



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association North Shore Branch

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Tel: 604-926-5222 Fax: 604-925-2286 website: www.chha-nsb.com
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Editor: Hugh Hetherington

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Mountain Ear

COME JOIN US! REGISTER NOW! HEAR WE GO AGAIN...the fun continues with the young at heart

Prez-Mez

By Mike Hocevar

Welcome to **Caroline Wickham** who has volunteered to serve as one of our branch directors, and thank you for doing this, Caroline....wasn't that a splendid presentation by **Flo Spratt** as our guest speaker back in November! Flo's personal radiance and energy is something we appreciate so much...to board member **Lauren Cotterell** who takes care of our goodies at the meetings, have a fun and safe vacation in Mexico early February!...Speaking of vacations, another board member, **Ruth Lapointe**, enjoyed a splendid trip over to Rome in the late Fall... Don't forget to bring your used hearing aid batteries to the February meeting for recycling...Condolences to former longtime board member **Rosalie MacDonald (Williams)** on the recent passing of her adult son. We wish you the best at this difficult time.

DIARY OF A COCHLEAR IMPLANT

Reflecting with Thanks

Anniversaries are good times to reflect, aren't they? That's when we stop, think back, reflect on the path that was taken so far, and then spring ahead with thanks in our hearts. We do this now and then. And, when we stop and reflect, we realize the gifts we received in the past make our lives blessed and beautiful today.

This month I reached my cochlear implant's fourth anniversary. In February, 2009, after many years of severe to profound hearing loss, Dr. Westerberg and his team at St. Paul's Hospital surgically implanted me with a cochlear implant. It is hard to believe it is already four years since then.

So it is time to look back. I simply marvel at all the dramatic changes that took place for me because of

this gift. I can hear people speaking with my eyes closed! Birds outside my window make *chirping noises* while they eat their suet! My cat *noisily* laps her water! My dentist can keep his mask on while talking to me! I can hear my husband in a restaurant! I have a cell phone and I use it! In group discussions, I know what everyone is talking about!

Not only do I hear so much now, but my brain is also able to discriminate between noise and speech, so that I can filter the noise better than ever. So my clock doesn't tick so loudly anymore, children's voices don't take over as much as they used to, I can hear speech over traffic noise better, and I can tolerate background music in most restaurants. This skill took time, and for me it took up to two years with my implant.

It is also 11 years since I began writing articles for our newsletter, first as president and then as a member of our branch. It has been very rewarding to put in words the many dimensions of living with a hearing loss. I think I learned to be more articulate with my thoughts as a result of my writing.

Now it is time to lay down my pen for this newsletter. As I look back over the years, I am very grateful for all that you have given our branch. There are so many givers in our company of caring people who know and understand hearing loss. In re-reading my first article (Dec. 2001), I found exactly how I feel about you all, and I want to reprint what I wrote about your gifts:

What are some of these gifts that I see among us? There is compassion for others who have lost their hearing, gratitude to those who willingly repeat themselves when not heard, resourcefulness in finding ways for all of us to hear, encouragement to those who need it, companionship with those who need a friend, and support to the ones struggling with their loss. There are also leadership gifts used to advocate for the hearing impaired in our community. We couldn't survive long as a group without administrative gifts. I love the gift of humor being sprinkled throughout our

meetings; without laughter we lose perspective. The gift of servicing is readily available at the literature and coffee tables. I am always looking for inspiration from the stories I hear from you. Thank you for giving so much!

Speaking of inspiration from your stories, I am excited to tell you that, in this issue, you will read Rick Waters' first article. In this and subsequent issues, he will write of his journey to a cochlear implant this spring. I know you will enjoy his humor, reflections and experiences as he tells us his story. No doubt you will also be inspired, encouraged and determined to do what you can to live your life to the fullest. Warmly,

Flo Spratt

From one Life to Another, My Hearing Journey

By: Rick Waters

This is Rick Waters reporting live from Vancouver, BC, well, at least as live as you can be with a profound hearing loss.

But not for long, I hope, as I've been scheduled for a Cochlear Implant surgery on March 11, this year. Excitement? Fear? Curiosity? Just some of the emotions I'm experiencing as I wait for what I expect will be a life-changing experience, not only for me, but for my wife and kids as well.

Hard of hearing since somewhere around two years of age, not diagnosed until the beginning of second grade, progressively worsening over the years, as exposure to industrial noise in summertime jobs at a pipe factory, sawmill and fish cannery before the era of hearing protection awareness, lead me to where I am now: profoundly hard of hearing in both ears.

Oh, I'm getting by, with Phonak Naida IX Ultra Power BTE hearing aids, but getting by is not doing the trick. So, about three years ago, I discussed this with my audiologist, and eventually was referred to St. Paul's hospital for a Cochlear Implant evalua-

tion. I did not meet the criteria, as I have excellent coping skills, and was able to piece the sentences together.

“Tried too hard” everybody said.

A year and a half later, I was re-evaluated as part of the intake process for a new clinical study being sponsored by Cochlear Americas, and Lo and Behold: I was accepted as a candidate, so now I’m doing the mental preparation for what I expect will be a brand new life. So, hear we go!

Why a Cochlear Implant?

I told you how excited I was to be scheduled for CI surgery on March 11. Not only excited, but also curious, and yes, a little bit fearful. Of course, something as potentially life-changing as a cochlear implant is bound to bring out those emotions, and learning to live with and even ride herd on those emotions is one of the keys to making this as positive as possible.

“Keep your hopes high, and your expectations reasonable” was how the audiologist at St. Paul’s counseled my wife Lynn and me as she wrapped up the screening testing. That didn’t stop us from jumping for joy when we later heard that I was going to be receiving the implant. So, I’m going into this not thinking I’m going to be able to hear sparrows whispering in the pine trees the same day that they switch on my processor, but rather that like every other person I’ve spoken to who has received an implant, I’ll hear way better than I have for the past 30 or 40 years. And I know it won’t be an instant thing, but rather a process during which my hearing will improve as my experience with this new way of hearing grows.

My history of being able to process speech despite a profound hearing loss is a testament to my brain’s ability to adapt and to “rehab”, something that’s always stood me in good stead. Let me give you an example: in 1992 I think it was, I began wearing a hearing aid in my left ear, the ear that had received no stimulation for approximately 20 years. I remember telling the audiologist that there was no point in fitting an aid to the left ear, because although I could

sense noise, nothing sounded like speech or music. It took a while, years actually, but now the left ear is better able to process sound than my so called good ear, the right one.

And that, I think, is why I’m confident I’ll do well with the implant: I can persevere, and my auditory processing centre has proven it can adapt to new stimuli.

Getting everybody on board

Once the initial shock of learning that I was indeed going to receive a cochlear implant wore off, it was time to let my family and friends know what was coming down the road. Since my wife, Lynn, had been present during the hearing testing session, she had learned much about the implants, the surgery, and the rehabilitation process from the audiologist. She had a fairly good understanding of what a cochlear implant is, how it is implanted, and how it works. She also knew that the “switch on date” would not be the same as putting on new glasses and seeing clearly; there was a period of adjustment and rehabilitation that would quite possibly be frustrating.

Next on the list, I let my daughter, Emily, and my son, Michael, know about the implant. I was concerned that they have peace of mind, and to that end, I not only spent some time explaining just what a cochlear implant was, and what it could potentially do for me, but also went over the various risks associated with the process, wanting to let them know that I understood those risks, and was happy to take the risks for the potential benefit.

Whoa! Risks? What risks? Well, yes, there are some risks associated with cochlear implants. In no particular order, they include the risk of infection, including meningitis, the risk associated with general anesthesia, the risk of device failure, and probably the most important: the risk that my hearing would perhaps not be as good after the procedure than it was before.

The risk of a meningitis infection is serious, but fortunately, a vaccination prior to surgery will mitigate much of that risk. There is always a risk associated

with anesthesia, but since I have previously been under general anesthetic, this is not a risk about which I'll worry too much. As for device failure, the various makers of cochlear implants, as well as the American FDA, maintain comprehensive records, and device failures are extremely rare.

It would not be an understatement to say that the risk that worries me the most is the risk that somehow, I will not hear as well after the procedure as I did before. Prior to making the decision to go ahead, I spoke with quite a few people who have received an implant, and I did a large amount of online research. What I found is that almost every person who receives an implant is doing much better than they did prior to receiving the implant, and typically made such statements as; "I would do it again in a heartbeat!"; or "I just couldn't stop crying when I heard people's voices."

I think what I am saying is all about is the importance of making sure everybody close to you is "on board" with the decision, and more importantly, that if you are thinking of having an implant, you must know what to expect, and must "buy in" to your own decision.

What I'm Hoping For

To be just like everyone else on this planet. That's a bit of a stretch, since one of our world's most beautiful attributes is that we are all different. To narrow it down, what I want is to be able to hear, as much as possible, like those folks who have "normal" hearing.

In order to do that, I'm going to have to accept a new "bionic ear", and learn how to process the stimuli that it produces, turning it into the sorts of sounds normal folks experience.

Bionic? What does that mean in the case of a cochlear implant? Do you want the long or short version of how the ear works? I'm going for the short version:

Sound is vibrations, usually in air. The ear turns the vibrations into electrical impulses, by vibrating fluid in the cochlea which in turn moves tiny hair cells. When these hair cells vibrate, they produce small

pulses of electrical energy. The electrical impulses are carried through the auditory nerve to the brain, where they are transformed into meaning.

With sensorineural hearing loss, the hair cells become damaged, and do not generate those electrical impulses. A cochlear implant works by implanting a string of small electrodes into the cochlea, putting an electrical device below the skin behind your ear, and "firing" the electrodes in such a way that electrical signals are sent along the auditory nerve.

A sound processing unit, usually mounted behind the ear, receives the sound through one or more microphones, converts it into an electrical signal, and transmits that signal to the electrical device (receiver) implanted below the skin.

And yes, it does look "bionic: with a device held to your skull by a magnet, and connected by a wire to the processor.

But hey! Better to look "bionic" than not to be able to hear!

Editor's Note: Excerpted from Rick's CI Blog. You can read his complete blog "Going Bionic-A Cochlear Implant" at:

<http://rickwaters69.wordpress.com/going-bionic-a-cochlear-implant/>

November Presentation

Living stress free with hearing loss

Developing and maintaining a positive attitude and an understanding of our hearing limitations are necessary for those of us with poor hearing, in order to cope successfully in our everyday life situations. Flo Spratt, our guest speaker for the evening suggests that this can be achieved starting with honest self-reflection and using simple critical analysis.

From personal experience and by drawing upon her professional school teaching career, Flo incorporated audience participation throughout to demonstrate her message that there are lots of ways to manage a number of typical scenarios. Here is a summary of her step-by-step advice:

1. **Personal attitude affects behavior:** Possessing a healthy attitude towards ourselves

and others does make a difference in coping with our hearing loss. Acceptance in this regard makes it easier to be open to strategies and gives comfort and confidence in any given situation. It also helps to accept that there are personal safety risks due to hearing loss and these need to be recognized and addressed as required.

2. **Look in the mirror:** It is important to be honest with yourself. Ask how you handle a difficult conversation or discussion. How do you feel about missing parts of the discussion? What do you do after such an encounter? Do you care or do you recognize the need to minimize these issues?
3. **Healthy attitudes of self-accepting reality and limitations of your hearing loss:** No question, poor hearing is stressful; it takes its toll on the body and mind, recognize that it is important to take rest periods to preserve your energy level. Determined desire to hear well by accepting new solutions is positive.
4. **Behaviors affecting attitude:** Embrace and learn coping skills and strategies. This could include taking speech-reading classes. Attending our branch's monthly Sound Advice drop in sessions. Learn about the hearing aids and other assistive listening devices available. Utilize the coping strategies offered by CHHA for everyday interactions.
5. **Realistic expectations of technology:** There are lots of devices and they are there to help and assist, yet can never cure your hearing loss. They can't bring it back to normal, but can make life easier for you and just as important, for others around you. Explore what might be useful to assist you in your lifestyle. Note that many of these items will have free trial periods available.
6. **How do you see others:** Think about what it means to a person communicating with you and your hearing loss. Do you appreciate their efforts? Do you recognize their limitations and forgetfulness? Do you give them credit for their efforts? Are you yourself patient and understanding in their attempts or efforts to communicate with you once they understand your situation? Are you considerate of others about actions you do because of your hearing loss?
7. **Some unhealthy behaviours:** Retreating and

avoiding situations where you anticipate a difficult hearing experience, as "an easy way out". Bluffing (pretending to hear) may be convenient, but are you showing full respect to the speaker and being able to carry on a productive conversation. Monopolizing conversation in reality is not a respectful interaction but is common with many who have difficulty hearing others. Complaining rather than addressing the required fix. Not using assistive devices; perhaps your lifestyle or place of employment could be enhanced by the use of some of these aids.

8. **How do I solve a difficult situation:** What are some strategies? Here are 3 steps: First, identify the PROBLEM. Second, Rephrase the problem into a NEED. Third, Make a list of possible SOLUTIONS and RESOURCES.
9. **Let's work through some examples:**
At home- can't hear well in the living room. **Need:** to make listening to visitors easier. **Solution:** to rearrange seating such as into a circle, turn down background volumes of music/tv, adjust or increase the lighting to see people's faces.
On the phone- the person's accent, or the person speaks too fast. **Need:** to speak slower and clearer. **Solution:** explain and direct how they could talk for you to understand them, or if necessary ask for a different speaker.
 Note: at this point Flo gave other examples and asked the audience for their answers: You can use your own examples and apply the same process.
10. **Conclusion:** It's important to note that those who care and do want to help, need your help, direction and patience. Your own efforts to improve your hearing skills will affect the amount and quality of effort others will give to you.

Flo's presentation was nothing short of dynamic and instructive. As a longtime past board member and president of the branch, she continues to inspire. Everyone went home much wiser and encouraged to take command to consider and address their everyday situations for the better. Thank you, Flo !

----Mike Hocevar

All opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association or CHHA – North Shore Branch.

April Presentation

Monday, April 22, 2013

7:00 pm at the Summerhill

135 West 15th Street, North Vancouver

Guest Speaker

Jolene Harrington, M.Sc., RAUD

St. Paul's Hospital

Department of Audiology

Topic

**Balance & Dizziness
Disorders**

Everyone Welcome

Wheelchair and Hearing Accessible

For information call 604-926-5222

Hearing Aid Battery Recycling

Bring your used hearing aid batteries to our meetings and we will take care of recycling them for you

CHHA—North Shore Branch Programs are funded in part by Social Service Grants from the City and District of North Vancouver and the District of West Vancouver.

Sound Advice

Presented by:

**The Canadian Hard of Hearing
Association**

North Shore Branch

**The group meets on the First
Friday of each month from
10:00 AM to 12 Noon**

(Holidays excepted) at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre's Social Rec Room, 695 21st Street in West Vancouver.

(No meeting in July and August)

When we meet, we discuss topics and issues dealing with hearing loss.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Bring a friend, a family member, they are welcome too.

Subjects to be addressed will include:

Technology; Coping Strategies;

Improving Relationships;

Improving Hearing Environments

For Information call: 604-926-5222

Everyone Welcome



CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING ASSOCIATION

NORTH SHORE BRANCH

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Prov. _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____

Please mail application to:

CHHA—North Shore Branch

Attention: Treasurer

600 West Queens Road

North Vancouver, B.C.

V7N 2L3

Cheque enclosed

Money Order Enclosed

Charitable Registration No.

BN 89672 3038 RR0001

I wish to support the aims of CHHA and the North Shore Branch and enclose my \$35.00 annual membership fee. (National \$25.00, Branch \$10.00). Membership is paid annually from 1 October to 30 September.