Choosing Hope
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For Bruce Beacom and his young son, those chimes built into the start-up program of Bruce’s hearing aids have become part of a daily ritual. When Bruce’s 5-year-old son wakes up each morning, he enters his father’s room afloat with excitement and asks his daddy to put his hearing aids in. Bruce then puts in his hearing aids and turns them on.

Together, father and son patiently count down with fingers in the air—five, four, three, two, one—as the chimes sound off in Bruce’s ears and his hearing aids kick into gear. The instant they reach zero, Bruce’s son showers his dad in a symphony of words, conveying each and every pressing thought he wants to share.

It’s almost ironic how such treasured moments as these can come from some of life’s most trying twists. For Bruce, these are moments he’ll never take for granted—because at one time, they seemed unimaginable.

Bruce is a singer, songwriter and guitarist. He and his band have performed at such iconic venues as the Troubadour, the House of Blues in Los Angeles, the Viper Room, and The Roxy Theatre. He’s also a professional sound engineer who’s been awarded honorary certificates three times from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences for his contributions as a sound mixer to The Amazing Race—CBS’s Emmy Award-winning reality competition program. He’s worked on other notable shows as a sound engineer, including Bravo’s Top Chef, ABC’s American Idol, The Bachelor and Bachelor in Paradise, and HBO’s Project Greenlight, season 4—produced by Matt Damon and Ben Affleck—for which Bruce was nominated for an Emmy for sound mixing. He also works the Red Carpet at the Oscars.

Bruce manages all this with the help of hearing aids, which bring his hearing up to 80%. One of the four programmed channels of Bruce’s hearing aids is specifically tailored for sound mixing and making music.
“With everything I’ve been through, I now clearly understand that when a challenging event occurs in our lives, it’s not the event that defines us, but it’s how we choose to handle it.”

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It’s an impressive list of accomplishments. But for Bruce, getting to this point was a hard-fought, often frightening—and at times, seemingly bleak—battle.

**A Sharp Turn in the Road**

When he was in his late 20s, Bruce began to experience “a horrible and deafening” ringing in his ears that steadily worsened. It was “like an internal siren that was so loud, it was incapacitating.”

By the time he was 33, he had 95% hearing loss—and he didn’t know why. Desperately trying to save his hearing, Bruce went to numerous medical appointments and was tested for one thing after another.

Still, he was never given a clear explanation as to why his hearing was disintegrating. From doctors simply saying it was severe tinnitus, to significant misdiagnoses of the underlying cause, the entire experience was discouraging.

For an aspiring musician earning his living as a sound engineer, the loss of hearing was devastating enough. But just shy of the time that his hearing began to take a turn, Bruce had proposed to his now wife, actress Holly Reiser—and the uncertainty of his situation made it even more stressful for both of them.

**The Window of Hope**

It took Bruce more than three years of searching for answers. But with Holly’s constant support, he finally found them—starting with one life-changing visit to audiologist Sol Marghzar, whom Holly serendipitously found through an online search in 2003.

The couple went to the appointment with the intention of getting new hearing aids for Bruce—as the pair he’d been using for the past 18 months were no longer adequate for his still-declining hearing. In fact, Bruce was struggling to such an extent that throughout the audiology appointment, Holly had to repeat everything that was said directly into Bruce’s ear—just so he could follow the conversation.

When Dr. Marghzar said he wasn’t willing to sell Bruce any hearing aids until he had surgery, Bruce and Holly were more than a bit stunned.

Dr. Marghzar urged Bruce to go to the House Clinic in Los Angeles to be assessed for a special surgery. He strongly suspected that otosclerosis was the cause of Bruce’s hearing loss. He wanted Bruce to undergo some blood tests and CT scans to confirm the diagnosis.

It was the first time that any medical professional had mentioned the word otosclerosis to Bruce. In fact, it was the first time Bruce had ever heard of it. He had no knowledge of any family history of the inherited disease.

Bruce recalls the exchange vividly: “That was the exact moment when Holly and I felt like there was finally hope. It was the first time that I didn’t feel so lost.”

An abnormal overgrowth of bone in the middle ear is associated with otosclerosis, and it’s what causes the Prague working on Spotify’s streaming content *Music Happens Here*. Bruce working at the 89th Oscars Red Carpet ceremony, February 2017.
mechanical problems that lead to loss of hearing in people with the condition. More specifically, the build-up of extra bone stops one of the three tiny bones in the middle ear from vibrating like it should, limiting the transmission of sound from the middle to the inner ear, from which signals are sent along the auditory nerve to the brain where they’re interpreted for meaning. The stapes is the bone in the middle ear that’s affected by otosclerosis.

Recognizing the urgency of Bruce’s situation—and empathetic to Bruce and Holly’s exhaustion, given all the confounding information that they’d already been given in their search for an accurate diagnosis—Dr. Marghzar personally put Bruce in touch with surgeon William H. Slattery, III, and was able to get him scheduled for an expedited appointment.

Although he wouldn’t sell Bruce any hearing aids that day, Dr. Marghzar gladly loaned him a high-quality pair that would allow Bruce to continue to work and communicate in his daily life.

Rebuilding: 2004–2008

Over the course of the next several years—and under the attentive care of Dr. Slattery at the House Clinic in Los Angeles—Bruce underwent four special surgeries called stapedectomies to restore as much of his hearing as possible. By removing the diseased bone in the middle ear that causes the conductive hearing loss associated with otosclerosis—and by replacing it with prosthetic bone—the specialized procedure provides a new mechanism for transmitting sound waves to the inner ear.

While most cases of otosclerosis require just one surgery for each ear, Bruce needed four, two for each ear.

In total, the surgeries spanned the course of roughly four years. With each surgery, Bruce and Holly put their wedding on hold.

Today, Bruce has titanium prosthetic bones in both his ears. As a result, 60% of his hearing was restored. With hearing aids fitted by Dr. Marghzar, he’s been able to gain an additional 20% of his hearing ability—for about 80% in both ears.

Making the Diagnosis

Bruce is emphatic that finding the right hearing care professional made all the difference in his ability to appropriately address his hearing loss. It took him more than three years to get an accurate diagnosis.

“Dr. Marghzar cared more than anyone else I’d seen previously,” Bruce says. “He dug deeper and identified the otosclerosis behind my hearing loss. That turned my ‘losing battle’ into an ‘uphill battle’—and eventually, into ‘a battle to be won.’”

When Hearing Life asked Dr. Marghzar what made him suspect that Bruce had otosclerosis, he explained it like this:

Otosclerosis causes a conductive hearing loss—which means there’s a physical problem that stops sound from moving through the middle ear. Patients with conductive hearing loss can hear better through the vibrations of their skull—which are transferred to the inner ear directly—than they do by the normal propagation of sound through the ear. Bruce could hear the sounds when I placed the bone conductor on his mastoid bone much louder than when I put it next to his ear. Therefore, I was looking for a conductive hearing loss. In patients with otosclerosis, the hallmark in audiologic diagnosis is the presence of a notch in bone conduction thresholds at 2 kHz. This is called the Carhart notch.
In the early years of his hearing loss, Bruce was able to keep working as a sound engineer: “I’d raise my headphone volume to feel the vibration and pay close attention to the visual readings on the sound VU meters—which showed me if I had good sound levels.”

When it comes to his music, Bruce says, “I’ve adapted by playing my acoustic guitar as an electric. I can feel the acoustic vibrate, which puts me more in tune with the instrument.”
Embracing the Future
At last, in 2008, Bruce and Holly had a beautiful wedding among supportive family and friends. Their son was born in 2014.

Now, the simple act of communicating is a blessing that Bruce thankfully counts each day.

Yet, he also acknowledges that he’ll always have to remain vigilant in his efforts to preserve his hearing. From the very start, Bruce made a personal pledge to choose hope—and to never let his hearing loss stop him from living his life as fully as he can, or to allow it to deter him from pursuing his dreams.

Over the years, Bruce has had to learn to be an advocate for himself. In sharing his story, he hopes to be an advocate for others.

He wants people of all ages to understand the value of hearing. But he also wants people of all hearing abilities to understand the value of people. Undoubtedly, losing your hearing is a difficult and trying experience. But having hearing loss doesn’t define an individual.

Above all, Bruce hopes that his story will help others find the courage and determination they’ll need when faced with their own challenges.

And if, by chance, you ever ask Bruce what single word has the sweetest sound, his answer will be quick: “Daddy.”

Platinum Pennies
In late 2002, Bruce started recording his second album, *Platinum Pennies*. A year later, he was almost completely deaf. But Bruce persevered—and he prevailed. In 2009, the record was released.

“Platinum Pennies is a testament of what it simply means to hear. During the early stages of its recording, I was diagnosed with a genetic hearing disorder known as otosclerosis. Over the next few years, I underwent four ear surgeries on separate occasions to try to save my hearing. There were many times when it appeared as if I’d never hear again. So I prayed, went under the blade, continued to write, continued to play, then yet again, went under the blade—three more times. To this very day, I pray. I’ve got prosthetic bones in both ears and have to wear hearing aids. But I can still hear because of it, and I’m forever thankful. *Platinum Pennies* is an oxymoron and a metaphor for life. Platinum is the most precious metal and pennies are the least valued monetary unit. Never overlook the smallest things in life—often they become the most valuable. Turn those pennies into platinum, y’all!” —Bruce Beacom

When you listen to Bruce’s music, you can hear an eclectic mix of rock, blues, punk, funk and jazz—all influenced by his growing up in the Washington, D.C., area, and having developed his style as a musician in both New York City and Los Angeles. Bruce is now working on a third record.

“I’m amazed at how Bruce maintains his career in sound and continues to play his music in spite of his daily struggles to hear. It’s a testament to his perseverance and positive outlook. I hope his story is an inspiration to others.” —Holly Beacom
“I’m beyond thankful that God gave me the strength to persevere and not become a victim of the circumstances that had befallen me—but to overcome them.”