

# HLAA TC

## December 2024

Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota



The mission of HLAA TC is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy.

### UPCOMING MEETINGS

December 21, 2024

*Robyn DeCourcy*

Guthrie Theater

Accessibility options at the Guthrie

January 25, 2025

*Darlene Zangara, executive director*  
MNCDHH

Making your Voice Heard: Lobbying  
at the State Legislature

February 15, 2025

*Kim Fishman*

HearsToU

Equipment, accessories and products  
to help us hear better and  
take care of our ears



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### President's email

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The December Hearing Loss Association of America Twin Cities Chapter meeting  
(HLAA TC) will be held on December 21, 2024  
**See page 11 for further details**

# *President's Message*

December 2024

by Robyn Coninx

As we come into the holiday season, we are thinking about the various holiday celebrations we will attend with friends and family.

I would like to offer what may seem to some as unsolicited advice: Part of self-care is knowing when YOU need a break from 'listening'. It is perfectly acceptable to seek out a quiet spot to relax and reboot. And PACE yourself! When hearing loss is involved in social settings, it helps to share what our listening needs are.

Remember that it is OK to ask those you are closest to, to review the HLAATC concise talking points for including those with hearing loss in your conversation. Perhaps 'hearing' members in the conversation can assist in sharing these points with the group. The card shown below may help.

**I have a hearing loss. Background noise makes speech comprehension harder.**

**I will understand you better if you:**



Make sure you have my attention.



Make sure I can see your face.



Slow down a bit.



Speak a bit louder.



Speak as clearly as possible.



Pause to give my ears a chance to catch up with you.

This card is brought  
to you by:





**Living with hearing loss? Do you want resources, community and support? Join us at HLAA-TC.**

**HLAA-TC has chapter meetings the third Saturday of the month (September - May). All meetings captioned (CART)**

**Contact Us**



**763-447-9672**



**www.hlaatc.org**



**facebook.com/hlaatwincities  
facebook.com/groups/hlaatc**



**linkedin.com/company/hlaatc**



**youtube.com/@hearinglossassocwincities**

*Gracious acknowledgement goes to HLAATC Board members, especially Christy and Laura for their work that they put into creating the above information card. If you would like copies of the card, you can pick them up at our monthly HLAATC Chapter meetings on the third Saturday of the months September – May.*

[HLAATC Website](http://www.hlaatc.org)

Best to all!

HLAATC TC President

Thoughts and questions always welcome,  
please call: 763-447-9672 or email: [president@hlaatc.org](mailto:president@hlaatc.org)

All members are welcome at board meetings - email us at:  
[president@hlaatc.org](mailto:president@hlaatc.org)

December Chapter meeting  
Holiday Meeting and Special Guest Speaking on  
Accessibility Options at the Guthrie Theater  
Saturday, December 21  
*Christy Myers*

Holiday Get-Together and Chapter Meeting

Join us in person in the Board Room of the Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute (address on page 11). Wear your favorite holiday attire, and bring a treat to share, if you are so inclined.

There will be games, conversation, and a special presentation by our guest speaker, Robyn De Courcy, Accessibility Coordinator for the Guthrie Theater. She will give us an overview of how we can access theater at the Guthrie with our hearing and/or vision loss. The Guthrie has a multi-pronged approach to accessibility, and you will learn new things.

About Robyn:

“Robyn DeCourcy (she/her) is a proudly neurodivergent and multiply disabled Accessibility Coordinator for the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. In addition to a self-designed BS degree in Liberal Arts and Autism Studies, DeCourcy also obtained a Certificate in Autism Spectrum Disorders from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. She has been a disability professional for over 15 years and is a regular speaker, writer, and consultant for a wide range of organizations across the Upper Midwest.”

Please join us on December 21<sup>st</sup>.

November Meeting Summary  
*by Christy Myers*

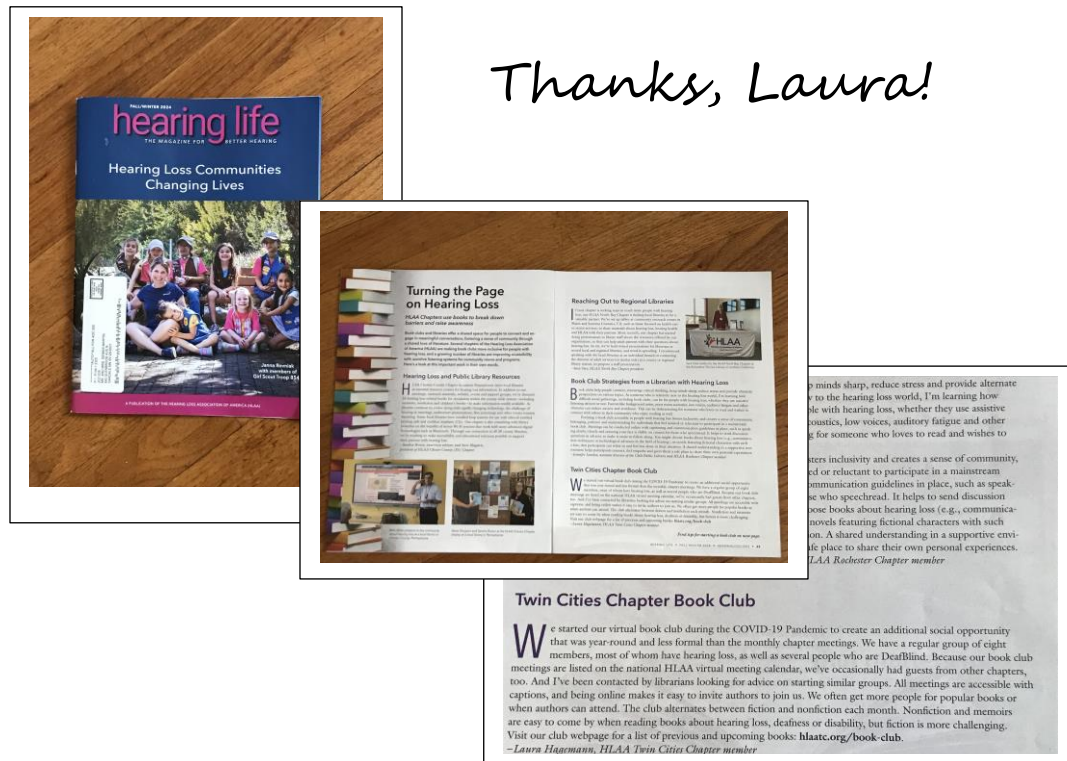
For our November Chapter meeting we welcomed, via Zoom, our guest Claudia Marseille.

Claudia is a painter and author from California. Her memoir “But You Look So Normal: Lost and Found in a Hearing World”, depicts her life from childhood in California, when she was first diagnosed with hearing loss, through her school years when she was mainstreamed and tried to conceal her hearing loss and into adulthood as she came to accept her hearing loss and find a way to exist in the world that is fulfilling and fitting.

Claudia shared excerpts from her memoir and discussed her years living in a hearing world without hearing. Her presentation was powerful and meaningful to the many Chapter members who were present.

Currently Claudia displays her paintings at various galleries in California. You can access her paintings and book at [www.claudiamarseille.com](http://www.claudiamarseille.com).

Hearing Life fall/winter issue "Turning the Page on Hearing Loss" includes a section highlighting the Twin Cities Chapter Book Club.



Thanks, Laura!

## Theater Outing

by Christy Myers

We had our first HLAA-TC theater outing on December 7th. The purpose of having outings is to let us get to know each other better while letting the world out there know that we are people with hearing loss who need some accommodation, thank you very much.

Eight of us attended a performance at Theater in the Round of Agatha Christie's play "An Unexpected Guest". We used their new assistive listening devices - phones that connected to their sound system and used either headphones or loops to connect to our hearing aids. The sound clarity was pretty good, after some initial issues. They also offered tablets, which provided captions. The theater is small enough that captions on my cellphone worked as well. The play had a lot of talking, much of it fast, and the captions were a little slow, so keep the pace of a play in mind when deciding whether to use auto generated captions as your primary "hearing" source.

Before the performance, some of us gathered together for dinner at a nearby restaurant - the Town Hall Brewery. The restaurant was LOUD. We had a table in the corner and it was small enough for four people to communicate but beyond that, this restaurant would not work for people with hearing loss. The food was good, though, and the theater was just across the street.

Items of interest from the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing  
(culled by Christy Myers)

**Two members of the board** are familiar names among HLAA-TC folks:

**Adrienne Haugen (Advisory Committee Member):** a representative of the Speaking DeafBlind community from Greater Minnesota

**Karla Sand (At-Large Member):** a representative of seniors with limited hearing ability and involved with the Hearing Loss Association of America, Twin Cities chapter

Why not join them? There are **still three at-large openings:**

“Board members have an important role at the Commission by providing guidance and oversight to the executive director. At least 50% of the board must be deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing. Board members are appointed by the Governor...”

Anyone may apply for an at-large seat.

To learn more about the board and how to apply, view our ["Join the Board" webpage](#). Or go to the [Secretary of State's page for our Commission](#) and apply now.”

Last, but not least, they have **decided to do away with their acronym** (We aren't the only ones who were struggling with all of those acronyms!)



Here is the reasoning behind this decision, and the new acceptable terms to use. (Note especially the last sentence!)

### **Board Decision on the Commission's Short Name**

“At the September 20, 2024, board meeting, the board unanimously voted to stop using 'MNCDHH' and use the 'Commission' to refer to the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing.

Therefore, the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing no longer uses an acronym as a short reference to the organization. The old acronym (MNCDHH) was hard to remember, unclear, and DeafBlind wasn't included. Going forward, the Commission will use their full name for first-time references and then switch to “the Commission” or in cases where we need to be clear which state commission, the ‘Minnesota Commission’ or ‘MN Commission’ for short.

Official Commission branding

- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing
- The Commission
- Minnesota Commission
- MN Commission

*To preserve the integrity of our branding, please do not make up any other short references or acronyms to refer to the Commission*

Here's Christy Myers reporting from the airport:



“Flying to Seattle on Alaska airlines - they have implemented voice-to-text announcements, so messages from the gate show up as captions on the screen behind the desk! Yay!”



## **Please Welcome Michael Smith to HLAATC He has been voted in as a Director-at-Large to the HLAATC Board**

I'm happy to introduce myself to the Board and membership of the HLAA Twin Cities chapter with this brief personal bio. I hope I can be of help with the chapter's goal of developing a larger membership base and creating additional outreach opportunities.

I'm essentially retired from an early career in live theater management and audience development, then in later years in food service management and concept development. My hearing loss is a typical progressive sensorineural loss that was identified in my early twenties but didn't become debilitating until sometime in my fifties, although I started wearing hearing aids by my late twenties.

After a decade of struggling, I was asynchronously implanted in 2008. I do very well with my cochlear implants but I've not forgotten, and never will forget, the isolation and struggle I had in my earlier years, especially those ten years that were mostly noise and garbled speech.

Early in those difficult days I learned that becoming proactive about my hearing loss not only moved me away from the anger and depression I was feeling but directly into sharing and supporting others who were also struggling - sometimes very casually, sometimes more in the role of a mentor.

The earliest platforms, as I recall, were email forums and chat rooms on AOL, as well as face to face meetings. What turned out to be true for me, as I've also heard said by many others who help others—I'm sure I gained as much if not more for myself by supporting others as I gave. It's very fulfilling to hear that someone you helped adjust to hearing loss is now doing much better.

Since receiving cochlear implants I've turned much of my effort to helping people with profound loss better understand cochlear implant technology, and more recently I've become a part-time web moderator and mentor coordinator for one of the cochlear implant companies.

I'm looking forward to meeting many of the people who participate in the Twin Cities HLAA chapter and hope I can help it expand through Social Media activity and whatever boots on the ground projects the chapter plans.

At my last visit to my audiologist, we talked about upgrading to a newer version of my CI processor. It appeared that I might also need a newer version of my hearing aid, since my devices work together to give me the fullest possible spectrum of hearing. Therefore, I might need a newer version of my i-phone too. This was starting to sound expensive. Would newer really be better, I asked? If so, I wondered, would that be due to the use of artificial intelligence?

My audiologist hesitated. We both know that no robot-ears are going to be as good as the original thing. Yet AI does account for “some” of the improvement, she said. The new CI would be more than just a newer *version*. It’s a new *generation*. That changes its potential.

I decided to ask ChatGPT. ChatGPT not only knows about AI, it *is* AI. ChatGPT wrote the following article in less than two seconds. I don’t think I learned anything new, but if there is one take-away from the article, it is probably the term “machine-learning algorithms”, which is the power behind artificial intelligence in any context.

See what you think...

--- editor



This is the output of ChatGPT to my command “write a short article on how AI is being used in hearing aids and cochlear implants”

## **How AI is Revolutionizing Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants** *by ChatGPT*

Artificial intelligence (AI) is playing an increasingly crucial role in improving the lives of individuals with hearing impairments, particularly through advancements in hearing aids and cochlear implants. These devices, powered by AI, are becoming more sophisticated, providing users with clearer, more natural sound and better adaptability to diverse environments.

### **AI in Hearing Aids**

Traditional hearing aids amplify sound, but AI takes this a step further by enabling real-time processing and customization. AI-powered hearing aids use machine learning algorithms to automatically adjust to different environments—whether it’s a noisy restaurant, a quiet library, or a bustling street. The device can recognize and enhance speech while reducing background noise, ensuring users can focus on conversations without being overwhelmed by environmental sounds.

Moreover, AI helps hearing aids “learn” the user’s preferences over time. Through adaptive algorithms, the device fine-tunes its settings based on the user’s auditory needs, which can change depending on context. For example, a hearing aid may boost high frequencies for someone who has difficulty hearing high-pitched sounds. The AI can also predict optimal settings for various situations based on prior usage, providing a seamless listening experience.

### **AI in Cochlear Implants**

Cochlear implants, which bypass damaged parts of the ear and directly stimulate the auditory nerve, are also benefiting from AI. While traditional cochlear implants offer basic sound amplification, AI is enhancing these devices by improving speech clarity, frequency modulation, and noise suppression. AI algorithms enable cochlear implants to distinguish between different sound sources, allowing users to better differentiate between speech and other sounds in complex environments.



(ChatGPT, cont.)

Recent developments in cochlear implants include AI systems that offer personalized sound processing based on individual auditory profiles. These systems continuously adapt to changes in hearing ability, which is particularly beneficial for users whose hearing deteriorates over time. Some cochlear implants also integrate AI-driven software for remote monitoring and adjustments, allowing audiologists to modify settings without requiring an in-person visit.

### **The Future of AI in Hearing Devices**

The future of AI in hearing aids and cochlear implants looks promising. Ongoing advancements in AI technology will likely bring even more personalized and intuitive listening experiences. Features such as speech-to-text translation, real-time language translation, and enhanced 3D sound imaging are on the horizon. Additionally, the integration of AI with other technologies like smartphone apps and cloud-based services will allow users to better control their hearing devices and sync them with other smart devices.

In conclusion, AI is transforming the landscape of hearing technology, offering more precise, adaptive, and user-friendly solutions. By continually learning and adapting to the user's environment and needs, AI is enabling individuals with hearing impairments to experience a richer, more connected auditory world.

### **January Book Club**

*Laura Hagemann*

**JANUARY 2025:** *(This book was originally scheduled for December 2024 and we are moving it to January.)* ["Sitting pretty: the view from my ordinary, resilient, disabled body"](#) by Rebekah Taussig (nonfiction), BARD: DB 101063. Tuesday, January 28th, 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Central Time [[ZOOM-Register Here](#)]. [Amazon Book Summary](#): A memoir-in-essays from disability advocate and creator of the Instagram account [@sitting\\_pretty](#) Rebekah Taussig, processing a lifetime of memories to paint a beautiful, nuanced portrait of a body that looks and moves differently than most. Growing up as a paralyzed girl during the 90s and early 2000s, Rebekah Taussig only saw disability depicted as something monstrous (The Hunchback of Notre Dame), inspirational (Helen Keller), or angelic (Forrest Gump). None of this felt right; and as she got older...

Thank you everyone for your participation, enthusiasm, friendship and interest in book club this past year and all the previous years. You have all made it keep going from our humble beginnings during COVID. Now we have talked to around 16 authors in several countries. Our regular members are from across the US. Hopefully 2025 brings many more fantastic books and guests, and remember ALL are welcome at book club (no hearing loss is necessary, so please let your friends know about us). I will be posting the 2025 reading schedule once it is decided.

Happy Reading,

Laura Hagemann  
Social Media Specialist

Visit our website and blog: <https://www.hlaatc.org/>  
Find out what the HLAA-TC Book Club is reading and join us: <https://www.hlaatc.org/book-club/>

## November 2024 Book Club Summary

*Laura Hagemann*

Thank you to the small group who attended book club on Tuesday, November 26th to discuss the book of poetry collection “Deaf Republic” by Ilya Kaminsky. We didn’t have the author join us. Following is a list of points discussed, with links. Reminder that we WILL NOT be having book club in December and have instead moved that book to January (more information at the end of this summary).

### Summary of Deaf Republic Book Club:

- Author’s website: <https://www.ilyakaminsky.com/>
- Ilya Kaminsky was born in 1977 in the former Soviet Union and immigrated to the US at 16. He lost much of his hearing at age 4 due to a misdiagnosed case of mumps.
- “Deaf Republic” is a collection of poems that tell a story. It’s a story told in 2 acts about the shooting of a deaf boy in a public square.
- An explanation of the poem that book club member Wendy found: "The purpose of Ilya Kaminsky's poem "Deaf Republic" is to use the metaphor of deafness and sign language to critique complacency in the face of violence and oppression, prompting readers to confront their own inaction by depicting a fictional town where citizens choose silence as a form of resistance against a brutal regime, essentially asking the reader to consider what it means to "listen" to the suffering of others and take action against injustice."
- [National Endowment for the Arts article](#) includes a brief bio, discussion questions and a video with Ilya Kaminsky discussing the book
- “Deaf Republic” was published by Graywolf Press (a local Minneapolis publisher). Publisher’s page on the book and author: <https://www.graywolfpress.org/books/deaf-republic>
- [The YouTube video I played a portion of where he reads from the book](#) (all selections he is reading are from “Deaf Republic” and he chose to read the first one in a different manner/style of voice (more pronounced Russian accent) because it was the prologue (my guess). This video was taken at a reading at Harvard University on December 4, 2018 and before the book was released on March 5, 2019.
- [A biography and selection of poems by Kaminsky](#) can be found on the Poetry Foundation Website
- The New Yorker did an [animated/illustrated version of part of “Deaf Republic”](#) that was published before the book’s release
- Several reviews of it help with how to read it:
  - [Kenyon Review](#)
  - [The Android Journal](#)

- [Poetry School Review](#)
  - [Amazon reader reviews](#) (book club member Leisla recommended reading some of these reviews).
  - [Goodreads reader reviews](#)
- **This blog post** talks about "how to read and understand poetry (something we talked about during book club as many members were unsure how to interpret poetry).
  - For another example of other poets reading their poems I found [Maya Angelou reading her poem](#) "Phenomenal Woman." (she has a very smooth lyrical style (I saw her twice, and she was amazing).
  - There are many interesting styles of poetry to listen to, in particular ["poetry slams" or "slam poetry"](#)

As mentioned, we won't have book club in December as we all take time to spend with our families and friends. I will be putting together our book list, so please send me suggestions [social@hlaatc.org](mailto:social@hlaatc.org) (I have to make sure they are accessible for our group by being on [BARD= Braille Audio Reading Download](#) for some of our members).

## Meeting information

The next meeting of the Hearing Loss Association of America Twin Cities Chapter (HLAA-TC) will be held on December 21, 2024.

**Location:** Courage Kenny, 3915 Golden Valley Road, Golden Valley, MN 55422

**Registration:** The meeting will be in-person only – no registration is necessary.

**Meeting time:** Meeting begins at 10 AM (social time at 9:30).

**Accommodations:** All meetings are realtime captioned by Captioners from Veritext/Paradigm ([www.captioning-paradigm.com](http://www.captioning-paradigm.com)).

*The meeting room is also looped for enhanced hearing directly to your hearing aids or Cochlear implant using T-coil.*

**HLAA TC**  
**PO Box 26021**  
**Minneapolis, MN 55426**



**Next meeting: December 21, 2024**

## **First Class**

### **Membership Form HLAA Twin Cities Chapter**

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

State.....Zip.....

Phone.(area code).....

E-Mail.....

*Newsletter via email included in all memberships*

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$25 (includes digital newsletter)

\_\_\_\_\_ Professional \$50

\_\_\_\_\_ Donation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Newsletter (optional) \$15

**Mail to: HLAA Twin Cities Chapter  
PO Box 26021  
Minneapolis, MN 55426**



Welcomes You!

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