In a February 2014 lecture at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Blake Wilson, one of the pioneers in the development of cochlear implants (CIs), estimated that, if current trends continue, by August 2020 there will be a million people with an implant worldwide (there were 324,200 as of December 2012, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration). One reason for this anticipated increase is because it is easier for adults with a less-than-profound hearing loss to qualify for a CI today than it was a few years ago. Another reason is a continued increase in the number of deaf children receiving an implant; infants under 12-months-old are now routinely implanted in the United States and elsewhere. In addition, many implantees, perhaps as many as one-third, are now undergoing bilateral implantation.

Fortunately for potential implant candidates, as well as parents of deaf children and professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing people, the life stories included in New Beginnings: Acquiring and Living With a Cochlear Implant are likely to be an important and useful resource. Following a succinct and informative discussion of issues such as the history, educational impacts, and cultural implications of CIs, co-editors Michael Stinson and Gerard Buckley organize 15 stories, written by the implantees (or parents of young implantees) themselves, into six categories. Both Stinson and Buckley use a CI and both discuss their experiences in this volume. These categories include implant recipients who were born deaf and received a CI as a young person, recipients who became deaf due to meningitis as a child and obtained an implant as an adult, and those who experienced a significant decline in hearing as a child and decided to get an implant as an adult. Life stories were also written by users of CIs who faced a significant hearing loss in adulthood and subsequently decided in favor of implantation, parents of young implanted children, and implantees who received the device after a progressive decline in both hearing and vision.

The stories were written between 2004 and 2010, and the contributors or their children were implanted between 1989 and 2006. The editors remind readers that the experiences described in these accounts are unique to these contributors and their families, as well as to a specific historical period and stage of CI technological development.

Although all of the stories are interesting, often moving, and generally well written, readers from different backgrounds will likely find some accounts more compelling than others. Many of the stories should be of interest to those who have some association with the Deaf community because several of the authors have this experience. And, for these authors, the implant experience has generally been a positive one, enabling them (or their child) to more effectively participate in both the deaf and hearing worlds. In fact, for almost all of the authors of these life histories, having and using a CI has been a very rewarding and often life-changing adventure for themselves or for their children. Hearing parents of deaf children are likely to find the accounts written by the parents to be particularly relevant and thoughtful.

The decision to get a CI is often not an easy one. The experiences shared by the contributors to this timely and important book will give those involved in making this decision much to think about.

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