

HEALING RELATIONSHIPS HURT BY HEARING LOSS

**Presenters: Laine Waggoner, MA, MS
and**

Rex Waggoner, MA

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Laine Waggoner holds a master of arts degree in communications, and a master of science in counseling. She has been living with hearing loss for 43 years and is profoundly hard of hearing. Her husband of 35 years, Rex, has normal hearing. Together they hold workshops on relationships and communication.

LAINÉ: One of the main ways that Rex and I have dealt with the hurt caused by hearing loss is through developing our sense of humor. I have had to learn to laugh at some of the dumb mistakes my brain makes for me. I have accepted that I have no control over it, but I need to recognize how it affects my understanding of speech. And, I've been able to make other people around me more comfortable by allowing them to laugh with me.

A quote that I often use, because it is usually very meaningful for hearing people, is one by Helen Keller. She said, "when you lose your vision, you lose contact with things, but when you lose your hearing, you lose contact with people." Very often, it takes a lot of explanation on our part to get that across to our hearing partners, friends and family.

Developing a positive attitude, trying to maintain a sense of humor, are extremely important. We all have problems of one kind or another. The attitudes we develop, how we deal with those problems and how we cope with them, are all going to affect the *quality* of our relationships and our lives.

A Little Personal Background:

I may have experienced hearing loss through college, but it wasn't brought to my attention until I was out of graduate school and teaching public speaking to high school girls.

When I couldn't understand what my students were saying, I would ask them to stand up and project their voices so the whole class could hear. What I really meant was "stand up, project your voice and speak clearly, so your teacher can hear." It took my roommate to point out to me that I was not understanding when something was said behind my back. Because I was teaching communication, I really needed to get out there immediately and deal with the problem. So, I got my first hearing aid. Because of expense and ignorance, I only purchased one aid, although I had a similar sensorineural loss in both ears, and I was told that it would be better to have the balance of two hearing aids. I thought, I don't want to cut myself off from the world that much.

At any rate, my first hearing aid was in big spectacles with a behind-the-ear (BTE) aid. Then, later I switched to a traditional BTE aid, which I used for about 20 years. Finally, because I would be teaching in college, I realized I would feel more confident if I had the balance of two aids. This has made a world of difference to me. I later moved into public relations, which is a very demanding field, requiring a lot of communication. As my hearing loss increased, it became more difficult for me to function in networking and social situations.

Rex and I married 35 years ago. What we're sharing with you is not only what I have learned, but what Rex has learned, and how we have dealt with some of the emotional issues which can be red flags. Unfortunately, sometimes the relationship problems are ignored and dealt with last.

In my newest career of counseling, my field is marital and family therapy. I especially enjoy working with couples. Many of the mature couples that I've worked with were recently married, where one partner had a hearing loss. They were dealing with the issues of a new relationship--of coming from different backgrounds and different worldviews. They were dealing with all the emotional "baggage" they brought from their parents, their previous relationships, various kinds of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and possibly past substance abuse. And they were dealing, unsuccessfully, with hearing loss and communication problems. It has been very rewarding to me to know that I could help them.

Other couples that I see in most of my support groups and in educational workshops tend to be retirees (late deafened) who are dealing with new coping and communication issues. I've come to believe that in many cases of lengthy relationships, communication had already deteriorated even before the hearing loss developed. As you know, progressive hearing loss creeps up on us. We try to make accommodations, and we go through all kinds of emotional changes and denial, and the end result is that most people don't acknowledge the problem or seek help. We call that "denial".

It's estimated that it takes an average of five to seven years before people do anything about hearing loss. This means that there are apt to be many loose wheels in relationships with all these communication problems and self-esteem issues. Our family members, our spouses or partners, and our coworkers are often spinning off around us, without a clue of how to help.

The Hearing Partner:

REX: It's been quite a learning process for me to understand Laine's hearing loss and her feelings-- especially her feelings. As her hearing diminished over the last 35 years, education and patience have helped me over some massive hurdles.

When I first saw Laine at work, I said to myself, "There's the woman I'm going to marry." The night I decided I was going to make my pitch for her, because I wanted us to become involved, I did not know she had a hearing problem.

LAINE: I was wearing a hearing aid but I was not admitting it to anyone.

REX: We were out dancing on Christmas Eve. The lights were low, the music was romantic. I leaned down to nibble on her ear. I was rewarded with a feedback the likes of which I had never heard in my entire life. That was my introduction to Laine's hearing loss and the fact that she wore a hearing aid.

In our early years together, there was no problem. We were both naturally very gregarious. We enjoyed live theater, movies and parties. We would have cocktail and dinner parties. Then, after about six or eight years, her hearing started lessening and she started to withdraw. She finally admitted she couldn't hear the actors on the stage. She couldn't hear the cacophony of sound coming off the movie screen; the parties were too noisy, she couldn't isolate voices. And at dinner parties she would be lost because there just would be too much sound.

During those early years it was a real problem for me. I loved to be around people. I would attend some events alone. Since my background is also in theater and communications, I went back to performing for recreation. One of the major problems is that I was just impossibly impatient; I was awful; I was rude. I was too lazy to repeat myself.

LAINÉ: He would roll his eyes, as if to say, "Do I have to repeat this again?"

REX: This went on for a while, until we discovered assistive listening devices. And, that made a total change, which we will get to later.

Over the years, learning to understand Laine's feelings and struggles has really educated me not to be impatient. And, that was a turning point for us. I have learned to replace that impatience with patience, and concern, and care, and understanding of what she is going through. She has taught me to replace hostility with humor. And, together we have learned to replace the isolation and the loneliness with really meaningful communication and intimacy.

For what she has done for me in this area, I can't tell you how much I love her and respect her. In fact, she just got her second master's degree in counseling in January because she has this passion to help people who are hard of hearing and their hearing partners and family members. I took an early retirement in June so I could support her in her work.

The Effect of Hearing Loss on the Body, Mind, Emotions and Behavior:

LAINÉ: One of the most important things to understand is how our bodies and our brains react to hearing loss. We must learn to share that with our families and our friends and our coworkers or employers.

Both hearing and hard-of-hearing people rarely make the connection between intestinal problems, backaches, neck aches, headaches, etc. that result from the strain of concentrating and trying to understand speech. They have not equated hearing loss with irritability, with stubbornness or the inability to concentrate and a host of emotional problems.

A major issue we need to share is the stress and the tension caused by trying to understand speech and the incredible fatigue that often results. One of the major things we can teach our hearing partners is that they should *not* try to communicate with us at the end of the day when

we're wiped out. Don't try if we're not feeling well or if we're worried about something. They have to choose optimum communication times. This is true for *any* communication between close partners-- that you need to pick your time and setting.

They also need to understand that emotions and physical problems affect our behavior. And we may act out in various ways by really being stubbornly resistant to getting help or to attending a support group meeting, to associate with more people like ourselves.

Healthy Relationships:

People need to learn to zip their lips when the first thing that they think of saying is something hurtful. This is important in any close relationship. "Letting it all hang out" does not always make for smooth sailing. It is easy to hurt feelings. This destroys friendship and mutual respect.

Some wise person once said that healthy relationships should be a port in a storm, not a storm in a port. I truly believe this.

One of the first things that I do in counseling couples is to give them a homework assignment of listing all the traits they remember that they were attracted to in their partner. Why did they fall in love? What are the positive things about the relationship that they want to retain? I am always so amazed at how complimentary they are about one another. Because, before that, all I've heard is a litany of problems they have. Such as, "he won't listen to me", "she nags", "he doesn't talk to me enough", "she's always criticizing".....you name it.

We need to convey how easy it is to appear inattentive. I liken hearing loss to Swiss cheese, with a lot of holes in it. This is sometimes very helpful to convey to hearing people. Many hearing partners have commented that they often notice that our eyes "glaze over," and they're not sure whether we understand. We need to explain that in the communication process, our brains very often play tricks on us and are slow to insert words into the conversation that they think fit into the context. Often, it is downright funny or sometimes we totally misunderstand.

I have no qualms about blaming my brain for my confusion. For me, this is a basic communication tool. Rex can be speaking right in front of me. If I don't get it, I have to honestly provide feedback. I can't let him guess whether I heard it. I need to say, "you know, I am not processing this. Can you try to rephrase it, put it in different words." Or, I might explain, "I'm just too tired now... I'm not functioning... I haven't even got my hearing aids in...I feel like I'm about to throw up.... Please excuse me.... come back to me when I'm feeling better." It's important to explain that when this happens we are not being inattentive, rejecting, dumb or stupid. We need to help others to understand that we're not always conscious of what's going on. And when the brain is tired, it tunes out.

With one of my first counseling couples, the wife was a licensed marriage and family therapist and her new husband was hard of hearing. I expected her to be more attuned to communication issues. The major coping strategy that I brought up in the first session was, "you need to get in his face to get his attention." Then, as learned as she was, we had to review all the basic communication skills they would need to practice.

How to get Attention:

I had to teach Rex how to get my attention. He told me that as the hearing spouse, he sometimes felt isolated and neglected. This is all too common. A feeling of neglect or isolation can often create, irritability, stubbornness and denial.

It wasn't until about 12 years ago, when I first joined SHHH that I ever attended a group where there were other hard-of-hearing people. I had not learned to be assertive about my hearing loss. Up to that time, when I was in a social situation, I just didn't bring it up. I later discovered that Rex was sometimes signaling to others that, "Laine isn't snubbing you, she can't hear you."

REX: This is horrible. I'm ashamed to admit this. I look back on how I was and I just shudder. To get her attention, I'd call: "Laine?" Obviously forgetting that she has a hearing problem, because I can't see it. It's invisible. There often would be no response. And I'd go: "Laine!!!!!" (louder and nastier). There would still be no response. Okay, I'd say to myself.. She can't hear. But, there was also the feeling that she was deliberately ignoring me. So, I felt unloved, unwanted, and rejected.

LAINE: Because of the way Rex shouted at me, I became angry. So, I would reply aggressively. I had to learn to replace aggressiveness or anger with being assertive about my needs. This is an essential part of communicating with others. Eventually I was able to say—"You know Rex, you need to get my attention first, then I'm facing you and I can understand you better."

REX: Then I might say rather angrily: "I don't know why you don't wear your hearing aids all the time. I'm really tired of repeating myself."

LAINE: Then I had to take him through the whole education process of why I didn't wear my hearing aids all the time and how I was feeling. I'd say, "Oh, my ears are tired, or my ear canal is irritated," or whatever. Now, if my aids are not in, at least he lets me know he needs to speak to me, so I put them on in order to understand.

REX: She finally explained to me her hurt feelings. And, she said, "Just touch me to get my attention if my back is to you." Then I did this: If you can believe it, I would tap her on the shoulder (poking Laine's shoulder hard). And I would say, behind her back: "Now hear this. Now hear this." Thinking I was being funny.

LAINE: Usually I would jump out of my skin or drop something. First, I would aggressively ask him: "Why can't you remember?" Now, we are at the point where I don't get mad. And, I don't try to get even. I'm just patiently assertive.

REX: She explained to me what the tapping on the shoulder made her feel like.

LAINE: I'd say, "Well, it feels like you're making fun of me when you do that, or that you're impatient." We cannot stress too much the value of patience in any relationship. Patience and never losing sight of your friendship and remembering what good things brought you together in the first place.

REX: Now, this is how I get her attention. It's usually a soft touch on the shoulder. I wait until she is finished with what she is doing and turns around to face me. Or, if I'm in a more playful mood, which I am now that I'm retired, I get her attention by leaning over and softly kissing her on the neck or the shoulder. It's a tremendous difference *and* very romantic. That's quite a change over the years. If we had only had someone who could have told us 35 years ago how important it was to change the way I get her attention.

LAINE: What often happens in a relationship where one partner is hearing-impaired is the partner who has the hearing loss sometimes becomes very dependent. So that the hearing partner begins to feel as though they are carrying the whole load.

Driving and Talking:

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One problem that my wife has especially is when you are driving in a car. We used to take long drives and have nice long conversations. And, we used to get a lot of problems solved that way. Now we can't do this anymore. Is there a solution to this?

LAINE: One solution is that we talk less in the car. But for me, I have found that the Pocket Talker works, using it with a headphone. Using it with a neck loop created electronic interference with the engine and I got a lot of static. But, if we were taking a long drive, I'd wear the headphones and I would clip the microphone on Rex's lapel or his right shirt sleeve, and use it when we wanted to talk.

I'm not selling equipment, but I have learned that assistive devices have made a world of difference for me. And, whenever I've introduced the idea to support group members they are just so avid to learn about the technology that is available. In addition to the PockeTalker-- there are certain other versatile devices that are less expensive, so they are affordable by most people. You have to be willing to use trial and error to experiment with the equipment and talk to the manufacturer, the distributor or other users if you have problems.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think that there may be an approach other than using a mechanical device. Because that doesn't give you 100 percent or anywhere near 100 percent. So I'm talking about the emotional way to approach this.

LAINE: Our joint solution is not to get mad at one another in situations such as this. We recognize the limitations of communicating in the car.

TOM DAVINROY: I want to mention about driving. I cannot hear at all. I haven't heard a sound in over 30 years. In driving, what I do is I use a note pad and my -- if I have a partner, my partner writes to me and I can hold it up in front of me at my convenience and still see the road.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (hearing spouse): Well, we have a system of hand signs we worked out between the two of us. I learned where his peripheral vision is, so I know where to place my hands so he can keep his eyes on the road and still see my hand signs. It works well. And, when I'm driving, he does hand signs to me, too, and it keeps it clear.

Problem solving and Fair Fighting:

LAINE: When you're in a situation like this, or any other situation that creates difficulties or challenges for us, joint problem solving is one of the key issues. But, always joint problem solving in a *clear-headed, friendly way*.

Very often withdrawal or picking fights is a way to avoid good human contact with your partner. One of the things that many marriage counselors do in dealing with peoples' relationships is teach them how to fight fair. You are not looking for a win/lose situation, where one person comes out on top the winner and the other one is the loser. You're trying to reach a joint solution to a problem.

Research has shown that, generally speaking, men's emotions tend to escalate much more rapidly than women do. In marital research done by Dr. John Gottman, with whom I studied, they have attached sensors to couples that are having discussions. The researchers noticed that in the course of a conflict hand sweating, body temperature and blood pressure in men sometimes increases off the chart, but that women don't escalate that fast.

So, it's very important that women learn how to help diffuse heated discussions, and that both partners must be conscious of the physical changes they're going through when they're getting angry or tense. Both partners need to agree, "Hey, we need a time out now." It is not productive to allow conflicts to escalate until someone gets mad and slams out of the room or locks themselves in their den and doesn't deal with the problem. That's called gridlocked conflict--where you are constantly going over the same issues over and over again. It usually means that you have not recognized the difference between solvable problems and perpetual problems. And because of our cultural differences and men's need to maybe withdraw and not share their feelings and women's need to share and be empathetic, a couple can come into conflict. If you can agree to disagree on certain issues, and really work on the problems that you can solve, then a lot of the anger goes out of the relationship.

Expressing Feelings:

REX: I have heard a lot of deaf people say that they really get very tired of having hearing people use "never mind" as a brush-off. Of course, it's insulting to you. But, hearing people don't know this until they are told. Remember that everybody's feelings are 100 percent valid.

LAINE: In any kind of relationship, we need to be able to say things like: "I feel angry when you do thus and such." Or, "what just happened made me feel depressed." Or, "I really would prefer you didn't do that." But rather say, "I'll give you a suggestion of how it might come over more acceptably to me," rather than aggressively say things like: "My God, can't you remember to repeat and face me and speak more slowly?" The mere act of shouting distorts our faces so that we look angry. We don't want to be angry at one another. Do we????

Communication Skills:

Sometimes if you find that verbal communication isn't enough, we need to have things written down. One of our common problems used to be setting social dates on our calendar or an appointment that has to be made. I would often misunderstand what Rex was saying. Then, I need to ask him to rephrase the whole speech for me, because I'm at a loss. He needs to break things down into short, simple sentences that I can comprehend. But I also need to give him feedback as to what I am hearing.

REX: Then there is my dilemma as the hearing spouse when I have said something and I know that Laine didn't understand it. Now, do I repeat it again, which plunges that situation into a parent/child scenario? And, what we have done for many, many years now is I'll say something like, "I've called the doctor's office and we can have appointments at 2 o'clock on Friday for our Flu shots. Are you available?"

REX: She might give a little nod, but by the look in her eyes, I can tell she hasn't focused on one word I've said. Then, I might say, "Did I say that too fast for you?" -trying not to sound like a parent figure.

LAINE: If I was not paying attention and did not provide feedback, he might say that. One of the things that used to make me mad was if he said: "You obviously didn't understand what I said. Let me rephrase it or let me speak more slowly." Now I know that *it's my responsibility* to let him know whether I heard none of it or how much I understood.

I cannot repeat this frequently enough: *feedback on both sides is essential to any communication*. I want you to share this with all your hearing friends, too. All the good communication skills that they can learn for speaking with you are immensely useful in *any* social, conversational or business setting.

We all have a lifetime of poor communication habits that we have to overcome. Again, patience is so crucial, because people are human and they forget. This is a biggie: Repeat after me: "*People are human and they forget.*" This means you need to be patient when they forget.

REX: And, I still forget, after 35 years. I'm always learning.

LAINE: We need to summarize soon. John Gray wrote a series of books on "Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus." Although he is not a scientific researcher and he has a degree from a university that nobody ever heard of, he has been able to popularize certain stereotypes about man/woman relationships. I feel that some of these stereotypes are damaging. But, there is a kernel of truth to what he has to say. It may not be a strictly gender issue, it could just be personality difference. But, even two women or two guys together could have this problem: Some people find it very difficult to express their feelings and their thoughts. And, there are other people, usually women, who need to communicate to share. Those who have problems sharing may simply clam up when communication is needed. Men tend to respond to a woman's need to share with instructions rather than empathy.

I may express to Rex my feelings or frustrations. And, he will often say to me: “You know what you should do.....” When he does this I feel as if he is talking like a parent and I’m the child. That puts one of us up and the other one down.

One of the things I have noticed among older couples, where the wife had been chiefly a homemaker and the caretaker of the children most of her married life, is that she had not achieved an equal standing with her husband, who was the chief breadwinner and decision-maker. So, there really was an inequality there. The husband really felt like he had to be strong for everyone around him. Very often, if he is the one who has lost hearing, this is very damaging to his self-esteem and to his ego.

We need to understand that. It may help to give him some multiple choices in terms of emotions, because he may not have the vocabulary to express his feelings. Women need to be able to say, not in a nagging way: “Tell me what's bothering you, tell me what you're feeling. Are you feeling sad, depressed, hopeless or angry?” But, there are things that the hearing spouse can learn that might help that person to deal more positively with the situation, and perhaps help bring the hard-of-hearing spouse out of denial or depression.

The basic goal in male/female communication - or where there are personality differences - is to *appreciate the differences and accept them without blaming*. Blaming and nagging are sure to kill a relationship. When I talk to a couple that's been together for a long time, I may have them go over what brought them together in the first place-- what do they really appreciate about each other. I help them to examine the fun things that they used to do that maybe they can find a way to enjoy again. Or, we seek alternative activities.

If there is no remaining friendship, no compassion, no admiration and no willingness to share, the relationship is pretty much doomed.

Value of Professional Counseling:

Be quite fair with yourselves. We can't always go it alone. Seek professional counseling if there is a deep clinical depression resulting from grief over a hearing loss. This is normal. Realize that the counselor that you go to may not know anything about how you both you and your partner are affected by hearing loss. Therefore, you'll have to educate them.

Coping Strategies:

There are a number of things that you can learn from publications that are available from ALDA and SHHH. Essentially, Rex and I try to treat the hearing loss challenge as a game.

Plan in advance for all the possibilities when you approach a new listening situation. Figure out your strategy. Do you know what the room is like? Who is going to be at the gathering? How noisy will it be? Where will you sit? What assistive devices do you need to have with you? Be sure to take more than enough batteries for your needs. If you're going on a trip, check out your hearing aids and other devices. I take my back-up hearing aid in case one should break or I borrow a hearing aid (“a loaner”) from my dispenser.

Don't create problems for your hearing family and friends by going out ill-prepared. It's maddening for them to be with you somewhere and to have you say, "Oh, I forgot my hearing aid." Frequently, when we're asked where it is, they learn it's at home, in a drawer. There are many reasons why we who are hard of hearing fail to prepare properly. Therefore, hearing partners must learn how to help us to check everything out beforehand....*without nagging or anger.*

Humor:

A sense of humor is extremely essential. That's why I collect jokes about communication and relationships. There's a wonderful book of humor about hearing loss, by people with hearing loss. (Maxwell Schneider's "Do You Hear Me?". 1996, Thinking Publications). It has great cartoons and all kinds of wonderful sayings that I enjoy sharing with people. For example, a whole list of reasons why we don't mind having a hearing loss, such as when you live under the flight path of a major airport, or the kid next door takes up the drums.

Coping = Doing the Best That We Can:

Coping is doing the best you can in any situation. Remember that you don't have to be perfect. No one is perfect. You need to constantly remind yourself: "*People are human and they forget!*"

We also can't hear everything. I am unable to keep track of free-flowing conversations because when people converse socially, their speech overlaps and topics change too rapidly for me. Then, I'll say something to a hearing person like, "Will you be my hearing buddy and fill me in on when the conversation changes or fill me in later?" What often happens is that I'm thinking about the movie they were talking about, and suddenly I realize they're talking about the world-series. How did they get there? I haven't a clue. But, I'm not going to berate myself or make myself ill over it. I just do the best I can.

And many of us have to deal with ambiguity. That's because most of us don't know where our hearing loss is going. None of us knows what the future holds. I don't know where loss is going, but I try to make the best of what I've got now. And, I'm certain that some of the positive attitudes and coping skills that Rex and I have learned will help us over the next hump, whatever that may be.

A positive attitude is essential. It's certainly a lot healthier. Thus we don't spend a lot of time worrying about "What ifs", but we to deal creatively with what's happening now and prepare for the future, whatever that may be.

REX: I just thought of this: I feel my life with Laine is the pot of gold at the end of my rainbow. I really feel that way. Our marriage is stronger now after 35 years than it has ever been. One of the reasons is Laine's change from withdrawal to becoming assertive. This occurred about 15 years ago, when she found other people that were having the same problems that we were and we discovered assistive listening devices. We're now able to go to live theater, and to some movies because of the assistive listening devices. We're able to go out to dinner, because I will wear the

microphone, which helps cut out the background noise. It doesn't cut it out for me, but it cuts it out for her. More frequently, we rent captioned videos for our "movie fix."

Social Events:

REX: Laine uses a clever technique for use with her personal FM system. When we go to a party, she will often clip the microphone onto her appetizer plate. Then, she will aim the plate at the person who is speaking. Most people don't notice that she is doing that. And they will not believe she has a hearing problem.

She will usually come away from those events so stressed and exhausted. This is something I really couldn't comprehend, the energy level that it takes to try to listen. The hearing partner also has to develop an energy level. We have to realize that we can't say "never mind." We have to expend the extra energy to repeat what we said. We have to spend the extra energy to rephrase what we have said. We really have to expend the extra energy get off our duff and go to the other room if we want their attention and. And, what does this show our partner?

LAINE: That you care.

REX: Another thing that Laine does is train our hearing friends: when we all go to a restaurant, they have learned to stand around the table and let Laine seat them according to her needs. Now, before they sit down, they ask: "Laine, where do you want us?"

LAINE: I tell my clients and my students, you must make these decisions. If your need is to be able to hear in the maximum way possible, then you set it up. Preplanning every situation is so crucial. You need to be assertive enough to say what your needs are. You don't want to sit in the middle of the room. You want to be in the corner, where the sound isn't reverberating around you. You don't want to have light behind their heads, because the glare will make it impossible to lipread. You can't expect to hold a decent conversation at McDonald's with all the hard surfaces. You ideally need to spend more money to go to a place that has carpet and tablecloths.

REX: And since the partnership is a two-way street, Laine thinks about accommodating my super-sensitive hearing. I have to wear earplugs just to sleep at night. In a crowded room, I just get this cacophony of noise. When we go into a very noisy place, she will often tell me, "We can't stay here because you won't be able to hear and you'll start to feel claustrophobic." So, she is also protective of my needs in this way, which I really appreciate.

LAINE: It's actually protective of me, because when he gets too much sound, he can get really disagreeable and unhappy. So we are taking into accommodation each of our quirks and differences. Patience and kindness and friendship are the bottom line of any good relationship.

REX: I can also tell Laine when her hearing aid batteries are going low, because her voice gets louder and more strident. Rather than saying anything, I'll just give her a hand signal, if we are in a group of people, so that she will know lower her voice, and go change the batteries. We have developed a lot of signals over the years. Nobody notices that we are doing this.

What we are doing is finding ways to be protective of one another in front of people, so that there is no embarrassment. It took me a long time to find the balance between being protective, but not doing everything for her. I let her do her own phone work as much as she feels comfortable with. I know that when she gets tired of hearing on the phone, she will ask for my help.

REX'S SUMMARY: It was a real revelation and an incredible "ear-opener" for me to attend my first workshop for hearing partners at this ALDA conference. Looking back over our 35 years together, I realized that I had undergone parallel emotions as Laine's hearing ability diminished. I, too, have experienced anger, grief, depression, hostility, fear, isolation, loneliness and hopelessness. I thank God that Laine had the passion and determination to work creatively through her "invisible" handicap and polarize it so we were able to forge an impregnable bond to our relationship and a loving adventure.

Laine Waggoner has an MA in communications and theater and an MS in counseling. She spent 35 years in public relations and communication training and consulting. Today, she is profoundly hard of hearing and counsels individuals, couples and groups on the psychological and social impact of hearing loss and trains them in developing effective coping strategies and communication techniques. Her special interest is working with couples and enlightening hearing professionals. Her master's thesis was a manual on: "Counseling Needs of Hard of Hearing People," which incorporated her work with psychologists Dr. Sam Trychin and Dr. John Gottman.

Rex Waggoner has an MA in communications and theater. He also spent many years in PR, advertising and journalism. In addition, he is a triple-threat playwright/actor/director/drama coach. He joined Laine in giving joint presentations on relationship issues in 1999.

Both Laine and Rex draw upon their theatrical backgrounds to include role-playing, humorous skits and improvisation in their presentations about coping with hearing loss. They are available for seminars and conferences. Contact them at Hearing-loss Education And Resources in Palm Springs, CA. Voice phone: (760) 416-9014, FAX (760) 416-1794, or Email: LaineWaggoner@aol.com.

COPING in RESTAURANTS - Some Waggoner Strategies

- People who are hard of hearing and those who use hearing aids need assistance to discriminate speech well in a noisy situation. *This requires the courage to be assertive.*
- Proper planning ahead can avoid or minimize many restaurant communication hassles.
- Select a place with minimal background noise, music or hard surfaces, which increase noise reverberation.
- Call ahead to reserve for a quiet time and explain your hearing needs when reserving.
- Sit in a quiet, but adequately lighted area- against a wall. I like to sit with my back to the noise. Booths are usually good too.
- Inform the staff that you have a hearing loss and explain what you need them to do to help you understand.
- Sit nearest the people you most want to speak with.
- Ask the members of your party to avoid talking all at once, with food in their mouths, or with their mouths covered.
- Ask someone to alert you when the topic changes.
- Use an assistive listening device to reduce background noise.
- *Remember: people are human and they forget.* So be prepared to give gentle (non-aggressive) reminders about what you need in order to understand.
- Relax and enjoy your food.