

I was born with left congenital microtia, which is basically an ear tag for a left ear. I had ear reconstructive surgery at a very early age (around 6 yrs old) to try to correct the appearance of my left ear. The surgery was broken up into 3 stages. It was the most painful experience of my life. At six years old the thought of surgery terrified me. The Dr. made me believe that the end results would be worth all the pain of having surgery. He couldn't have been more mistaken. I still remember the horrible day when the Dr. held the mirror up and took off the gauze around my head to reveal my left ear after the painful surgeries. To me it looked pretty much the same as before I had surgery. I was so emotionally let down. The Dr. acted like it was the best thing he ever created. I kept wondering if we were looking at the same ear because he was making it sound like it looked completely normal and it didn't. I may have been little, and deaf in one ear, but I wasn't blind.

Growing up I never wore my hair up. I even stopped taking ballet classes in third grade because I was self conscience of my ear. When I went to the beach my friends would always ask me what the scar on my stomach was from. I wouldn't tell anyone what it was really from because I was too embarrassed. I usually made up some random story and changed the subject quickly. Only my family and closest friends knew about my ear because I hid it so well. When the wind would blow I would hold my hair over my ear, and when I went swimming I would always make sure my hair was covering my ear. At the age of 16 I tried to contact the Dr. who did my first surgeries to find out if there were any advances or other options. That appointment was just another let down.

When I turned 23 years old I knew there had to be a solution to my problem. I remember walking about a mile to my car from my college class on a windy day and thinking that there had to be a way to create a normal looking ear that you could wear during the day. I had my college books and keys in my hand, my purse on my arm, and I was trying to hold my hair over my ear all at the same time. I was thinking that I either needed an extra hand or a normal looking ear because I was fed up with this lifestyle. I searched the web when I got home and found Mr. Barron's web site. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was like I found a pot of gold and diamonds. I immediately told my family what I found, and

they were very supportive. I made the call, and my mom and I scheduled our trip to Virginia.

I got my first prosthetic ear in May of 2009. Mr. Barron magically made a normal looking ear held on by adhesive on top of my reconstructed ear, and it was 100% painless. I couldn't believe that I could finally wear my hair up and not feel uncomfortable. I had so much more confidence. Everyone at work was wondering what was different about me but they couldn't put their finger on it. I got so many compliments on my appearance. My family and close friends were amazed with the authentic look of my new ear. I wore that ear for about a year and then made the big decision to get the osseointegrated ear implant.

I had to go through two surgeries for this to happen. The first surgery was to remove the reconstructed ear, and the second was to have three titanium posts implanted in my skull. The pain was minimal; I took a couple Tylenols for a few days afterward and that was all I needed. The Doctors who operated on me were surgical geniuses. Everything was meticulously put in place so that my ear would be in perfect symmetry with my right ear. The doctors explained in great detail what the procedures consisted of and what to expect. They were genuinely nice and I could tell that they really wanted to help me.

I can't wait to wake up in the morning and wear my hair up. I no longer worry about the wind blowing my hair back. It is nice to take pictures without my hair covering up most of my face. I cannot thank Mr. Barron, Dr. Fetter, Dr. Dufresne, and Dr. Singer enough for changing the quality of my life. I consider all of you my heroes. I thank my lucky stars that this team of experts was able to help me when no one else could. Now I can finish up my college degree and move on with my life with a smile from ear to ear.

Melissa Cronin





