

Hello. Thank you so much for having me here. I have to say, this seems to be the year for me to share my story, as earlier this year I was asked to share my hearing journey at work, and there I only had an hour to share, and it was difficult to fit everything under an hour. Here, I've only got 10 minutes, so you'll really get the microwave version.

I was born in 1994 and back then, hearing tests weren't performed on newborn babies. My family didn't suspect that I had a hearing loss until my first birthday party. We had everyone over and I was holding a balloon in my hands, and it popped right in front of my face. Everybody in the room jumped. When babies hear a loud, abrupt sound, they usually start to cry. As for me, I thought the balloon disappeared as if it was like magic. This was the start of my hearing journey, which is probably not unlike many other stories, with one's hearing being tested with the banging of pots & pans, numerous doctor appointments, and the crushing confirmation of one's deafness. As for me, I was diagnosed profoundly deaf – I have no hair cilia, which affect both my hearing and balance. My parents (who are here, please wave) were left wondering why I was born deaf as we have no family history of deafness.

My parents investigated many different avenues to help me start communicating – sign language, deaf schools, hearing aids, speech therapy, cued speech – you name it, they probably looked into it. My mom discovered the cochlear implant and thought it was a really good idea, however my dad was reluctant at first since I am his baby girl and he didn't want me to have to have surgery so young. However, my dad did eventually agree, and thus began the fight with insurance. I was implanted December of 1996 and around that time, DVOLC opened. We believe it was God's timing because He provided our family with the resources to help me learn how to hear and speak.

I attended DVOLC basically right after I was activated and am one of the founding students. I still have some memories: some of the teachers, speech lessons, playing to learn words and sounds, some of my classmates, some of which I do still keep in touch with today. I think it is an understatement to say that DVOLC set the foundation for my future. DVOLC prepared me so well that my parents felt comfortable pulling me out of DVOLC so I could be mainstreamed for kindergarten, which was unusual at that time.

When I was mainstreamed, I was placed in schools near my parents so they could come by if any issues arose. I transitioned into the public school system without many issues and did so well that my teachers would sometimes forget I was deaf. I would have to remind them to turn the captions on for movies or to wear the microphone. I even had a teacher tell me once I needed to listen better.

I am going to kind of skip over my teenage years, and I am sure some people wish they could have actually have done. But I do have a few notable things to mention from this period. I took a lot of advanced courses and one of the reasons why I was so successful is because my parents and I made sure I was provided with the resources I needed: assigned seating, note takers, and even short/shaved mustaches. I did receive my second cochlear implant when I was in middle school, and due to the timing of my surgery, I was able to miss all, but one, final that year – I definitely remember that being a positive. Getting my second implant was definitely interesting because I was able to experience everything from when I was younger again. It was not easy and I had to go home and learn the sounds of the telephone ringing, my mom's laughter, footsteps down the stairs, and even the pages of a book being turned.

When I graduated from high school, I attended the University of Arizona and decided to pursue a degree in Biomedical Engineering because I have always loved math and science. One other inspiration for this

route was my cochlear implant. I saw the impact that the cochlear implant has on me and wanted to give that to someone else, whether it was big or small, but I knew I wanted it to be medical related. Back to college, I definitely had some struggles because a lot of my teachers were foreign, and I have a really difficult time with accents. However, I persevered and got my degree. I was also offered an engineering job before I graduated. One life event that happened during college is that my family and I finally discovered why I am deaf – at a routine eye appointment, I mentioned to my doctor that I have a difficult time seeing small children and even trashcans, and she did a rough peripheral vision check and wondered if I RP. I then went to a specialist here in the valley and after I got my DNA tested, he diagnosed me with Usher Syndrome, which affects both the hearing and the vision. And yes, I have had some challenges due to this, but it is nice to finally know why I was born deaf and to know what might come. I continue to handle every obstacle that is placed before me one day at a time and learn to overcome them.

I currently live in beautiful Flagstaff and I enjoy being outdoors – I love to camp and hike. I also really enjoy working out – right now I am obsessed with Barre3. I work as an engineer in one of the top Biomedical companies which specializes in stents, grafts, heart valves, and so much more. Some of our devices are coated with Heparin, which is a blood thinner. As a result, the FDA requires that we test the levels of the drug present on the device over its shelf life. I am in charge of seeing that these studies are planned, executed, and reported. One notable life event I should mention is that I recently got engaged to a wonderful man, Seth, and we plan to marry April 2020.

I share all this to show that yes, I had a tough start to my life, but DVOLC gave me the foundation I needed to be successful. I am proud to be a part of the DVOLC family and there are not many people who get the opportunities that we are provided with and I think that DVOLC would greatly benefit from your funding so more children can be reached and set on a path to have successful lives.

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