How I Got Hear

My story starts just like any other middle class boy’s story. I am the second son born to two loving parents. According to my mother I was an easy baby. I was always happy and loved watching my big brother. I was always eager to follow his lead. Sometimes we would get into mischief together. My mother told me about a time when she was upstairs doing laundry and my brother and I got into the fridge. We pulled out a jug of iced tea and poured it all over the kitchen floor making a huge puddle. We gleefully drove our ride-on toys through it. We enjoyed many similar adventures together. To look at me, I seemed very normal. But something about me was very different from the other children. This difference would take quite a while to reveal itself. I didn’t feel different because it was what it was. It was all I knew.

My mom started to notice that I wasn’t talking when I turned one year old. When I got a bit older I was having difficulty speaking in a clear way. I still do to this day. At times it seemed like I was in another world. Other times I would climb on my mom or dad’s lap and take their face in my hands. I would try to read their lips to understand what they were saying. I would try so hard not only to understand, but to also get others to understand me. My parents were very concerned. So much so that we went to the doctor. I was referred to speech therapy and I started getting my hearing tested. I was told to put blocks in a bucket when I would hear a beep, but I would just put blocks in the bucket even if I couldn’t hear the beeps. This went on for two years.

Finally, my mom demanded that I be referred to another hearing clinic at Children’s Hospital. She could tell that something was wrong and it had to do with my hearing. I don’t remember the day but it was a day that changed the path of my life. Almost immediately the audiologist detected a problem. She hurried out of the room and tracked down the ENT in the next office. The truth came out. I was hearing impaired. My future wasn’t clear. Would I ever function normally? Would I have learning disabilities? Would my hearing loss get worse? There were so many questions and no answers.

Once they finally diagnosed me with hearing loss, I was given hearing aids. It took a while for me to adjust to them. I was hearing sounds I couldn’t hear for the first three years of my life. However, I could hear the world so much better and could finally realise what people were saying. A speech therapist would come to my house and work with me every week. My mother’s goal was to support me in the best way possible so I could be as “normal” as possible. My father, like most dads, thought I was perfect just the way I was. I started preschool and began to form friendships with other children besides my brother. It was there that I met many of the friends I have today. Despite this, everyday was a challenge. I would take my hearing aids out after a few hours because I was exhausted from all the listening I was doing. Sometimes if I didn’t like what someone was saying to me, I would look right at them and turn my hearing aids off. I also realized that books contained words and stories that I was eager to discover. After about a year in the hearing world, my speech normalised.

By the time I started elementary school, I was talking well and ready to start kindergarten. Because of the friendships I made in preschool, I was easily accepted by the other children. I would sometimes get the teachers to wear something called an “FM System. This device would receive their voice and feed it directly into my hearing aids. I could hear their voices as clearly as if they were speaking right into my ear. There would always be the odd kid that would ask me what my hearing aids were. It was no big deal though.

The answer was simple, “They are hearing aids. They help me hear.”

Sometimes the questions would get annoying. “Why do you need them?”

“I was born with hearing loss”

Once I got to Middle School things got better. The questions stopped. I was pretty much a normal guy. People seemed to understand or assume that I was born with it and I was still just like them. My hearing aids didn’t really affect me when it came to my school work and I was able to understand the lessons and produce high quality work. Sometimes I would get the odd stare and I could tell the person didn’t really know what they were or why I had them. Having my hearing aids was never a big issue.

High school is relatively the same. People mainly treat me the same as everyone else. I don’t feel different from other people. I feel like I can hear the same as everyone else but I will never know. The technology has gotten very good but I know for a fact that hearing something through a microphone is not the same as if it were with ordinary ear. I know for a fact that the way human ears isolate sound is not the same as the way hearing aids work. There are certain sounds I cannot hear even with hearing aids. I do miss some things. There are times when I miss things that people say. There is nothing I can do about that.

My hearing loss has actually worked in my favour at times. One day I was playing hockey. It was a big game that we needed to win to advance forward. My team was down by a few goals and my coach was getting frustrated but knew that we could win because we had been out-performing everyone all season. The problem was that their team was one step ahead and always intercepting our plays and outsmarting our defencemen. My coach knew that I had an FM system so he got the transmitter from my mom and started talking to me as I was out on the ice. He could tell me where to go and what my teammates were going to do. Using this tactic my line was starting to outsmart them and I was getting into the right spots. With his directions I managed to get a couple goals to tie it up with only seconds to spare. We had pushed the game to overtime. The game went into second overtime and my team was starting to get very tired and I was afraid we would let our guard down. The other team was in our zone and kept getting shot after shot and were able to pick it up afterwards. We simply couldn’t get out of our zone. Then, my coach told me to push up a little bit and get between the guys at the points, he knew that one of them would pass to the other. The other team passed to the right point and he passed toward the guy at the left point but I extended my stick and poke the puck forward and intercept the pass. Because I was in between the two defencemen were very far away from me. I was going in all alone. It had all come down to this, my heart was racing. I could feel their guys gaining on me. Right before I got to the goalie I deked to the right and the goalie moved with me and I was able to get the puck between his legs and win the game with a hat-trick. My team went crazy and rushed toward me to celebrate. We were so happy and my coach just gave me a smile. No one but the two of us knew the secret.

To be honest, people have a lot of different things to look at when they see me. No one says anything to me about my hearing aids. They don’t seem to care or maybe they just don’t want to ask. One thing I want them to know is that inside I am no different from them. I now know that no one is perfect and that every one of us has some kind of adversity or struggle. For some this can be an internal struggle. For others the struggle is obvious for everyone to see. As I move forward in my life I believe that I am well equipped to succeed in the world. I have also learned that life has ups and downs but it is important to continue to forge ahead. It is up to us to make the most with what life has given us.