

Date:11/17/04
Robert Barron
Custom Prosthetic Designs, INC.
20608 Gordon Park Square #150
Ashburn, Va. 20147

Otis Trotter
1200 13Th S.E.
Massillon, Ohio 44646

My experiences as a young child with a congenital ear atresia were not too negative. Except for the inquisitive and the inevitable question of “what happened to your ear” my life as a young boy was pretty normal. I do not have a vivid memory of being singled out and made fun of. A strong family unit may have served to buffer me from some of the psychic trauma I may have suffered on a subtle level. I engaged in the usual active activities that elementary school aged boys participated in; and my inclusion was actively encouraged. My speed and agility were valued attributes.

I remember looking in the mirror when I was a young boy. My impression of myself was pretty positive. I was rather content with my appearance except for the ear. I thought it would have been nice if I had two ears, but I did not dwell on it. It was a situation I felt I could live with. It seems that for me, most of the psychic trauma and disappointment arose once I started having surgical procedures in an attempt to correct or ameliorate the ear anomaly. For every procedure (I had at least four), I spent months healing up from it; and being physically restricted. Even though this was not very enjoyable, I was more than willing to endure it, for the doctors and nurses seemed to lead me to believe that the final results would be gratifying. I would have been happy for something close to normality.

Finally when I was about 19 years old the last operation was done. I was very excited as was the rest of my family and friends. When the bandages were removed (My family was not there), I was shocked by what I saw. The doctors acted like they were pleased with what they had done. They would say, “Oh I think we have achieved the results we were attempting”, or something to that effect. They also indicated that it would be better after the swelling went down.

Strangely, the more I looked at my ear in the hospital, and the more they tried to convince me that they had performed a successful ear reconstruction, the more I thought that maybe it was not that bad after all. When I left the hospital, I felt somewhat elated about it. After my family members saw my ear, their facial expressions could not disguise the psychological disconnect between what they saw and what they had expected. One of my brothers who has always been very blunt about his opinions said, “Your ear looked better before they did anything to it. It did not look gross.”

Not surprisingly, I became rather depressed about this situation. What started out as a situation I could live with ended up being something I was very unhappy about. I became more acutely aware of the stares and reactions of other people. The fact that I was a young man in my late teens, a time when most guys that age were having fun meeting members of the opposite sex, was emotionally traumatizing. Later on, long hair styles for African- American men became fashionable. I grew mine long, and was able to mask the problem for a few years.

Doctors should be honest with the children and their parents, and to not offer unrealistic promises. In my opinion, and I think the research supports this, that most

children fair better psychologically by doing nothing compared to subjecting them to years of reconstructive surgery that ultimately fall short of everyone's expectations.

Last year at the age of 49, I had a silicone ear prosthesis designed by Robert Barron of Custom Prosthetics in Ashburn, Va.. I have been very pleased with the results, and the reactions of others have been very positive as well.

If the science of anaplastology were as advanced then as it is today, I would not have hesitated to have had it done. In the process, I would have saved myself from enduring years of psychic and physical pain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Otis Trotter". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Otis Trotter