



ALDAcon 2007—Rochester, New York

I King Jordan Award Presentation ALDAcon 2007

PRESIDENT BERNIE PALMER: Tonight we present the I. King Jordan Award. This award is given once a year at the discretion of the Board of Directors to a late-deafened person who has succeeded and become distinguished in their chosen field of endeavor. The award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to their profession, in their community and/or within the nation. This person must be an outstanding role model for other late-deafened people and for deaf people in general. This person clearly demonstrates to the hearing community that deaf people have honor, character, integrity and capabilities to succeed. They are not diminished by their deafness.

I would like to invite Dennis Gonterman, one of the people who nominated our award winner tonight, to the stage please to say a few words.

DENNIS GONTERMAN: As you become aware of who tonight's winner is, you will probably say to yourself, "hasn't he won this award before?" He did not win this award. However, he did win the ALDA Brainstorm Award for founding the LDA Chat group on Yahoo. He is a Past President of ALDA and a former Region IV Director.

In 1995 Edna Shipley-Conner brought some 20 really cool people from California to the Rockford ALDAcon. Tonight's winner was in that group. It was his first ALDAcon and my first ALDAcon, too. That was the day we began our friendship. The following year in a workshop at the San Francisco ALDAcon was the very first time I saw the Internet demonstrated. The workshop was presented by this man along with Dr. Roy Miller.

Later my friend insisted that I buy a computer and learn how to use it. At that time computers were really expensive. I went ahead and bought it. I didn't know anything about computers. He had to teach me everything about it. I became hooked and we still chat online almost every week.

I think it was at the 1998 ALDAcon in Chicago that we went to a Cubs game with a group of people. That game began a series of adventures that the two of us have since shared. At the Santa Fe convention we came early and took a hot air balloon ride over the Rio Grand Gorge. On the last day of ALDAcon '03 we went on a helicopter ride from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon and had lunch on the Canyon floor. Another time at the Newport, Rhode Island convention we drove to Martha's Vineyard and in Utah we went to the Olympic facilities in Park City and just three days ago the two of us drove to Niagara Falls in Canada and rode the Maid of the Mist.

Tonight's winner is a very close friend of mine who helped me to become the person I am today. Now I want to introduce Carrie Levin.
(applause).

CARRIE LEVIN: Good evening. Thank you to the Board for giving me an opportunity to present tonight and speak about the recipient for the I. King Jordan Award. When I think of this person I think not of all his amazing accomplishments but of the legacy and impact this person has made on all of us, and continues to do so to this day.

When I think of this person I think of a famous quote from one of my famous Presidents, JFK, who once said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

When I think of this person I think of the many aspects about him. He is a doer. He has that “can do” attitude. He is a giver. He is a person who walks his talk. He is a lovely person with a golden heart. Most of all, he is the funniest person I have ever met.

What’s so amazing about this person is that whenever I’m involved in any deaf or hard of hearing event or when I research into any of the websites regarding advocacy, I come across this person’s name. He is in it, everywhere. He probably has a few thousand hits on the internet. So I’m pleasantly surprised to learn that he is not only involved behind the scenes, he’s in it.

His work came into this community at many levels and it made quite an impression on me and I call that inspiration. I am constantly in awe of this person and I thank you that this person has given his love and wisdom to me and to all of us and this person really deserves this award and gives his all.

I want to introduce Lori Messing.
(applause).

LORI MESSING: My name is Lori Messing, formerly Lori Heir, and now that I’m actually standing up here, those of you who know me also know the winner of this award because he and I are really pretty much inseparable. And it is a great honor to present this award to my best friend—my *bestest* friend—in the entire world, Kenneth Matthew Arcia!

I would like to tell you a little bit about my very best friend, Ken Arcia, and what he means to me and to the world, and how he is a role model for late-deafened adults everywhere. He is incredibly deserving of the I. King Jordan Award. The secret to understanding Ken lies in his unique philosophy, a simple but powerful philosophy he seamlessly incorporates into his daily life. He devotes his life to making deep connections with people, and to him there is nothing more important. He puts people first.

Up until several years ago, he exercised his philosophy while working for DCARA where he made significant humanitarian and social contributions to the deaf community in California. He often taught deaf people how to use computers in the technology classes he taught. He took particular interest in seniors who were especially isolated and unfamiliar with the technology that connects us today.

It was through DCARA that Ken met one very special lady with a similar philosophy and she became an extremely important part of his life. She was his adopted family and he was a son to her in addition to a great friend. I know that Edna Shipley-Conner is looking down on us right now with a tear in her eye. Those of us who knew her well can see her face gleaming with pride for this award to Ken. He spent years working side by side with Edna at DCARA. Together they accomplished groundbreaking work that enriched and connected countless people with hearing loss in California and elsewhere.

When Ken left DCARA to join Sprint he did not lose touch with his life’s philosophy. With Sprint he connects people with each other—CapTel and handheld wireless devices to name but a few methods. He made connections between family and friends. He opened lines of communication for people with hearing loss who might otherwise remain isolated and apart from the world at large. He rightly takes pride in his work and finds it greatly fulfilling but he is humble to a fault.

For all of his accomplishments he remains modest and listens even though he can’t hear. To me this is the most incredible thing a person can accomplish. His way of life demonstrates very clearly that a person’s competence, intelligence, integrity and human worth are not diminished in the least by the fact that he or she cannot hear.

It could not be bestowed upon a more deserving member of our family, and now to present the award I would like to invite Dr. I. King Jordan up to the podium.

(applause)

DR. I. KING JORDAN: Ken, come on up.

(applause)

This opportunity has been one of the most important pleasures of my life. Every year I have the opportunity to give an award to someone who dedicates his or her life to making the world a better place for deaf people. One of those people was Edna Shipley-Conner and I know she would be very proud to see you receive this award, Ken. I'm really delighted, and very, very happy to have the honor and the privilege to give Ken the I. King Jordan Award.

(applause)

KEN ARCIA: Thank you. I'm very honored tonight and I'd like to thank the academy—I mean the ALDA Board of Directors—for this lovely honor. (laughter)

When I joined ALDA in 1994, I had no idea that I would be involved in the national organization and local chapters as well. For those of you who don't know my story, I was born and raised in the farmlands of central California in Fresno. I have a sister three years younger than me. We are very close. She is also late-deafened.

I lost my mother when I was five years old. She was a victim of domestic violence. I miss her very much and I know she is watching tonight.

I grew up very poor. The area that I lived in was eventually taken over by gangs and violence and I was very fortunate to have moved away from that area. I am lucky that I was, and am, close to my sister. I also have a half-brother and half-sister. They are all in Fresno at the bedside of a dear aunt who is going through the last stages of liver cancer. I wish they could be here.

I attended hearing schools and had no noticeable hearing loss at all. I enjoyed music and tended to memorize all the words of the songs that I liked. That would come in handy later on. At the age of 19 I decided to get my hearing checked. My grandfather was hard of hearing and I knew it was related to tumors that he had. My mom also had tumors and they were found during her autopsy. When I went to see my ENT to get a hearing test, he told me that they found something that needed more testing. They sent me to the House Ear Institute in Los Angeles.

In 1981, late 1981, I went and had testing all day long. At the end of the day they said, well, you have two tumors, one on each side and the one on the right is twice as large, and you have NF2, neurofibromatosis. We would like to operate as soon as possible.

I put my health in the hands of the doctors and had my first surgery in 1982. It seemed successful and I got most of my hearing back on the right side and then we went to the left side. The left side was much more involved and I lost all of my hearing on that side. My facial nerves and balance nerves were also affected. For the next two years I was in that river in Egypt—denial.

"I'm fine, I'm fine" was my attitude. But I was also saying "what?" "Huh?" quite often and bought my first closed caption decoder and was shocked by how much I was missing. I remember watching "Cheers" and realizing I missed many of the jokes because I laughed through the "second" joke. I then decided to get a hearing aid and contacted my local voc rehab office and bought a hearing aid.

I remember telling my best friend, guess what, I'm going to get hearing aids. His response was "what took you so long?" (laughter) As most of us know, our friends and family often are aware of our hearing loss and accept

it before we do. It so happened my audiologist was a former marriage family therapist and he had a support group for people who had lost their hearing and we met once a week. From that we set up a local chapter of SHHH.

I was taking sign classes and started to get involved in the deaf community but I had nobody my age. In 1993 I went to the state SHHH conference in the Bay area. I walked in and saw several people my age who were signing. I asked, are you with SHHH? They said “yes, but we are also in ALDA.” I never heard of ALDA but I immediately clicked with them. Some of the members I met that weekend were Nancy Hammons, Karin Kasper, Bill Zitrin and Edna Shipley-Conner. I had found my second family, ALDA and ALDA-East Bay.

I traveled by train from Fresno to the Bay area several times that year to attend events. Eventually Edna and Nancy helped me get a job at DCARA, the deaf services agency for the Bay area. I packed up everything I owned and moved to the Bay. I want to acknowledge the deaf community in the Bay area for being so accepting of this new late-deafened kid who was running the local community center. They were patient with me and I felt accepted from the start.

In 1995 I attended my first ALDAcon. I was a very active member of ALDA-East Bay but didn't know very much about ALDA, Incorporated. I remember traveling to Chicago, then taking the bus out to Rockford in the middle of nowhere, I thought, and meeting all these other people my age. It was wonderful. I also had never seen so many other people with NF2 in one place. We all shared our half smile. I got to meet Rick Skyer and his sisters Mary and Kathie. I also got to meet some of my closest friends that weekend, Mary Clark and Dennis Gonterman. I became involved with the ALDA Board the following year in 1996. I learned a great deal.

After that first ALDAcon in 1995, I've been to every ALDAcon since. This is my 13th. I'm very happy to be involved with ALDA both locally and nationally and I continue to advocate for the unique needs of late-deafened adults in my personal and professional life. I also founded the online discussion group LDA Chat. This group has over 600 members and is over six years old now. I'm very proud of that group.

I'd like to thank the people who had an impact on my success as a late-deafened adult. At the top of my list is Carrie Levin. I must say I was touched and surprised that one of the nominations was from you. I thank you very much and I appreciate it and appreciate how proud Edna would be of me. Edna Shipley-Conner, was a second mother to me. I know she isn't here physically tonight but she is with us in spirit. She helped so many of us with accepting our deafness. Always had a smile, a shoulder to lean on and that twinkle in her eye. I miss her every day. I love you, Edna.

Dennis, I'd also like to thank you for nominating me for this award. I look forward to our trips together. Thank you for your support and friendship over the years, especially during our pre-'con travels.

Lori, I'm so glad I met you in 1999. You are a great “bestest” friend. I love you very much and am glad we have each other to confide in and to share the most important moments in life. I am so thankful that you are here to share in this with me. Thank you.

As mentioned before, you know I now work with Sprint Relay and continue to educate and advocate for late-deafened adults. Sprint has been very supportive and a great company to work for. Thank you, Sprint.

Thanks to all the others I have met over the years at ALDAcon, via email or other events. You have inspired me, supported me and helped me to be who I am today. You are my second family. In the words of Elvis Presley, “Thankyouverymuch.” Thank you. I love you all. Thank you.
(applause)