

Around the World

By Jennifer Vernon, Coordinator of Production and Editing

Ten-year-old Jordan Eric Del Dottore has a profound bilateral sensorineural hearing loss and attends Istia Elementary School in Grosseto, Italy, where he lives with his parents, Jodi and Luca, and his younger sister, Sofia.

Born in Baltimore, Md., in August 1996, Jordan was not diagnosed with hearing loss until age 1. "Jordan was born before universal newborn hearing screening was implemented in the United States, so we didn't have the benefit of knowing immediately about his hearing loss," his mother Jodi explained.

Concerned when Jordan was not vocalizing by age 8 months, Jodi and

Luca made an appointment with his pediatrician. "Given Jordan's precocious physical nature and alert behavior, we were surprised that he wasn't making any sounds," Jodi said. "Our doctor explained that living in a bilingual family often causes speech delays in children. Like so many other families, we were told not to worry."

In the meantime, Jodi and Luca decided to make Grosseto their family's permanent home. "One month after moving to Grosseto, we took Jordan for his first-year checkup with his new pediatrician," Jodi recalled. "The pediatrician noticed that Jordan didn't react properly to a routine hearing test and recommended we see an

audiologist in Florence."

When the results from an Auditory Brainstem Response test indicated hearing loss, the audiologist fitted Jordan for hearing aids and recommended a Grosseto-based speech therapist. Jordan began speech therapy shortly thereafter and used hearing aids with success for eight years before receiving a cochlear implant in his left ear in 2004. "We're fortunate because the Italian government covers medical expenses such as ear molds, hearing aids, FM systems, cochlear implants, batteries, supplies and speech therapy, and also provides a monthly stipend toward additional related costs," Jodi said.

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The Del Dottore family. (LEFT TO RIGHT) Luca, Sofia, Jordan and Jodi.

Now in fifth grade, Jordan is on his way to becoming bilingual. "Jordan's first words were in Italian, which is also the language spoken in his classes at school," Jodi said. "He began taking English lessons when he was 5. We spent last Christmas with family in Baltimore, Md., and Jordan was able to play bingo with his grandmother and have conversations with her and other

family members. We're really proud of the progress he has made."

Jordan's favorite subjects include English, math and physical education. Some subjects, such as Italian, history and geography, pose challenges for Jordan because of his hearing loss and the level of Italian vocabulary involved. "I didn't speak Italian when we first moved to Grosseto, so Jordan didn't acquire vocabulary at the rate he might have in a household of only native Italian speakers," Jodi explained.

For his more difficult subjects, a classroom support teacher works with Jordan 10 hours per week. "The presence of a support teacher allows a class to be divided into smaller groups for more individualized attention," Jodi said. "This teacher, along with Jordan's grade-level instructors, a psychiatrist and a school system coordinator, work together to monitor and assist his academic and social progress."

A typical week in the Italian school system runs Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., and most tests are conducted by oral examination. "Because the majority of testing is done orally, it's essential that Jordan hears and understands his lessons," Jodi noted. "He studies several hours each day, so when he gets a good grade, he comes home very happy."

Despite the rigors of school, Jordan finds time to enjoy many other activities. According to Jodi, his number one passion is playing baseball: "Getting a hit and scoring sends him to another planet." He also enjoys taking piano lessons, riding his bicycle, swimming, going to the zoo, playing with friends, visiting relatives and taking care of his younger sister. "He's an outgoing, curious, studious, energetic and sensitive boy," Jodi said. "What makes Jordan unique is his heart, because he loves unconditionally." ☺

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