

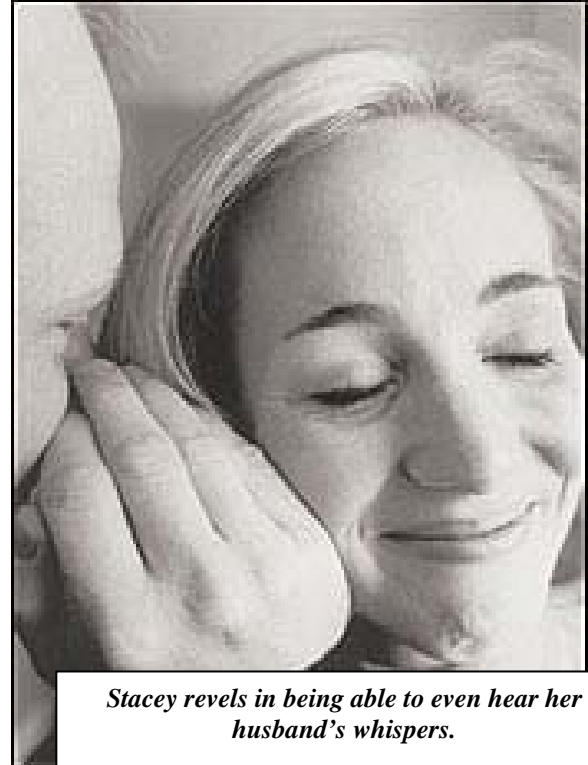
Stacey McGovern, age 33, female; mother of 3; suffered sudden onset of deafness at age 25; cause unknown; received CI at age 28.

Shortly after my twenty-fifth birthday I began to lose my hearing. Doctors desperately tried to stop the progression, but to no avail. By the age of twenty-seven, my medical charts read *profoundly deafened adult, cause unknown. How could this happen to me?* The question plagued me as I struggled in my new-found world of silence.

As many late-deafened adults will explain, I had been dropped in a foreign country where I couldn't understand the language. *What? Huh? What? Could you say that again? Could you write that down for me?* Lip reading was a

constant challenge and the world around me was easily frustrated. "Never mind, it's not important," people would say not wanting to repeat a third or fourth time. I wanted to scream, "I'm important!"

As the dangers of life without sound began to creep in, I wondered how I could keep my young child safe. I couldn't hear him cry and was devastated that I would never hear his little voice. Others began to tell me of all the adorable things he was saying. "*I want to hear what you're saying!*" I'd scream inside myself as I struggled to read his lips. When my second son was born, I watched him cry, but there was no sound. *I need a miracle I thought . . .*



Stacey revels in being able to even hear her husband's whispers.

When life inside my silent bubble became unbearable, I began seriously considering a cochlear implant. I met several people who had cochlear implants and was in awe of their capabilities. I realized that, although they were deaf, they could do all the things I dreamed of . . . enjoy music, talk on the phone, listen to the voices of their children, and simply hear the sounds of life around them. *But what if it didn't work for me?* I worried. I finally concluded that the possible benefits outweighed any risks.

Just a month after the cochlear implant surgery, I found myself back in a wonderfully noisy world. Silence was replaced with birds signing, people laughing, and phones ringing everywhere! (Now I was able to use a cell phone like the rest of the world!) Once again, I felt alive in a crowd. I could follow conversations with ease at parties and I knew what was going on around me. For years, trying to function in a hearing world made me feel like I was drowning and with my cochlear implant I felt like I could breathe again. I felt myself smiling as I enjoyed life without constant struggle.

The day after my implant was activated a tiny voice came from the back seat of my mini van, "I want orange," I pulled my car over in disbelief. "Did you say you wanted orange?" I asked my three-year-old son. "I wanna orange pop, mommy." The poor little guy had been talking half his life from the back seat and finally someone answered him. And just weeks later, I heard my second son say his very first words.

Today, I am an active mom who hears via a cochlear implant. I talk on the phone, listen to music, hear my children when I am not looking at them and enjoy every sound around me no matter how small. Just recently, my cochlear implant allowed me to hear

my baby cry as she entered the world. “It’s a girl!” I heard my husband yell over her tiny screams.

When I walk in the snow and hear the crunch under my feet, when I pause to listen to my children breathing as they sleep and when I hear my husband’s voice over the telephone line, I am thankful for the technology that has truly given me my life back.