

To People Considering a Prosthetic Ear,

In 1987 our daughter, Kristin Economos, was born with a birth defect called Microtia. This resulted in an inner and outer ear deformity, as well as a substantial hearing loss in her right ear.

When Kristin was just 9 years old she had her first ear reconstruction surgery. The 6 hour surgery involved putting in an ear implant and then grafting a large area of skin, removed from Kristin's stomach, for coverage. She stayed in the hospital for 6 days. Several months later they performed the 2nd surgery, to rearrange the skin to give the ear more definition. Then a 3rd surgery, to try and make the ear look more believable.

Within a month, the ear implant split open. This meant another surgery for Kristin (now 10 years old) to remove the infected ear and try a new one. Again, this involved a 6 hour surgery and another 6 days in the hospital. Then, several more surgeries were required to try and reshape the various parts of the tissue around the ear structure. Every single time a problem would develop with the reconstructed ear. Even at its best, it looked like a blob stuck on the side of her head. It always appeared very flat, and the details were never believable.

Over the next 8 years, she endured one surgery after another. After 13 surgeries failed to provide good results, we were referred to Dr. John Reinisch, a doctor in Los Angeles who was a forerunner in the ear reconstruction field. We flew to L.A. where Kristin had a 7 hour surgery, followed by several days of recovery in a hotel room. After returning to Des Moines, Kristin got busy packing for her upcoming trip. She had been invited to perform at Disneyworld with her other dance team members. At 13 years old, she had worked for nearly a year to earn the money for her trip. Two weeks before the scheduled trip, the new ear split open in several spots. Because of the open wounds, the risk of serious infection was very high, and meant it must be operated on as soon as possible. So instead of getting on the plane with her friends to go to Disneyworld, she and I got on a plane and flew back out to L.A. for her 15th ear reconstruction surgery. As usual, after shedding a few tears and confessing how disappointed she was, she looked for the positive and went on with her daily activities.

Within a few weeks the new ear implant split open. She was devastated. **She had another surgery, her 16th,** to remove the entire structure. Kristin had lost the desire to pursue getting an ear through any reconstruction surgery. **She**

was left with tremendous scarring on her abdomen, behind her natural ear, and all over the right side of her head and still had no right ear.

After feeling like there were no other options, we decided upon a prosthetic ear. Kristin's 17th and 18th surgeries were required to imbed 2 titanium screws into the bone along the side of her face. The bone anchors would enable a prosthetic ear to be attached to the side of her head.

In 2003 we drove back and forth to Iowa City, for many appointments for the prosthetic ear. Kristin was looking forward to finally getting an ear that looked fairly normal. The prosthetic ear she received was unbelievably disappointing. It looked very unnatural, and the less than perfect fit mean she had to use glue to help keep it secure. After several weeks of trying to make it work, Kristin, her dad and I realized this was not an acceptable solution.

After 18 surgeries and 9 years of dealing with all this, we were exhausted and thinking it was time to end our search. That is when I wrote out a prayer and told God I was officially resigning from trying to solve Kristin's ear problems. I vowed to trust God 100% with the outcome, whatever that might be. I trusted that if his plan was for Kristin not to have an ear, that He would give us peace with that. Or if there was a different solution, that he would put it right in front of our face. That is when everything started falling into place.

I was watching Oprah one afternoon and Bob Baron was the guest. I knew that if he was on The Oprah Show he had to be credible, and when I saw his results I was ecstatic. I felt he was the answer to our prayers. After several phone conversations with Bob, and then doing some research about his qualifications, we were ready to meet him. I learned that although he wasn't a doctor, he was a Certified Clinical Anaplastologist, as well as a gifted artist. In June, we flew out to Bob Baron's office in Ashburn, Virginia. Bob and Dr. Michael Singer began the process of creating a prosthetic ear for Kristin They first took impressions, then began making a gold bar that would attach to the posts she had in the bone. The ear would then attach to this gold bar, and be very secure. We were so impressed with Bob and Dr. Singer's talent, as well as their kindness.

About 7 weeks later, we went back to Virginia to have the prosthetic ear completed. Bob Baron made the silicone ear, made small adjustments for a perfect fit, and then carefully painted the finishing details. Kristin received her prosthetic ear on August 3rd and is very happy with the results. **It not only looks amazingly similar to her other "normal" ear, but now she can wear**

sunglasses, wear two earrings, and most importantly, it has improved her hearing! Bob's work is really incredible!

Unfortunately, many insurance companies are refusing to pay for prosthetic ears. A great looking prosthetic ear not only allows for eye glasses to be worn, improves the hearing capability, but also, makes a tremendous difference emotionally to so many children. The ear is an investment, and we are frustrated that insurance companies waste so much money for ear reconstructive surgeries, when a much less expensive, less invasive, and much better looking option is available.

All 3 local television stations interviewed Kristin prior to getting her ear from Bob, and then did follow-up interviews afterwards. All the reporters continue to be amazed at what a great attitude Kristin has about the whole thing. We are confident God will continue to use her experience for something good, as she completes the rest of her senior year of High School, and heads off to college.

Over the years, we have had a large "support group" of friends and family that helped us get through all the surgeries and hospital stays. As our way of saying thanks, and celebrating Kristin's happy ending, we held a huge Ear Celebration. We had over 100 friends attend, and Mr. Baron himself, came all the way from Maryland to join us. Everyone at the party was AMAZED at the results that Bob had produced. People just have no idea that such great looking prosthetic ears (and noses, eyes, etc.) are available.

It is our hope, that getting Kristin's story out will prevent many other children from being butchered by ear reconstructive surgeries. Bob Baron is passionate about saving children from this kind of tragedy, and we hope our story will help.

Sincerely,

Alicia Economos