

# Pat's hearing loss story

2021 Libby Harricks Award winner Pat Fulton

## Defining periods in my life as a person with a hearing loss

At 9 years of age my school teacher advised my parents I needed to sit in front, to hear him. I suspect my behaviour at home hadn't raised concerns for my parents.

It seemed I coped without intervention at school, into my Nursing career and motherhood.

At 20 when I asked my ENT specialist "what will happen in the future?" His reply "one day you will need hearing aids".

A particular event comes to mind as a Mum. We were entertaining on the verandah at dusk when my husband called to me from the other end. I replied "*turn on the light I can't hear you*" much to the surprise of our friends, though they did know of my hearing loss.

So, it was at 43 my first hearing aid. My nursing colleagues were most supportive of this intervention as they had observed my struggle, particularly at meetings. Four years later my second hearing aid.

I suspect 10 years sooner may have been more beneficial for me.

I retired from Nursing in 1994 when my husband and I bought our B&B in Berrima.

It was over those six years that guests, before heading out to dinner would enjoy pre-dinner drinks and nibbles with us. Some commented on their departure how much they enjoyed our hospitality "*even though I had hearing aids*". This raised my curiosity as I considered what's next for Pat.

In 2001 I searched the Federal Government Website, to find a recent Survey that showed 30% of their clients with subsidised hearing aids did not use their prescribed aids.

At that time, I reflected back 20 years to my own experience with my first hearing aid. I was advised to use my hearing aid initially for a few hours, increasing over time. ***My message of hope to all who use hearing devices, is to use them consistently all day for the BRAIN to get the message.***

It was in 2001 when my advocacy support began for those with hearing loss. It was from this beginning my Hearing Coach role developed in support of Aged Care residents and staff training.

In 2012 as a member of Quota International of Moss Vale I coordinated the first of three Bowral Hearing Awareness Expos. We invited Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre from Gladesville as one of the exhibitors. I asked the question of them "*how do I decide whether to upgrade my hearing aids or consider a cochlear implant as I was struggling in conversation*"

I was shown on the Laptop the impact a cochlear implant would have in my speech recognition as a person with severe to profound hearing loss. This was a surprise, to me an 8 out of 10 (my estimate).

In 2013 my decision made, now for an appointment at SCIC for tests to check my candidacy for a cochlear implant, I was apprehensive, at the same time amazed this was happening.

This was a such profound period for me. I met with my surgeon Prof Bill Gibson, date set.

Following my Candidacy tests for a cochlear implant Prof Gibson was able to tell me my hearing loss was a congenital condition, the first I knew of its origin. A Superior Canal Dehiscence ie. a hole in the bony structure in both ears, now a reason for my hearing loss and good for our family to know.

The best of all was to come with my "switch on" two weeks later.

With family present, I answered my husband's question from behind, there were tears of enjoyment.

My swift adjustment to this new hearing astonished my Audiologist, family and friends.

Thank you Professor Bill Gibson and Cochlear for bringing this technology into my life.

