

# A Father Inspires His Daughter to Study Audiology

By Lydia Riehl, New York City Walk4Hearing

Last September 2013, I participated in the New York City Walk4Hearing for the first time and it was a wonderful experience. I enjoyed seeing people of all ages come together to support those in the New York City community with hearing loss.

I'm a first year student at The Graduate Center, CUNY pursuing my clinical doctorate (Au.D.) in audiology. I fundraised and took part in the Walk4Hearing, along with other classmates and professors from The Graduate Center. It was important for me to participate in the Walk4Hearing because I know I will one day be providing care and services to those in the New York City area with hearing loss. As a future audiologist, I want to remain aware of the challenges many individuals face every day with hearing loss, as well as the latest treatments available.

My decision to pursue audiology came from seeing my own father's journey with hearing loss over the last ten years. Dad (Damon) was unable to participate in the 2013 Walk, but he was enthusiastic about supporting the CUNY team with a donation and hopes to participate in 2014. Although my father's hearing loss came about fairly recently, it has affected many areas of his life. However, he has a great network of support around him to include friends, family, audiologists, and other doctors. After witnessing his experience with audiologists who have greatly helped him, I became passionate about the field and helping individuals like my father.

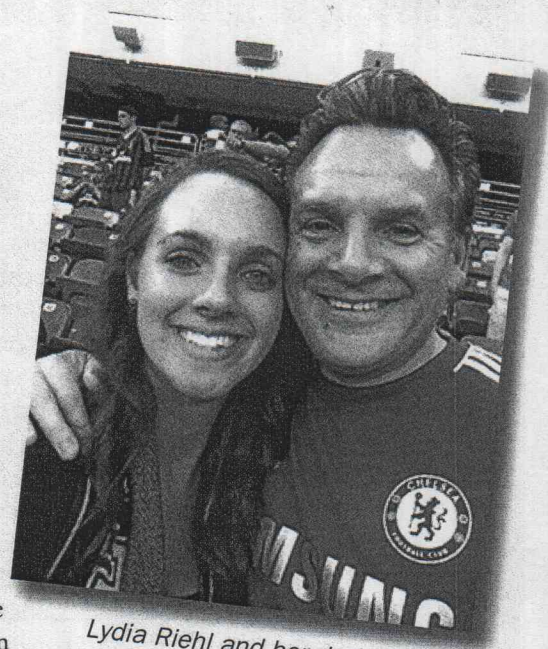
In 2004, my dad was diagnosed with Neurofibromatosis II (NF II) after a large tumor was discovered on his spine. He was 43 at the time and had gone his whole life not knowing he had NF II or tumors of any kind. One day he was lifting a heavy ladder to put Christmas lights up on our roof and tweaked his back. Shortly after this, he was in a lot of pain and knew that something was not right. After a visit to the chiropractor, and then the emergency room, an MRI showed he had many benign tumors throughout his body, the largest being about the size of a grapefruit on his spine.

Shortly after discovering and removing the tumor on his spine, an MRI revealed he also had two small tumors growing on both his right and left auditory nerve, one of the most common places for tumor growth in those with NF II. Doctors advised my father that surgical removal of these tumors would be risky. However, if just left alone they could grow further and press against his auditory nerve. My father and his doctors decided that laser surgery would be a safer choice to kill the tumors and keep them from growing any further.

After receiving laser surgery in both ears, the tumors were successfully destroyed and no further growth was possible. However, they were not equally successful at conserving my father's hearing. Today in his left ear he has only 15-20 percent of his hearing, and his right ear has retained about 80 percent of his hearing. My father has since been fitted with high-tech, behind-the-ear hearing aids that have greatly helped him, especially at work. He shared with me that, "It would be a real struggle at work if I didn't have hearing aids. Luckily I am able to adjust the volume throughout the day and I work on the phone often so can use my right ear."

While his hearing loss has not negatively impacted his job, large social interactions have presented the greatest challenge to my father. My dad readily admits that in large group settings it can be difficult to hear, even when wearing his hearing aids. In a restaurant setting or at a cocktail party, he has to lipread or often ask people to repeat what they said. This can become frustrating for my dad, and those he communicates with, as I am sure many people with hearing loss can relate to.

Amazingly, throughout the experience of discovering his NF II, my father has kept a positive attitude. Even though his hearing might continue to deteriorate, he remains hopeful that the technology and tools will be in place to help him along the way. **HLM**



Lydia Riehl and her dad Damon

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