

Cochlear Implant: FREEDOM

This speech was presented by Len Ulrich at the Launch of the Freedom Cochlear Speech Processor at the MCA Sydney before a number of invited guests on May 25th 2005.

'My chains fell off, My heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee'

Those few lines from the Hymn "And Can It Be" define FREEDOM in the best possible terms I know of. And so to put them into perspective with my experience with the Cochlear Implant 'switch-on' on 6th August 2003, silence was replaced with sound – I could communicate on my own – I was back within the community.

The 3G was my first speech processor which I had for three months. During the switch on as the electrodes were 'Mapped', by Monica Bray, for very soft and comfortable loud there follows the exercise of hearing all the electrodes as I call it up the scales.

It is a wonderful first sound, I have now heard these scales many, many times over the last 18th months, they thrill me to bits as I ask myself 'How am I hearing this?'

On leaving the Implant centre at Gladesville I heard the rain on the roof and my footsteps as I walked. As we drove back to the Mountains chatting away in the car, Marjorie, my wife driving, I suddenly realised something and said to her, "do you realise we are talking to each other in the car?"

I could never take part in conversation in the car prior to the implant, now I can speak with folk in the back seat even when I am driving.

Our retirement village is set in the bush at Springwood and on returning home, down I went to the outer bush area to listen to the bellbirds. And yes I heard them with the Whisper setting, this was a goal I had set for myself, and, in the words of Peter Cundall, it was blooming marvellous to achieve it.

Later speaking with the grandchildren, on my own and Marjorie not having to be there interpreting for me. Another goal I had set and achieved.

I have been involved with Nucleus Freedom since December 2003. And here now there is on display a product that has astounded me with its ease of use and clarity of sound. It comes to benefit the deaf and hearing impaired and has been marvellously worked on by a dedicated bunch of men and women at Cochlear Ltd, all of whom it has been a pleasure to be with.

Of course I am always asked, 'What does it sound like? Is it normal hearing?' Describe what you are hearing, ladies and gentlemen, it is hard, I am sure you will agree.

I have been hearing impaired for the past 50 years, so I am not aware of what normal is. However, does it matter? Am I not listening, am I not conversing? Don't worry, I know you still want me to answer the question!

The Nucleus Freedom has a wonderful clarity of speech, a preciseness of words, There is no rolling together of the words, the sound is striking. To me it is Normal!

The Processor has that ability to make the bellbird's ding become a ring, Children's voices to come alive, and the violins or any other instrument stand out in orchestral music. As a classical music person I am once again enjoying playing CDs.

I love to hear Pipe Organ Music, however for many years prior to having the implant, organ music was just a noise, impossible to distinguish any musical sound. Last year I was astounded when, at the Great Hall of the University of NSW at our daughter's graduation the organ sounded forth! It took me back 50 years to the same sound of the Albert Hall Organ (on a smaller scale of course) – I was thrilled I just could not stop talking about it.

The operation of the Freedom Speech Processor is so simple and the changes of Programs can be felt when pushing the button as well as hearing the beeps numbering the program that you chose. There are four programs, each program has 9 volume changes, and 20 microphone sensitivity changes.

There is a telecoil on the Processor which is excellent in reception. I find now that I don't need to use it as I can hear speakers and the TV so well with my standard program. I can also use a mobile phone and the landline phone with ease.

If I am at a meeting with a number of different speakers, with different accents, then if I need to I can change the microphone sensitivity to enable myself to hear each speaker well. There is a LCD on the Processor that lets me know what volume or sensitivity I am at.

However even better there is the Body Controller which I can change over to in a matter of seconds and be able to use in front of me and see right away in the window of the unit as to where I am at, in any Program. The Body Controller is a real versatile handy addition, I used it many times. It was not until I handed the Body Controller back that I realised how much I missed it.





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I have a standard Program that does serve me well as a day to day Program.

There is an Adro Program that is really the main one I use, this enables me almost all day to be able to hear and converse under any situation that I encounter.

Then there is the Whisper program, which all at Cochlear know that I delight in. It is for use with soft speaking people. Personally it is super duper in the bush for hearing the birds, frogs and other soft sounds I encounter there. I have always said that switching to the Whisper setting transports me to the centre of the Forest, the birds are so much enhanced and the number so much increased. It truly is an amazing experience.

My experience with the Beam Program has been that it is ideal for a one to one conversation when facing that person in a noisy environment.

I dedicate these words tonight to three ladies.

Knowing that Professor Gibson was present I digressed from what I had written to acknowledge that it was he that had looked after me and operated on me, and my appreciation to him is immense, but tonight it is ladies night!!

Firstly to my wife Marjorie, who has steadfastly stood by me and encouraged me over the past 30 years of my life, through all these times Marjorie was my ears, my interpreter and during the last two years has been my steadfast support with the Nucleus Freedom.

Monica Bray from the Cochlear Implant Centre at Gladesville who led me up to that fantastic switch on day

and with her patience and skills re-kindled my life all over again.

Esti Nel from Cochlear Ltd has introduced me to so many new sounds, through so many different changes of programs since July 2003. Esti has been so caring and so professional, we have spent two hours each week almost, testing, changing programs and discussing results. Esti, Marj & I wouldn't have missed meeting you for quids!

As a final word on Freedom let me read to you a section of an email I sent to Esti following Marjorie and I visiting Tasmania for three weeks in November last year:

“But let me say this: I have heard the silence of the rainforests to the roaring of the waterfalls. The Nucleus Freedom has performed brilliantly, I have had so many conversations, heard so many birds, frogs, and wild winds that it has been truly the makings of a lovely holiday.

“The Freedom has been up chairlifts in a roaring gale at Stanley, At Cradle Mountain we had snow, hail, sleet, rain, gale force winds and sunshine each 10 minutes. In fact the four seasons each ten minutes. The temperature was 2.1 degrees there and the speech processor was unstoppable.

“It has performed well on the cruise up the Gordon River and through the entrance of the Macquarie harbour in a one and a half metre swell and with me out the back of the boat hanging on for grim death.

I really am so grateful to be involved in the program and trust that others will enjoy the wonderful experiences that I am enjoying.”

Len Ulrich ■

Len & SHHH (Blue Mountains)

Len has only recently retired from his position of Secretary of SHHH (Blue Mountains).

He and his wife Marj were very active in the group for many years – and are still members.

Blue Mountains SHHH meet at 1 p.m. on the first Monday of March, May, July, September and November. (There is also a Christmas gathering).

The meetings are held at the Mid Mountains Community Centre in New Street, Lawson.

They have a guest speaker each meeting on matters related to hearing loss.

The new Secretary is Pam Fitzpatrick.

If you would like to join and attend meetings, you can contact her on (02) 4739 2450.

