



Cochlear™ Awareness Network

# Carol's Story

Carol Beaumont  
Hears with a Cochlear Implant

Taking part in the Hearing World



Hear now. And always

**Cochlear™**



## Meet Carol

### Carol Beaumont

Currently hearing with a cochlear Implant

Implant October 1998



Hi. I'm Carol Beaumont from Brisbane, Australia. I would like to share the story of my life with a hearing loss and how I regained it with a Nucleus® Cochlear Implant.

I was the last of five daughters, born in the halcyon age of the baby boomers. It wasn't until I was 3 or 4 years of age, when I spoke only a few words but mostly made noises, that my mother realized I was slow to learn to speak. I think these noises were actually a language I invented for myself!

Mum took me to the specialist, who told her I had a hearing loss in the moderate-to-severe range and I wouldn't learn to talk unless I had a hearing aid. So I was fitted with an aid. While I didn't particularly like wearing it, I do remember it made a huge difference. I learnt to talk very, very quickly after getting my aid and didn't need speech therapy.

My first was the button in the ear with a cord and bodice which held the battery. I didn't like this at all and I would try to get out of putting it on. I just hated being different. I tried to avoid talking about it or thought of imaginative reasons why I wore it. I told one of my friends that I liked wearing strings in my ears!

I went to mainstream schools, with visits once a term from the Glendonald school for deaf children to check up on how I was coping. However, I did very well and was awarded a Nelson Bequest scholarship, so these visits were discontinued.



Life continued apace. I never really made allowances for my hearing loss but despite the fact that I was actually doing very well, I thought I was a 'fairly average' student and unfortunately this led to my life-long perception of mediocrity.

My hearing didn't really change much until I attended business college, the year after graduating from RMIT with a Diploma of Arts in Fine Art Painting. One night I was kept awake by church organs roaring in my head. The noise was so loud that I put my ear over my mum's to ask her if she could hear it! Sadly, the specialist told us it was tinnitus, a sign of deterioration in the inner ear. But we didn't want to believe it - not even Dad, who was a doctor. Fortunately the tinnitus settled down, became tolerable and at times, almost enjoyable (well, it was musical tinnitus most of the time).

After graduating from Business College, my first job was in a library. I really loved this job and was shocked when asked to resign. The bosses perceived I had difficulty at the front counter when it was my turn to be rostered on.

I was supposed to wear a badge saying I had a hearing loss, but this wasn't something I wanted to do - it made me feel 'different' which I hated. So I was really sacked but made to resign so it didn't look like I was sacked! Eventually I found a job in the federal public service, which is where I remain to this day.

I lived with my hearing loss not really thinking much about it for many years. I'm not really sure when it started to deteriorate. In 1996 I contracted Ross River Virus and seemed to be having trouble with my hearing aid; it started playing up when we went on holiday. Then I got a really bad cold a few months later and noticed I could barely hear even when my hearing aid was turned on. Fortunately my hearing level recovered to some extent after I got over my cold; but I was getting more and more bad days where I was 'as deaf as a post' as I used to joke to my work mates.

I became increasingly reliant on an assistive listening device I used at work and it got to the point where I couldn't have a one-on-one conversation without it. But still I thought my problems were due to my 10 year old hearing aid and trialled a new one. This didn't help



as much as I had hoped and I returned it. During this time we also had to deal with my husband Mark's ill-health (he had cancer, but has since made a full recovery).

I went back to my doctor, who told me I was likely to go totally deaf and referred me to a specialist who said my hearing was dropping. He told me I heard 'too well' for a Cochlear Implant and nothing could be done.

During a camping trip in 2000 I suffered an allergic reaction to something in our camper trailer and couldn't breathe at night. It was so bad I had a vacuum effect when I swallowed. I did recover after we got home, but I could no longer understand the family without my hearing aid. I couldn't have a conversation with someone across my lounge room,. I had to sit on the floor at their feet. I was no longer able to have conversations on the phone. I avoided softly spoken people because I just couldn't hear them.

By now I was relying on others to help me with simple tasks such as phoning for a doctor's appointment. Music became horrible and it was a constant reminder of what I could no longer hear because I had lost the high frequencies.

### I was depressed and isolated.

Unfortunately most people around me didn't really understand the grieving I was going through. Some people asked me whether I would prefer to be blind or deaf. Well, neither thanks! Others suggested I should learn sign language (Auslan). That's all very well, but who else was going to learn it? I didn't know any deaf people apart from the people at lipreading classes. I was told I should 'accept' my deafness and live with it. It was like being in a no-man's land - I couldn't hear, but I wasn't part of the culturally Deaf either. I was depressed and felt very isolated.

Fortunately, I had a very sympathetic neighbour, who told me about a surgeon, Bruce Black, who specialised in Cochlear Implants. I went back to my GP and asked for a referral to him.



## At last there was a ray of hope.

Thus began my journey back to the world of sound. I walked into Dr Black's surgery and one of the first things he said to me was: 'You need help'. I had my hearing aid optimised and surprise, surprise! Despite it was now 12 years old, it was working just fine. So I started the long and arduous testing for a Cochlear Implant. At last there was a ray of hope.

While I was undergoing the evaluation process, a friend asked us: 'What if it doesn't work?' That was a scary thought, but I reasoned that taking the chance was better than being deaf and at least I had the hope of an improved life.

Fortunately Cochlear had just revised their clinical guidelines. It had been recognised that implantation was best undertaken before someone was totally deaf and this was in my favour. Evaluation completed, I was told I was a suitable candidate. I could have been implanted straight away, but I had heard that the new and latest technology, the Nucleus Contour was soon to be released, so I decided to wait until this new version had been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Act for use in Australia. This added nearly 12 months to my wait.

The operation went smoothly and I went home the next day. I couldn't believe the tinnitus I was hearing though - it was like a jet engine in my head! Worse than I had ever experienced before. I had to wait a couple of weeks for healing and then my processor was activated.

Switch-on was interesting, but very strange. It was as if I was hearing 18 different sounds all at once! My audiologist, Karen Pedley, said: 'Hello Carol, how are you?' While she sounded like a small barking dog, I still understood her. Then there was this terrible, incomprehensible sound - I didn't have a clue what it was. Much to my horror I realized it was me replying! The thought ran through my head: 'what have I done?! Oh well, I knew it might not work or might sound awful, but that's OK - I will look, listen and learn.'



This is exactly what I did. In a few minutes the sound settled down. Karen sounded a bit more like I expected, as did husband Mark, as well as Mum. What's more, I could actually understand them and this was a huge relief.

## The clock ticking is one of my favourite sounds.

I went home that afternoon and when I walked into the family room I could hear a dripping tap. We did have a lot of dripping taps, so I wandered around trying to find it. I went back to the family room and said to Mum: 'what IS that noise?'. 'What noise?' she asked - she couldn't hear anything unusual. But something made me look up and I saw the clock. It was ticking!! That was my dripping tap, a sound I had never really heard before - and to this day remains a favourite.

In those very early days things like the wind and plastic bags had a very strange high pitched rushing noise because my specialists didn't switch on all electrodes at the start. But once all the electrodes had been programmed and switched on I had much better recognition of sound. Other sounds I have heard for the first time include a frog croaking, the sound of a beetle's wings whirring, the sound of birdsong through the open window of the car while driving to work. Even the drone of a blowfly is marvellous (although somewhat annoying!) to hear.

I have found too that my greatest success with the cochlear implant has been the ability to hear softly spoken people - the very people I avoided before, are now among the easiest to understand. I can hear and understand children for the first time and I have regained the ability use the phone (a lot of my work is done on the phone). A new skill is to hear in a group conversation as well as occasionally eavesdropping (unintentionally of course!). I can hear the full range of sounds, and once again I enjoy music, drinking in the sweet, tinkly high pitched sounds that I thought I had lost forever.



## Connect with the Cochlear Family

Want to connect with other people who hear with Cochlear Implants or Bone Conduction implants? Here's how:

1. Read more stories on [www.cochlear.com](http://www.cochlear.com)
2. Visit the Cochlear Awareness Network website [www.c-a-network.com](http://www.c-a-network.com)
3. E-mail or call us to connect you with a Cochlear Awareness Network (CAN) Member who can share their personal story with you. CAN Members offer something unique – and that's experience. All CAN members are recipients of cochlear or bone conduction implants.

E-mail:        carol.beaumont@gmail.com

Ph:            07 3269 9268

Be sure to tell us a little bit about yourself and your situation so we can match you with the most suitable CAN member.