

Hello,

I am writing to you at the request of Robert Barron to tell you about my son Jackson. Jackson was born 7 ½ years ago with several congenital defects including a lack of external ears and ear canals on both sides (microtia and bi-lateral aural atresia).

When Jackson started getting close to school age I began researching what to do about the lack of ears and ear canals. I quickly found out that because there is little air space in his middle ear, he is not a candidate (at this time) to have his ear canals reconstructed. I did find two options for his external ears: ear prosthetics and ear reconstructive surgery.

My original thought was that I wanted ear reconstructive surgery for Jackson. It seemed like an easy choice because the ears would be permanently attached. As I did more research I became less and less comfortable. The pictures I saw of the results didn't look anything like natural ears. Also, there would be several surgeries involved and a high probability of complications with the recovery.

Once I started looking on-line for facial prosthetics I immediately found Robert Barron. Friends told me about TV shows and magazine articles portraying the work he has done, it is truly miraculous. I read on his website about his history (Wow!) and looked at pictures of other children with microtia (small or missing external ears). Even though he was all the way across the country I knew I wanted only the best for my son, so I was determined to work with him. I assumed the insurance company would pay for Jackson's prosthetics and I would cover the cost of travel to Virginia. What I found was surprising to say the least.

I talked to several of Jackson's doctors about my intentions and I was immediately warned about how to word my request to the insurance company. You see, the insurance companies consider the replacement of his ears to be cosmetic because it will not directly improve his hearing. I was amazed but started the process. I called my insurance company many times, Jackson's pediatrician faxed medical records several times, I wrote letters to my insurance company but I was never able to get a straight answer about what they would pay for. They would never give me a dollar amount, a percentage they would pay (if any), or straight answers about how to get that information. Extremely frustrated I abandoned any hope of being able to work with Mr. Barron. The cost for the prosthetics on top of the travel was just too far outside what our family could afford. I found an anaplastologists in the Seattle area and met with her about Jackson's ears. We talked about insurance companies and she reaffirmed what I had already found out. Mainly that the ears would be considered "cosmetic" and that we would probably have trouble getting reimbursement for them.

About this time I was contacted by a new talk show called "Home Delivery". They were interested in doing a story about my son Jackson and the trouble he has had because he was born with no ears. They ended up paying for everything. They paid for my family's travel to Virginia to work with Bob and for the prosthetic ears. It was truly an answer to prayer for us. I don't have any idea how we could have afforded this otherwise.

It's difficult to say what the final outcome with our insurance company would have been. The local anaplastologist still has a couple claims in for appointments we had before "Home Delivery" came into our lives. I don't know if insurance will pay them or not. When Jackson is older and his head stops growing we have the option to implant titanium posts to hold the ears more firmly in place. Today they are simply held on with a strong adhesive. I have no idea if that will be covered by insurance, I doubt it will be. It is a financial concern for us, but one that's out in the future so I try not to worry about it too much.

One of the great things about the prosthetics is that it leaves Jackson's options open for the future. If ear reconstructive surgery improves (and boy does it have a long way to go before I would consider it for anyone in my family) that option is there for him. If the airspace in his middle ear changes he still has the option to have his ear canals opened. If we had chosen reconstructive surgery this might not be true. He can also choose to keep using adhesive, or to have the titanium posts implanted... or whatever methods become available in the future, who knows how technology will change.

The main benefit of the prosthetics is just the way they look. They look like he was born with them, or that they grew overnight! I took him to the pediatrician he has had since he was 6 months old and he thought it was his natural ear. He tried to look in it and examine his "ear canal". Jackson's hearing aid might catch some attention but his lack of ears is never a distraction in public or at school anymore. I believe that having this done now has preserved his positive, outgoing personality. If he had gone through several more years of teasing at school I'm not sure how that would have changed him. I'll be forever grateful to Bob and to "Home Delivery" for what they did for our family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Stacey Wood".

Stacey Wood