**Gloria McGregor – BACK TO THE HEARING WORLD**

I believe lip-reading is one of the biggest assets that those of us who have hearing loss can have. I now have two cochlear implants and I still think that lipreading is useful to me.

My cochlear implants are quite recent. I have worked with people with hearing loss since 2006, some of them had cochlear implants, but I never felt that I would like to have them myself. All that was soon to change!!!

Some years back my husband was asked to go forward as Master of a London Livery company. This would involve both of us going to and hosting dinners and events for over a hundred people, lots of charity work. Of course, I said I would support him, but secretly I was very worried about how I would cope at these events where I would be expected to hold conversations, in for me, difficult situations?!! The years passed and suddenly it was next year when he would be The Master. (2018). Then, one of my lipreaders had a cochlear implant and the difference it made to her was so noticeable I asked her for the name of her consultant. I was lucky to be able to have my cochlear implant privately so not such a long waiting time.

I met with the consultant and he thought that both my ears would meet the criteria for an implant. However, I still had to have the assessment. This is a hearing test like no other!! It assesses your usable hearing. I met with my rehab tutor and she also assessed me. She sent a message to the audiologist saying that I was a very good lipreader so make sure I couldn’t lipread.

Well, I had two tests -one was listening to words coming out of a box. It was a strange experience. I just said what I thought I heard and had no idea how close or not I was.

The audiologist said it was very interesting! Make of that what you will. She then told me that both my ears would qualify for a cochlear implant. She told me that I had 1% useful hearing in my right ear and 10% in my left ear. I knew my hearing was poor but I was shocked to hear this and I burst into tears!! How had I managed all these years - **lipreading!!!!!!** She understood, and said she was sure the implants would make a huge difference. I decided to have an implant in my right ear.

I then had more tests including for balance and the date was set.

Before I had my implant, I had a date at Buckingham Palace. My husband was to receive his OBE. How wonderful it would have been to be able to hear what was said but it was still a thrill to be there. We wondered who would make the presentation and can you believe it? It was Her Majesty the Queen. Such an amazing day. The start of an amazing year!!

My operation was set for 23rd July 2017. I was a little disappointed because I would have to leave a large family gathering in Scotland to get back in time. My husband couldn’t come back with me but he would come to see me in the evening after my operation. My departure for the airport was made very memorable. It was raining and many of my family were outside forming an arch of umbrellas for me to walk under. It was such fun.

7.30am the next morning, my taxi arrived and I went to hospital. Back in my room, I saw I had a huge bandage round my head - no pain. I looked like Pudsey!! John popped in and would return in the morning to take me home. After seeing the consultant, I was off home to wait for 6 weeks until switch on.

At last, 4.30pm on the day came and I was nervous and excited at the same time. The audiologist fitted my processors (like a hearing aid but with a magnet to be attached to the implant), then he began to tune the processor. For a long time, I heard nothing and I began to wonder if it had worked? Then I began to hear what I can only describe as the noises that used to come from the cat’s whisker radio that my uncle made just after the war. Lots wh/sks! and crackling! but not real communication sounds. Still worried!!! Then I thought I could hear speaking very faintly and these sounds gradually turned into my tutor’s voice speaking to me!! I couldn’t understand everything, but I could understand quite a lot. What a relief and joy!!!

On the way home for the first time ever I could hear my husband speak to me in the car.

There followed a very intensive training programme for me – 2hrs, 6/7 days a week learning to recognise the sounds that I was hearing. And to hear speech without the aid of lipreading!!!! It was a very intensive and tiring programme lasting about 10 months. At the end I was practising using the telephone; and listening to my tutor with two cd players, playing different stories so that I could practise picking up what my tutor said against background noise.

Whilst this was happening, I was also listening to all the gadgets in my house so that I could recognize the beeps etc. and know which was alerting me. Incredible!

I kept a log over this time on my website.

It was amazing to me to hear my then 3yr old grandson talking about his friends at his playgroup and telling me their names. I got them right too!! So much I could now hear. The birds singing, a saw being used in a neighbouring garden. A lorry reversing and its alarm signal. Just indescribable to hear all this. Just before Christmas 2017 my husband came into the sitting room to find me in tears, because I could really hear Barbara Dixon singing the carol “In the Bleak Midwinter”. Oh, how I had missed music!

Because it was so successful, I decided to have an implant in my left ear. This was scheduled for May 2018. I didn’t have a bandage this time and no stitches - a glue was used!! I had my switch on in June. This time I heard the sounds much more quickly and I could hear what my tutor was saying, also what the consultant was saying, very quickly. I could even tell the difference between a man and woman speaking without looking!! It was just amazing. I began my training but didn’t need very much - my brain seemed to be able to transfer all that I had learned before. I was so pleased and like learning to lipread it has changed my life. There are still times when I find some difficulty – in very large groups and noisy situations or when people speak very quickly, but on the whole, I can hear really well. I should stress that I paid for all my training because I wanted to make the best of my cochlear implants. I don’t think this level of support is available on the NHS. I have now put more stories on my website and also put instructions on how to use my stories to improve your hearing if you have cochlear implants!! I know that some universities are using my website for this purpose. I am trying to compile some tips that may help others to make the best of their new-found hearing. There is a lot we can do to practice speech sound recognition on our own!!

I have been very lucky. I feel as if I have been given my personality back. Some of my friends have had real problems with their implants and needed more treatment and support. Even so they believe the implants have helped them. Everybody must do what they think best for them.

In October 2018, my year as the Mistress of the Livery Company began and I was nervous but actually looking forward to it!! I could now speak to people at the company dinners. I went to as many of the functions put on for the Consorts as possible and went to many interesting talks and amazing places. I had lunch at the Guildhall with the Lady Mayoress and had lunch at the Old Bailey with the Sheriff’s consorts.

I even found the courage to host my own Consort’s event. We had an afternoon tea in one of the Livery Halls. I gave a talk on deaf awareness to over a hundred guests from the London Livery Companies and some invited guests from the Hearing Charity world including Sophie Ede. Two very special young ladies joined me to give a presentation. They were both very accomplished musicians who happened to be Deaf. One had been Deaf from birth, the other began losing her hearing aged 5 and was deaf by 15. They spoke about their childhood experiences; their determination to become musicians, teachers and charity workers. One played the flute and the other played the violin. They played for us individually and together and they gave a presentation about their charity work. They were wonderful. One of my guests said, “I cried when you spoke, I sobbed when the girls spoke!” It exceeded my wildest expectations and together we sent a powerful message to our guests and we raised a lot of money for charity!!

Like Sophie we attended a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and enjoyed many other events. BUT the most memorable event was one hosted by the Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers. Every year they give their taxis and their time, free of charge, to take a group of seriously ill children for a weekend to Paris Disney World. P&O provide a ferry free of charge and the trip is sponsored by business and Livery Companies. The police accompany the procession to the ferry and then the gendarmes take over in France. It is just an amazing experience to be part of the sendoff. First at about 5.30am, everybody involved; from the families; sponsors; taxi drivers; the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress, Sheriffs plus Aldermen of the City; St Johns Ambulance Staff; support staff from hospitals if needed; to the police escort, sit down to a breakfast in Canary Wharf. The children are given Disney back packs. Presentations are given then those going to Paris collect their packed lunches and an amount of spending money each and make their way to their taxis ready to set off. We found the taxis that had been sponsored by our Company and spoke to the mums and children. The mums were so emotional about this and it was hard not to well up too. Soon they were ready and were waved off by all of us. What a procession! Over a hundred taxis plus the other vehicles. Many of the ladies had tears in their eyes. What a wonderful thing to do!

Every Master holds a Master’s Weekend towards the end of their year and it is usually somewhere special to them. Our Master’s Weekend took place at a small hotel in Scotland near Edinburgh. It was a very happy time including different trips and activities; a mini highland games- great fun if a bit competitive; a lovely black-tie dinner where a piper piped our guests to their tables.

The year whizzed by and it was just an amazing experience made so much better for me because I was able to join in much more successfully with the group than I had for over thirty years and I made some wonderful friends.

For me, my cochlear implants have changed my life and I am so pleased that I took the plunge. I know it is a big decision but for me it has been a good one.

That year was most memorable not only for being able to hear my friends and family again but because I was able to support my husband in this very demanding role and to enjoy it too!!

**Not all plain sailing**

When our year had finished, we were less busy but still involved with many events. In early January 2020 we were on a business trip in China. It is a long flight and on the way home I suddenly felt unwell. I got up to seek help but didn’t get very far. I collapsed into an empty seat. I couldn’t stand and I had lost my hearing in my right ear. The cabin crew were fantastic and having sought medical advice gave me some travel sickness pills. These made me feel a little bit better, but I still couldn’t stand, and I couldn’t hear in my right ear. When all other passengers had left the aircraft, I had an amazing journey by wheelchair and then on a buggy, through the airport (including passport control) to pick up my luggage and them to my waiting taxi.

We arrived home and I slept downstairs that night.

In the morning I still couldn’t stand without help and I couldn’t hear in my right ear.

My husband took me to see my GP who confirmed that I could function OK except for my balance and hearing. More pills.

I began to be able to stand but my head still felt “Odd”. I was given advice by my audiologist which I followed and by the end of the week after some very strange noises I could hear again.

My balance was still not right. However, I count myself very lucky because we then learned about the covid virus! Life changed for everybody. Although I still felt strange because of my balance I didn’t feel I could seek further advice at this time.

In about September my right cochlear processor stopped working. I have a spare processor and used this while my first processor was sent back to the manufacturer and was replaced. My audiologist and my tutor sorted this out for me because I couldn’t see them due to lock down. The manufacturer programmed my processor with the plan given to them by my audiologist. Then the spare stopped working and we repeated the process. My right ear seemed much louder but at least I could use it.

Unfortunately, by February 2021, the loudness of my right ear became unbearable. I couldn’t turn it down. Also, it was aggravating the strange feelings in my head and my balance. I didn’t ever feel that I was going to fall down – I felt unbalanced in my head and I had some difficult walking in a straight line.

In February I stopped wearing my right processor and consulted my doctor who after some preliminary tests felt that the balance problems could be due to my heart, so I saw my heart specialist. More test and confirmation that my balance problems are not due to my heart. I then saw an ENT specialist who recommended I contacted my audiologist. I haven’t actually seen him, but he has reprogrammed my right processor and my hearing is much more comfortable and while not completely right, my balance is much improved too. I send him regular reports on how I think I am coping. I am sure that in the not too distance future all will be even better.

Another cochlear implant user I know, had a similar experience to mine whilst on a flight, but he recovered much more quickly. I think that if you have problems and are at all concerned about your processor or anything to do with your hearing it is wise to seek advice! It has been difficult trying to sort this out with the Medical Staff being under such pressure in the current circumstances, but I believe I am nearly there.

We all have to do what we think is right for us! and for me, despite this hiccup my implants have made a huge impact on my life.

Thank you for reading this and I wish you all a happy, good hearing summer

**Gloria McGregor** [www.lipreadingpractice.co.uk](http://www.lipreadingpractice.co.uk)