

My name is May Johnson. I grew up with normal hearing. I got married and our three sons were nearly raised when I noticed that I was not hearing as well as I used to. I thought it was just something temporary and my normal hearing would come back. But after several months with no better hearing, I went and had my hearing checked. I had nerve deafness and would continue to lose more hearing. It was suggested that I get a hearing aid. I was only 40 years old at the time and felt hearing aids were for the elderly and so I passed on that idea. One year later, I had lost more hearing and was ready for a hearing aid. Then another and then another. When I was told that I was going to go completely deaf, I did not feel bad because I did not realize what being deaf meant. The hearing aid was doing a good job at first. As my hearing got worse, my boys had a hard time adjusting to mom not hearing. It almost made them mad at times when they told me something important and I did not follow through. It took a while for them to realize their mom could not hear well. After a while, they understood and were great to come to my aid. They even took some sign language classes with me. I did not know any deaf people and met few who knew sign language, so I worked at lip reading. Lip reading with a HA in my better ear soon became my way of hearing. I had signal lights to let me know the phone was ringing, but why know when the phone was ringing if I could not talk on the phone. I felt left out when the family got together. I was there, but I was not in on the conversations. About 6 years ago, my twin sister told me she was starting to lose her hearing. I cried for her, by now I knew what was involved in being deaf. I had heard about cochlear implants and I had also heard about their high cost. A couple of years ago I went for a newer hearing aid. I was told that I was a candidate for a CI.

After dreaming of having an implant for 2 years, I found out that Medicare would pay for a CI (or most of it anyway). I called for an appointment in December of 2003, got one with the surgeon for January, than the Audiologist in February. I was told that I was a very good candidate. My good ear scored only about 10% on the word recognition test. My surgeon was booked up for 6 months. He is very good, one of the best and I felt worth waiting for.

On July 1, 2004, I was implanted with a Nucleus 24. I was implanted in my right ear which was my worst ear that had not been used for 14 years. My good ear was not very good, but with a hearing aid, it did give me some information. I just could not give that up. The surgery went well. I had it at 2:00 pm and was home my 8:00 pm. I live two hours away. Some friends were at my house with a home cooked meal. It was very good and I ate a plate full. I had very little pain and no other side effects. The next day, I wrapped my bandage in a scarf and went to my husband's family reunion. I was tired when I got home, but felt fine. I was told to keep my bandage on for 48 hours and than I could take it off and wash my hair. When I took off the bandage, I was happy to see so little hair missing. I did tire easily for the next two weeks and took lots of naps. I had trouble sleeping on only one side and could only sleep a couple of hours at a time. I was craving sleep. My two week check-up came with the news that all was well and I would be ready for hook-up in another week.

It's funny how I looked forward to getting my CI, yet when it came time for the hook-up, I was scared. I was afraid that not only I would be disappointed, but my family would be too. I warned everyone that I would not be able to hear till I had a few mappings and my brain had had time to learn how to hear with the CI. At the audiologist, my electrodes were checked and then he tested my hearing for the softest and the loudest sound I could hear. My husband was told to get in front of me and be the first person that I heard with my CI. The audiologist turned on my processor. I heard a twirling noise and saw my husband's lips moving, but could not hear the words. My audiologist said that the twirling noise was my husband, but I knew it was not because I could hear it before his lips moved and after. He decided I was hearing the air vent. I thought that I was going to be a hard case. I also knew from reading others' experiences that things would get better. I was just excited to hear the new funny sounds. He kept talking to my husband and I started to hear a new noise, it was a funny little noise which I can not explain. The more they talked, I realized that I was hearing them talk. Soon with lip reading, I could understand some words. When I spoke, I stopped mid-stream and look around to see who was talking. It did not sound like me. I went for a walk around the hospital. There is a small water fall and the noise sounded like water falling (a little louder than normal). I went back and I could tell that sounds were getting softer. He gave me a louder program on program two.

On the way home, I heard on the car radio : "94degrees". I was so excited because it had been years since I had heard (understood) anything on the radio. I also knew that I had heard words with my CI without lip reading. By the next day, I was on the program 2 (the loudest) and the volume turned all the way up. I heard crickets, the car motor, water running, and many more things, but speech was harder. Men and women both sounded like women robots. Before when I wore just the hearing aid, I could understand men's voices better than women, so I was surprised to understand my daughter-in-law better than my husband. I went back for a second mapping that afternoon. I kept a list of what I could hear and not hear and how normal or strange it sounded. My audiologist loved this and it helped him in mapping. It is one of the first things that I give him each time I go for a new mapping. My audiologist made a few changes and gave me more volume. He was pleased with what I was hearing and that I was ready for more volume. But I was disappointed on the way home when all I could hear was car noise. I was beginning to wonder if I had made a mistake because so far I liked my hearing aid better. When I got home and out of the noisy car, I heard birds, frogs and more crickets. I was starting to understand my husband if I was lip reading.

On the third day after hook-up, I went to the library and checked out 2 children books with tapes. I was beginning to hear words, the beep to turn the pages and even could tell when the reader was changing his/her voice. The next day, I went for an adult audio book and read along with the book. It had 6 tapes, by the 4th tape, I could get by without reading along. Wow, this is so much better than a hearing aid. I went to church and didn't need my FM system. After telling

everyone that it would take time to learn to hear, I surprised them by being able to understand them, mainly with lip reading. It was funny to listen to them, they squeaked like little mice. I was told not to wear my hearing aid for 3 weeks to let my brain get adjusted to the CI. I cheated and wore my hearing aid with my CI at church. I loved it with both, but quickly turned the hearing aid off because I wanted to do as told.

I did have a loud roar in my implanted ear after being hooked up for two weeks. It scared me, because I thought it was my implant messing up. The loud roar would come almost every day and last for about an hour. They gradually got softer and came less often. They are just about gone. (I'm in my 5th month at this writing)

I continued to improve with each new mapping. One of my goals was to be able to hear while I am driving and not have to take my eyes off the road to lip read. I have reached my goal and now after 5 months with my CI, I have almost normal hearing. I can talk some on the phone, but still have a ways to go. I can hear the sales clerks and understand some on the radio talk shows and the words to songs that I know. I have learned that grandkids say the cutest things. People sound like I remembered them sounding, but a little raspy. I can go with or without my hearing aid. The hearing aid does help the music sound more normal at church. It also helps speech sound more normal, but I am getting use to the raspy sound and like not wearing the hearing aid. I did test better in the sound booth with both the hearing aid and the CI.

I am very happy, thankful and grateful for my new hearing. I feel like I have been given a great gift. Until last year, I had thought that I would never be able to hear again till I got my new ears with my new body in heaven. I am very thankful.

I kept a CI journal for my sister to have and compare with her own experience as she will be getting an implant in the future.