

Janet

My name is Janet. When I was 32 I had my first hearing aids and right from the start, I would say, things sounded very unnatural, certain things were quite uncomfortable like a tap running or a kettle boiling, very loud.

Anyway about 5 years on from then my hearing dropped suddenly for no reason, and gradually over the years it just deteriorated. The audiologist that I was seeing said I had to think about having a cochlear implant, well I really didn't want one. I found it quite frightening, to be honest. I managed another ten years, but by then it was really hard work, and I was relying on friends and family to keep me up to date with the conversations. I was really quite a nightmare, I think!

I went back to the audiologist where they adjusted my hearing aids - they were always really, really good - and I said to him, "I am really struggling with conversations, can you please adjust my hearing aids?", and he said, "I really can't do any more for you, that's it, that's all I can do. You need to have a cochlear implant.". I felt devastated and I wasn't sure if he was actually being truthful, because I could still hear noises, I could hear voices but I couldn't... there was no clarity. I got an appointment to come about the implant centre, and I said to my husband on the way over, "Please don't try and persuade me". I found that quite a worry, so that first appointment that I had, I think I almost did a u- turn. Everybody seemed to understand what I was saying, they were very encouraging, and they said that they were very hopeful that I would hear much better with an implant. So I had to have other assessments and what have you, and it all started going ahead - and in the end I was quite looking forward to it!

I can hear now all sorts of things that I hadn't heard for years. I am not sure how many years, but a long time. I can hear birdsong, a smoke alarm, the doorbell, and even with hearing aids I just didn't get any of that. Everything is such an improvement, and it's much easier for me to sit with somebody and talk to them. Before I was getting some sound, but I was really basically lip-reading and now I actually hear, it is really quite amazing.

When they first switched on I was expecting the sounds to be unnatural, robotic or they said Donald Duck-ish. They couldn't say exactly how it would sound. When she did switch on, her voice was like electronic beeps but the beeps were going with her voice it was - obviously I was getting her voice as beeps but it was all the same tone, everything was the same tone. She asked my husband to speak to me and he sounded exactly the same as her, which I found quite amusing. It was the same pitch. She just kept asking me questions and obviously

making adjustments, and by the end of that first session she banged a drum and it actually sounded like a drum, and so I felt then it was really... I was ok.

By the time I got home my husband was actually sounding pretty good. It was more like a voice than beeps, it changed. Every sound that was new seemed a bit weird and gradually, if I turned a tap on it sounded most peculiar, but as it was running it was changing and everything started to sound natural. Gradually all the sounds that I was hearing that I hadn't heard for a long, long time were sounding, you know, really good and nothing sounds uncomfortable. I could hear pedestrian crossing noise. I think all in all it's just been really great. So, I think my life is just easier now and less stressful. I would miss it - I am just very grateful in the mornings when I switch it on and can hear anything.