

My grandfather was deaf. Back in his day he didn't have access to appropriate hearing devices or social services to assist him as do the hard of hearing or deaf today. My mother said many times that she never had a conversation with her father. He lived alone in his old age. As I was growing up, my family would visit him on Sundays. Those memories are mixed with tears of grief. My grandfather lived in his own isolated world of silence and sometimes paranoia due to fear of surroundings he could not navigate. My mother would write notes to him and he would weep loudly or try to vocalize a response. The pain born of frustration from not being able to communicate was insurmountable. We wouldn't stay long on those visits because they were so painful for him . . . and us. We'd cry too.

Little did I know that in my middle school years I would begin my own slow journey into deafness. It started quite gradually, so gradually in fact that I didn't even realize I was losing my hearing until I reached high school. By the time I was in college, I was avoiding eye contact with others and eating my bag lunches in the most remote cubical in the library in order to avoid conversations that would end in awkwardness or embarrassment. Doctors told me that my loss wasn't yet at the point of requiring hearing aids. I was 26 years old before I had my first set, just months before I married a supportive husband.

Thirty years later after raising two daughters, both of whom were musicians and one who studied at MacPhail, I decided I would revisit my own passion for music and challenge myself with learning to play the cello. I've lived a life of meeting communication challenges and living between the two worlds of the deaf and the hard of hearing--I wasn't totally deaf and I wasn't totally hearing. But I was unwilling to let go of one aspect of my life that had always been important to me and confronted it head on. Music had been ingrained into my upbringing and been an essential element of my own home. Music was worth fighting for.

I was nearly completely deaf when I had my first lesson from Jacqueline Ultan. Hearing aids were no longer sufficient and I was losing all ability to follow melodies, keys, and intonations to music I loved. Cello lessons would be my last chance to be able to express this passion and preserve some ability to play an instrument, if that was at all possible. I was willing to risk failing. Without hearing aids, I couldn't even hear the cello I was learning to bow, but Jacqueline understood my needs and took me under her wing. She encouraged me, patiently corrected my intonation and finger placement over and over again (and still does), and inspired me to continue through many tough challenges. With hearing aids, I put in a lot of work the first couple of years to make the cello even sound like a cello. But over time Jacqueline and I worked through the difficulties pretty well. Then came an even bigger challenge: my hearing had decreased to an even more profound level. Three percent of hearing remained in my right ear and 9 percent in my left. I was "legally deaf" at that point.

After much thought and research, I decided to have a cochlear implant in my right ear. The bit of hearing which I still had in my left ear was just enough to preserve any natural sound in hearing with the use of a Bluetooth aid. Sixteen computer chips were implanted in my head on July 15, 2020, and, after two weeks of healing, my world turned on! My journey forward began as I reacquainted myself with the most beautiful hue of sounds I barely remembered from childhood. Jacqueline sat by my side as I relearned how to hear the world, her voice, and my cello.

I can't imagine how she tolerated all the noise coming from my cello, especially during that transition! It's a wonder *she* didn't lose hearing! Jacqueline truly has been my hero. She helped restore the beauty

and wonder of music in my life, and my soul has been once again satisfied. She helped me gain confidence and instilled the ability to take part and enjoy the world of music once again.

Since I've studied with Jacqueline, she's encouraged me to use my skills and newfound hearing abilities to bring happiness to others, as well. While my father was in nursing care due to Alzheimer's, I would play hymns on my cello for him most Sunday nights. He couldn't speak, but I saw the emotions well up in his eyes. I knew I was communicating in a mode he was still able to understand and feel. I have elderly neighbors who have enjoyed listening to my cello as I play along with my husband who plays guitar. The two of us are now in the process of working up some hymns in hopes of playing now and then at church. Jacqueline has even coached me in perfecting a few pieces I've composed!

All this joy! This unimaginable restoration of music in my life would not have been possible without the very skilled, incredibly patient, and ever-encouraging person who took me on as a student nearly seven years ago. Jacqueline has made a difference not only in my life and soul, but in the lives and souls of others as well.

I'm so thankful and grateful for Jacqueline. Her teaching, along with my state-of-the-art technology (the cochlear implant) has brought me to a point of hearing what I had long ago lost. Oh, how I wish my grandfather would had had such opportunities . . . and a hero to step in to his life.