

the BIG news

The Newsletter for the Buffalo Implant Group

Volume 21 • Issue 4 - 2008

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UPcoming Events

B.I.G. Meeting May 21
B.I.G Picnic July 20
Grace Lutheran Race August 3

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**DRAKE JACKSON
WILL BE OUR
GUEST SPEAKER AT
THE NEXT B.I.G. MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MAY 21ST
6:30 PM SHARP
AT
DAEMEN COLLEGE
THE PRESENTATION
WILL COVER
INSURANCE
COVERAGE FOR
IMPLANTS**

GETTING TO KNOW ... SAM SPRITZER

By Shirley Jaskier

Sam Spritzer may be a familiar name to some of you, and chances are it is not because he is a member of B.I.G. If you are a runner, volunteer at local races, or just work out at Gold's Gym, there is a chance you already know him. Sam loves to run, and is a board member of the Checkers Athletic Club. He has participated in close to 100 races in the last three years, ranging from 5K to 15K.



Sam Spritzer

school system, and he was able to obtain speech and lip-reading therapy during his school day. He never learned sign language, and relied on lip-reading and his body hearing aid to hear, understand speech and to communicate. The body hearing aid was a large box that he wore on a harness, and he remembers being teased by his classmates. Sam remembers one time striking back with a swift kick to the shins of the teaser! His father had to pay a visit to three of his classmates in one day, because Sam had kicked them in retaliation for being teased.

Good thing for Sam (and his classmates with the sore shins) that Sam was fit with behind the ear hearing aids when he was a teen. It was around this time that he developed an interest in working out at the gym.

Sam graduated from high school, and went on to complete his education at Pace University, where he obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting. He has worked as an accountant and an auditor in NYC. His hearing loss did not affect his ability to retain a job after college, because at that time, the world was a simpler place, and not as competitive as it is today.

Sam was born in Brooklyn, and was named after his grandfather. His story is familiar in that his parents suspected that he was not hearing properly, but the pediatrician assured them that there was nothing wrong. (If I had a nickel for every person who had this same experience, I would be a wealthy woman!) His parents were persistent, and he was ultimately found to have a severe hearing loss in both ears.

Sam attended the Albany Public School system, and was mainstreamed into a regular classroom. The Albany Medical Center worked in collaboration with the

Sam's hearing deteriorated, and in his late 20's, even the most powerful hearing aids only provided a mere whisper of sound. Any attempt to raise the volume was met with feedback. He was unable to use the telephone. In the 1980's Sam was evaluated for a cochlear implant at NYU Medical Center, and was told he might be a candidate. He does not remember why, but at that time, he decided against the CI.

Fast forward to 2006... Cochlear implant technology had much improved, and Sam knew his hearing would not get any better. In fact, it was getting worse. He went through the evaluation process at

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GETTING TO KNOW ... SAM SPRITZER

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Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center, and met with Dr. Ernesto Diaz-Ordaz. He found out that he was a candidate for the surgery, and was told that with the cochlear implant, he might be able to use the telephone. This was a major factor in his decision to have the surgery. He knew he had everything to gain, and nothing to lose.

In January of 2007, Sam was implanted with the Advanced Bionics Cochlear Implant. The surgery was performed at Windsong outpatient center, and there were complications with the intubation. After he was implanted, he experienced a twitching problem that was caused by electrical current leaking through the wall of the cochlea, affecting a facial nerve. To avoid this problem, when he was implanted in the left ear, a shield was made out of bone and placed between the CI electrode and the facial nerve. Sam was implanted with the second CI at Sisters Hospital due to his history of complications. This surgery went off without a hitch, and the recovery was much better than expected.

Sam says that the first few months after the first surgery, he was mostly in awe and was surprised with many, many "moments." He absorbed all of the environmental sounds like raindrops on the window, the pilot light clicking on the stove, the turn signal of a car, ice crunching underfoot, birds singing, cats meowing, etc. etc. He did have a bit of tinnitus, and of course, people were constantly asking him "Can you hear me?"

After the second surgery, he was able to hear in "stereo" and he loved the sounds of music. He found conversation to be much easier also. He does not have 100% speech comprehension, but he is able to converse without asking the person to speak up or repeat themselves several times.

The audiograms don't lie, and the comparison of the pre-surgery audiogram to the post-surgery audiogram confirmed his success. Before the implant, the sounds were detected at 90db's but would drop off the chart at the 2000 - 4000 frequency range. Post-surgery, sounds were detected at the 30db range, and literally cross the entire frequency spectrum.

Sam says that the beauty of being a bi-lateral cochlear implant recipient is that he is truly able to enjoy things in life that he could not have otherwise. When he was growing up, he was shy and somewhat introverted, and this extended through his adult life. His hearing loss was a barrier to truly enjoying a social life where he could carry on a conversation in noise, and be able to understand what is being said. This simply was not possible with hearing aids.

The one challenge Sam has not yet conquered is the ability to use the telephone. In recent years, this has had a profound effect on his ability to search for a job, because so much communication is done via the telephone. He knows that mastering the telephone will take practice, and says that at his "advanced old age" it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks. He confessed that while he is afraid that he may goof up a conversation, he is also afraid that his "family might enjoy it so much they'll be calling me all the time!" Sam's mom lives in Florida, his sister in Greece, and numerous other family members are scattered throughout the US.

Sam and his wife Stephanie have been married for 28 years, and have two sons - Mike (24) and Dan (16). Stephanie has normal hearing, but after 28 years, somehow she only hears Sam when she wants to... (Sound familiar ladies?). Sam enjoys spending time with his family. Next to that, he loves to run. He is hoping to complete a half-marathon this year, and eventually, he wants to complete a full marathon (26 miles). When he is not running, he may be found at Gold's Gym working out to stay healthy, and keep the weight off.

Sam's advice to those who are considering a CI is to work with professionals you can trust, like Dr. Diaz-Ordaz and the wonderful CI team at Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center. Take advantage of all the resources you can find, including BIG (buffaloimplantgroup.com) and HLAA (shhh.org).

Check out Sam's great website at <http://samspritzer.com>. He has links to websites related to cochlear implants, running, and other general information. You can actually watch the video of his CI activation. He also recommends you make contact with local CI users, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Lastly, his "3P's" - and this applies to all of life as well - Persistence, Perseverance and Patience! Sounds like great advice to me.

MANY THANKS

Ed Bastian

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Lisa Brewster

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IN MEMORY OF BARBARA DIXON

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**Please submit articles
for the Fall Issue
by August 1st,**

Thank You!