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ALDAcon 2006 Academy Awards Luncheon

Keynote Speaker: T. Alan Hurwitz

DR. JANE SCHLAU: I'm here now to for the third time at this conference introducing the same person and I'm still very honored and pleased to have the the privilege.

I met Dr. Alan Hurwitz this past spring at a conference for rehabilitation counselors from states all over the country and Alan had a little party at NTID after we had a tour, and I, on a fluke, walked over to him and said, "Alan, you help ALDA so much. What about helping me have an ALDAcon in Rochester?"

And he said, "Oh, sure" and he just rattled off this person, that person, the next person who can help us plan a beautiful conference for next year!

Since then, we've spoken a few times. Each time he's given me more help and support and different experts who are so knowledgeable of Rochester. I'm sure we're going to have a wonderful 'con next year. It's my privilege and pleasure to introduce Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, our keynote speaker.

(Applause)

DR. T. ALAN HURWITZ: Well, what am I supposed to do? I'm not sure! I thought maybe with the keynote speaker, when they asked me, I thought I would prepare something, maybe an hour, ninety minutes long, but Kathy says, "No, no, no!"

Oh, I said, "Oh, how much time you want from me?"

"Oh, 15, 20 minutes she said." I thought, "Okay, fine."

Now, it's really a pleasure to be here. Even though this is my first time to attend an ALDAcon for its entirety, I was sitting there yesterday listening to Bill Graham and his presentation, his talk about the history of ALDAcon and I started to have these flashbacks.

Probably—I think I was invited to speak at ALDAcon—oh, gosh, maybe 12, 13 years ago in Chicago. That was at the—at a hospital that I don't remember. Mercy Hospital. I remember the speech there.

I think I had some connection with ALDA organization in its infancy, and I remember several years ago, there was an ALDA conference—ADARA conference in Kansas City, and at that time there were many people who were members of ALDA who attended there. And they were invited to join. And, oh, there were wonderful discussions taking place. I'm not a late-deafened individual. I was born deaf. Both of my parents are also deaf. But I truly believe that we deal with so many people with diverse backgrounds, diverse needs, that—I mean, that's just what America's all about.

And also I have the pleasure of coming back to St. Louis, as my wife—it's her hometown. There's family living in St. Louis. And I literally grew up in St. Louis. I went to school here. I went back to Iowa to attend a very small college for several years and then I transferred over here to Washington University, and that was very simple because I wanted to be close to my girlfriend, who of course later became my wife.

And this morning—or early afternoon—my wife and I were walking around the town, the downtown area, and I went to the brand-new baseball stadium! Oh, my word, It's a beautiful stadium. Went into the shop and bought some things for our grandchildren, and there were just so many memories when I looked back, and I love being in St. Louis with the Cardinals. I'm a Cardinals fan just so much of my life. I mean this—and Iowa. You know, part of it, Iowa farm teams with the Cardinals. Many, many years, a supporter of that, so I was thrilled to go—I mean the World Series now, they're playing in Detroit! So it's very exciting. I know it's going to be a tough game. Tough World Series with the Cards, but it doesn't matter. They made it to the World Series.

Now, I mentioned that—well, let me talk a little bit about my parents. My father and his parents' family, they moved here from Russia. They were not able to speak English at all, but they owned a grocery store. My father, when he was born, his parents realized that he was deaf and they didn't know what to do, so they isolated him. They sheltered him. They kept him away from other people until he was 13 years old and they discovered the Iowa School for the Deaf, so they sent him off to that school, and that was his first exposure to formal education, from the time he was 13 till he was 25.

Now, my mother's case, she was born and raised in Kansas City. Her parents had no idea that she was deaf until she was five years old. And there was a neighbor girl who was around the corner who was 10 years old. She was a deaf individual, and she went up to my mother at that time, and she says, “You know what?”—she went to her mom

and she says—“Mom, I think that little girl is deaf.” So her parents met my mother's parents and told them. That's how they realized that she was deaf.

They sent my mother to an oral school, but she was just a Tomboy. She wanted to play, climb trees, be outside. She was very outgoing. Her hearing sister was always engrossed in reading books. Here's my mother as a child playing outside till she was about, oh, 18 years old.

She attended a school for the deaf. Now, at the age of 18 she still couldn't read at all, for some reason. I think she just had maybe a mental block about reading. So the teachers of my mother said, “Hmm, you can't learn to read? Well, then you're going to have to leave school.” So the teachers gave her a book called *Little Women* and my mother struggled to read it and understand what was in the book.

Finally, she started picking up and made a connection with the pictures. She would read the captions of the pictures, and then could visualize the story, and then that gave her a clue to what was being said in the plot and she was able to then pick up the rest of the story. Now, remember, my mother was raised oral, lipreading. My father learned sign. And when they met, my mother couldn't sign. Their aunts knew each other. As soon as they met, they fell in love!

My mother couldn't sign, remember. My dad couldn't speak. But, you know, the expression “love is blind,” so they became—they got married and four years later, I was born!

My parents knew immediately I was deaf. They started reading books to me, telling me stories through sign, and so that's how I developed a passion for reading at a very young age. When I was about four years old, my parents decided that they wanted to send me to a private oral school, because that's where my mother attended and she felt that I could receive a good education.

My father supported that decision, so they sent me to CID, Central Institute for the Deaf here and I went to that school for approximately 10 years. Those were wonderful years. I didn't have any brothers or sisters, but living there at the deaf school is almost like having 10 brothers living there in the dorm. We all interacted with each other. Can you imagine? Ten brothers! It was a wonderful experience!

At that school, you could stay till the eighth grade and then you went into a mainstream school setting. So at that time, I went back to Iowa, into a mainstream public school. And I remember very well, I was about 13 years old when I first went into this history class and was dumbstruck with the large student population there in the classroom. There were 40 kids in Central Institute for the Deaf, can you imagine? We had maybe six students in a class. It was a very intimate setting, with the classrooms, the classmates. We knew each other well. And the teacher, we had a good rapport with.

But in the public high school—a large classroom—I was terrified! And my parents, being deaf, they had never gone to a public school. I had no siblings. No friends. I didn't have any friends to assist me.

So what did they do? They put me in the front row. But the teacher was so sweet, and I remember her name was Mrs. Poppin. A wonderful teacher. She would try to comfort me. I was terrified, though!

There was no interpreter at that time. That was during the Dark Ages, so to speak. There were no interpreters.

I was sitting down, and one day in that class, the teacher wanted to read the Gettysburg Address, and wanted the class to read along with her. I refused to read out loud. The other students were reading out loud along with the teacher, but I was reading silently. I have to admit, I was a little bit bored. I was just kind of looking at my classmates, following along, trying to figure out where they were, and I was trying to follow along at the same pace.

They're all speaking along, reading out loud, and all of a sudden the teacher—Mrs. Poppin—asked the class to stop. “Let's go ahead and discuss the point.” But I'm yammering away ta-da, ta-da, ta-da, ta-da, about the Gettysburg address and then all of a sudden I realized something and I froze and the teacher said to me, “Well, continue on, continue on.” I'm like, “Oh, no, no, no. Forget it.” I was just so embarrassed.

Another time, I thought the teacher was writing something on the blackboard, but in error. This was the old days, you know, the blackboard. Now we have the whiteboards, but this was the blackboard. And the teacher was writing something. I thought the teacher wrote something as a mistake, so I raised my hand and I spoke out. I thought I could speak well because I had some speech training, I said, “Excuse me. You wrote something wrong on the blackboard.” And the teacher said, “What? What?” And I repeated it. And I repeated it. And the teacher is going “what? What?”

So I decided to get up. I walked up to the blackboard, to make the change. Then I realized, oh, the teacher was right! Uh-oh! I wanted to look for a hole to—waiting for the earth to open up and swallow me. Oh! So from that point on, I decided huh-uh! I'm not going to ask questions! I'm not going to make comments! I'm not going to participate in group discussions! I was going to be a very passive student from from that day on and continued in high school that way.

I was fortunate because I had very good study skills. I worked hard outside of the classroom. I would go to the library. I would read books. I was actively involved in my homework and studies so I did well in high school, but it was a very lonely experience for me because I was the only deaf individual in a high school of 2,000 students. But I did have acting skills. I could participate in sports like football, baseball, golf, so I was able to have some friends. But most of my relationships were were superficial. You

know, I'd walk by, "Hi, how are you, how's the weather?" There was no in-depth, meaningful dialogue taking place.

But, again, I was fortunate because on a daily basis, I would come home to my deaf family. It was almost like my retreat and I was able to speak openly and freely with my parents. I was able to persevere and get through it. And then in college, I wanted to major in engineering. So I wrote a letter to Gallaudet. At that time, Gallaudet—it was not a university—it was Gallaudet College.

So we wrote back and forth. Finally, the admissions director said "I'm sorry, we don't have any programs in engineering. We have one course in mechanical art, kind of like drawing," and so I thought, well, okay, I'll go five years there, and then I could go to engineering school. But that's five years at Gallaudet and then four years of a professional engineering school, that's nine years! That's way, too long!

So I went to a small college near my hometown. It was a public college. Morningside College is where I went. I applied, went through the process, sat down with the Registrar's Office, just to make plans for me to enter that college. And they said "Hmm, we would only accept you on one condition: that we establish some type of support service for you." And I thought what? I was insulted by that! "Why? I went through high school just fine, so why are you telling me I have to have some type of support service?" And they said, "Well, well, well, now, that was high school and it was a little different, you know, the teachers used textbooks, they followed it lesson by lesson. College professors, they have their own writing style, they write their speeches and lectures. They may go off target. So we decided that you need some level of support."

I thought, well, okay. Now, remember there were still no interpreters at that time, and I never really thought about sign language interpreters. They weren't around. They suggested maybe setting up some type of note-taking. Hmm. A note-taking system. Hmm. "Well, okay. I'll try that." So they decided they would look for another first-year student who would be taking the same courses, same course load that I had, same schedule. And they hired that individual as my note-taker. I thought, fine, okay. I was agreeable to that. I felt that person should have a strong high school background, maybe straight A's, so they could handle the stress of taking notes for me. That was my requirement.

The college looked high and low. It seemed they couldn't find one. I couldn't find one. Well, they did find someone who was maybe an average C in high school but very motivated. He really wanted the money, you know, and the college was willing to pay for it. So we sat down, and they used paper, they would write it out, with carbon paper copies. You remember the old days, you know, long before any Xerox machines or anything like that. There was a carbon paper inserted and then at the end of the class, he would give me that duplicate copy of his notes.

But, you know, I just really wasn't satisfied. I was bored to death. I would sit in class, nothing to do, waiting for my classmate to finish writing the notes so I could read it.

After about two weeks, I finally told my classmate, “You know, forget this carbon paper. Just forget that business. Don't give me carbon copies. Just go ahead and write your notes. I'm just going to look over your shoulder. I'm going to read what you wrote, and then I'm going to copy it down and I'm also going to have my textbook open and I'll just kind of jot down my own notes. If I have a question for the instructor, I will write it down on a piece of paper, slip it over to you, and then you can go ahead and ask the question for me, get the response and then we could do it that way.”

And it worked beautifully and we had such a good relationship. We were close friends. We were together for a year. By the end of the first year, he became an A student!
(Laughter)

So that system really assisted him as well as assisting me.
(Applause)

After one year, that note-taker had to leave school for personal reasons. My second year, I decided, hmm, I didn't want this to be a big issue, you know, my deafness here. I just wanted to be in the background. I wasn't going to tell the teachers that I was deaf. I would just come into the classroom, sit down, and, you know, this is my second year, and I would just sit back and kind of look for one of my classmates who was very diligent and took a lot of notes.

So the next day, I would quietly come in and sit down next to that student, the one who was taking a lot of notes, and I would just kind of peer over his shoulder and maybe see all the information, and I would write it down on my paper. And that person was kind of giving me the eye, and trying to turn his shoulder to block me from looking, and then I realized, oh, my God, I could get in trouble for this. So then after class, I said, “I'm sorry I was looking at your notes. I'm deaf, and I need someone who takes good notes.” And in almost all situations, the student would say, “Oh, really? Oh, I'd be more than happy to loan you my notes.” So that's how I would use that system of note-taking throughout my college years and I got my bachelor's degree and then my master's. I eventually went to the University of Rochester to get my my doctoral degree. And at that point, I had interpreters for class for my first time.

I was just appalled and in awe of how much information I could receive through interpreters. I asked myself: how the hell did I miss so much information those past years? I started to realize because I didn't know what I was missing. I had nothing to compare with. I was just getting—you know, just—I thought it was normal. But now, I'm using interpreters and I look back all those years. If I had it to do all over again, I would never take a class without an interpreter. When I interact with you this week, I am so impressed with how many of you are able to deal with accessibility issues, finding ways to communicate with each other.

I was really humored yesterday by Bill Graham's talk on how the organization was first founded, and how people found different ways to communicate with each other: paper and pen, writing back and forth, then technology changed and became available, and

it's really evolved now to where we have these large caption screens today. So it's just been a wonderful experience for all of us.

I want to mention that NTID, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, it's one of eight colleges within RIT, the Rochester Institute of Technology. There are 14,000 students, hearing students, plus NTID has some 1200 deaf students. About 50% of our deaf students are mainstreamed in the other seven colleges of RIT, studying with hearing students, and they have a full range of accessibility services and support services. They have interpreters, they have note-takers, they have realtime captioning, they use FM loops for some of the students who can benefit from them. They have a wide range of services for the students.

Right now, we have over 200 students who are using cochlear implants, and the number of students using cochlear implants is growing. We also have 10 audiologists who are full-time trained staff members to work with the cochlear implant students. To deal with all of the equipment for mapping purposes. In the past, we didn't have that type of equipment and many of the students who had cochlear implants, if they experienced a problem, they'd have to fly back home for the weekend for mapping purposes so we decided we would go ahead and get all of that equipment, to provide additional support to the students.

Plus, we have an excellent Center for Employment. We provide support to students who receive co-op employment and also permanent job placement. And then we also provide workshops for our employers, to assist them in developing some knowledge and awareness about deaf employees with hearing employees. Also, the supervisors, so that they can all work together as a team, working together more effectively, using a variety of technology and support systems that would allow deaf employees to become successful in their workplace.

Right now, there's about 95 percent job placement for those individuals who are in the workforce. Those who complete their college education and are seeking jobs, 95% of those students are successful in getting into the field where they have received education and training.

Time is running out but I'm just so excited that next year, Rochester is the place where you will have your ALDAcon, so I give you a warm welcome. It's going to be in September. I believe it's the last week of September. What are the dates? The 26th through the 30th in 2007.

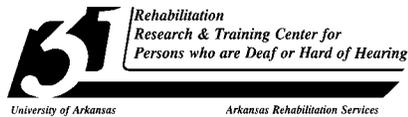
And we will also have Bob Brewer. Bob will be there. Oh, a wonderful friend of mine! I know he just loves many of you here. So he will be there to provide all of the support and access services you'll need.

Thank you for making both my wife Vicki and myself feel such a warm welcome here at your conference. Thank you so much.

BIOGRAPHICAL

Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, a prelingually deaf son of deaf parents, is Vice President of Rochester Institute of Technology and Dean/CEO of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of Rochester Institute of Technology. He has been a member of the NTID faculty since 1970. Prior to his faculty appointment to NTID he was employed for five years as an Associate Electronics Engineer and Senior Numerical Computer Programmer at McDonnell Douglas Corporation in St. Louis.

Dr. Hurwitz received his B.S. degree from Washington University in St. Louis and M.S. degree from St. Louis University, both with a major in Electrical Engineering. He holds a doctorate in teaching and curriculum from the University of Rochester.



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