

## In Their Own Words, Life after Listen and Talk

by Peggy Fitzgerald



Our children are triplets, and like many multiples, they were born premature and faced some early challenges. Claire had the roughest start of all, and despite having a normal hearing screen when she left the hospital, she lost her hearing completely somewhere at the end of her first year of life. When she was diagnosed with a severe-profound hearing loss, it was a shock. We didn't really know what her life would be like, but we did know that we wanted her to grow up together with her triplet sisters, able to enjoy everything that life had to offer. We knew for sure that we wanted her to listen and speak and participate fully in the hearing world.

Claire received her hearing aids shortly after diagnosis, and she got her first cochlear implant at 18 months. All three children started at Listen and Talk at age 3. At the time, it was hard to imagine that Claire would catch up to what her sisters were doing, for they were early talkers. But we knew we wanted to have all three attend the same kindergarten class, and Listen and Talk reassured me that most of the children who went through the program were ready for mainstream kindergarten. The dream seemed almost too good to be true.

We had a great experience with Listen and Talk. I wondered if Catherine and Anne would be bored, but it turned out that the teachers at Listen and Talk provided individualized instruction to all the children. To us, that was wonderful: not only was Claire receiving exactly the services she needed in therapy and the classroom, but Catherine and Anne were also challenged and grew in their social and academic skills. Every day, the girls would arrive home with a picture page about their day and armloads of art projects, song pages and even writing. Their play at home reflected the activities from school – one favorite was acting out the story of “The Billy Goats Gruff.” Even now, the girls enthusiastically sing their pre-K songs in the car and during play.

One of the best aspects of Listen and Talk was the support from other parents. When Claire got her second cochlear implant at age 4, other parents shared information about insurance struggles and helped us navigate our way to getting it approved. We supported each other with our children with hearing loss, which made many things easier: researching kindergarten options, sharing information about IEP and therapy, sharing tips for helping kindergarten teachers to work with our children's equipment and so forth. We continue to have playdates, which helps Claire to know that she is not the only child to have a hearing loss or wear cochlear implants.

Today, the girls are kindergarteners at The Bush School. Their teachers were impressed with how well they were prepared for school. Claire is doing very well with her academic work — especially reading, and is making good friends. She is even succeeding in both her Spanish and Mandarin Chinese classes and loves to sing songs in both languages. As I watch all three of our children playing on the playground at school, laughing, joking and talking with

their friends, I can almost forget the struggles we had in the beginning. And I know Listen and Talk helped to make it possible.

