

Cochlear Implant Siblings

I *magine hearing for the first time the crash of ocean waves, or the lilting song of a bird. That was the joyful experience of siblings who elected to receive cochlear implants together on the same day at the House Clinic in June 2003, after more than 40 years of deafness.* Stephen and Debbie Bottles of Boise, Idaho, were four and five years old when their profound sensorineural hearing loss was diagnosed. The most powerful hearing aids provided only limited benefit for their degree of hearing loss; so both became expert interpreters of facial expressions and body language.

Thanks to their family's tireless efforts, they successfully developed oral communication skills. Relying on a combination of lip reading, closed captioning and oral interpreting assistance, they overcame their challenges and grew up to be highly independent. They attended public schools where each was active in sports and music. Debbie performed in piano recitals and Stephen was second chair trumpet in his junior high school marching and concert band.

Debbie and Stephen stayed abreast of news on the cochlear implant (CI), and as CI technology evolved, they decided to consider it for themselves. In 2002, while attending a *Self Help for Hard of Hearing* (SHHH)



*It's a
Family
Affair!*



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conference in Seattle, Washington, they attended CI seminars, visited manufacturers of the devices and spoke with people who were using cochlear implants.

By the time they returned home, the Bottles had decided to pursue cochlear implantation, and they wanted to do it together. “We felt comfortable with the improvements in CI reliability reported in recent years,” Stephen stated. “We wanted to begin to rely less on lip reading and more on speech understanding, with the hope of being able to use the telephone without relay services,” Debbie added.

In the process of researching medical facilities that perform cochlear implant surgeries, they discovered that William H. Slattery, III, M.D., who had attended college with their younger brother, was now practicing at the House Clinic in Los Angeles. In April 2003, Dr. Slattery evaluated Debbie and Stephen for implantation, and a June date was set for their surgeries at St. Vincent Medical Center, with Dr. Slattery as the surgeon. “Debbie and Stephen’s hearing was not significantly improved by hearing aids. For this reason, and because they already had good oral communication, they were ideal candidates for cochlear implants,” Dr. Slattery stated.

Their same-day surgeries were a success, and were documented for a story on *ABC Television News*. Following a 6-week recovery period, the Bottles returned to the House Clinic with their family, where their implant devices were “turned on.” The television cameras were rolling when

Debbie and Stephen heard sound for the first time. Clinic audiologists Dawna Mills, Au.D., and Danielle Dzubak, Au.D., “mapped” their tones and made adjustments for comfort and clarity. “We were able to hear tones very early in the session,” Debbie reported happily. “Soon we were able to repeat back the words and sentences spoken by our audiologists without reading their lips,” she continued. “We wanted to rush outside to hear the city sounds, to the beach to hear the waves crash, and to stand by a tree and listen to the birds sing.”

Hearing one another’s voices and those of other family members was the high point for the Bottles.

Their dream of using the telephone also has been realized. Both are working – Debbie at an escrow firm and Stephen in a real estate office – where they use the phone daily. “Just enjoying music and the sounds of nature makes us happier people,” said Debbie and Stephen. “Being able to hear the sounds around us makes our lives much simpler now.” ❖



Stephen and Debbie Bottles with William H. Slattery, M.D.