

# A Young Adult CI Recipient's Perspective:

## Growing Up Using Hearing Aids, Transitioning to Cochlear Implants, and Becoming my Own Best Advocate

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I was born deaf and diagnosed with bilateral profound, sensorineural hearing loss. I was diagnosed at 18 months and shortly after, aided with hearing aids. I grew up learning spoken English as my primary form of communication. My older brother, who is also deaf, and I were the only children in our school district with hearing loss. I functioned very well with hearing aids all the way through elementary school. I benefitted from speech therapy, although I “graduated” out of that in third grade. In 2004, I found out that I might be eligible for a cochlear implant. While it was not an easy decision, seeing and hearing the experiences of my older brother and a few older high school and college age peers with cochlear implants helped me make my decision to move forward quickly.

It's worth noting that for the first ten years of my life, I was painfully shy—even with peers I had grown up with and known my entire life. My go-to tactic in elementary school was “social bluffing”—nodding or chuckling at my peers and hoping that they asked me a “yes” or “no” question given I often had no idea what was said to me. This had behavioral ramifications. I would purposely put myself in the back of the lunch line to ensure nobody talked to me from behind, fake stomach aches during class discussions since the background noise made comprehension impossible. Strangers sometimes

scared me because their voices were unfamiliar, I had no fallback on what to ask or say, and no past history with their facial cues and expressions.

Within 6 months of receiving my first cochlear implant, I no longer needed to use social bluffing or find ways to circumvent normal social functioning. I could actually hear my peers and my teachers! My confidence exploded. I did things I previously never dreamed of doing including speaking to Dartmouth College medical students (in the town where I grew up), being on panels at cochlear implant conferences, and even leading my own 504 meetings!

During the remainder of my primary/secondary educational years, I thrived. I was a member of two varsity sports teams (golf and baseball), achieved my third-degree black belt in Taekwondo, and earned several academic awards while graduating in the top 15% of my class. I also earned academic awards from the Spanish department and had the opportunity to go on school trips to Spain and Nicaragua, where I was able to converse on behalf of my non-Spanish speaking classmates. None of this would have been possible without my cochlear implants.

While I did go right to college after graduating from high school, I ultimately decided to take some time away after one year for personal



reasons. Flash forward several years—I went back to college and earned my Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Granite State College with a 4.0 GPA. I was selected to be the Student Commencement Speaker by the Board of Trustees of the University System of New Hampshire. From there, I was accepted into the MBA program at the University of New Hampshire where I have nearly completed my first year and am maintaining a 3.67 GPA. I did all of this while I was also working full-time as an administrative assistant for the University of New Hampshire (Durham).

Currently, I work in a department that serves undergraduate students at UNH, helping them develop all of the skills, strategies, and confidence needed to succeed in college. I bought my first home three years ago with my fiancée. Our favorite date-night activity is to go to concerts. We average 7-15 concerts each year! In my free time, I greatly enjoy fine woodworking and gardening projects for our home.

When I explored my candidacy for cochlear implants, I had no concept of how this hearing technology would change and enrich my life. Having struggled to hear in so many situations pre-CI, I recognize how cochlear implants make it possible for someone with a hearing profile and history like mine to go mainstream and truly excel.