



Journal of

**HEARING MATTERS  
AUSTRALIA**

Support from real life experience

May 2019

# *Hearing Matters*



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"I am extremely honoured and thankful to be receiving this significant award, the Libby Harricks Achievement Award, from Hearing Matters Australia. I am deeply grateful for the recognition I have received here today, because I am sure that every nominee for this award is as worthy as I.

Although I never met Libby personally, she is known for her determination and courage to achieve things which improve the lives of people with hearing loss. When I was young, I found out about Libby and Hearing Matters Australia, which was then known as SHHH Australia. This discovery became an inspiration for me to help the world be a better place for people with hearing loss.

I have faced challenges throughout my life, and each one has strengthened me and made me the person I am today. My challenges stem from being born with both deafness and cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is a neurological condition which affects my brain and the way it transmits and receives messages to and from my body. The cerebral palsy affects the right side of my body which causes weakness in my limbs, lack of balance and tactile difficulties.

I am sure that when my parents were told I couldn't hear sufficiently and might never walk, they felt anxious about my future. Would I hear enough speech to learn to speak? Would I be able to read or write, or use sign language if I couldn't speak? There was uncertainty about my future physical and intellectual development.

I was fitted with hearing aids. I attended, and still attend, a variety of activities which challenge, develop; and improve my physical abilities and the management of my brain and my body: physio, hydro, speech, auditory, occupational therapies and exercise physiology.

The first school that my parents considered enrolling me into had a deaf unit but it was unsuitable for my needs. A second school refused to accept me because they had experienced challenges with a deaf student and weren't willing to have another hearing-impaired student. On the third try, we got lucky.

My first paid job after finishing the HSC was as a teacher's aide in a school for the Deaf, where, using Signed English, I taught students to safely use public transport. I loved the work and decided that my career would involve working with people with hearing loss. I transitioned from Signed English to Auslan while attempting a university degree in this field. I was unable to complete the degree due to illness and a lack of support. Later I was able to fulfil my career goal through working with Deaf Australia, where I communicated in Auslan only.

In 2008, I received a Cochlear implant for my right ear. For almost 10 years, I could only feel sounds but not hear it. Last year, I finally heard single tone sounds through it for the first time. In 2016 my left ear deteriorated beyond hearing aid use, and I received my second Cochlear implant. With this one, I could hear sounds as soon as it was switched on.

In 2009 I began an online Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Communications. In the midst of studying this degree, I was working at Macquarie University both as a volunteer and a paid employee, mentoring students with disabilities and students who study off-campus. I recently completed my final subject and I expect to attend the graduation ceremony later this year.

Winning the Libby Harricks Award would not be possible without the following people in my life: my Mum and Dad, my sister Christine, and my grandmother, my partner Ros: my primary school teacher Mr Elliot; my friend Fiona who has been there since pre-school; my cochlear implant surgeons Professor Bill Gibson and Dr Jonathan Kong, and all the other health professionals and organisations. These include Australian Hearing, Cochlear, CICADA Australia, and the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre, who have helped me reach this stage where I can proudly hold up this award as a mark of my achievements. Thank you!"

