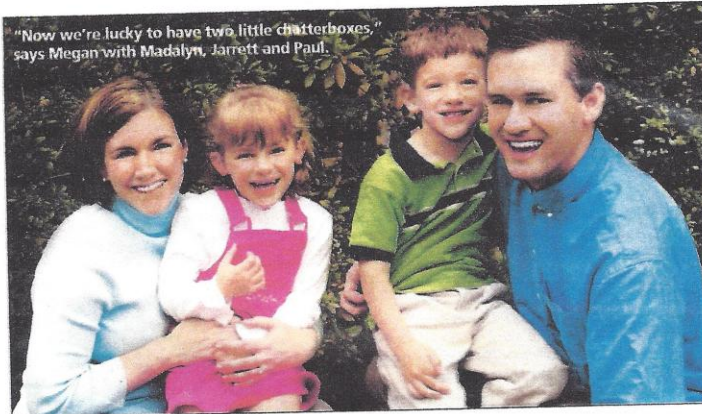


Imagine being told your children couldn't hear you

No "I love you," no "Happy Birthdays"—nothing. That's what Megan Hopkins was told about her 18-month-old twins Jarrett and Madalyn—and though Jarrett only needed hearing aids, they wouldn't help little Madalyn...



"Now we're lucky to have two little chatterboxes," says Megan with Madalyn, Jarrett and Paul.

Wriggling his little hips, two-year-old Jarrett Hopkins danced to *Sesame Street*. Then, his mom, Megan glanced at Jarrett's twin sister, Madalyn—she was staring blankly at the TV. It's so unfair, Megan cried. With hearing aids, Jarrett was learning new things every day, while Madalyn remained trapped in a world of silence, the chasm between them growing deeper—just like the ache in the Williamsburg, Virginia, mother's heart.

"I won't let you get left behind!"

"A double blessing," everyone cheered when Madalyn and Jarrett were born. But by 16 months, Jarrett was uttering his first words, while Madalyn remained quiet. "I'm worried about her hearing," Megan told her husband, Paul.

And tests confirmed her worst fears: Madalyn was profoundly deaf.

Then, the audiologist tested Jarrett, too... "I'm afraid he has severe hearing loss in his left ear and moderate loss in his right," the audiologist said.

To have one child who'd never hear her say "I love you,"... it was already so much to grieve. But both? "Jarrett should do fine with hearing aids," the audiologist said. But it became apparent that Madalyn's hearing loss was so great... "She may need a cochlear implant."

Megan had read about the cochlear implant, a small electronic device surgically implanted behind the ear then attached to an external speech processor.

Did you know?

Prolonged exposure to noise equal to the level of a hair dryer can damage hearing.

Knowing all the learning Madalyn would miss while Jarrett moved ahead... I won't let you get left behind! Megan vowed, deciding in favor of the implant.

Megan thought: God gives you two ears. Why not science?

A month after the surgery, it was activated.

"Maddy," Paul began. "can you hear me?" But Madalyn buried her head in Megan's shoulder and burst into tears.

The doctor had warned that, at first, everything would sound garbled, but over the next few months, Madalyn adjusted to the noise around her. And one day, she followed a trail of sound to the piano, where Jarrett was banging away.

"You heard that!" Megan rejoiced. And Madalyn didn't cringe at the sound. She was smiling.

"My two ears!"

Soon three-year-old Madalyn began making strides—saying words, then stringing them together.

"My ear," she called her speech processor. "My ear on!" she'd plead, not wanting it turned off at night. Then, one day, Madalyn

pointed to her ear with the implant, then to her brother's two hearing aids. She pouted, "Jarrett—two ears!"

Yes, Megan wondered. Why only one implant? Doctors explained they were expensive, and some specialists preferred to save one ear for future advances in technology.

But after they attended a conference on "bilateral implants," Megan and Paul turned to surgeon Barry Strasnick. "Would you do the surgery for Madalyn?"

At first, he was hesitant. But when he learned that children with bilateral

implants understood more and spoke better... "I'll do it," he decided.

In January 2004, four-year-old Madalyn became the first bilateral recipient in Virginia and just one of 80 in the country.

This time, when the second implant was activated, Madalyn smiled wide. "Thank you—my two ears," she told Dr. Strasnick.

Today, Madalyn's right on track with Jarrett. Each morning, Jarrett puts on his hearing aids and Madalyn hooks up her processor and off they go to preschool—with hearing children.

Sometimes, when Jarrett's playing gets too loud while she puts her dolls to sleep, Madalyn will say, "Be quiet!" And Megan can't help but laugh.

"She's succeeding beyond our wildest dreams," Megan beams. "Madalyn truly is our little pioneer."

—Shari Cohen