

Ian

My ability to hear and discern speech had been declining over the years to the point where I was finding it difficult to understand the conversation. I couldn't use the phone any longer, my wife had to carry out all the telephone calls to the family and a call that might take half an hour to her to complete was relayed in perhaps 30 seconds - a minute, so I lost all the personal feeling of the family and the cadence of what was happening in their relationships. There was no TV anymore, I couldn't go to the theatre and I had already withdrawn from the University of the Third Age, any voluntary work I had been doing I had found I couldn't act on the committee.

After a lot of research on the internet and talking to many people, I referred myself directly to the AIS, Auditory Implant Service, here in Southampton with the prospect of following what they call the self-funded pathway through to potentially an implant. So after the assessments I was accepted as being a good candidate for cochlear implant.

It's now a year since I was actually implanted and in that time of course, there was uncertainty from the time of surgery. I wondered would it be successful, what would it be like, had all that money been justified, would my life return to what it had been before. So of course, switch on day was rather important, very important and my wife was sitting across the room.

Nicci Campbell finished her initial settings of the electrodes in my cochlea and I could understand enough at that point of what she was saying that what she intended to do after a little bit of acclimatisation was to say two words, so she put a piece of paper in front of her mouth and she said what I understood to be, 'blue' and I said 'blue' and she said 'yellow' and I said 'yellow', I could understand straight away and I looked across the room at my wife and we smiled and I think a tear ran down my cheek.

So, that was day one, the weekend followed and I returned on the Monday for further tuning, more refined settings of the electrodes and speech became even more easy to discern, not perfect by any means but enough to get by. And at the end of the first week I took an audiobook out of the local library in Salisbury and connected it up directly to my implant processor through various cables and started to follow the text in the book, listening to the speech being broadcast by the actor. At first I had to rely almost entirely on the book but following successfully through my processor, but after a week of that I found that more and more I could do away with the text and follow the story and, in fact, start to enjoy actually what the book was about. So life started to improve quite quickly.

So now it is a year on and I have been improving since those days. I would say family life has returned for me, I can take a telephone call as long as it's somebody I know who probably will speak a little more slowly. I can make a call but I tend to have to say to the other person, "Can you speak a little more slowly, not necessarily louder, but just slowly and we will get on.", and that works. I can chat with my wife in the car so long as it isn't raining as the sound of the water and the road noise just gets too much in the way.

I am going out again. We have been to a ballet relay at the local cinema. We have been to the theatre, I have to use the loop system and I don't always get everything that is said, but I can enjoy it again. But I have to say speech and noise is difficult. If there is a lot of background noise, I have to concentrate very much on the person I am trying to communicate with. I still benefit from lip-reading and looking at somebody directly in the face. Women's voices are more difficult - everyone's pitch for me has been elevated so a high speaking lady is difficult, but I love a low speaking gentleman. I can recognise somebody I have known from years back just by listening to their speech and not seeing their face and I can remember who that person is, so I am discerning speech so much better.

If you said to me would I have another implant, well I'd say the first one cost me £35,000, would I spend on another one? If I won the lottery I certainly would, I would be knocking on your door on Monday morning!