AAC: From both sides now

In this paper we will use AAC dialogue to shoot out stories of the highs and lows of using technology to keep up with the speaking world. Meredith and Mel have known each other since we were in school. We are Australian AAC trailblazers: the first in Australia to use the Cannon™ communicators that shot out words on paper. The first to try out our batty “Beautiful Betty” Dectalk™ voices with our shiny new Lightwriters™, and we discovered how an electronic voice shaped the attitudes of those around us. We cried when the Australian voice “Karen” came into our lives - we finally had our own voice.

We screamed when technology failed us. We screamed louder when battery life decreased. The manufacturers told us we wanted more processes not longer battery life. Our screams were not heard. Our lives are ruled by battery life. We always have to carry a second communication strategy with us.

Most do not realise it is not as simple as putting a device in front of us and saying “communicate”- you need literacy, you need skills, you need patience on both sides.

We are two of the very few who have taken our electronic voices into the work force, where we have experienced frustration and triumph as we educated our colleagues and employers. Come on a journey with us through the last 30 years of assistive technology in Australia.