

THE JOURNAL of SHHH AUSTRALIA INC.  
Self help for Hard of Hearing People

# *Hearing Matters*

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SHHH Australia Inc  
1334 Pacific Highway  
Turramurra NSW 2074



***Shirley Edwards – 2011 Libby Harricks  
Achievement Award Winner***



# Shirley's story

Shirley Edwards

Good morning ladies and gentlemen

I am going to talk to you today about how I lost my hearing, what inspired me to embark on a journey towards hearing again, the cochlear implant and CICADA. It wasn't until I was about four years of age that it was noticed that I could possibly have a hearing loss. My parents took me to various specialists who informed my parents that there was nothing that they could do, and that it was highly likely that my hearing loss was caused by my mother contracting German measles when she was pregnant. At that stage I was hearing enough to attend school, and was always placed in the front of the class so that I could hear. This worked very well up to when I was ten when my hearing took a turn for the worse and I was fitted with my first hearing aid. I completed my high school education, and after leaving school, obtained and completed a hairdressing apprenticeship. I married and had two children, and it was after the birth of my second child that my hearing started to worsen. I found I couldn't hear from distances, struggled to hear on the phone, and couldn't hold or carry a conversation without having to ask everyone to repeat everything they said – sometimes up to three times! Shortly after I got an ear infection which resulted in hospitalisation, and from then on I could hear one day and nothing the next. This went on for a few days until I had no hearing at all.

The cause of why I lost my hearing has never really been determined, the main theory at that time is that the antibiotics that I was given to hopefully clear up the infection was the culprit. I was also told that there was nothing that could be done, to go home and learn sign language. Well, that didn't go down well with me. Why did I have to learn sign language to communicate, when the hearing world I lived in and the majority of people didn't know sign language? I could speak....why did I have to learn sign language? It was very frustrating.

This began 10 long years without hearing. Not long after losing my hearing my marriage came to an end and I was left with a multitude of problems, including two children, no job, very little savings and a mortgage. After much soul searching I concluded that my first priority was communication and I taught myself to lipread then set about getting a job. Not being able to use the phone was a drawback, but eventually I went door knocking many companies, and one day at the end of my tether, I said to one Manager that all I had wrong with me was a hearing impairment, all I needed was to be given a chance and that I'll even work for nothing. The Manager was so astounded by my outburst that he gave me a job on the spot. I worked for that company for 5 years working my way up to Office Manager until the company was dissolved. While all this was going on, I never gave up hope of getting my hearing back, I met and married my wonderful second husband who was hearing.

In 1988 I read an article about the cochlear implant, and visited my GP who referred me to an ENT specialist. One year later, in 1989 I had the first implant. Shortly after joined the newly formed CICADA Queensland and going along to the social functions I saw firsthand how people's lives change, how they had come out of a world of silence, the confidence they gained and how many had gone on to successful lives in every way. I wanted that for me, those people inspired me to keep going. Unfortunately that first operation was not successful as was a series of further operations up to 1992 when I had a new surgeon who successfully implanted 15 only electrodes. I could hear consistently for the first time in over 10 years. It was really wonderful. Over the years up to 2005 it was evident that the electrodes were shorting out and I would need yet another operation. That operation was the turning point. For the first time all electrodes were successfully implanted and after a short rehabilitation I began to understand speech with the implant for the first time, recognise and identify environmental sounds. I even learnt to hear on the phone to my amazement. A few years later it became evident that the electrodes in the right ear were shorting out quickly, so in April 2008 I had the last operation, which was successful, and so now I have two cochlear implants, termed bilateral. I never dreamed that it would take twenty years to hear again, nor did I dream that I would end up with two! It's turned my life around, opened avenues that I thought were closed. I'd like to tell you about CICADA. CICADA Queensland has a paid up membership of over 125 people, and we have a mailing list of our popular magazine of up to 200. We have various social functions in and around Brisbane.

After a few years I became Secretary, a position I still hold today. Our main agenda is to offer support and advice to those who are wishing to know about the implant. People come to us and want to know what it involves, how do they going about getting one and does it work? We tell them what the implant has done for us, give them advice on what to do and give them a list of the surgeons who perform the surgery. A person coming to one of our functions



can see how those with an implant interact with each other and this goes towards making that all important decision on whether to have an implant or not. We also give advice and support to implantees after they have been switched on. We help them adjust; make suggestions on what they can do to improve their hearing. We also warn them of things that could happen when they least expect it. For example one day I was walking home from work and it started raining. I whipped out the umbrella and after a few minutes of walking, I found I couldn't hear anything!

I couldn't figure why I couldn't hear anything until the umbrella was in front of me where I saw the external part of the implant with the magnet stuck to the umbrella rod!!! Not hard to imagine we tell them to avoid being too close to metal objects!.

As CICADA grew, so did our objectives. I initiated the annual CICADA Queensland achievement award, which is awarded at our Main Event of the year during Hearing Awareness Week. We all know that hearing impairment is an invisible disability... one which a lot of people and organisations that are approached just don't want to know, or understand. I want to make the invisible visible. I want ignorance and misunderstanding to disappear. People with a hearing loss always have to fight at least 10 times more than other disabilities. I enjoy working with people who are embarking on a new journey back into the world of sound, it is always a warm feeling to see people change, how they interact with others easily, go out to meet the world with confidence and achieve things they didn't think they would. Without this wonderful invention of the cochlear implant there would be many people living in a world of silence and isolation still.



Shirley with Michael Choi, Queensland member for Capalaba

My research of Libby Harricks has revealed that she was a founding member of SHHH Australia Inc and a multiterm President. She became profoundly hearing impaired as a young adult, but persevered with her career as a pharmacist while raising two children. As a driving force behind SHHH, she helped it to become an effective volunteer organisation and was also widely known and admired as a dynamic advocate for access for hearing impaired people. She was a wonderful role model for all those who felt lost and overwhelmed by hearing impairment. She was made a member of Order of Australia in 1990 in recognition of her work for the hearing impaired.

In her story Libby said: "I look back over those years since I became hearing impaired and realise that any efforts that I have made have been returned to me threefold. I have found talents I never knew I had, I have gained so much from the many people I have met and worked with to improve life for people with disabilities and through self help I have turned the potential negative of a profound hearing loss into a positive sense of purpose and direction in my life".

I am proud to accept this Award, and I thank my nominators Gladys Emerson and Rob Frith, and for the support of CICADA Queensland members, but most of all my husband, who has seen me emerge from a world of silence to a world of sound, seen me achieve what I have what I didn't think I could.



Brisbane Cochlear Factory Tour



Shirley at CICADA Olympics