

Shabbat Shalom! (wait for congregation to respond)

Hi I am Eliana Milich. I am 15 years old and currently a sophomore at Morristown High School. This month is Disability Awareness Month. I am here today to share with you my story. I was born premature at 24 weeks. It was during my stay at the NICU where my parents learned that I was deaf. It was a scary time for everyone because they didn't know what was going to happen. Would everyone need to learn sign language? Would I ever be able to hear? My parents immediately started talking to specialists to find out what was best for me. They learned that I would need to be fitted with a hearing device. I started off wearing hearing aids but they did not work for me. My parents looked into getting me a cochlear implant and I received my first implant at 19 months old on my right side. Then, when I was 26 months old I received my second implant on my left side. When I was younger, I used to be embarrassed of my cochlear implants and hated being asked what was on my ear. As I got older and realized that people are just curious to know what is on my ear, since there isn't a whole lot of knowledge about cochlear implants. When people do ask me what is on my ears, I tell them that I am

deaf and wear cochlear implants to help me hear because without them I can't hear anything.

There are many obstacles that I have faced in my life and I am going to share with you how I overcame some of them.

I started going to a sleepaway camp called Camp Kinder Ring when I was 9 years old. The first day of camp I was so scared and nervous about people staring at my cochlear implants. My dad talked to me and helped me have the courage to get out of the car. Two of my best friends, Ilana and Sammy went to the camp too and they made me feel welcomed and made sure that I wasn't left out or being made fun of. Eight years later I am still attending this camp, where I have met an amazing group of girls that accept me for who I am and don't care about me being different.

As many of you may know, I have been playing tennis since I was 4 and tennis is a sport that requires good hearing to be able to identify the sounds on the court and the way the ball bounces off the racquet. There are times where I play matches and I have to ask my opponent to say the score louder so I am able to hear it better. My mom has encouraged me to stand up for myself and to not be afraid to ask them to say to score louder. This is an

obstacle that many face but for me it is harder to ignore the noises around me.

I love being able to play just like everyone else.

Imagine standing on a beach, staring at the ocean but not being able to hear the sounds of the waves crashing. This is pretty much what I had to go through until I got a waterproof device when I was 9. When I was in third grade my family and I went on a cruise. I went into the ocean with my dad and I was so excited that I would finally be able to hear the waves. It was amazing to hear the waves crash against my legs and seeing the happiness on my dad's face.

Being able to hear has given me the ability to hear my parents, brother, friends, classmates, teachers, music, rain, and the sounds of laughter. I learned overtime that nobody is perfect and everyone has their differences and obstacles that they face in life. I will continue to live my life to the fullest knowing I can overcome any obstacles I face later on. Thank you all for listening to my story and Shabbat Shalom!