



*ALDAcon 2007—Rochester, New York*

Opening plenary—Sally and Paul Taylor

VICKI HURWITZ: Welcome everybody and good morning. I would like to introduce two personal friends this morning. They have been friends of Alan and mine for quite a while now. We have been friends for over fifty years. We went to the same school, Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis, Missouri.

Paul and Alan went to the same school for the deaf. They lived in the same dorm, in fact. Sally was a day student, and it is funny because the four of us didn't really know each other—we didn't realize all of this until the class reunion many years later.

Sally and Paul went to Utah last January and February for the Sundance festival and their daughter, Irene, was the recipient of an award for the best documentary. It is going to be shown on HBO next year, so you should all look for that. I am very proud to introduce Sally and Paul Taylor. They have been married for 44 years (that is just two years longer than I have been married!)

(Laughter.)

And they have three beautiful children and eight grandchildren, Let's give them a warm welcome!

(Applause.)

SALLY TAYLOR: You first.

PAUL TAYLOR: Good morning! Do you understand? Great.

I love that sign. I learned that from an old timer. It was just a beautiful sign. Just good morning. It is good morning and good night. It is very nice. It is perhaps one of my favorite signs.

Sally and I are honored to be here with you today. This is our first time attending an ALDA conference. Wow, what an interesting group! I hope to meet more of you. I should say Sally and I hope to meet more of you during the time that we are here. Unfortunately, we are only going to be here today. We have to leave tomorrow. Hopefully we will see most of you today.

When we were asked to speak at this conference, we both questioned, why us? We weren't considered late-deafened. We both have been deaf all our lives. In fact, we grew up deaf. How did this fit with the ALDA conference?

The reality is that we have an important bond, all of us. We all have our needs that relate to hearing impairment. All of us do different activities to make sure our needs are met in a variety of ways, you know, as technology has advanced,

When I was a boy, I can remember my hearing aid. At the time it was a box I would carry around my neck. And it was very heavy, and my pants were lopsided because of it.

It was around my neck, I remember that, and the hearing aids sat here. And every day I had to lug it around, and I would want to take it off. And my teacher would scold me and say, "no, you have to put it back on." And, reluctantly, I would.

Now hearing aids have become so small. It is wonderful. Technology has just grown so much. It has advanced with TV, communication, telephones.

At 11:30 at night, on television, on CBS, there is a show called David Letterman. I always enjoy watching that. He always has a list, a top ten list. And he never started with number one, right? He started with number ten and counted down. I think that is a great way to talk about the advancements in technology. I am going to start with number ten now.

Captioned TV. That is how I learned about David Letterman. It was on CBS. Number nine, we had captioned and subtitled movies. I still fell asleep regardless.

(Laughter.)

Next we had realtime graphic display. And forget about all the interpreters, right? Next we have interpreters who use American Sign Language, signed English, or who provide oral interpretation. I am confused now. It is too many options! Next we have the telephone. (It was too late for me to make a new girlfriend with the new telephone technology.)

(Laughter.)

We now have the relay. And I have a bad habit. I tend to want to talk with the interpreters, which we all know is not allowed.

(Laughter.)

Educating people in stores and shopping malls, educating them about your needs and my needs. Having clear communication, no barriers on the face [for lipreading], my credit card maxed out—I can't spend anymore.

(Laughter.)

All because I can communicate with people in the stores now.

Hearing aids have become digitized. Now I know what frequencies are and I know what frequency transposition means. I feel smart after all this time!

(Laughter.)

Cochlear implants are the next item on the list. Hey, I have that. I have this hole in my head, right? And finally, number one, is the door bell, the visual door bell. And it always happens when I am on the toilet.

(Laughter.)

Sally?

**SALLY TAYLOR:** Hi there. Nice job, Paul.

I can't follow that with his humor. That is why I married him.

Thank you very much to Vicki. She already stole half of my presentation, but I will go ahead anyway.

The part that I would like to share with you is what it was like to grow up as a deaf person. Just like most of you, we went through an adjustment period. We had to learn to live in a world without sound. But the only difference is for us it started 65 years ago. We have been deaf all our lives.

Three years ago, the two of us decided get cochlear implants. And our children said, "why? Why are you going to get a cochlear implant? You are both fine." And we said, "hey, there is some new technology available. We would like to try it and see where it takes us. Just like all the other technology, like TTYs and telecaptioning."

Our young daughter—we have three children—our daughter is a filmmaker, and she asked, can I document this? Can I film your experience for, you know, memory's sake? So she made a film of our visits to the doctor, for testing, of our actual surgery. She filmed the surgery.

She filmed us during our fittings. She filmed us during our mapping, and our concerns of hearing sound for the first time, our excitement in our new learning to recognize a variety of sounds. You know, we had to help each other, try to pick things out.

She also caught on film the frustration with the adjustment to a world full of noise. And as a result, this film actually became a full length feature documentary film that Vicki mentioned won an award at the Sundance Film Festival this past March. It won the Best Documentary Film.

So now the film is being shown at film festivals around the country. It is kind of nice because sometimes we get to go and meet people—all expenses paid, nice hotels. It is a pretty nice way to travel!

HBO bought the film, and it will be shown next year. We don't know exactly when. They didn't bother to tell us when. We won't know until it is almost time. So for today we got permission to show a very small part of the film, and you will see it up on the screen here.

This shows what it was like for us growing up as deaf children in a hearing world and also within the deaf world, and I think the film does a better job explaining than I possibly could because my explanation might be kind of boring. So the section we are going to show is twenty minutes, and after that we will be open for your questions. We will give you the answers that we can. So let's go ahead and roll the film.

(Video shown)

(Applause.)

SALLY TAYLOR: So no questions, right? None at all? That's fine. Anyone?

AUDIENCE: What is the name of the documentary?

SALLY TAYLOR: The name of the film is *Hear and Now*. Not here, as in this place, and now, but hear, as in hearing, and now.

AUDIENCE: You said you grew up hearing.

PAUL TAYLOR: No, no.

AUDIENCE: I am sorry, grew up deaf. Okay. I grew up hearing.

(Laughter.)

How were the sounds for you? Because I remember when they first turned my cochlear implant on, it was very strange. So how did you learn what a sound was?

PAUL TAYLOR: Well, I had the hearing aids for about forty years prior to that. So the first thing I did when they turned my processor on, right away, I compared it to what I previously had known as sounds from my hearing aid, and I didn't find that there was much difference. I thought that they were very similar.

I did notice, however, higher frequencies were more crisp. And that was my first impression. Perhaps Sally, would you like to give your version?

SALLY TAYLOR: Mine was quite different. I did not benefit from hearing aids. I wore them for a very short time while I was a child, and I could hear when my kids were babies and I could hear the kids cry and things like that, but I didn't use hearing aids for speech recognition.

So when I got the cochlear implant, it was all noise to me. It was just very noisy. But I do remember hearing some sounds with the hearing aid. And it was nice to hear, become aware of the sounds around me, but I never understood words. And I still struggle with that.

Maybe when you see the whole film, you will understand. You will see more of my frustration and struggles to hear and understand. It is now three years later, and I am still learning. And it is not an easy thing for me. I am pretty much starting all over like I was a kid again learning to hear. So maybe 65 more years from now, I will hear fine.

(Laughter.)

But we will see what happens.

AUDIENCE: Can you two share what was the first thing you heard and recognized? I would like to know what was that first thing you heard and were able to recognize.

PAUL TAYLOR: You mean since the cochlear implant?

AUDIENCE: Yes, yes.

PAUL TAYLOR: Well, the first thing, Sally and I were both in the audiologist's room, naturally. That room is very quiet. I wasn't too surprised, but I do remember coming out of the room and I was in the hallway in the waiting room area and there was a lot of rustling around and a lot of talking that was occurring. Again, it really wasn't a surprise to me. It was similar to what I had experienced with my hearing aids.

SALLY TAYLOR: I will share my experience. I shared it in a short TV program recently called *Through Deaf Eyes*, and some of you may have seen that on PBS. I was explaining when I first heard sound, and it really wasn't what I expected because I had a hearing aid before, you know, a body aid. And I could hear *some* sound, but now I didn't hear the sound in my ear. I heard it in my brain. And I was waiting for something to happen at my ear, but it didn't.

The audiologist said, do you hear something? I said, well, there is something going on up here. And he said, yes, that is sound. And I said, oh, I hear something up on the top of my head? So that was my first experience of sound. It was something right up here in the middle of my head.

And when I came out of that room, that protected environment, people were talking and I thought, I am hearing all these people talking at the same time. This is noisy! This is uncomfortable. And I had to ask, what's that noise? What's that noise? And someone told me it was people talking. I said, oh, really? Okay.

And then another time, while we were out walking, close to our home, it was a very quiet, early morning. And I heard this "baa-baa-baa, baa-baa-baa." And I am looking at Paul and saying,

"where is this baa-baa-baa coming from?" And it was a bird singing and that was very new to me. I had to ask, "what was that sound?" Now I can recognize that every morning when I am out on my walk with my husband, I hear this "baa-baa-baa, baa-baa-baa," as the birds communicate above my head, and that was the beginning.

AUDIENCE: Did they allow you to use sign language when you were in the oral school or did you learn it later, and did you use sign language with your children growing up?

SALLY TAYLOR: No.

PAUL TAYLOR: Let me give you my version because Sally was in day school and I went to both day and evening. I actually stayed there as a residential student.

Some of the signs that we used were what we call home signs. That is like, well, I would say about fifty percent signing, fifty percent mouthing.

SALLY TAYLOR: No, no, not 50/50, more like 90/10, really.

PAUL TAYLOR: I am talking about in the dorms. I am thinking there was a lot of gesturing that occurred. In the classroom, you are right. You had to be very careful to not be caught by the teachers.

SALLY TAYLOR: "Oh, far, far, far"—you would say "far far far away." "Home, home, home." You know, you would do a lot of gesturing. But not real signs. We didn't really know them. We never saw sign language in the fifties. I mean, that was another world somewhere out there—somewhere else. We weren't exposed to it. When we first learned sign—

PAUL TAYLOR: I was in my forties. What happened was my mother and my father and I went to church. My mother said, are you bored during church? I was looking at the books, the Bible, while everybody was going about their singing and worshipping. And my mother said, you don't have to do that. You can be out with people enjoying yourself, people in church. So I called some friends. One of my friends was an interpreter. And they were an interpreter at the church, and made arrangements for me to go to that church.

It was a little hard for me at first because I didn't know most of the signs. So it took me a while, I would say about six months to a year, perhaps, to understand sign. For me, to sign myself was much easier. To understand another person signing stories or sentences to me was rather difficult.

SALLY TAYLOR: For me it happened when I was in college because I went to a hearing college, and while I was there, it happened at my parents' church when they began a deaf ministry that

used sign language. And that was an eye opener for my parents. They were very used to deaf children talking and lipreading, and here was this other group who could sign. And this happened before there was much deaf awareness in the world. The only interpreters were church interpreters.

So when I came home from college, at one point, I met these deaf people and they communicated in a way that I couldn't. I was talking and they were signing and I was talking and it didn't work. I was like, okay.

So then I went to a church camp for the summer, and there were four other deaf people on the staff. And we became good friends. We began to learn how to communicate with one another. They taught me some signs, and before the end of that summer, the four of us were asked to be in a choir of hearing people to sing the Lord's Prayer. They asked the four of us to sign it while everyone sang it.

I had to learn how to sign, "Our Father Who Art In Heaven." So when I came home, I signed, "hi, Our father who art in Heaven," and those were the only signs that I knew very well.

Through meeting other deaf people, I was starting to pick things up. But remember, now, it was the fifties and people who could sign did not move their mouth. So I really couldn't understand what they were saying.

I was looking for people who could move their lips and sign at the same time, and then I would lipread them and learn sign that way and that is really how I learned it. At the age of 21, 22 years old, when I finally learned sign language.

And I really didn't improve my signs until I moved to Rochester and began to work at NTID. Of course, everyone at NTID signs and I had to learn pretty quickly. And I became quite comfortable with it and now I do much better and it is much better for us.

**AUDIENCE:** Do you have any deaf friends who are used to the oral method—lipreading. What do your friends think of your cochlear implant?

**SALLY TAYLOR:** It is an interesting thing. We knew that the cochlear implant is a very controversial issue, so when we decided get cochlear implants, there were some mixed reactions from our friends. But because we were very active in the deaf community, people were a little more open to the idea of, "well, all right, I guess it is fine for you two. I wouldn't go and do that myself, but if you want to do that, that is fine."

So we were accepted by our community. But, of course, there were some people who were kind of skeptical about it, and we would approach them and say, "hi, I got a CI." And they would go, "uh-huh." I would say, "do you want to see it?" and they would go, "oooh!" And I would take it

off and show it to them, and they would feel the bump in my head, so they would feel more comfortable and accustomed to it. And they became more comfortable and accepted us for who we were, and it helped that we were already very involved in the community. And at the same time, a lot of other people began to get them.

I look at a lot of people who may have gotten it before me, like this person sitting here, Jerry Buckley. It is just something that happened here in Rochester, a lot more deaf adults who were thinking about getting cochlear implants and were accepting a very diverse group of people who were getting cochlear implants. So that really has been very helpful.

AUDIENCE: Do your children notice a difference in your speech when you have the cochlear implant on?

SALLY TAYLOR: Do I talk better? It is not so loud, right? That is one thing maybe, one example.

PAUL TAYLOR: When I use my cochlear implant, my voice has more variety. I am able to use more inflection. When I remove the cochlear implant and I talk to individuals, people say I am more monotone. So it helps to get that feedback from people when I am speaking.

SALLY TAYLOR: Yeah. When I am wearing my implant, my two daughters love it. When they have their kids, they can say, "mom!" when they are stuck with their babies and I can hear them and say "what's up?" instead of her coming with the baby and telling me she needs help. Now they can call me by yelling. I can hear something is going on and I can come into the room and see what is going on. So that was a benefit, and I know my children really appreciated that.

Yes, one more.

AUDIENCE: I don't have Home Box Office, so would I be able to buy a tape somewhere and where I could get it?

SALLY TAYLOR: I don't have HBO either.

PAUL TAYLOR: I think it is on NetFlix.

SALLY TAYLOR: But we don't know that. NetFlix hasn't bought it.

PAUL TAYLOR: They are advertising it.

SALLY TAYLOR: Right, because they automatically put every film that was at Sundance, they put them on NetFlix. Eventually it will be available.



PAUL TAYLOR: Yeah, I think it is there.

SALLY TAYLOR: Next year you will probably be able to find it somewhere, but for now you may have to go over to a friend's house and have a screening and watch HBO. We are planning to have a party here in Rochester at somebody's house who has HBO. You can probably do the same. That would be my suggestion.

Is that all?

PAUL TAYLOR: Thank you. We love you. Thank you very much.

SALLY TAYLOR: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)