



No portion of this article may be reproduced without
express written permission of Style Publishing Group, LLC.
©2007 • All rights reserved.



Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
Web: www.friscostyle.com

Ad Sales: (972) 335-1306



Conner and Cole Cantu
photo by Leah Ratliff

not respond when his back was turned. When he was four, Cole's hearing had deteriorated enough to require hearing aids in both ears, a difficult adjustment for an otherwise healthy, active boy. The following summer, just before the start of kindergarten, Cole and his Dad endured another blow – the death of Cole's mother Susie to cancer.

“Cole's parents had been told of the likelihood that he would one day lose his hearing...”

Though faced with significant challenges for one so young, Cole adjusted and started school. During the first grade, his teacher suggested that Cole might benefit from a tutor. She recommended a third-grade teacher named Janie. Cole and Janie quickly warmed to one another. She assisted him with schoolwork and seemed to naturally begin filling the void left in his life by the death of his mother. Cole came to care for Janie as though she were a part of the family. And before long she was, after Frank asked her to be his wife and Cole's new mom. Later, the little boy celebrated with the rest of the family when his brother Connor was born. Everything in Cole's life was improving. Everything...except his hearing.

By the time Cole was 12, he was virtually deaf. Now his doctors brought up the subject of cochlear implants. They had discussed the subject before but it wasn't an option to be considered until there were no others.

Cochlear implantation can produce amazing results for the deaf, but the procedure is irreversible. During the relatively simple surgery, a magnet is placed under the skin just behind and near the top of the ear. Next, the implant, which is about the size of a credit card is slipped beneath the skin. After it has been programmed using the external apparatus, or processor,

Silent No More

By Caren Elizabeth Austen

FOR MORE THAN 200 YEARS Thanksgiving has been a time for gathering with family and friends, feasting on savory, seasonal foods and reflecting on aspects of our lives that we consider blessings. Cole Cantu, a sophomore at Centennial High School, and his family will consider themselves doubly blessed this Thanksgiving. Three years ago, Cole received a cochlear implant, a device that has restored hearing to his right ear. This year, Cole, joined by his dad, Frank, and six-year-old brother, Connor, will hear the Thanksgiving Day football games

rather than relying on closed captioning for the play-by-play commentary.

Cole was born with a significant and very rare birth defect that required emergency surgery and twelve days attached to a pediatric heart/lung bypass machine. Cole's parents had been told of the likelihood that he would one day lose his hearing because of his extended time on the machine, but it seemed a small price to pay compared to his life.

Cole's hearing loss became noticeable when he was about three years old. His parents began to notice that he often did

that fits over Cole's ear and attaches to the implant via the magnet, the implant will take on the function of the cochlea. However, before the surgery can be completed, all the auditory nerves must be severed, rendering Cole completely deaf in his right ear. He recalls the six weeks between the surgery and the beginning of the programming as a "very frustrating" time.

This programming, called mapping, allows the physician specialist, called a "neurotologist," and the audiologist, to set the frequencies of the device precisely to Cole's unique, personal needs. Cole described those first sounds as nothing more than meaningless "beeps and buzzes." Since he had experienced hearing and still had a slight sense in his left ear, he knew the difference between those artificial sounds and the sounds of everyday life. It would take about six months for Cole's brain to adjust and begin to translate the beeps and buzzes into recognizable sounds.

Janie reminded Cole of what it was like when they all walked out of the hospital after his first mapping session. "He kept saying that everything was too loud. He wanted them to turn the volume down on the implant." But, understanding that Cole had been nearly deaf for years, the specialists left the volume up as they continued through the several mapping sessions it took to fine-tune the programming. Janie remembers Cole's reaction at the sound of running water, "Wow! The water makes a sound!" That sparked Frank's memory to Cole as a little boy, shortly after he received his first hearing aids. "He was playing outside and came running to us, squealing, 'Mommy, Mommy! I can hear the birds!'"

When Cole started school, he was assigned a deaf education teacher, Cindy Williams. She started with Cole in kindergarten and has been with him ever since. They will work together until

he graduates. Cole has always been in mainstream classes, relying heavily on his self-taught ability to lip-read before receiving his cochlear implant. Cindy and Cole focus less now on what he may have missed during classes and more on his ever-improving speech.

According to Frank, Cole has not



The Cantu Family

photo provided by Frank Cantu

"Cole described those first sounds as nothing more than meaningless 'beeps and buzzes.'"

faced many of the problems that most hearing-impaired children do. "We've lived in the same area for a long time so Cole has grown up and attended school with the same kids from fourth grade. No one has ever treated him differently," nor has he missed out on childhood activities. Frank has been Cole's city league coach nearly every summer since he first began playing T-ball. Last year Frank coached both Cole and Connor's teams. "It got a little crazy

at times," Frank admits.

Connor looks up to his big brother, even emulating Cole's excuses for leaving chores undone. Janie grins, "Like the time Connor said he didn't hear me because he wasn't wearing his hearing aid!" Having grown up with Cole's disability, Connor seems to intuitively know

how best to get Cole's attention. According to Janie, "Sometimes Connor will get right in Cole's face to make sure he hears him. Or if they're in the other room playing on the computer, Connor will tell Cole when I call to tell them dinner's ready. When I'm handing out chores, they both act like they can't hear!"

Cole is like most teenagers. He loves the music his parents can't stand. He's just gotten his driver's permit. When asked if he can hear other cars honking, "Not when I drive, just when he does," Cole quips, gesturing toward his Dad.

Cole's Dad is proud. Cole spent his first eight weeks in a neonatal intensive care unit fighting for his life. He's endured the death of his Mother and the loss of his hearing--all without self-pity or excuses.

He makes good grades, does his chores and plays with his little brother. His proudest accomplishment so far is making the freshman baseball team as starting first-baseman. This year he hopes to make the junior varsity team. And the t-shirt he's wearing hints at his future plans – attending the University of Texas.

Surviving a near-fatal birth defect was Cole's first miracle. Having his hearing restored through a cochlear implant was his second. The Cantu's will consider their miracles and blessings this Thanksgiving Day. Then they'll turn on the games, and this year Cole will be watching and listening!

Caren Elizabeth Austen is a freelance writer living in Frisco.