

My Days with Robyn Cox: Fourier, Fosters, and Audiologic Forays

Published September 3rd, 2014

Gustav Mueller

Many of you reading this journal are probably seeing [Dr. Cox's monograph on earmold acoustics](#) for the first time. Not me. My well-thumbed original version is sitting on my bookshelf, and at one time, I probably could have given you memorized page numbers for some of the key figures and tables.

In the 1980s I worked at Walter Reed Medical Center, and one of my colleagues was David Hawkins. Earmolds were a big thing back then, and we talked about earmold acoustics all the time, and even conducted a few related research projects. When controversy arose, we of course went straight to Robyn's monograph to see who was right. I always thought that David had an unfair advantage, however, as he knew Robyn through some Memphis State connection.

Because of all of David's high praise, and my desire to obtain inside information, I searched Robyn out at an American Auditory Society meeting – 1985 or so I think it was. I knew she was an Aussie, and I liked to drink beer, so it seemed like the two of us were pretty much a party waiting to happen. It was not too far into our discussion, however, that I realized Robyn was more interested in Fourier than Fosters. She was almost like ... a real scientist. There tended to be long pauses in our conversation; these were times when it seemed like it was her turn to talk, but she wasn't – I knew she was thinking, and I knew what she was thinking about: This Mueller guy isn't very bright! I quickly went back to Robert Sweetow's group, where it was much easier to follow the conversation and chime in.

Not too many years later, I was honoured to join a group of 11 other audiologists in forming what became known as the Independent Hearing Aid Fitting Forum (IHAF). Wide dynamic range compression hearing aids were becoming common, and our self-imposed goal was to come up with a better way to fit these instruments than what was currently available – all prescriptive methods of that time were geared toward linear instruments. I already knew all the IHAF members – a great group to hang out with – Robyn Cox was one of them. Over a two-year period we had quarterly meetings that were mostly fun, but sometimes got a bit convoluted – 12 opinionated people with, you guessed it, opinions. Time and time again, when the dust would settle, and only when no one else was talking, Robyn would speak up and succinctly summarize what everyone else was trying to say, or should have said in the first place.

As the IHAF meetings progressed, we decided we needed a self-assessment component for the protocol, something that could be used for pre-testing and also measure post-fitting outcome. Robyn showed up at the next meeting with the APHAB. We then decided we needed some way to assess loudness growth. Robyn showed up with the Contour Test. We also needed a way to predict desired gain in the 2 cc coupler. Robyn showed up with her new friend VIOLA (Visual Input-Output Locator Algorithm). Yes, the final product was called the IHAF Protocol, but without the

work of Robyn, I doubt that there would have been a protocol. In honour of her contributions, at the 1994 unveiling of the IHAF Protocol at a meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Robyn sang solo and acapella, the chorus to the IHAF Serenade (to the tune of Ghost Riders in the Sky): “Aye-Phab-Be-Eye-Aye, Aye-Phab-Be-Eye-Oh; IHAFers in the know.” I remember thinking, she might be a “Foster’s Girl” after all!

And, speaking of accomplishments, I would be well over my word count limit if I tried to list all of Robyn’s here – and that’s just using the acronyms! So let me sum up what her work means to me in another way. While I do have a PhD, I’m not really a “researcher.” You’ll find the lion’s share of my publications at places like *The Hearing Journal* and *Audiology Online*; not *JASA* or *Ear and Hearing*. So what does this have to do with Robyn? Well, for those of us who have tried to carve out a career doing workshops and writing review articles that rely on the research of others, to maintain our own credibility, we have to make sure that what we are reporting is good stuff. That’s not as easy as you might think, and often involves hours and hours of dissecting articles, digging up additional information, and trying to figure out what is “behind the curtain.” But, there is one exception: A Robyn Cox publication. We all know, if Robyn has attached her name to it, what is contained has been thought out, and thought out again, and carefully crafted, with no hidden agenda. So thanks Robyn, for all the time you’ve saved me while I’ve stolen your material over the past 35 years!