

Hannah was born in Colorado in the winter of 1987. A perfect baby, however; she had only one ear, this is called microtia. After a doctor examination we were told she was born with hemi facial microtia and microsomia. Microsomia is the underdeveloped bone construction on the right side of her face.

At the age of four was Hannah's first operation, a finger extender was put in her jaw. Everyday we turned a screw, resulting in the lengthening of her jaw. It fell out twice, so she had to have two more operations to put it back in place. Later we found out this was a new procedure on the jaw and still in its experimental phase.

Approximately one year later we learned of the Children's Craniofacial Association (CCA), this is a wonderful support group with lists of many specialists. CCA connected us with a surgeon in Texas, this doctor started with the construction of an ear for Hannah. He did advise us that we would be building an ear using cartilage from Hannah's rib cage and that things would not be perfect, nobody can make an ear as good as God. We were told that Hannah's body could accept the new ear, reject it or absorb it. We were given lots of information up front and all of our questions were answered, we felt as though this was the best option for Hannah to have an ear. It was exciting when we saw an ear taking shape after three operations. Unfortunately, the ear was eventually absorbed by her body and she was left with a small bump in the shape of an ear.

Next was some jaw surgery to give Hannah a jaw joint and make it stronger and longer. Once again a rib was used. This time the surgeons used the rib from the opposite side of her body and flipped it to make the joint. They also gave her a cheek bone.

Orthodontic spacers, oral surgery and braces followed.

By the time Hannah was twelve we learned of her severe scoliosis. Hannah has three hemi vertebrae causing extreme curves in her back. Surgery was pretty immediate and they fused the growth plates in her spine planning to stop the curve from getting worse. Less than a year later she had grown a couple of inches and we found the curve had worsened. Immediate surgery on her back was once again needed. This time they stabilized her spine with two rods and several hooks holding them in place. Hannah was fully recovered after six months and getting back into all of her activities. The following autumn the family moved to Idaho.

While living in Idaho we found a doctor in Salt Lake City, Utah who would continue and complete Hannah's jaw surgeries; which included straightening and alignment. Hannah always wanted to do something else with her ear, but she new that finishing the constructive surgery wasn't the way she wanted to go. Now that she was older we were letting her make more of the decisions, after all it was her life and future. About two years ago we were watching a TV show together and there were previews on for Montel. His next show was going to be about a miracle worker, retired from the CIA, who was changing people's lives with his artistic and scientific abilities. His name was Robert Barron. He was going to be on while Hannah was at basketball practice, she asked me to tape it for her. That evening when she got home she went downstairs and watched it. The next week she e-mailed Mr. Barron, without my knowledge. She gave him a brief history and explained her situation to him. To her amazement he responded to her the very same day. Hannah kept this to herself for a while because she new she wasn't done with surgeries. She wanted her jaw surgeries to be complete, that way they could put her new ear in a better more symmetrical place. She kept in contact with Mr. Barron for the next year updating him on her surgeries. She had to complete three more jaw surgeries.

Hannah decided on her final surgery. This was the first and only surgery that was her idea; she wanted it without being told she had to go through it. She was growing up, by now at the age of seventeen she knew what she sought after. With sixteen surgeries on her list, there was one more to be done to end almost two decades of surgeries.

Without talking to Mr. Barron, Hannah, asked her doctor to remove her right ear and ear lobe. She was questioned and tested about her decision to the point of tears each time. She kept telling me that she new what she wanted. So, she went in for surgery on August 30, 2004 to have a chin implant placed in her jaw to create a more symmetrical look and remove her ear that had been a part of her for about thirteen years. I was more nervous than she was. She was confident she was making the right decision, and I believe that she was. If there was any doubt in her mind she might have faltered when doctors began telling her that is wasn't what she wanted and that she could never take back this decision. Crying she stood up to her decision and went through with it.

When Hannah came home she loved the way she looked without her old constructed ear, which by the way didn't even come close to the appearance of a real ear. She would tell me she felt better without it even if she never got the chance to get a new ear made by Mr. Barron. We both regretted the ear constructive surgeries that she had to go through.

A while after getting used to her new appearance she contacted Mr. Barron. She was excited to write him and let him know that she was done with her other surgeries and she wanted to know the odds of receiving a prosthetic ear from him. Once again he responded the same day and told her he was so glad that she had the constructed ear taken off because it was harder to build silicon ears around the flawed constructed ears. He said that it would look more real without it because then he could just take a perfect impression from her good ear and make an exact replica of it to go on the other side.

It was a great relief to finally meet Mr. Barron. In early December 2004 was our first appointment. Mr. Barron was genuinely a great person and we had no doubts that Hannah had made the perfect decision. The beginning of January 2005 we went back to Virginia to complete Hannah's ear. It was awesome and Hannah looks great! She had tons of support from her family and friends.

Doctors had said she would be disappointed and that a prosthetic ear wouldn't stay on. So far they have been proven wrong it stays on during basketball, swimming, running, jumping, riding horses and everyday activities. Mr. Barron also pierced Hannah's ear for her. Now she is able to wear dangling earrings, glasses and sunglasses without them sliding down her face. It is tough looking back on the surgeries that Hannah had to go through not knowing that we could have avoided emotionally and physically tough surgeries. We are thankful that we found Mr. Barron and I know he really has changed and improved Hannah's life.

*Jill Shamholz*