

Hello, my name is Lee.

I am 47 years old female. Born and raised in the vicinity of Seattle, WA. I am 3rd of 4 children, two of my brothers, both older, are hearing. I have a deaf sister, 3 years younger than I. She is still thinking about getting the implant, after seeing the success in me. My dad was hard of hearing since childhood, he never worn hearing aid until he was 60 years old. There is no doubt with our family's history; there is a strong tendency that my deafness is of genetic cause.

I am a mother of 2 adult children, I have to admit that my career were mostly "full time homemaker". I married a hearing man in 1982 and it was a very blessed marriage until his death in 1988.

Currently, I am a full time student at a local Community College aiming for AA and AAS degrees in paralegal. I am fulfilling my lifelong passion for law.

All my life, I have great passion for the out of doors. I camp often, not the RV kind of camping but the kind that you would be roughing out! I still enjoy times with my children, if I can keep them at home long enough to talk to me.

I hope you will enjoy my short story.

Lee  
Pre-lingual deaf

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I was born with profound hearing loss in 1957. In those Dark Ages, there was no way to confirm hearing loss until a child turns 3. Being a summer baby, I was tested that summer and was placed in a pre-school through Seattle Hearing and Speech Center (now known as Hearing, Speech, and Deafness Center). I wore my first hearing aid at the time. I spoke my first words in about 8 months. I thought that "eyes" and "nose" seems strange to say the first words, but mom explained that the teacher was using visual aid of a face and we had repeatedly worked on face words. I pity my family, I learned to speak it on a Friday, and spend all weekend saying what it sounded like "I know" (eye nose). Mom said that weekend was one crazy weekend, because with the first two words, it was almost as I was acting like if I knew everything... good grief.

Dad once told me that once I spoke my first word, I refused to "shut up". He also said that I refused to give up my hearing aid for the night, and would sleep with it for 3 or 4 months, it was if I was very insecure without it. I grew up as Oral deaf, wearing hearing aid all my life. Learned to sign at Gallaudet when I was 19, but still I was very much an oralist.

In about 1970, I first heard about Cochlear Implant. My uncle was an engineer for the City of Seattle and there was an article about the CI experiment in France in their magazine. I asked mom about it and she said

NO! Saying it was for those who have no hearing at all. Thinking back to that article, I don't even think I would want what was offered in 1970!

Twenty years later, for the first time, I met someone with a CI. I had an opportunity to ask him about it, but the thought of wearing that big box (BWP) scared me off.

In 2000, I was involved in a major car accident; therefore my mobility had greatly reduced. The thought of getting CI came back to me. My thinking was ... if I can't rotate the way I used to when I hear something (environmental sounds), I felt more deaf than before.

When my hearing aid died on me in 2002, I asked about CI and was told it would not help me because I have been deaf too long. I was disappointed, wondering if I should have had it in 1970 or not. Instead, I got another hearing aid.

Being very determined to check more into it. I joined the CI Hear group in the summer of 2003 and started asking questions. At the same time, I learned that I now have an option to have BTE, and I was THRILLED as the "box" still is very much as a rejection tool to me. Part of the problem was, I wore an over-sized body aid until I was 19 and I didn't want a reminder of all the mockeries I had growing up.

That summer, I finally decided, I will get the implant, no matter what it takes. I was evaluated at Listen for Life Center at Virginia Mason in Seattle and was told that I am a candidate on my first visit. In the months that followed, I was asking all kinds of questions, being scared knowing that CI will be a whole new world from 43 years of hearing aid use.

On December 12, 2003, I walked into the surgery room with my hearing aid on, and just before I was knocked out, I retired my hearing aid, saying "so long my friend". I was activated on January 8, 2004. On the day of my activation, after being turned on, in the audiologist's office, I was really confused by what I was hearing, being scared, wondering if it was a mistake getting an CI. What I did not know, I was hearing "S" sound for the first time in my life! Needless to say, I spend the day hissing at my family.

The next day, while watching TV, I was surprised to hear phone ringing in the other room, I didn't know what to do; decided to get up and answer and do my usual "No one is home now to take this call, please call back later", and hang up. But NOOOOOOOO...I stupidity said "hello?" The caller said "Is Jannie home", I looked at the phone in a confused state and said, "Jannie is not home, can you call back?" ... caller said, "ok, good bye", I was shocked by what had I done! When my daughter came home, I told her that I think someone called for her and she looked at me with an expression and asked how would I know, I told her that it was clear and I swore she said your name. This was my first ACTUAL phone call in my life! She then called her best friend and later told me that her friend was just as shocked that I talked on phone and yes, it was for her. Couple days later, I saw the caller, and we both talked about it, she said that when I answered, she didn't know what to do either! Knowing that I am deaf, she figured to talk slow and clear and thought that I will go crazy with "HUH HUH HUH" or something, but never thought I would answer her accurately. I told her, that there were few familiar words from my years of hearing aid and lip reading; I never dream I would hear and understand anything without lip reading.

Before I knew it, having a CI changed my life. No longer was I allergic to college. I was determined to fix the mistakes I made 26 years ago. My self-esteem skyrocketed, my classmates are wonderful to me, something I never had growing up. If I was feeling down, they all came to root for me, even offering me their notes. Once I left the class in tears, frustrated with my typist, and to my surprise, three of my classmates came out to check on me... My hearing brother still has doubts about my returning to college. I don't blame him, as I was a D or F student 26 years ago, but now doing very well, completed 2 quarters full time and both times, on the Vice President's List (honor roll).

In the past 12 months, each time I go in for hearing tests, my speech discrimination had slowly improved. To give you an idea, at one month I was able to discriminate 28%; at three month, 31%; at six month, 35%, and lastly, 47% at one year mark. Sounds are still very new to me. I didn't care about what other think as to how much I should be hearing, what matter is, I got more in the past 12 months than in 46 years of my life! I am still very dependent on lip reading but my communication and social skills have improved.

Looking back, my doubts of having a CI even in the 1970's, I wish I had it sooner... If you are considering getting a CI even as pre-lingual deaf, go for it, you have nothing to lose but better awareness of environmental sounds, if not for speech discrimination.