



***The following report was written by Stephen Yaukubu Kutchin, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Jos, Nigeria, in 2011 regarding his experience with the cochlear implant program from Jacksonville Hearing and Balance Institute.***

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Marking my 4th year of hearing after five years of deafness.  
Dear Brothers and friends. How are all of you doing?

It is now four years since I came back from the deafness to the hearing world!  
I feel it is necessary for me to tell you how I am doing so far with my hearing devise (Cochlear Implantation system) for these past four (4) years.

*To the sighted who could write for me, my words were: "Please write what you are saying for me because I'm a deaf." To people that could not write for me especially the blind and little children: "Please could you repeat what you are saying? May be I can lip-read you." To others who could but were reluctant to write: "Please I consider this information you are passing to me very important and I can't just guess so please write for me." Or, "Please let me call someone that can hear what you are saying so he can write for me, thank you." In one occasion, to my uncle who could not write and whom I was visiting from a village several miles from where I was staying: "Father, I just have to go. There is nothing we can do now since there isn't anybody around that can write what you are saying to me. I will visit you again some other time, goodbye."*

Those were the normal words: "please and thank you; please, sorry and thank you." For more than five (5) years. When I lip-read, guessed and missed twice or thrice, confusion came in. And so a onetime sharp and cheerful lecturer became a dull and confused human being just within three weeks. It was difficult, lonely, painful and yet real. But that condition got terminate dramatically on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2007.

For those of you who may not know what happened; I was born with a normal hearing. I remained so for more than 32 years specifically; up to the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2002 when I woke up from sleep in my sick bed and realized that I had lost everything called hearing. This followed 3 weeks of fever and medication. My hearing became so bad that I could hardly hear even a gunshot!

After almost one year of searching for possible medication to reverse the condition, I came to realize that my condition was irreversible with Medication. I got to know more about the hopelessness of my condition when I met people like Dr. Sam Marzo of Loyola University USA to whom I was directed by Cynthia Allison. I was made to know that there remained only one surgery (Cochlear Implantation) that could help but the cost of this surgery was frightening since I hadn't any Health insurance. I got to realize that the cost of just putting the device in my inner



ear alone excluding Hospital bills etc. was about \$30,000! That was more than 4.5 million Naira! Worst of it all, the surgery was not available in Nigeria, not even in Africa. So humanly speaking and going by my income; there was no wisdom for me to even dream of ever having such a surgery.

**But with God all things are possible.**

As a University lecturer (of Mathematics) who had enjoyed hearing and suddenly lost it, you could imagine how terrible it was. You know the joy of an academician is to research, tell others what he/she is discovering and to hear what others are doing through seminars etc. With Deafness that privilege is not for you. Any time there was a seminar, joke, project defense, songs and sermon in the Church etc., I was the only one that was not following. I continued to teach, but my students had to write and passed forward to me whenever they had questions. Although as I later found out, many students enjoyed that method of asking questions especially those of them who were shy and naturally could not ask questions during normal lectures, yet it used to tell on us because we had to sacrifice much more time with this method of teaching.

One thing that used to pain me was the attitude of people towards disabled persons. Many people feel that they are so special to ever have any form of disability. There is one sad encounter I am still trying to forget. It happened in a bank. I was directed to a woman to attend to me because it looked as if I was overpaid. The woman thought that I was complaining for short payment. I pleaded with her to write for me what she was saying. This woman said since I knew I was a deaf I was suppose to always bring someone to be writing for me because they cannot be wasting their time writing for a deaf. Even though the woman later apologized to me when she got what I was telling her, yet my memory of her treatment is unforgettable despite the fact that I have truly forgiven her. I came across such kinds of treatments severally.

My social life suffered immensely; I had to stop attending meetings or social gatherings. Radio and musical instruments became useless to me. I had to lose many of my friends. Some of them were those who couldn't write. There was no way for me to communicate directly to those that could not write. Those included the small children. There was no way I could communicate with even sighted people once it was dark. The worse were my students and friends who were blind. I had to keep away from any function that had anything to do with hearing.

**Almost all the time I was lonely even when I was not alone.**

Another serious problem I used to have is one irksome sound that rung continuously in my ears. The specialists in the field call it TINNITUS. This irksome sound alone was often worse than the deafness itself because it used to be loud enough to spoil my days and even interfered with my sleep. The thought of the possibility of the irksome sound to remain and torment me for the rest of my life used to be depressing.



My job was also at stake because I stood the risk of losing my speech and consequently my Job. To worsen the situation, depression had to come in and life generally became hopeless and miserable. I encountered so many other problems, which I also want to leave for your imagination. I suffered this condition for more than five and one quarter (5 1/4) years.

**I could have probably remained in that condition for the rest of my life if I had not come across two (2) benevolent American Surgeons.**

The first Doctor is Joel Anthis, an ENT Surgeon from America who had worked for months in ECWA Evangel hospital (Jankwano) Jos, the capital of plateau state of Nigeria where I was a known patient. Dr. Douglass Green is the second American surgeon who specializes in Head and Neck Surgery. He is based in Jacksonville in Florida State, United States of States of America (USA). He works in Center One, a Health center complex located in the same town he resides.

Sometime in May 2005, Dr. Green brought two (2) Cochlear Implantation systems from Med El. Company. He fixed one on me free of charge and travelled back to USA leaving me in the care of Dr. Joel Anthis. That could have been a ground breaking, because the surgery would have been the first of its kind to be performed and succeeded in Africa outside Egypt and South Africa. Unfortunately (but it was fortunately for me because it later turned out to be for my good), the wound could not heal even after months of surgeries and treatments against infection by Dr. Anthis and his team. They had to remove the implant there by taking us back to square one. It was a very painful experience.

**But all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to His purpose. (Roman 8:28).**

Dr. Green visited Jos-Nigeria again sometime in 2006 and made one of the rarest offers one could ever imagined. He invited me to Jacksonville Florida state of USA to have the surgery free of charge and to remain in his house as his guest throughout the period of my medical trip which included the period of tests and medical assessment, the surgery, the healing of the wound up to the time of activation of the implant and the subsequent follow ups.

Although I later spent almost all the time with Prof. Pius Kyesmu, yet Dr. Green's invitation to host me in his house as his guest was one of the major determining factors considered for the issuance of my US VISA. The people at the embassy are normally reluctant to give non immigrant VISA if one is going to stay with a relation within the period he/she would be in America.

Dr. Pius Kyesmu is a Professor of Plant science and Genetic Engineering. We were colleagues of the same Faculty (of Natural Sciences), University of Jos in Nigeria. Coincidentally, he had just migrated to the same town as Dr. Green and not very far from Center one, the medical



complex where the surgery took place. It was then arranged that I stay with him (Prof. Pius) for almost all the period of my trip.

**I believe that was part of my miracle.**

Dr. Green did not stop there; he turned my medical trip into a summer pleasure tourism trip. He lavished on me lunches and Dinners. One of the Dinners I cannot forget is the one that Dr. Green invited families! Yes, not individuals but families to one of what I believe the most expensive hotels around. This was the evening of May 29, 2007. He did so to celebrate the recovery of my hearing since my family could not be around to celebrate with me this life changing event. It was the day that my over five year's deafness got terminated earlier on, during the activation of my hearing devise in Center One, Jacksonville.

Dr. Green's family is a wonderful one. His family even took me to Tourist Centers. In fact, Dr. Pius Kyesmu and Dr. Green's families made my trip to be so joyous that I can say with all sincerity that it was for my advantage that my hearing recovery did not succeed in Nigeria. If it had succeeded in ECWA Evangel hospital Jos Nigeria, how could I have had such a privilege to travel to this great country United States Of America (USA) and to enjoy the love and affection of the good people over there?

**Everything turned out to be for my advantage. (A verification of the Bible verse Romans 8 verse 28, which I quoted earlier).**

**APPRECIATION**

I will ever live to be grateful to all of you friends and brothers that helped in one way or the other towards the process of my hearing recovery which my Brother **Dr. Daniel Kutchin** coordinated as if he were planning for a battle or coup d'état.

I appreciate even those who discouraged me from going in for the surgery because of their concern for me. Some of these include Dr. Ukwajiyi, an ENT surgeon in National Hospital Abuja, Mr. Danazumi an Audiologist also in Abuja and some of my colleagues in Special Education Department here in University of Jos. I know your suggestion was because of the concern you have for me. Please know now that the Cochlear Implantation is a viable method of restoring hearing. The Technology is growing like that of Computer Technology. Please everyone of us should make time and find out from Internet. People should know that the surgery is not too dangerous. I don't think it is as dangerous as appendiciasis surgery. It takes fewer hours and you don't have to sleep in the hospital after the surgery. People should desire it. Governments and NGO's should be made to assist candidates of this surgery. It is expensive, yes, but it is cost effective since it improves the quality of lives of the users.



## **THE RECOVERY OF MY HEARING**

Friends and brothers, the effort we put into the recovery of my hearing is very much rewarding and a huge success.

**Almost all the negative things I mentioned to you earlier in this mail that came to my life as a result of the deafness have gone with the deafness.**

My Cochlear Implantation System has continued to amaze me. With the device, my sound perception is more than 100% normal. The volume of the speech processor can be regulated so I am able to hear sound as audible as I choose to. I am able to hear even sounds like blowing of the wind, tick-tick-tick sound of a clock, squeezing pieces of paper, my breathing, ringing of the door bell etc.

My speech perception is remarkable. I can put it as more than 50% normal. Note that there is a difference between speech and sound perceptions. It is no longer necessary to write for me if one wants to communicate with me. My speech perception is even improving as I get used to handling the hearing system. It is indeed very amazing that human beings are able to understand and to replace the complex hearing function of the inner ear by an electronic device. The astonishing thing is that these speeches I perceive are almost natural and perfect. The speeches are not as mechanical as the way some hearing Aids users tell me they perceive through their Hearing Aids. I can differentiate and recognize voices especially those whose voices I knew before the onset of the hearing loss.

I gain a lot from watching Television and listening to the Radio. I am now able to exchange messages through landline and even mobile phones especially with people that have loud or sharp voices.

I enjoy varieties of music. I very much enjoy all the songs that I knew before I lost my hearing. Songs of birds, Sound of musical instruments and many natural sounds are among the music I am able to enjoy almost perfectly now.

Environmental noise and sound pollutions that suffer normal hearing people are no longer problems to me. When I get to any noisy environment, I simply switch off or lower the volume of my speech processor. I can now read, sleep and feel okay in any noisy environment; a privilege people with natural hearing cannot enjoy.

On a lighter note; I have been telling my students almost frankly, that I enjoy my hearing device more than the natural hearing system. I hear only what I want to hear and with the volume of my desire.

Again on a lighter note; I recommend Cochlear implantation to hearing people that have nagging spouses or friends. With Cochlear implantation, you can have a peaceful sleep while your spouse or friend is raging. All you need is just switching of your speech processor.



The irksome sound TININITUS is no longer a problem to me. In the day time it is completely masked by sounds or background sounds I perceive with my hearing device. I put off the device when I want to sleep and fortunately, the Tinnitus sound does not wake me from sleep.

**SOME CHALLENGES (NOT COMPLAINTS) I STILL FACE WITH THE HEARING DEVICE.**

The challenges I face now are mostly on speech perception. I often find it quite difficult to understand speech from public sound Amplifiers. People with light voices often have to repeat some of the words especially words I am not used to hearing frequently. It is very rare and no longer necessary for someone to write for me any word in a conversation.

Another challenge is the power consumption of the device. In the environment where I work and many other places here, there is serious noise pollution. Electric generators are used here and there to complement the poor power due to the shortage we have. These generators produce a lot of noise, which makes the batteries of the speech processor to run down many times faster than usual. On the average, if I am using the ordinary batteries, I often have to replace the pair of the batteries more than six times a day! On the average I use to change my disposable batteries once in every 2 hours. Durable disposable batteries last longer but they are not economically efficient. One may quickly say " what about rechargeable batteries?" But electric power is needed before you can charge such batteries and over here you don't always have it. With the rechargeable batteries, I often have to change the batteries about twice or sometimes even more than three times a day. It therefore means that if I want to enjoy hearing for a whole day; with the ordinary disposable batteries, my extra daily expenditure on batteries alone is between ₦160 to ₦240.

Again, I must state here that I am not complaining. There were times I had wished I could give up all what I had to have my hearing back or hear for even a limited period.

I have some strategies that I use to employ to reduce power consumption. I try as much as I can to avoid noisy environment. I switch the speech processor when there is a continuous sound like that of a filing machine or that of a grinding mill. Apart from sound pollution, music and radio are next leading killers of my batteries.

I am exploring means of overcoming this power consumption problem. I will be very happy and welcome suggestions from any one of you on how to minimize this problem of batteries' consumption.

People like Doctor Green may not understand this problem of noise pollution. If I were working in his office, a pair of rechargeable batteries would have been lasting me two or three days before replacement.



### **MY FUTURE EXPECTATION AS I USE THE COCHLEAR IMPLANTATION**

It is expected that my speech perception will be excellent if I have the opportunity to go back to America or to get an Audiologist somewhere that can fine-tune the device.

I was suppose to have at least six months of regular visits and then yearly follow ups to the Audiologist to fine-tune the device and to get it re-programmed where necessary. But you know, I couldn't afford that luxury. I had just three (3) visits within less than three weeks from the day of activation of the implant and my return to Nigeria.

Another thing I am looking up to having is a spare of the speech processor so that I can have the backup of my hearing level strategy and some spare of the cables that connects external parts of the system. This is in case something like an accident happens to the speech processor then I can use the spare without having to wait for an opportunity to travel to America.

### **DOCTOR GREEN WISHES TO DO MORE.**

Doctor Green has the heart of helping more deaf the way he helped me if he could get any manufacturer of the device that agrees to donate it.

A deaf in particular is one of our students- Samuel Ochenehi. He is a very brilliant medical student here in University of Jos, Nigeria. Samuel is from Benue State, Nigeria. Just as it happened to me, he lost his hearing abruptly after a few days of fever and medication. He had his problem when he was just about going to second year of Pre-clinical in the medical School here in the University of Jos Nigeria. Though Samuel has made it up to his second MB, yet he cannot make it in the clinical without hearing. The Authorities have told him that he will require hearing to conclude his clinical.

Brothers and friends, let's continue to pray for people like Dr. Green and Dr. Anthis. Visit their websites, write to thank and encourage them time to time. Please also enquire from them about Christofel Blinden mission. You will know more about what they are doing and what you can do too.

Once more I want to appreciate all of you my brothers and friends for your support. May God's blessing be with you, let His love fill you and His guidance be cleared to you.  
Amen and Goodbye.

Yours,  
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