a medical emergency when we have a hearing loss can be terrifying. Our speaker this month is passionate about advocacy for people in the hospital, or the doctor's office or the Emergency room. Mary will share some ways to help make these scenarios less terrifying. Like so many things in our lives preparation or thinking ahead can make a difference. Grabbing our Hospital Kit should be the only thing we need to remember, and the rest of the pieces will be easier to overcome. When we are under stress, as medical scenarios tend to be, it's normal to forget all those things we need to do. Having a "grab and go" kit can help alleviate some of that stress.

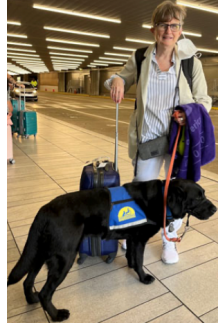
Mary Clark has been a member of HLAA since 1990, and active in chapter leadership at the local (CA and NM), state (California State Association) and National (former member of National Board of Trustees) level and has given dozens of talks, workshops, and programs on multiple topics over the years. Known as a trainer before retirement, her current passion is helping people with hearing loss.



Join us for a program on Hearing Loss in the Hospital Setting, when Mary will share tips and tricks to enhance communications in medical settings, as well as how to make up your own Hospital Kit.

The HLAA ABQ Chapter could use some help to resume hybrid meetings (for example, with hospitality), as well as some new blood. You already know our dedication to providing the best information, advocacy, education and support for people with hearing loss. You can ease your way into volunteering and learn how this works. Just email one of the board members (listed on the left). You may also use the chapter email: HLAAbq@gmail.com.

By staying alert to my surroundings, I have never missed a flight. I also make sure the airline knows in advance I am flying with my hearing dog, Shine, and complete all the required service animal paperwork. Gate personnel often help me understand the pre-boarding announcements and ensure I get on with those in front of the line.



A Call for More Awareness, Education and Empathy

Beyond assistive technology, the most important accommodation is simple compassion and understanding for people traveling with disabilities. In this case, communication broke down and gate agents had the police take this 71-year-old woman with hearing loss to jail.

Airline Agents Responsible for Providing Accommodations

Had McGee been aware of the ACAA, she could have disclosed her disability and requested pre-boarding at her first gate. Then flight agents would have had to ensure that she received the same information as everyone else. She would have learned about the gate change, found the new gate, and been allowed to pre-board successfully.

Had McGee known her rights and self-identified, what could the gate agents have offered as accommodation? One option might have been hearing loops, an assistive listening method provided by a growing number of public spaces including airports. Hearing loops can feed sound directly into a person's hearing aid or cochlear implant when equipped with a telecoil.

According to the Accessibility page of its website, the Austin Airport has a loop installed between Gates 1 and 12. If her hearing aids had an activated telecoil, a mechanism to receive the input from a hearing loop, and if the agents knew how to use the hearing loop, it's certainly possible that McGee could have communicated more effectively and made it to her connecting flight.

But an air carrier's responsibility doesn't end if one's hearing device doesn't work or if the gate is not equipped with a hearing loop. There are more options to provide access than even a few years ago. Speech-to-text apps on a cellphone or tablet could be used. A pocket talker, or small sound amplifying device, might have been available. Even old-school pen and paper could be used in a pinch.

It's important to note that airports are complex places and accessibility falls under multiple jurisdictions. In this case, the airport itself is under the jurisdiction of the city of Austin, which must follow ADA regulations as well as Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules. Departure gates, ticketing counters, airplanes and baggage fall under the ACAA for people with disabilities, so Austin has no control over what the air carriers provide.

The ACAA has been law for decades, but still very few people are aware of it. Had McGee or the flight agents been more knowledgeable about this law, her harrowing experience may have been avoided. The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) continues to advocate for more comprehensive training about required accommodations under both the ACAA and ADA, for all airline and airport personnel, and enhanced assistive communications at every airport such as visual messaging, hearing loops and more. HLAA recently sent a letter of support to Congressional co-sponsors of a new ACAA Amendment Act, requiring more text and accessible information. HLAA also wants passengers with hearing loss to be empowered with information before they travel.

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Remembering Karen Twohig

Stephen O. Frazier, Hearing Loss Support Specialist

I was surprised and saddened to read in the most recent newsletter about Karen Twohig's passing. I wish you had known about it sooner. I'm sure I am just one of a multitude of people who missed her memorial service because we were not aware of it.

The notice said she was active in the chapter way back when it was SHHH. Active hardly covers the impact Karen made to the chapter and on Albuquerque's hard of hearing community. In addition to being an upbeat and outgoing individual, she was one of the long-time leaders of the chapter and a mentor, advisor & confidant to so many people with hearing loss.

Karen was a long-time member of the Abq. SHHH board, as well as past president of the chapter. She was the chair of the NM Relay system's board of directors for a time when it was a local entity employing dozens. She was a volunteer to take charge when a leader was needed to organize a yard sale or prepare a lunch for an all-day training session on hearing loops etc. for local audiologists, staffing a chapter booth for a health fair at the mall or some other chapter project.



An untold number of people learned about and then got cochlear implants after talking with Karen, who was the chapter's first CI recipient. Later, she would help them adjust to the technology. When the chapter had less than a dozen dues-paying members in the 90's, it was

Karen who always made a new visitor feel welcome at a chapter meeting. Celebrating his Birthday and implantation when long-timer "Bagel Harry" got his CI was typical of Karen. Karen (and Jim) hosted many guest speakers in their home. One of them, Dr. Juliette Sterkens, told me they were the most gracious hosts she had ever stayed with in her visits to present to groups throughout the US over the years.

Several years ago, Karen received the Virginia Carr Award—a recognition that used to be given each year by the chapter to a leader in reaching out to and helping people with hearing loss.

Thanks for putting the notice in the newsletter. The notice was right, Karen will be missed by all of us who knew her at HLAA and, I expect, many with no affiliation with HLAA.

Loop People, Loop Places

Ginevra Ralph

What's One More Gadget?

OK, one more story about our buddy Harry who is working to Loop Lincoln—at least his life in Lincoln! Harry has identified several places at work where he benefits from assistive listening equipment. It's typical for a person with hearing loss to struggle in a large group meeting room, especially with ambient sounds such as air conditioning, paper rustling and side conversations. So along with the other microphones for Zoom and telephone connections, he



puts his at the far end of the table, connected to his portable loop. Later, back at his desk, he positions the microphone at the entrance to his cubical and places the portable next to him. Then when someone knocks or

speaks from behind his back he hears them through the loop. Co-workers are curious about it and learn a lot about hearing loss on the job as he explains how it works and why it is so helpful.

Thanks to those listed below for their generous donations.

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