



WHEW! GOOD BYE 2020...

Notes from a new cochlear implant user

By: Don D. Porter December 2020

I was diagnosed with hearing loss at age 59, in 2001. During succeeding years of hearing aid use, my loss got worse. By 2018, I was using expensive and sophisticated digital aids, along with other assistive technology, such as the Bose Headphones. I was also experiencing close to zero speech discrimination in my right ear, with amplification. Fortunately, my left ear, with a good aid and good audiology support, remained useful, especially in ideal conditions, despite a moderate-to-severe hearing loss.

In 2018, I began to research cochlear implant (CI) possibilities for my right ear. Some of my HLAA friends use CIs; they were very helpful to me. My lifelong amateur musician practice (mostly piano) motivated me to look at experiences of musicians with CIs. I found that one of the 3 CI providers (Med EI) seemed to pay especial attention to musicians, and used longer electrode arrays in hopes of extending frequency range below the most

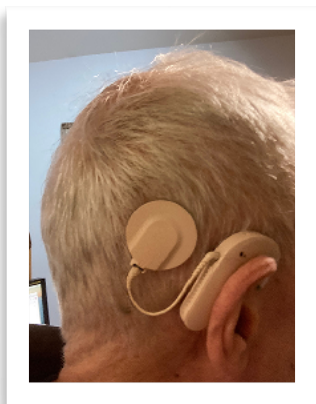
important speech reception frequencies (500Hz to 4kHz). I made some contacts with the Med EI support organization, and began consulting with Dr. Foyt, a highly recommended ENT in Albany who does CI surgery. A series of audiology test sessions determined that I was a good CI candidate. Preparations continued, including study of others experiences, emphasizing that rehabilitation after activation was going to be necessary in order to retrain my brain to use the new input successfully.

Dr. Foyt implanted a Med EI Synchrony Flex 28 electrode array in my right cochlea on July 22, 2020. I had neck soreness and a little dizziness, and, since I was 77, a slow recovery from the general anaesthetic. Overall, it was a relatively easy surgical adventure. As prescribed, I took it easy for a while, and let the physical healing proceed.

On August 29, Lisa Artino, the audiologist who works with Dr. Foyt,

managed the follow-up activation of the implant, with backup support from Rebecca Mancini, of Med EI.

I received two “processors”. First, a Sonnet 2, with a magnetic coil that attaches to the coil implanted under my scalp, and connects to an “ear hook” that looks like a behind-the-ear hearing



SONNET 2

aid.

Second, a Rondo 2, a small single-unit pod that attaches to the implanted coil



RONDO 2

and contains a microphone, processor, and rechargeable battery.

Lisa connected the Sonnet 2, in place on my head, to her computer. Various tests ensued, which I experienced as clicks and beeps in my right ear; that was pretty shocking, as I had not heard any sound in that ear for a couple of years. After tests, and volume adjustment using the computer, the Sonnet 2 was activated and suddenly, in my right ear, I was hearing Lisa and Lois, my wife, speaking! I took the hearing aid out of my left ear, and still, using only the CI, I was hearing and understanding what they were saying, in the quiet office. Lois sounded like herself. I expected to reach this level of function probably after weeks or months of rehab. Instead, it was instantaneous. And I recognized, as I was encouraged to do, that further improvement would come with rehab and practice over time. No one can predict how a cochlear implant will work, as every person receiving a CI has a unique situation. My experience is just mine – others will certainly be different.

I immediately started using the CI (alternating between Rondo and Sonnet) 15 or 16 hours a day. There was some fatigue at first, but the gains were easily worth it. As I gained comfort and skill with the CI, I participated in a FaceBook group of Med EI users. There is a lot to learn; sharing experiences with others who are using similar tools to deal (past, present, future) with similar problems is a

big help. After nearly two weeks, I went back to Lisa's office for a tune-up. This "mapping" process is quick and painless. Lisa had suggestions for my problems – wind noise, noise in general, music volume, lack of dynamics (variation in loudness), etc. One rehab practice I used was finding online poetry sites where I could see the text and hear it read. Anthony Hopkins reading Dylan Thomas's poem "Fern Hill" was a challenge! Lois reported that she did not need to repeat things for me at all in the first week. Then I guess I did some backsliding. After another few weeks, I was back for another "mapping" tune-up.

And then on October 29, I was in for the third tune-up. Lisa reported that there were essentially no changes this time. She put me in the booth for post-testing, to compare with the pre-testing she had done before the surgery. The word and sentence tests were the most important. One test set was done with my hearing aid out while white noise was directed to my left (good) ear. Pre-surgery, my word and sentence comprehension in my right ear in these tests was 0%. Post tests on October 29 showed 89% comprehension. Other test sets were done with my hearing aid in use, along with the CI, but with environmental noise added in the booth. This approaches a realistic situation post-implant – noisy setting, using both hearing aid and CI, and trying to understand someone talking. The pre-

test in this mode was 36% comprehension – as my right ear was not understanding anything. Post test on October 29 had 87% comprehension. That is obviously a huge win. It is also important to note that 87% is not at all 100% -- which would be the result for a person with normal hearing. In the hearing loss world, we get "aid", and "assistance", not "correction" (which is often possible in the vision loss world).

As time goes on, I do notice continued improvements, though less dramatic. In early December I began noticing that I was hearing "rumbling" – low frequency noises. I first thought it might be an artifact, but then I realized: "no, that really is a helicopter", and that is noisy machinery. I found that I am indeed hearing low-frequency sound with the CI. I've heard musicians with CIs say that they don't hear the bottom two octaves of the piano. I'm very pleased to note that I'm hearing music across a broad range of pitches, including the entire piano keyboard. The Med EI extended array may have helped me with that; I'm glad I made that choice. After the October 29 tune-up with the encouraging test results, Lisa and I agreed that I'm good for 6 months before the next tune-up.

At times, it is still a struggle to understand what people are saying. I'm working at it constantly. But I'm understanding a lot more than I was 6 months ago, because of my cochlear implant.

The Signing Santa Drive-By Event co-sponsored by Hands & Voices and HLAA ALBANY on December 19th was a great success - much fun was had by all.



HEAR NEWS is a newsletter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Albany Chapter. We are a not-for-profit self-help group for individuals who are deaf, have hearing loss and/or impairments. Any mention of opinions, products or services does not mean endorsement, nor does the lack of mention mean lack of endorsement.

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We welcome your input! Please send notes, articles and inquiries to the attention of the Editor at the PO Box or e-mail address above.

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Mark your calendar for a Zoom on Wednesday, February 17th at 6:30 - join author Noel Holston in discussing his book: **LIFE AFTER DEAF: My Misadventures in Hearing Loss and Recovery.** From a renowned media critic to a man with sudden and full hearing loss, Noel Holston ran the gauntlet of diagnoses, health insurance, and cochlear implant surgery.

On a spring night in 2010, Noel Holston, a journalist, songwriter, and storyteller, went to bed with reasonably intact hearing. By dawn, it was gone, thus beginning a long process of hearing-restoration that included misdiagnoses, an obstinate health-insurance bureaucracy, failed cochlear-implant surgery, and a second surgery that finally worked. *Life After Deaf* details his experience with warmth and understanding. It's not just for the more than forty million people in the United States alone who cope with some form of hearing loss, but is also for their wide circles of friends, family, caregivers, and audiologists. **This highly readable book will be an invaluable guide and source of hope for the large number of baby boomers now handling hearing loss.**

INFORMATION YOU CAN USE

(Note: See www.hearinglossalbany.wordpress.com for more details)

- Hearing Loss Association of America — www.hearingloss.org
- Hands and Voices — www.handsandvoices.org
- Hearing Like Me — www.hearinglikeme.com
- Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center —
- National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes — nationaldeafcenter.org
- Albany Law School Civil Rights & Disabilities Law Clinic — www.albanylaw.edu
- Office of the NYS Attorney General, Civil Rights Division — www.ag.ny.gov
- Young Adults - www.hearingloss.org/content/young-adults-and-hearing-loss
- American Tinnitus Association — www.ata.org
- Career & College Advice for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students — www.affordablecollegesonline.org/college-resource-center/deaf-student-college-career-advice

Lion's Hearing Devices Loan-Out Centers — try out devices before you buy them!

- Madison & Saratoga Hearing Ctr, 14 Columbia Circle Drive, Suite 202, Albany, NY 12203 (518) 690-2060
- Madison & Saratoga Hearing Ctr, 414 Maple Ave, Suite 800, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 (518) 584-0578
- Madison & Saratoga Hearing Ctr, 81 Miller Road, Suite 700, Castleton, NY 12033 (518) 689-0792
- Resource Center for Independent Living, 347 W. Main St., Amsterdam, NY 12010 (518) 842-3561
- Center for Better Hearing, 318 Ridge St., Glens Falls, NY 12801 (518) 798-4800
- Resource Center for Independent Living, 401 East German St., Herkimer, NY 13350 (315)866-7245
- HearUSA, 2200 Burdett Ave., Troy, NY 12180 (518) 272-7323

Patronize These Accessible Venues!

And...if you know of other venues, please share them with us!

- AMC Loews (amctheatres.com) — Rotterdam — Captioning
- Bowtie Cinemas (bowtiecinemas.com) —Schenectady, Saratoga, Wilton —“cup holder” Captioning
- Regal Cinemas (regmovies.com) —Clifton Park, Crossgates, Colonie Center, East Greenbush, Wilton Mall and Aviation Mail — Captioning and Captioned Glasses
- Capital Repertory Theatre (capitalrep.org) — Loop
- Proctors Theater — Loop in the Main Stage and the Addy
- Delmar Reformed Church (drchurch.org) — Loop
- Unitarian Universalist Society of Schenectady (uscheneectady.org) — Loop
- St. Mary's Crescent Catholic Church Clifton Park (www.stmaryscrescent.com) — FM System
- Our Lady, Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Princetown Road, Schenectady, NY (www.olqprotterdam.org) — Loop
- Christ Our Light Catholic Church, (christourlightchurch.org) Loudonville, NY — FM System
- First Presbyterian Church (firstpresalbany.org) 362 State Street, Albany—perimeter Loop on the right side of the sanctuary
- Barrington Stage (Barringtonstage.org) —first six rows of Main Stage are looped
- Spectrum 8 (landmarktheatres.com) — Infrared and CCR-100 Captioning
- Loudonville Community Church (www.lcc.org) — FM Receivers
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, (www.gsllc.org) 510 Albany Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211 — Loop
- St. Mary's Catholic Church, Hamilton, NY— Loop
- Schenectady Light Opera Company, Schenectady, NY—FM Assistive Listening System
- Universal Preservation Hall (<https://universalpreservationhall.org>) Saratoga Springs, NY loop
- Gloversville Public Library's Carnegie Meeting Room (<http://gloversvillelibrary.org>)
- Crandall Public Library (Glens Falls) Christine L. McDonald Community Room (<https://www.crandalllibrary.org>)

HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA ALBANY CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION

The Hearing Loss Association of America Albany Chapter operates on a calendar year from January to December. Registration is due in January of each year.

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