

Dear Oprah,

10/28/04

My name is Joe Testa and I am 37 years old. I was born with a severely deformed right ear, which is known as microtia. At three years of age, my parents decided to take me to a surgeon in the hopes of repairing my deformed ear. After multiple surgeries (about five in all), my ear looked even worse. These surgeries kept me in the hospital for weeks at a time with a long recovery period after each surgery. My parents had the highest hopes and put their complete trust in their team of doctors. As you can see, these doctors didn't help me at all; if anything, they destroyed me.

I have had 30% of my right rib cartilage removed, utilized for bone grafts and 6" x 6" skin grafts on each hip, used for the covering of the ear reconstruction. The doctors cut me up like a chicken or should I say, "butchered" me.

As you can imagine, my childhood was pretty rough. I was constantly being made fun of; being called a "one eared freak" was one of my tormentor's favorite sayings. As I got into my teenage years, it got a little better. My hair was always longer than usual and over the years I never really told my parents how I felt about my ear and how grotesque I thought I looked. I knew they only wanted the best for me and I never blamed them for the way I looked because I love them very much and they only had good intentions for me.

As a young adult, I looked into having more surgery done (believe it or not) to fix the botched ear reconstruction, but no doctor would even consider it. (Thank God!).

I married at 25 to a beautiful girl named Stacey who loved me for me. We had our first child, Jordan, in 1993 and our second child, Emily, in 1998. Two beautiful girls! That is when I started thinking about the doctors who worked on my ear. I thought, how could any doctor look my parents in the eye and say, "I can help your son." It really made me angry. My parents trusted these doctors with their only son. I'm sure if my parents had known the outcome of my surgery, they would never have put me through any of it. Not to mention, the tens of thousands of dollars these doctors received from my parents. So, my life went on. I was fairly content with myself, although the look of my ear always bothered me; it was always staring at me in the mirror.

In 2003, I was watching a show on the Discovery channel. It featured Bob Barron; it showed him making a full-face prosthesis for a man who had been severely burned. I could not believe the quality of this man's work. He gave that man a second chance at life. Then, about six months ago on another channel, I saw Mr. Barron giving a little girl a new ear. I was absolutely amazed. He changed that little girl's life before my very eyes. The realism and quality of his work was like nothing I had ever seen before. Last but not least your shows were the best of all. Sue's story was incredible. The follow up show with Tim's story and him proposing to his future wife was incredible. I thought to myself, he might be able to help me.

In May 2004, I called Mr. Barron's office and left a message on the answering machine. The next day he called me back. He asked me to send him pictures of my ears and he would get back to me with his determination. He called me back at work a couple of days later. (I'm in construction and of course I was around a bunch of guys at the time). Mr. Barron said, "Joe, I can give you a perfectly normal looking ear." I walked away from the men, hid behind a steel column, and started crying. I couldn't believe I heard those words come out of his mouth. I've waited all of my life for this.

My father and I went to his office to have a set of impressions made. While waiting, we looked through the photo albums of his patients. There were hundreds of kids like me, butchered by their doctors. I emotionally lost it. I finally realized these doctors know they can't deliver an acceptable product. They are doing it for one reason: MONEY. These poor kids. It's an outrage and it must be stopped.

Oprah, there is no greater humanitarian than you on this earth, I mean that. You do so much for people. These kids need you to help get the word out about this awful practice and that there are better options out there, such as prosthetics. It is safe, painless, reversible and most of all, it looks and feels like a real ear. Mr. Barron is also very passionate about this practice being stopped even more so than myself. Like you, Oprah, Bob Barron deeply cares about children. He has seen first hand what doctors are doing to these children, some as young as two years old (like myself).

The fact of the matter is, there are no doctors that can deliver a product as good as Bob Barron's prosthetics. The most important reason to expose this awful practice is for the sake of the children. They are the ones who suffer through extreme pain, the physical and emotional ups and downs, long stays in the hospital, and the ridicule of their peers (which is by far, the worst of all).

Oprah, Bob Barron and I need your help in this matter! You are so loved and well respected by people world wide and you are really one of a few people that can make a difference by exposing this practice for what it is: making money by butchering children.

After receiving my new beautiful ear from Bob Barron, I thought to myself, what a sense of accomplishment people like you and Bob must have by making your living by helping others. Wow, What a way to live! It is only a dream, but given an opportunity, I would love to make a full time commitment to helping others. I would love to set up a foundation to help needy children and young adults acquire prosthetics, which they need so desperately to live a normal and healthy life.

Thank you for all you have done for others and for reading my heartfelt words. God bless you.

With love and kindness,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Testa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joe Testa