

January 18th, 2005

"Wired for Sound"

Today was my CI activation and all I can say is -- WOW -- what an amazing experience!!

My neighbor Lillian was the only person who attended my activation. My Sister was called into work at the last minute. To be honest, since I didn't know how I would react emotionally, I thought it would be best to keep the number of people in a room down to 2 or 3 to avoid distractions, etc.

Lillian and I arrived at the hospital a half hour early. We decided to go up to the clinic to wait for my tactile interpreter. A few minutes later, my interpreter arrived and asked me how I felt about today. I said, "Excited -- Very excited!" The more we started talking about my activation, the more Lillian started to tear up telling me how happy and excited she was for me.

At ten minutes past 1:00, my audiologist came out to get us and took us into a room. She then explained that she would go through each electrode and set my comfort (C) levels. Because I had difficulty knowing when I heard a medium sound, my audiologist asked me to listen to the very loudest sound I could tolerate and work my way down from there to establish a comfort level. Some of the higher pitched tones were those I felt rather than heard. Although the tones didn't hurt, their vibration was somewhat bothersome. My audiologist explained that because I haven't heard many of these frequencies in a very long time, my brain needed time to become used to hearing them again.

We next moved on to threshold (T) levels. I had some difficulty with this because I couldn't always tell when I was hearing beeps. Sometimes it seemed as if I were feeling them instead of hearing them. By the time 17 electrodes had been programmed, I began to recognize that I was hearing 3 beeps which made it easier for me to concentrate on their loudness.

Now it was time for my activation!! After my audiologist checked the implant area, fitted the magnet and 3G -- and explained some of the sound characteristics I might hear when my speech processor was turned on, she asked if I was ready. I said yes and held my breath for what was to come... After a few seconds, my audiologist spoke for the first time. Instead of hearing Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse on helium, I heard a repetitive metallic sound that was uncomfortably high pitched. I couldn't understand anything she said, but I knew it was her voice because I could hear rhythm and pause, rhythm and pause, rhythm and pause. I told my audiologist, "I can't understand what you're saying, but I can hear you!!" Instead of crying, I started to laugh because I was so happy with what I had just heard!! That

metallic blur of sound was music to my ears!!

After a few minutes the high pitched metallic sound became uncomfortable, so my audiologist lowered the threshold. She then asked me to wear my right hearing aid so that the high pitched frequencies from the implant could be balanced with the low frequencies picked up by my hearing aid. My audiologist began to speak again and asked that I listen to her for a minute or two so that I could determine whether or not the sound of her voice was becoming more comfortable to me. It was!!

Several more minutes passed (I'm not really sure how many because I wasn't looking at my Braille watch - LOL!) and I asked my audiologist to increase the volume (threshold level?) twice. It was then that I began to notice that although I couldn't recognize words, I could distinguish differences between letters by their tonality. For example, after my audiologist demonstrated the "ssss" sound, I noticed that it had a higher tone than a "t" or hard "c." The more my audiologist began to talk, the more I could recognize "s," "t" and "c" sounds by their tone.

I was then shown my 3G equipment. Instead of showing me all of my equipment, at once, my audiologist thought it would be best to shown equipment to me (for example, FM system accessories) at a later appointment when I would be using them so as to not avoid getting them confused. (I agreed because my poor brain had more than enough to handle today. LOL!) Today I was shown the 3G, splash case and box of 600 batteries. After that I practiced putting on/removing my 3G, inserting/removing batteries and using/identifying its controls.

I was asked to remain on program 1 for at least a few days until the quality of what I'm hearing becomes softer or more difficult to hear. From what I was told, program 2 is slightly louder and will provide more volume.

My appointment lasted from 1:15 until 4:00 and by the end of it, I was exhausted!!

As Lillian and I left the hospital, I heard a loud sound but could not tell what it was or where it was coming from. I was told that it was a large passenger bus.

When Lillian and I took the elevator down to the underground parking lot I was hoping to hear the elevator doors opening and closing, but I didn't. However, as we were waiting for the elevator, I heard people talking. To my surprise, Lillian told me they were an arm's length away from me!! I couldn't believe it!!

While we were in the car getting ready to leave I heard yet another

sound -- the sound of Lillian putting on her gloves. I also heard the turn signal in her car and the sound of her winter coat brushing against the car seat.

When Lillian and I got home I asked her to come with me to my apartment for a moment. I went over to my microwave and started pressing each button. I could hear them beep and better yet, it sounded just like the way I remembered with my hearing aids!! I can hear the clicking of the computer keyboard as I type this message. It sounds like popcorn. LOL! I can also hear the rattling of Tigger's collar and the sound of an object as it slides across the table.

Just a few moments ago I heard what sounded like a voice. I went outside my door and asked if anyone was in the hallway. I asked twice, but received no response. It was then that I realized it was my talking calculator clock that I had left on the kitchen table in the hopes that I would be able to hear it when I got home. After it announced the time, I thought I could faintly recognize what it was saying. When I pressed the "talk" button again, I was delighted to find out that yes, I **could** understand it -- even if just barely.

As I say random words out loud right now, I notice that although the high pitched metallic sound is still the same, I can faintly hear words and that they are beginning to sound like I remember with hearing aids.

What a wonderful day this has been!! I wonder what tomorrow will bring!!

Lisa