



# CHHA-BC Chatter..

## CHHA-BC President Marilyn's Matters:

### **National Speechreading Project:**

CHHA-BC has been accepted as one of six places in BC to participate in creating a Media Splash to announce publicly, across Canada, the launch of this upgraded and standardized Speechreading curriculum and teaching project. Vancouver is the major city named, but the pr video will be shot in the Resource Centre in Chilliwack, so another task for office staff to organize and run. An effort will be made to include some pr for all of the CHHA-BC Branches as well. Target date for this production is May. This will be followed in 2015 by the actual start of training programs. It will be considered, also as a skills upgrading/refresher course for existing Speechreading teachers, as it is the first standardized curriculum that CHHA has authorized.



### **Public forum on Hearing Aid Costs and Services:**

This is shaping up nicely, with the room, assistive device and CART, and caterers booked, and a complete panel of presenters. I have attached a page with info about the panelists. Please do go to the web site and register for the event, and do plan to attend and add your voice to this unique opportunity to question our hearing health care providers on hearing aid costs. Organizing committee meets again this coming Saturday, to move things ahead., particularly as regards distribution of publicity to the public.

While most of the work on this project has been done by volunteers in Vancouver, still the Resource Centre has been involved in items such as setting up the registration site, preparation of flyer, and so on.

### **Youth mentorship program:**

Bowen Tang, Joy Gong and Tasha Cox, who are organizing this program send their thanks to the board for the promise of \$200 to support the mix/mingle social to accompany the planned Transition workshops. As a part of accepting volunteer mentors, a criminal record check must be done. CHHA-BC has agreed to serve as the sponsoring program for this and Sharon Perry is looking after preparing and supplying the letters of authorization, for each mentor applicant. The Chapter board can be proud of supporting this very much needed project.

## ***BC FERRIES ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE***

I am writing to you as a member of the BC Ferries Accessibility Committee. This is a committee made up of representatives of numerous associations whose purpose is to help people in BC deal with their various disabilities while travelling on the ferries. I am the representative of the Canadian Hard Of Hearing Association. This committee meets twice a year with representatives of various department heads to discuss accessibility issues. As a result of these meetings, there have been many changes to existing facilities, but more important is that the needs of the disabled are front and centre when new facilities are being designed (such as ships and loading ramps).

If you are going to be travelling by BC Ferries, and you have a disability, I strongly suggest that you visit their web site, [www.bcferreries.com](http://www.bcferreries.com). (Click on "reserve and plan" and then "persons with disabilities") and learn about the assistance that is available to you. If you have mobility issues, your needs can be better met by planning ahead and informing the customer service department of your travel plans and needs.

➤ Did you know that you can have a friend help you get on the ferry and get settled and then leave the ferry before it sails?

➤ Did you know that there are wheelchairs available at the terminals and on the ships for use by the public? Reserving ahead will make sure one is available for you.

➤ Did you know that using the hazard lights on your car will alert the loading staff to the fact that your vehicle is the one that needs to be parked close to the elevator? (You will have previously informed the customer service department and mentioned it to the ticket booth employee just to be sure everyone is aware of your needs.)

➤ Did you know that if you do not tell BC Ferries of your needs, they will not know what they are? That seems like a silly statement, but think about it. How many of us are hesitant to speak up and tell people what we need from them. (Don't tell me you do not want to be a nuisance. People want to help, they just don't know what to do, so tell them!)

There is lots more information on the BC Ferry web site.

Planning is now taking place for the mid-life refit of the Spirit Class vessels. The engineers are aware of the benefit to the hard of hearing of an induction loop. Because the ships are made of steel there are many difficulties putting one in a ship. However they are working on this with the goal of having a loop system installed on the Spirit Class vessels when they go in for their refit. Hopefully, there will also be monitors around the ship that have closed captioning of announcements.

A temporary induction loop in one of the lounges of the Queen of Surrey has recently been installed while she was having maintenance done. If anyone has the opportunity to use this loop, please let me know of your experience.

If you travel on the ferries and have had any difficulties related to your disabilities, you can send me an email and I will bring it to management's attention. You should also write or call their customer service department. Both the hearing and hard of hearing know that the speaker quality is terrible, so there is no need to bring up that topic.

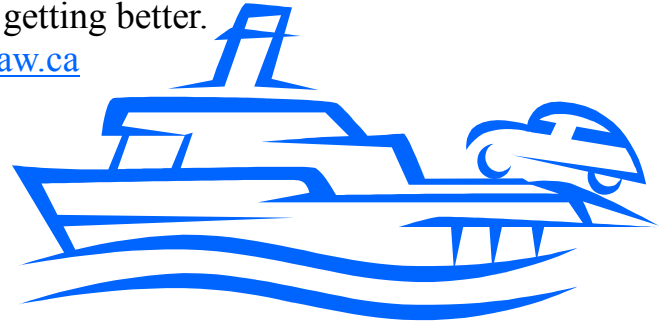
Change happens slowly, but things are getting better.

You can write to me at [hughsheila@shaw.ca](mailto:hughsheila@shaw.ca)

Yours truly

*Hugh Mitchell*

[hughsheila@shaw.ca](mailto:hughsheila@shaw.ca)



*These days, Happy Hour is a nap.*



## Google-dot-dog

I was told there would be a wait of two years when I applied for my Hearing Ear Dog Guide so when the phone call came after just 19 months I was both surprised and nervous – surprised at how soon it was happening and nervous because I still had a very busy month to go before I finished my course at BCIT and I didn't know how long I would have to wait if I turned down my first chance. Luckily, I wasn't the only one who wasn't available, and the Lions Foundation was able to delay the class another month. I agreed to attend the June class, even though it meant missing my convocation, because

if I passed up this chance I may have to wait another six months or longer.

I had submitted my application form (found online) in September of 2007.

The application is extensive, requires no application fee and covers:

Family members, type of home, transportation used

Policy about other pets in the home (not allowed once you get your Hearing Ear Dog Guide)

What pets the applicant has owned in the past

Employment status

Questions about the hearing loss, lifestyle/activities

Character references

Legal, moral and financial obligations of having a Dog Guide

Additional forms to submit: contract; permissions from employer and landlord, medical report from GP; and recent audiologist report

The Lions Foundation of Canada in Oakville, Ontario was my preferred choice because I had two other Hard of Hearing (HOH) friends who got their Dog Guides there and spoke highly of the organization; they convinced me that follow ups and support could be provided despite the distance. About 10 months after the Lions received my application, my husband and I had a home visit from the head trainer much like that required of human adoptive parents. A few months later I received news I was accepted. Then the wait began in earnest.

I arrived at the Lions Foundation's training facility on a Thursday in early June 2009. After being shown to our private rooms with private bath and outfitted with a TV and computer, we started with an evening orientation. The trainer and her assistant introduced themselves and I got to know my classmates. There were five other people in the class; three of the students were Deaf and two besides me were HOH. Four of the participants were from Ontario, Carmen from Alberta and I (Port Coquitlam) represented the west. Two of the Deaf participants were a married couple who share one dog. They were retiring their 12 year old arthritic Dog Guide back to the centre so they could train with their new dog.

In addition to the Hearing Ear Dog Guide (HED) program, there were three other programs in session when we arrived, each with varying training lengths, all timed to end on the same day so we could graduate together: Canine Vision (for the visually impaired), Service (for those who have a physical disability), and Seizure Response (for those with epilepsy). (There have been two new programs added since that time: Autism Assistance and Diabetic Alert).

By the time we finished our session with a tour and wrapped up by 9 p.m. we knew we would have to wait until Saturday to get our Dogs Guides. We were not told in advance what kind of dog we were getting but we were given a clue on Friday when the trainers handed out dog gear. Knowing we would likely either get a mid-size lab or a poodle (miniature or standard) we drew our own conclusions by the size of the leash, halti and harness (vest uniform) we were given. On Saturday, we returned to our rooms at mid-morning break to wait for one of the trainers to bring us our dog. I needed a dog I wouldn't be allergic to and I really wanted a poodle. I had been tipped off by a caregiver who was attending with a client from a concurrent and longer program that there was a black miniature poodle picked out for me ("everybody wants her, she's so sweet!"). I crossed my fingers! When Google was brought to me I was thrilled. She, on the other hand, whimpered at the door a bit before settling in with me for a short getting-to-know-you session.

I was, after all, her fourth mommy as the trainer liked to say so this hand-off was strange for her too.

We were all over the moon when we returned to class with our new dogs and anxious to see our classmates' dogs. From that time on, the dogs were our responsibility 23 ½ hours a day. Our only respite was 30 minutes in the evening when we were allowed to put our dogs in a crate and go for a walk off the property.

Puppies start life at the Lions' breeding facility. Once weaned, they are placed with a foster family for socialization and obedience training. Foster families are expected to attend obedience class regularly. At the age of about one year they are returned to the Oakville training centre where they are assessed and a program is chosen for them. After approximately 6 months of sound work, they are assessed to and, if ready, a class is planned for the dog to train with the Deaf or HOH handler. Sometimes dogs are disqualified (DQ'd) if they fail the training; sometimes they are tried for more than one kind of training to find a good fit.

I was told some dogs are not curious enough to be good Hearing Ear Dog Guides and some have health problems. Google had a brother and a sister who were both disqualified; she was the star of her litter! The Lions Foundation keeps a list of potential adoptive families for these dogs as well as the ones who are retired to the centre.

Our training started with basic commands: 'wait' (never 'stay' because they have to be ready to respond), 'sit', and 'down'. We learned how to walk our dogs indoors and out, how to make them lie at our feet in the dining room, how to get them into a routine (feeding, grooming and out for 'business').

Hearing Ear Dog Guides learn several sounds during their six months of training: doorbell; kitchen timer; telephone; smoke alarm; alarm clock; and someone calling the handler's name. We each practised sound work, sitting with our dog in one of the three sound rooms set up to simulate an apartment while waiting for the anticipated sound so we could reward our dogs with a treat. We aimed for three tries always ending with a success.

The Lions Foundation provides the dog, training, travel and room and board without charge to the handlers they accept for their programs because they want everyone to have the same opportunity regardless of personal means. Behaving in public is essential training for the dogs so there are outings every day and all field trips are paid for by the Lions Foundation— even the coffee at Tim Hortons! We walked the Dog Guides on the street, in the park and on the waterfront, up and down escalators, in elevators and on buses.

Dog Guides are owned by the Lions Foundation; we are only caregivers. But when we take on a Dog Guide we are responsible for any costs incurred once we get them home. That includes gear, food, and veterinary costs. When I left the

centre I signed a contract committing to use Google for a minimum of three sounds. Trainers check in with me annually to help me problem-solve any training issues. Veterinarians send a report to the Lions Foundation following regular physicals and trainer assistance is offered if the dog's weight gets too heavy. Unlike Canine Vision Dog Guides who work mostly outside of the home, Google works primarily in my home (doorbell, timer, name calling and telephone) and at the office (alerting me when people approach my desk from behind). Once I got her home we had at least six months of bonding time before I started to feel like we were a team. We both brought some baggage – Google for her famously poodle trait of stubbornness and a little barking issue and me for some residual frustration I had training a previous dog. But the sense of security she brings me if I am alone for the night and the way she finds me if my husband calls and I can't hear him have really improved the quality of our lives and bring much joy to our little family (my husband and I are empty-nesters).

I will remember my time in Oakville partly for how tired I was – training with my Dog Guide was as intense as any live-in learning program – but mostly for the rich learning experience it was, living and learning with this mixed class (HOH and Deaf) and going through the predictable bumps in the road while the group learned to trust each other. My rudimentary signing skills rarely get practiced so I was not comfortable communicating with people who are signing Deaf before this experience. Each little group gravitated toward each other at first, but all my Deaf classmates loved to teach signs, and seemed comfortable advocating for themselves, so they eagerly helped us HOH folks find alternative ways of conversing (miming, writing notes and speaking aloud).

If you would like more information about the Hearing Ear Dog Guide Program at the Lions Foundation of Canada, go to their website at <http://www.dogguides.com/index.html> . And if you have specific questions about living with a Dog Guide you are welcome to email me at [dshaffer@telus.net](mailto:dshaffer@telus.net).