

Stan

For as long as I can remember I have had a hearing loss in my right ear, but it never really bothered me because having perfect hearing in the left, it wasn't really a problem. That was until about 20 years ago, when I had an accident following which, I lost the hearing completely in my left ear, just leaving what I had left in the right. That's when it became obvious how bad my hearing was.

I had a good local audiologist who fitted me up with a hearing aid, and that enabled me to go back to work, and do most of the things that I had done in the past with the exception really of being able to listen to music and watching the television. I needed subtitles because I couldn't hear the words too well.

Over the years my hearing continued to deteriorate but the audiologist was always there to update the hearing aid with the most modern [hearing aids] - better ones, stronger, more powerful state of the art. That was fine till about 7 years ago when my hearing got so bad that there was not much more you could do with a hearing aid.

At that stage he suggested I might like to go for a cochlear implant. Well, from what I knew about it I decided to decline at that stage. I suppose really I was a bit scared with the thought of having what I thought was going to be a very major operation... so I left it at that stage and struggled on with the hearing aid that I had.

I had a lot of family support particularly from my wife where we developed our own sort of sign language. A lot of stuff had to be written down pen and paper-wise because otherwise I just couldn't understand it

We are both keen amateur photographers and spend a lot of our free time out and about with our cameras. As part of that, very often people would come up to us and ask us what we were doing or ask questions about the cameras and the lenses that we were using. That was when it really came home to me just how little hearing I had because I just couldn't get involved in those conversations

So I got a referral to the unit here at Southampton for an assessment for a cochlear implant and I had those assessments during April and May of this year, and following which as I had hoped and expected, I was accepted for an implant and put on the waiting list. Fortunately I didn't have to wait too long because I had the operation at the beginning of September.

Just in hospital for a day, came home the next day, and then had to leave it for 4 or 5 weeks til everything had settled down and heal up before I could get turned on. Anyway the day of the turn on was the beginning of October. My wife and I got ready and got up early in the morning, and were quite excited at the prospect of within a few hours being able to hear again. We arrived at the centre quite early, we met the audiologist and after a few initial set up tests really just to get the sound level that was comfortable for me it was time for the actual turn on.

I was warned not to expect too much, it might sound a bit odd and if you get a couple of words then you'll be doing really, really well. So, anticipation was there...! She threw the switch and I was just totally blown away because I could hear every single word she said. I could also hear my wife who was in the background behind me, so clearly it was just absolutely amazing and I couldn't believe it how so lucky I was and that was the beginning of really a new period in my life.

Each day after that brought, and still does, new hearing experiences. Sometimes they're just small things like hearing the telephone ring, or birds singing, but the main thing has been being able to hear people talk again and have conversations with friends, family, even strangers. It is still early days though. I have only been turned on for a matter of about 6 weeks now, but what I am really looking forward to over the period of months, maybe even a couple of years is being able to listen to music again, use the telephone normally, maybe even go to a concert or two.

Do I have any regrets, well yes, but only the one, and that's why didn't I go for the cochlear implant years ago when I was first offered it? It has changed my life completely.