

**Transcript of meeting: Saturday, November 17, 2018**

*This is an edited version of the transcription projected on the screen during the meeting. The transcriber used the “TypeWell” method synthesizing the essence of the discussion using advanced abbreviated software. Thus, the following is not necessarily verbatim.*

**Dean Olson**, President, Washington State Communications Access Project

***Accessible and More Rewarding Holiday Travel***

I used to be on the Hearing Loss Association of America’s (HLAA) State Board of Directors in Austin, Texas and in Albuquerque, New Mexico where I was also treasurer, newsletter editor and president. I served several years on HLAA’s Washington State Board. In 2009, I left Washington for a job in Tucson and returned home in 2013.

Since then I have been working with John Waldo, who is legal counsel and Advocacy Director of the Washington State Communication Access Project (Wash-CAP). I am the president. Wash-CAP has been quite successful over the past ten years in getting captioning in many venues such as live and movie theaters, sports arenas, public transportation and others. Visit our website to see the big picture. [www.wash-cap.com](http://www.wash-cap.com).

Not all hearing technology and devices get us the best access in houses of worship, sporting events, plays, etc., and especially in spaces where public speakers have accents. We want captions in public places. This is how Wash-CAP helps: to get captions to help us cover as much of the hearing loss/deafness spectrum, as possible.

Today’s presentation is primarily about traveling when you have a hearing loss or deafness. This is more than going to someone's home during the holidays, much more than that.

Back-up Equipment

Now, when we travel, whether going to Chicago, New York or to another country, we need to think about batteries, whether you have a cochlear implant or a hearing aid.

You need to bring a box of batteries, essentially. If you have spare hearing aids, bring one. Bring an ear mold. If your tube goes out, you'll need a tube. In the case of implants, you have a cord, so bring a back-up cord. I needed that when I went to Pittsburgh last June. My cord started to go out and my wire was exposed. I had my backup with me.

Rechargeable batteries: if you use those, bring backup rechargeable batteries. That way you can avoid trouble. The last thing you want to do is go on a trip and have a tour planned and have to make an emergency visit to the audiologist.

Some people may suggest bringing a back-up alarm. I have a Fitbit and it shakes at 5:30am to wake me up in the morning. It vibrates on my wrist.

I don't know about smoke alarms, but a lot of hotels don't have a smoke detector or carbon monoxide detector in the room.

Expect something to break. Even if it's an older, backup hearing aid, bring it.

Bring a dryer kit with you. Over my time with hearing aids I've used Super Seal for hearing aids and Ear Gear for implants. They both work well for their respective devices.

Bring neck loops with you. If you use them, bring them. They only cost $40-$70, depending where you get it.

If you have direct audio, on side you have the jack and the other is the clip-on microphone. These are really cheap and easy to use.

If you happen to go to a show on your trip and you get a receiver, sometimes the jacks are a funny size, but there are jack adapters as you move from 1" to 1 ½" or whatever.

Male Speaker: These are all ⅛."

Dean Olson: The pocket talker uses a larger jack. They all use different sizes.

That's just preliminary planning for backup equipment. People use the term "hearing accessible technology" and we should all have a “HAT” bag where we keep all of our hearing related gear together. I keep mine all in one place.

I also have a brick. It works with droid and iPhone hook ups. It's got about 6 hours charging.

Joyce: What is a brick?

Dean Olson: It's like a battery. They are very cheap now.

Jennifer: What is it for?

Dean Olson: It's a gigantic battery storage. It recharges your batteries, Bluetooth, Roger pen, and other devices. It charges your devices in case you're in a place with no plug ins.

Jennifer: It's just a different brand for hearing aids?

Dean Olson: No, you just need the right type USB and it needs to be compatible with your device. This is a good point: Test this stuff before your trip because you want to make sure it works.

The same thing with testing listening devices. I'll get into a point later about that. When you get into the event and it's not working, that's a waste of time and clarity.

Male Speaker: If you travel overseas, for God’s sake, bring a voltage converter.

Dean Olson: That is the point I'm going to next. Australia and South Africa and Europe all have different voltages. That's why you have bricks to charge your remote control or whatever else you need. They can be charged with the brick.

Bring your reader glasses because you'll find the print is too little

Let's say you're going to the Czech Republic. I am planning to go there in the future. You will want to bring a dictionary and you'll want to have it downloaded on your phone. Make sure you don't pay a lot on your phone bill. Use Wi-Fi but have your translation dictionary out there on your smartphone so you know where to find the bathrooms.

When you fly, you have a choice. You can fly as a deaf/hard-of-hearing person or a normal hearing person. For years I flew as a "normal" person but I got in trouble because the flight attendant thought I was using a device that was interfering with the plane. If you declare you are a deaf/hard-of-hearing person, they will seat you first. It's actually a good idea because they know where you are.

On Southwest, they have festival seating, and you sit where you want. If you declare deaf, they know to watch you and keep an eye out. It's smarter all the way around and then the employees know your status.

We have these little tablets now and we can load movies to be used with our headsets. Before you leave home, load your movies and books. During the flight you can use your movies which will be captioned, not the ones they provide that are not captioned.

Let's say you are with someone and he/she wants to see a show in Budapest at the famous opera house. I have no understanding how to approach this. But weeks or months before you go, find out if they provide any assistive listening devices. Email and ask about the time of the performance you are planning to attend. Do you check it out? Does it have English subtitles? Usually they will answer these types of questions.

The reason I suggest this is that a couple of years ago, in 2013, I went to New York and wanted to see a David Letterman show. I assumed they had a loop or assistive listening devices with a neckloop, but they had nothing.

The Ed Sullivan Theater routine is to show up at lunch hour, get your tickets, come back in the evening and get your places at 3:30pm. They told us they didn't have any neckloops, but they could help me out when I came back from recording at 5pm. They had me sit next to the sound guy and I was hooked into his headset. It was kind of Mickey Mouse. But it worked.

Before you go, test your equipment. Make sure everything is compatible. Test the brick charger. You'll be somewhere with bad voltage or no hookup.

I went to the Fifth Avenue last week for "Come from Away" and I got an email from someone two days before the show who wanted to test their t-coil with the theater’s assistive listening devices. But 48 hours is not enough time. We need to do that weeks or months ahead of time. Please be reasonable.

You can also use a neckloop or a receiver and test it with the theatre ahead of time. Test it before you go. This applies to all situations. It helps to build your self-confidence when you go in. There won't be a question mark in your mind that doesn't work for you.

Some people ask me to fix things the day before the show, but I can't always do that. But I can meet up with you at Starbucks a few days before the show and help you get your equipment working properly.

Make sure you set your cell phone plan before you go. In Vancouver, roaming charges drive up the monthly bill.

I'm planning to go to Prague with frequent flier miles next October. It looks like I will get a chance to do that. Rick Steves office is in Edmonds and I went there to pay for and receive a half-hour consultation. They told me that I could hire a local translator or a local Rick Steves tour guide, and you can tell them you are hard-of-hearing and they will adapt their style to suit you. Most speak a pretty good English dialect.

If you are going overseas, go to Google and search: Using technology in Europe Rick Steves. That should give you a YouTube-type video that will give you the information you might need (he doesn’t caption his videos). You will get a lot of information from that. With no captions, if you get about half or two-thirds of the words, that’ll help. These videos will give you a lot of information about traveling in Europe.

Mike Sweeney: How about speech-to-text apps? I know you can get them in English or Spanish.

Dean Olson: I don't know because I really rely on person to person interaction in dealing with taxi drivers, bus drivers, etc. With cell phones, when using a different country’s phone system (be careful). You may get charged a lot of foreign transaction fees. If you don't pick the right card, you could end up with a lot of charges. I always call ahead of time.

If you do not have a telecoil, we have something that imitates a telecoil. You can borrow that and see what the experience is like, if you want.

Some of us go on a vacation and are very autonomous. Some of us like to go on guided or group tours. Yes, you can go to Rick Steves; that's a “guided tour.” University of Washington and Western Washington University have alumni tours (guided tours). They do cost a bit more but you support the school and get the help you need with hearing challenges so you can enjoy what you are doing as much as possible.

Drivers can be arranged before you travel as well as local guides. They don't cost too much, as it turns out.

I was talking earlier about going from Bellingham to Seattle with live theatre and the challenge of testing new devices. If you don't have a telecoil there are devices like Lou pointed out a minute ago.

Is the show you are attending a small one? Do they have printed captions? Just things to keep in mind…..

I went on a West Point Tour when I was on the east coast and I took the full two hour tour. You go to West Point, get your ticket, get on the bus, there are security issues, and I talked to the tour guide and sat by her on the bus the whole time. They didn't have a loop. When we walked around to see the important tour stuff and concepts, I stayed close to the guide and that worked out well for me.

[On screen.) Here's a self-guided tour in downtown Prague. The way to learn to a confusing city like Prague is to get a guidebook, such as *Lonely Planet* and you can learn exchange rates and local spots.

If you are in London or Seattle in a normal November, expect about 10" of rain. We have sensitive equipment on our chest, our ears or we have glasses. If you have a full brim hat, you cover your implant and your glasses. If you have this type of coverage you will be well protected by investing in a hat like this full brim hat -- a travel recommendation I received from a guide last month.

Larry: I play golf and sometimes the wind is really blowing when it rains, and Cochlear has these little waterproof covers that work really well.

Dean Olson: That was my next point. Let's say it’s cold, you can put on a hat. When I have the stocking hat on and my Ear Gear on, I'm cutting the wind and the noise. When I was in Africa, we were on a safari and I was in an open truck in the backseat and I put a hat on like this so I could hear what was going on. This type of hat (wool cap) is important in a different way. The full brim hat keeps rain from glasses and hearing instruments.

Male Speaker: I want to mention that your hat has a string on it, because if you're out in the wind, it can come in handy.

Dean Olson: When I'm waiting for the train to come in Edmonds, I always use this hat with the string around my chin. They are affordable these days, less than $100.

Let's say you go to Rome and want to be in a less noisy restaurant. Go outside and order your food. That can help you hear the people you are with.

When you get outside Canada or the United States, they may ask for documentation of your disability, but you can get a discount. If you're older, Elder Hostel has a new name: RoadScholar.org. I am not old enough yet, but this is a good way to go.

[On screen.] Here's another night view of Prague.

Female Speaker: I have taken one Road Scholar trip and I'm about to take another one, and they are more expensive but they teach you a lot and is a good trip.

Dean Olson: Yes, having someone act as a docent and someone who can help you hear, is very important. On these little trips, even in Seattle, you learn where the Chinese District was as well as other Asian cultures. You learn about Seattle's history with skid row and the underground, etc. These people who are guides, if they know you are not hearing well, they can help you.

In the end, we must take ownership for what we are and who we are, and we can turn something that could be a passive issue into a positive experience. If you ask your guide, well, why did these things happened between Munich and Berlin, etc., you have someone in your court to explain these things to you.

I think I covered everything I have. It's like a big stew of things.

Robert: What did you say about YouTube technology travel? Are there special tech travel videos?

Dean Olson: When I looked up YouTube, my girlfriend, Janet, and I were looking up different types of Google lookups. Some seemed kind of vague. Then we focused on discounts for trains and busses. It's hard to find specific information about traveling while deaf or hard-of-hearing. It can be difficult. What I have discovered, and quite to my surprise, is in Europe, when you walk to a ticket window, they have a loop. If you have automatic t-coil it will turn on and you can do your transaction. They have those in South Africa and Australia as well.

Don't leave your auto t-coil on and get on a flight because that can interfere with the overhead announcements there.

Tanya: I wanted to add to your tips. You talked about a hotel where they may have flashing lights for a fire alarm. I noticed recently, if you look for a handicapped room they have "deaf/hard-of-hearing" rooms. Look for that as well when travelling. I would say as far as your tip on telling the airline you're hard-of-hearing or deaf, get a service dog. Not only do you get to board first, you get upgraded to the bulkhead seats where you have more legroom. They actually come and get you to board first. It's awesome. It's good to be disabled.

 [Group laughing]

Dean Olson: Yes, I have missed hearing seating group announcements, like Group A or Group B, and I missed that and get on last.

Tanya: I used to wait till the very end to board and no more.

Dean Olson: For better or worse, it's always better if they know your status so you can get on first.

Tanya: It's good to be disabled.

 [Laughter]

Charlene: Dean, one thing that was helpful for me was taking a bus tour through Italy and Greece was that were prepared to help people with headsets, but they knew nothing about neckloops. If anyone is planning to take a bus tour, let them know ahead of time. You can't tell them you have a hearing loss and need hearing help because they don't know the different varieties of assisted hearing devices we may need to help out.

Dean Olson: In hearing help I'm including mini mics, FM receivers, neckloops, etc. If I'm on a bus and I don't want to hear the buzz or the hum and I can't do a neckloop because of it, I usually use a different device, a Mini Mic, that allows you to take a patch cord and put it in the receiver and turn on the Bluetooth. That's another version of a headset.

Charlene: I'm not that tech savvy, so I'm saying taking the neckloop and putting it in the receiver worked just fine.

Dean: Sometimes if you're on an electric jet or bus, you get that electric hum or feedback.

Charlene: Speech reading skills really help. They let me sit right behind the driver of the tour bus rather than other people trading off. I got it to keep. The woman who was the narrator of the bus tour was down in the pit below the driver.

I could speech read her because in the side mirror, her face was reflected. Even though it was in reverse, her face was her face and her mouth was her mouth. I could not believe my good fortune.

Dean Olson: That's great you mention that. When I was in the West Point Tour I made sure I was in the right seat to speech read as well. The whole campus is very hilly and has different houses of worship and different cemeteries. It worked out very well.

You have to practice. I am a bit tech savvy. We need to know when and how to use a mini microphone or a Roger, etc. You should know when to use a neckloop and how to position it. Now I'm getting a little more advanced.

Jennifer: Someone suggested to me when I went on a trip I asked for a rolling shower. If I can't go in, I can't go in. I went to a wedding in Port Townsend and I couldn't get in because of the steps. They suggested I started a blog listing the accessible places for those of us with hearing loss or mobility issues.

Dean Olson: I just got certified to be an ADA coordinator and I think you can call or email to find out where those sites are. There are a couple of people doing that now and it's an app on a phone. If you contribute to that, you'd be helping.

Jennifer: Yes, if people travel they know where they can and can't get to.

Dean Olson: Can you walk at all?

Jennifer: Then I could not, but now with a walker.

Dean: What about a place where you can get into the room and then there's no rails or handrails in the bathroom?

Jennifer: I ended up getting a bathroom with a shower chair and they had a glass thing, and there was no way I could get in. I told them that's not what I asked for. I got my money back.

Dean Olson: Did they have any lights for emergency?

Jennifer: No, they did not. Twice that happened when I had surgery and had to stay in a hotel.

Dean Olson: Make sure we exchange information because I need to get you in touch with the right people. If they don't have a strobe light for a smoke detector or CO2 monitor, that's a problem.

Jennifer: Sometimes you can call and ask if they have it and when you get there, they don't have it. Just be careful.

Jerry: One thing I wanted to say is last Christmas I was a novice traveler since I became deaf. Your carry-on is your most important piece of luggage. I had a lot of the devices that you spoke of in my checked bag, which was lost. It was a 3 to 5 day minimum to get my bags bag and my ten-day trip to Jacksonville turned into a 22-hour turnaround because I didn't have my hearing stuff. Everything in that carry-on is vital.

Dean Olson: That HAT bag needs to stay with ME. Don't check it.

Mike Sweeney: We need to wrap up. Thank you, Dean, for an excellent presentation as always.

 [Applause]

 [End of meeting]