

# **“Oh Darn – I can’t talk behind your back”**

**By Debbe Hagner**

It has been over one year since I got the cochlear implant. I have heard many people tell me “Oh darn, I can’t talk behind your back.” I often wonder- how much was really going on behind my back. I guess I will never know. I know some of them were joking or teasing me. It made me more conscious. So watch out! I can hear now!

Since- I wrote the first article, I have had people ask, please continue to write more on what you learned or new things you heard. After the second mapping I did not understand the TV or the GPS in my car. Over time I started to recognize words on TV. I would check with my friend Gary, with whom I share an interest in genealogy; I would ask if I heard blah, blah correctly. He would say, “Yes, that is correct,” or “No.” I would keep on trying. I was disappointed some days, as I couldn’t understand the GPS or TV. But I was reminded “Be Patient.”

Then I started understanding the teller at the bank or the drive-through at McDonalds. I was stunned. Little by little it got better. I was really surprised how I understood Gary while the TV was on (loud) about six feet away. While Gary and I worked on genealogy, he would make me repeat back to him what I heard. Before the cochlear implant, I would make several mistakes in repeating what I thought I heard. I am very grateful that he was patient with me before and after the cochlear implant.

One of the things that surprised me the most was noise came from Rice Krispies. For 40 years I never knew that that cereal made a “pop crackle” noise. I thought the Rice Krispies advertisement was a joke, as I didn’t believe that it really did make noises. I never heard them through the hearing aid.

Over time I have not had to ask people to repeat things, or said “uh.” People commented that I look much more relaxed, and my speech is better. I think I have said “huh” or “what” one time since I got the CI, which is really nice. It feels good!

## Movies and Other Discoveries

Before caption glasses came out I hardly went to movies because it was hard to understand the dialogue. I would rather wait till the movie came out on TV with the captions. Or I would only watch movies with a lot of action. Now It is great having the caption glasses and enjoying movies

Going to ballgames during spring training to hear the sport announcer was always a challenge. Now I can hear the announcements!

The Post Office. I heard music in the background (background is one word). I asked the postmaster, "Did you always play music?" He said, "Yes." The music was soft and he was surprised that I could hear it, though didn't understand the lyrics. (Though I've been told even hearing people can't always make out lyrics!)

I went to pay for the stamps. I heard a beep when I used the debit card through the card reader. I asked, "Did that thing always made that beep?" The postmaster said, "Oh, I didn't notice it. I guess I tune it out."

At the gas station at RaceTrac, I was surprised to hear music on the overhead speakers. When I used the credit card, I could hear the beep again- Music and the beep were both new sounds to me.

Now I am enjoying music in my car and on Jango on my iPhone. I am surprised I can understand some of the words to some of the songs!

While driving, I am surprised that I can hear "ding" when a rock or pebble hits the car.

I finally got around to listening to an audio book, and I enjoy reading and hearing "The Devil in White City" by Erik Larson, which is about The World Fair in Chicago. Very Interesting!

It is nice hearing the microwave "bing" when food is finished. When I made chicken in the oven, I was surprised I could hear the timer beep from six feet away.

More beeps. I went to visit a friend, Denise, a genealogist and librarian, and while we were talking I kept hearing beeps. I asked her, "What's that sound?" She explained that when the books or CDs are being checked out, they get desensitized to deactivate their magnetic strip so that an alarm does not go off at front door. Books being returned get re-sensitized to activate their magnetic security strip again, and a beep happens as books are sensitized. I was really shocked that I could hear those beeps across the room, about 20 feet away. I was thinking WOW Cool! I never heard that sound before.

And by the way, it sure is a noisy world we live in.

### **Back-seat Hearing**

What is really cool is I can understand my sister or my brother-in-law who are sitting in the front of the car, without my sister turning around so I can lip-read her. Before my CI I used to dislike using the speaker on the phone, as I could never understand the words. Since I got the CI, I have been using the speaker on the phone and understanding almost all of the words.

COOL!! One time I was on Skype with my sister, and her husband called. My sister had the phone on speaker, and I understood what my brother-in-law said on speaker THROUGH skype.

## **Groups and Family**

Recently I traveled to a genealogy convention with other “genealogy ladies.” For the first time I felt comfortable with them and we had a blast! I didn’t feel left out. I handed my article about my CI experience to several professional genealogists. One said that she got goosebumps in reading it. Another well-known genealogist asked me if he could use part of the article for his keynote speech in July. I was surprised and excited to hear this. I said, “Yes, go for it!” I want the world to know that CI works. I want awareness and understanding of what one goes through, even though I know it is not for everyone.

Before I had a cochlear implant, I didn’t care for groups, as it is exhausting to lip-read everyone while trying to follow the conversation. There were times I would stop and say “what,” or I would pretend I understood. After the CI there were a few times I didn’t catch it as I guess my brain was tired. My sister would say “Pay attention.” I would try harder. It is new to them as well as me. But I know I am not as tired as I used to be.

One of the things I was hoping with the CI is that my nephew would call me or engage in conversation with me. Before the CI, I would initialize the conversation and it was always short and sweet. At the holidays, it was nice to be able to participate and listen to people’s conversation in groups and not feel left out. I guess it will take time for them to learn or adjust with me. I only wish they would show more interest or excitement about my hearing new sounds in my journey other than just saying “yeah.”

I am often in the role of a presenter -. I used to walk up to a person who asked a question, as I couldn’t hear or lip-read that far from podium. Now, with the CI I can hear from the back of the room. Oh WOW!

## **Next Steps**

Occasionally I need to take my hearing aid out to give my brain time to focus and rest from the CI. The hearing aid is a booster but not enough as a standalone. One of things I complain about with hearing aids is that there is no clarity. It is really hard to explain. I hear sounds, but I need constantly to lip-read everyone. I could not hear the turning signal in the car or a siren unless it was close by. Now I can hear a siren, but not always where it is coming from.

My primary doctor is thrilled to see my progress and suggests that I see a speech pathologist. You see, I have difficulty hearing and enunciating consonants that are similar – B, P and D.

When I say the word “ditch,” it sounds like “dish” or “fish” to people. So I would like for hearing people to correct me when I am saying it wrong. Though some of them feel that they would be hurting my feelings, I greatly appreciate it and view it as encouragement. I am looking forward to more training from USF on speech and auditory tools.

**Stay tuned!**