

Juliet

I first started to lose my hearing when I was a young adult in my 20's and the hearing loss became progressively worse over the next couple of decades. In due course I had only got hearing left in one ear, and when that started to go life became a real struggle.

Eventually that ear packed up too and I was left with absolutely no hearing at all, at which point I was referred for a cochlear implant. Of course, that was the only chance I had of ever hearing anything again, so I seized the opportunity. At long last, after about 10 months of complete silence, I had the operation. I was really pleased how painless and easy that was. They were marvellous in Southampton General Hospital and I recovered very quickly, and it then was a case of just waiting a very long month for the implant to be switched on.

I do remember a feeling of waiting for my exam results, the excitement and anticipation, but being slightly nervous too when the day came that the implant was to be turned on. It was the most fantastic feeling when it was first switched on. Within an hour I could begin to hear, I could begin to make sense of words and sounds. Within 24 hours even though at first they only switch on a few channels of your implant I could begin to have conversations that made sense and the feeling of being able to hear sound again was absolutely marvellous.

I do remember realising that I had got to work quite hard to retrain my brain to hear properly and that it would be a learning curve again, learning to hear with this implant. One memory I have very strongly is of, within the first 48 hours, getting up on the Saturday morning and going down to the kitchen where my husband was already cooking some breakfast. In the kitchen there was a very strange sound and I couldn't identify it. 'What's that noise?' and of course my husband couldn't tell me because he didn't know what I was hearing. It turned out that at that time he was frying an egg for his breakfast, and the sound I was hearing was the sizzle, pop, crack, hiss of the frying pan, of the egg in the frying pan - and that was the first time I had heard that frying sound for decades. So thereafter I stood by the stove with my ear to the frying pan for several days for the sheer joy of hearing the sound of frying! That's the sort of sound that I had to re-learn.

It's been a wonderful journey ever since, obviously being able to chat to people, sitting around the table with family and friends and joining in the conversation. So many environmental sounds that are so pleasurable, because they connect you to the world. Leaves rustling on the trees, dogs barking, just the wealth of environmental sounds, bird song, the sheer pleasure of being able to tune into a sound and listen and enjoy it.

And so now, 18 months after my implant was switched on I can use the telephone, I can listen to the radio and probably hear most of what is spoken.

This summer I enjoyed hearing for the very first time in years and years a skylark singing in the sky. These sounds are so pleasurable and so joyful, that I think it would be honest to say it has transformed my life having the cochlear implant.

Of course things aren't perfect, and I still think of myself as a deaf person, but it is so much better, it has enabled me to reconnect with life. One of my very old friends summed it up, I think, in our somewhat heated discussions about Brexit. He looked at me and he said, "It's good to have you back, Jules". And I think that is what it is: it brings back your life, your self-confidence, your ability to connect to the world. It has been a great success for me to enjoy the cochlear implant. I would recommend it to anybody.