

From Australia:

Loss of hearing, and music: Felicity's Story



Playing piano again in 2015



Playing piano in a restaurant 1984



Felicity in 2010

Losing the beauty and joy of music

“Piano was my first love. For as long as I can remember, I wanted to play. But unknown to me, during a severe bout of measles when I was around 9 years old, a time bomb had been planted in my ears that would eventually render me completely deaf. By 29, I lost hearing in my left ear and my right ear was severely deaf.

I still worked in the music industry selling pianos and organs, playing in concerts as well as teaching. My large repertoire came in handy when I played easy listening dinner music in restaurants and hotels. As hearing loss progressed, I lost the tinkly sounds of high pitches first, hearing only the clicking of the hammer hitting the string. Without the help of a hearing

aid, I could not hear the sound of the piano at all; with a hearing aid, it was unclear and distorted with the noise building up like in an echo chamber.

I gave up teaching and little by little stopped playing as all sound died: I was profoundly deaf. Even with the help of a hearing aid, I could no longer understand the TV, radio, meetings or movies; parties were hell. I was heavily reliant upon lip reading for conversation and became isolated. Depression was a constant companion and I considered ending it all.

Finding hope

Somehow, I found the resilience to enquire about a cochlear implant (CI). At the time it was a new procedure in my city and while I was eligible, I waited five years before my turn came. I was implanted in my 25-30 year deaf ear in December 2002 with switch-on six weeks later. Within a few minutes, I understood speech without the help of lip reading. Within a few days, I was talking on the phone and listening to the radio. Keep in mind, not every CI recipient has this kind of initial benefit or quick improvement.

Knowing my interest in music, my audiologist suggested I try music appreciation. This is not generally an expected outcome for CI users, so it was really exciting! For me music is like a second language; I hoped my brain would remember the sounds and make sense of them. Two months after switch-on I bought a new piano and started playing again. More about the experience of regaining music with my cochlear implant can be found at my blog. www.bellaonline.com/site/deafnessor www.felicity.bleckly.com/index.html