

Jaki Scheckter, age 32; born deaf; cause – rubella pregnancy; received bi-lateral CI's at age 30

I'm Jaki Scheckter, I'm 32 years old, was born on July 14th 1974 with sensorineural hearing loss due to my mom who had German measles while pregnant with me. I have worn hearing aids since around the age of 1 year old. I have attended some special oral speaking schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing kids as a young kid. I was perfect in junior school with awards for being the Dux person of the school (highest grades of the school) then I went to a normal hearing high school. I was the only hard-of-hearing teenager there. I passed every grade, received awards for perseverance. Was the 1st team swimmer for the school. During my young years I raced motocross for 5 years, winning some races and a state championship. I then graduated to racecars at 16 yrs old. During my 5 years of racing cars, I won races, poles, fastest laps and 2 championships; one in SA and one in USA. I have done various odd jobs since then. I was looking for something I want to be passionate in, finding my purpose in life. All I want is to be successful.



Jaki in foreground with CI author, M Cohorst

My whole life I was with normal hearing people; I hardly had any friends with my hearing level. I never thought I was hard of hearing. Until recently, I felt I couldn't progress in my life if I want to reach my goals of success, where I felt I reached a plateau. Then, I was introduced to the CI technology a few years ago, and wasn't interested. I was very comfortable with my hearing aids, and as typically as a human being can be, close-minded! I came back to the States to work with my cousin Tomas in January 2004. He met a mother of 2 kids that recently had CI surgery and were doing very well. Tomas was so blown away about the CI, and felt the need to help me. I checked it out and wasn't interested, again, closed-minded! A year later, I started to feel frustrated with my life, and wanted to go back to SA, but my girlfriend at that time wouldn't give me up without a fight. So I decided to stay in the States and continue working for Tomas so we could be together. I was asked by Tomas again to seriously consider a CI. Still, same story.

Then one day in the month of May 2005, I had to take Tomas' Chevy Suburban to Pedigo Chevy, my girlfriend's dad's dealership for a service, and I happened to speak to one of the service men, who had 1 CI and 1 hearing aid. And he explained to me the huge differences they make and I was blown away! I realized that it might be my savior to get to the next level in my life. At that time, I couldn't speak on the phone, talk to people in meetings or in noisy environments. I didn't have much confidence in that area, except with 1 or 2 people in quiet surroundings. In this world today, one needs to be able to communicate via phone and be confident in meetings wherever and whatever the situation is. So I immediately went to Tomas and said, "...let's go ahead with it!". I saw it both ways: to help my life grow to be successful, and be with my girlfriend. (Please note that my girlfriend and I are now friends, it was at that time we were together.)

I went for a checkup to see if I qualified for a CI, and “yes, I do!” was the answer. I was so elated about it! I was pretty much moving forward and wanting to get the surgery done. I felt confident with the experience of my Doctor, Dr Miyamoto, for him to perform surgery on me. He is based at Riley Hospital in Indianapolis, IN. I also did lots of research online, so I was pretty much well informed. Also I had plenty of communications with wonderful people at Advanced Bionics to clarify the technological aspects of the CI. I just dealt with it in a positive, businesslike manner to move forward and get the whole thing done. I was advised to go with one CI now and one CI a few years later. I didn't like the idea of that. I'd worn both hearing aids my whole life, so I didn't want 1 good and 1 bad ear and the cost and trouble of a second surgery. The only concern I can think of was that mostly people were being too conservative because I wanted to have simultaneous bilateral implants at same time, but I was adamant we go all or nothing. It was done before, as in the case of Sarah Sommer. I had plenty of communications with her, and we are good friends now. I had to ensure that the Doctor would be happy and comfortable in performing the simultaneous surgery, which he replied yes, and it was a success!

I had surgery on the 8th November 2005 at Indiana Hospital, and it went very well. My hookup was done on the 19th to 22nd December 2005 at the Riley Hospital. The first few weeks were an experience where I had to learn and understand. I realized I had to be like a baby again, like a rebirth -- . even though I did hours of research to expect what would happen and read the book, *Rebuilt* by Michael Chorost. I did speech therapy on a weekly basis to understand how to listen, practiced at home and learned to identify various sounds. At times it was frustrating, at times it was wonderful! Music was awesome at times, terrible at times. It was all part of a process of learning what is nice and what is not nice! With hearing aids, there were many things that I couldn't tell were terrible or not! Most of the time it was nice! Now I realize what I heard on hearing aids was nothing compared to my CI's! Miles better! I realized normal hearing people are the same to the sensitivity of the sounds where it's nice and where it's terrible. I learned to adapt to this and realized I liked it because it was close enough to normal hearing, even though we may never be exactly like normal hearing people.

It was only around 6 months later that my hearing and listening started to get even better. I started to hear words on the radio, talk a bit on the phone, and words in music I'm familiar with I can pick up.

I returned to South Africa; back home after 3 years in the States this month, and it was wonderful! My family and old friends were blown away by how much easier it is to talk with me. It's more relaxing now; we don't have to focus face-to-face any more; even though we have to realize that it's not necessary anymore to do that! It is a bit of an adjustment for everyone, but in a positive and exciting way! Right now I can talk about 70% on the phone, have conversations with my parents without lip-reading, and music is even better. It's all progress as I get used to the CI. It takes time for the body, mind and soul to accept the change, and it has certainly changed my life.

I'm really looking forward to my future. It has given me newfound confidence, and I'm excited! We all have to be patient and work for what we want to achieve in life. Everyone has a purpose in life on earth, and I'm so grateful for the wonderful people who have created the CI, dedicated their lives to improving the CI to help people like me and other's with other forms of hearing loss. This does nothing but improve and change

their lives for the better! It not only affects us, it affects everyone around us in a positive way as I have noticed!

I hope in the future, we can all educate everyone as to the benefits of CI's, how wonderful they make life, and how we can learn to enjoy life in a positive, open-minded way. We all need tools and leverage to help us achieve what we want in life. CI's are the most important leverage and tool for hearing loss people to improve and change their lives for the better. I certainly hope so!