



ReSound



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Mare and Foal on the Isle of Lismore

Photo by Scottish C. I. user Robert Brooks

CONTENTS

Clinic Announcements; Editorial	2
Cicada Club News	3
Cochlear Implants and Hearing Loops	4&5
Forthcoming Events	5
Letters; Stagertext	6
A sister's Letter	7
Zoe's Story	8;9
Letters	9
Recent Developments in Cochlear Implants	10 11
Questions	11 12
Music and Cochlear Implants	13
Gordon's Long Walk :- Diary	14 15
Listening to Audio Tapes and CDs	15
CICADA Membership	16
Addresses	16

Zoe's Story

My name is Zoe Tomlin I was born in London in 1977; I think I have always had hearing difficulties from the time I was born. I even lip-read in my dreams.

It took a lot of appointments back and forth to the GP and finally a visit to Nuffield ear nose and throat hospital before I was diagnosed with a moderate loss of hearing at five. No one seemed to know why I had hearing loss, I was told that the cells in the cochlear were dying and there was nothing to be done. My hearing continued to decline throughout my childhood, and every check up would more or less produce a new hearing aid for both ears, until a day when I was told that hearing aids just were no longer enough to help me at 18.1 soldiered on, and even tried the digital aids which gave clarity but did not have the power I needed to actually hear speech.

At the age of 26 having got through collage and university to achieve a 2:1 degree, I was finding it almost impossible to hear anything. In time this made me wonder if I would be able to continue to do my job, as I was no longer able to pick up any speech and was lip-reading for most of the time.

I did a lot of research on cochlear implants, I joined a number of forums including a UK forum on Yahoo called ciug2004 set up by a young lady called Alison who had already had a cochlear implant and wanted a chat forum for others to search their experience of getting a cochlear. I found this a useful forum to go to for information about the assessment process of gaining approval for a cochlear specifically in the UK.
(<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ciug2004/>)

I was assessed by the Manchester cochlear programme which took under a year to complete. I was given the choice between Med El, Advance Bionics and Cochlear. I chose to have the implant provided by Cochlear because of its reputation and also because the new Freedom processor had been launched in April 2005 which provided four possible programmes which could be set individually to suit my needs.

My operation was done on Monday 13th June 2005 by Mr Saeed at Manchester Royal Infirmary, who I cannot hold in high enough esteem for his skill as a surgeon. The scarring was minimal and eventually faded into the natural crease behind my ear. Much to my surprise the hearing test proved that I still had residual hearing after the implant had been put in, which can only be a testament of Mr Saeed's skills. I found the first few hours after the surgery quite painful but the post op staff were wonderful and I was allocated a nurse who stayed with me until the pain was under control. I was up and eating that evening and from that moment on felt very little pain. I suffered from no vertigo, even my

tinnitus sounded quieter! The only side affect I had was my tongue felt numb on one side, which affected the texture and taste of food. This lasted about three weeks and then went away. I consider myself very lucky to have had Mr Saeed as my surgeon. I only wish I could convince the Manchester Cochlear Programme to let Mr Saeed implant my other ear!

The following day I had x-ray which I had a sneaky look at, it was truly amazing to see the implant coil

round in my cochlear and see how the whole implant fitted in my head. Once this was checked by the consultant I was free to go home. I had some bruising which showed its self over the following few weeks. The date of my switch on came in the post shortly after. This was for the Thursday 30th June, which I found so exciting.

First they opened the programme, which checked the implant was working - it was quite impressive to see each electrode light up on the cochlear logo. This confirmed that everything was in working order.

Then I had some beeps sent thru the processor, which sounded like a normal hearing test - this set my tinnitus off quite badly and it was very difficult to hear the beeps.

I was sitting there waiting and everyone was looking at me because I had not responded and all of the sudden I realised what I had been listening to for the past few minutes was not actually my tinnitus it was a two tone beep and I looked up in surprise and Amy smiled and said "You have been hearing that, haven't you". She counted the beeps as they came to me, which helped me make the comparison between the sounds and my tinnitus - I got quite excited by the fact that I was hearing the beeps.

I then had to let Amy know when I heard the sound, when it sounded soft, medium, loud, too loud. None of the beeps sounded soft to me! I could only judge when it was loud and too loud. The Amy tested the electrodes in sets of five, which I confirmed I was hearing.

Then it came to the big moment - she turned it on and I waited, waited, waited and about 5-10 seconds later jumped six foot in the air and said turn it off!

The sound was **SO LOUD**, it was not human, terrible screeching, growling, beeps, pops, squeals and nasty sounds I can't explain were coming through.

Amy played with the settings a bit more; we tried again, same thing happened but a bit softer although it was still pretty unbearable. Amy turned it down a little more and I told her that I really found it unbearable - but Amy was reluctant to turn it down much further as it was on a very soft setting (could have fooled me at the time).



Zoe on holiday

After about 20 minutes the sounds settled down a little, and when Amy or anyone else spoke I could hear a beep for each word. I could hear it beeping when I spoke. It sounded like someone was pressing the highest key on a piano every time someone said a word. I was thinking "oh my, this is terrible, it's not going to work!" - But then I realised I could only hear beeps when there was a sound to be heard. Amy felt this was very positive.

Although everyone really tried to prepare me for pre-switch on and post switch on - nothing can. Although I was quite disappointed by the lack of progress on the first session when the implant was switched on, it did improve very quickly. By the third session I was hearing speech quite well. Lots of people say that the worst sound is plastic bags, but I love the sound as I had never heard it before. I also thought it was completely amazing to be able to hear the fizz when opening a bottle of fizzy drink. Over the course of a few weeks I started to hear more and more sounds that I had forgotten about or never heard before which was mind blowing.

Just fourteen days after switch on I tried talking to my partner on the phone and we managed a conversation that consisted of one or two words at a time.

It has been nearly five months since my switch on and my confidence has grown to such that I have been able to sort out my car insurance, change direct debits, call family and friends via the phone. Which is something I never dreamed would ever be possible for me to do.

I have not looked back since the cochlear operation, and it is with out doubt one of the best things I ever decided to do. My advice to any one thinking about going for the cochlear would be to join as many forums as you can, ask as many questions as you need to, once you have decided it is the right thing for you, stay positive, be patient, keep practicing, as my cochlear implant has rewarded me with more sounds than I could ever dream of and all the work I have put in has been worth it one hundred percent

Zoe Tomlin
November 2005

Update - April 2006.

I am having a blast!

I am now using a mobile phone to speak to family and friends and I don't think it will be long before I work up the confidence to use it for work when I am out and about. I am also able to recognise and identify people by their voice without seeing them. I am now able to write things down that people are saying when I am not looking at them! Life is getting so much easier.

<http://www.tomlinuk.com/ci.html>