

Hi,

My name is Peter Dankelson, and I would like to talk about a few things that make me different from you. Even though we've been in school for almost a whole year now, I know you were probably surprised when my ear fell off in class! I suppose that was pretty freaky, but for me it's just a typical day.

You see, I was born with a "small ear." It didn't grow with the rest of my body, so when I was five years old my entire family went to Washington D.C. to have a special big ear made by Mr. Robert Barron. He used to make disguises for people in the CIA to protect them during undercover work. Isn't that cool? You should see his office; it's full of ears, fingers, eyes, and noses. Sometimes he makes big ears for kids like me and other times he helps people who have been burned in a fire or had to have surgery from cancer. He is an amazing artist, and a very special friend to have. Mr. Barron is going to make me another big ear this summer since I've grown quite a bit over the last three years.

I have to take my ear off every day at bedtime. My Mom puts it back on in the morning before school. We use a special glue to make it stick to my head. I ran into another kid in the hallway the other day and that's why my ear came off. Actually, it's a pretty funny trick to play on people that don't know about it. One of my favorite things is to try and trick my doctors into examining my pretend ear because sometimes they forget that it's not real!

Sometimes when people first get to know me, they wonder about how I look a little bit different than they do. I run and play and like to be silly just like all other first graders. You may see some scars on my face and notice that I wear a band-aid on my neck. The bones in my face do not grow the same as yours, and in order to breathe and eat I have to have surgeries to make them bigger. I had a lot of trouble breathing when I was born, so my doctors gave me a trach. A trach is a breathing tube that goes in your neck. I had the trach for four years before I was able to breathe normally through my mouth and nose. In fact, I had to have several surgeries on my face to help place and lengthen bones. I wear the band-aid because there is still an open hole in my neck. It helps protect me from icky germs.

When I was born I was not able to learn to take a bottle because I was so tiny and weak. The doctors put a special "button" in my belly called a feeding tube that helped me eat. I still use my feeding tube because I don't eat enough on my own to grow big and strong. I'm still learning to chew and swallow food, so don't be surprised if I don't eat the same way you do. I'm sure you have all noticed my special shakes that I drink for lunch. We call them "brain shakes" because Mom says they will make me smart.

Thanks for letting me share some of my differences with you. Just remember that the next time you see someone who looks different, don't be afraid to say hi and maybe even make a new friend.

Love, Peter - April 2008

