

The Oxymoron of Being a Deaf Person in a Hearing World

Hearing Journey by Omer Othman

My Mother's Persistence

My mother loves to tell the story of how she found out I was deaf. One summer day, she called me for dinner, and I never answered. This happened after a few months of my hearing going in and out and random homemade tests of seeing what I could hear, and my mother decided to take me to the doctor for an official hearing test. I was diagnosed with severe hearing loss in one ear and mild hearing loss in the other. Naturally, I was prescribed hearing aids, but my mother explained to the doctors that I refused to wear them. Audiologists followed my hearing closely, and I started to become profoundly deaf in both ears. Thus, at three years old, a new identity was manifested: I received a cochlear implant. I underwent auditory oral therapy and did my preschool at the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf.

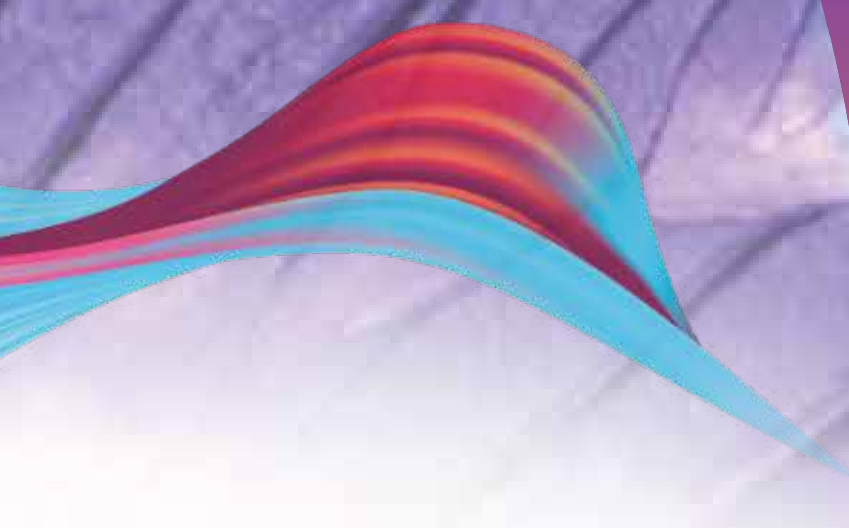


Don't Go Down the Slide!

I still remember the day my mother told me that I couldn't go down the slide at parks because the audiologists were afraid that the static from the slides might affect my cochlear implant. One day at the park, I was with my father, who had forgotten about this rule, and he let me go down the slide. *Nothing happened.* Wanting me to be able to go down the slides like all the other kids, hearing about this made my mom so happy. As a child, I was very social and energetic. I was the lead in my end-of-year preschool play, *The Rainbow Fish*. I grew up with this unique aspect that I never considered to be a disability until life became less about going down a slide and more about advocating for my rights. When I moved to the United Arab Emirates for elementary school, things changed. I became more reserved, I didn't make as many friends, and I became more and more isolated without knowing why. While moving to a new country is difficult for anyone, for someone who is a social butterfly, it didn't make sense that I would be struggling so much. Looking back at it today, it is clear that the difficulty was a result of the fact that I wasn't able to tell my new friends to sit on my right side or that I couldn't understand them if I couldn't see their lips.

Dancing My Way Through Life


Moving back to Montreal for high school, I received individualized attention from the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf while attending my neighborhood high school. I learned to become confident and social once more. I joined my high school's dance troupe and auditioned to be in the drama club. I even tutored other students after school. Having a support system outside of my family was crucial, and I would not have thrived without it. I also had the opportunity to learn about my rights and how to adapt to being a deaf person in a hearing



world. I make a point to say it in that way because having a cochlear implant positions me that way - stuck between the deaf world and the hearing world. The Deaf world shames me for seeing deafness as something that needs to be fixed, while the hearing world assumes that everyone has perfect hearing. My friends always tell me how lucky I am to be deaf (ironic huh?) because I am able to choose when I can hear. This means sleeping like a baby every night or choosing to not hear a conversation because “my battery died”. To the surprise of many people, including hearing professionals, I love doing things that some people with cochlear implants do not often get to enjoy. Implant recipients often have difficulty hearing and understanding music, and yet I love music. Watching and understanding movies in the theatres can also be difficult for implant users, and yet I can do it. Learning new languages is often hard for people, yet I speak five languages and want to learn even more. To pretend that my deafness does not affect me negatively would be unfair to say because it does. Post-secondary schools told me that I no longer required accessibility services because “my grades were too good”. My successes and capabilities are often glorified where people think my deafness should have led to failure. Some people refuse to even believe that I am deaf because I can carry on conversations and speak without a “deaf” accent. *Whatever that means.*

I Went Down the Slide Anyways

I didn't choose to become implanted, but I did choose to accept my deafness. Stuck between both worlds, I went down that slide anyway and found my world, and I wouldn't have it any other way.



Omer is a recent graduate of the Communications and Marketing program at Concordia University. He began his journey at Hear Québec in 2019 as a Canada Summer Jobs worker, continued volunteering, and served as the Young Adult Director on the Board of Directors for the past year. He spends his time listening to music, exploring the world, and learning new languages. Omer looks forward to discovering himself even more as he embarks on his future life and career.

