



Princess Maggie and the Magic Ears

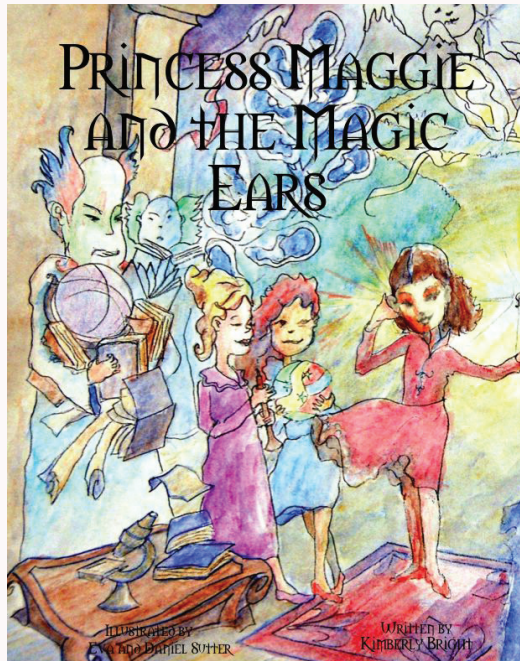
By Douglas L. Beck

Often in fairy tales there is conflict or jealousy between princesses and queens. We've all read stories about beautiful young princesses and crotchety old queens. But in the real world, if you're a princess, it's good to have a queen who loves you.

In the case of Princess Maggie, the queen is her mom, Kimberly Bright. Kimberly wrote a book, *Princess Maggie and the Magic Ears*, for her daughter to help her cope with hearing loss and her bright pink hearing aids. Of course, little girls (and particularly princesses) tend to choose bright pink things, such as the bright pink Oticon behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids that Maggie chose. Everybody notices things that are bright and pink. Naturally, it goes without saying that being different is almost always difficult—perhaps even more so when you're a young princess, leaning toward bright and pink accessories, while attending the royal elementary school.

Long ago (6 years) and far away (in Indiana) as Princess Maggie was entering day school, Queen Kimberly made the correct and accurate observation that young Maggie wasn't hearing properly. Mothers often know these things. The pediatrician insisted (time and time again) that it was just a head cold, just a little fluid in the ears that was causing just a little temporary hearing loss. It wasn't.

Kimberly eventually slew the insurmountable dragon (metaphorically speaking),



thus allowing the queen and princess to travel to glorious Bloomington, where the princess saw not only the royal otolaryngologist, but also—the audiologist! This dynamic duo diagnosed the young princess with bilateral serous otitis media and hearing loss. Tympanostomy tubes (unfortunately, not pink) were placed at age 3 years, yet the hearing loss remained. The princess began wearing hearing aids at 4 years of age.

After the audiologist fitted the young princess with bilateral hearing aids, Maggie heard (for the first time ever) the sounds of birds and cicadas in the royal woods. Indeed, she even started to turn

down the TV and radio whilst in the castle, making the royal residence a quieter place for everyone else!

Nowadays, more than 95% of all children are screened for hearing loss before leaving their birth hospital.¹ Some 90% of all children screened and identified with hearing loss will attend mainstream classrooms by age 5 or 6 years.² But when Maggie was born on November 8, 1998, the situation was very different. Indeed, in 1993, fewer than 5% of all babies born in this country were screened for hearing loss.

Princess Maggie turns 11 later this year. She's a solid student. Although Queen Kimberly has to occasionally review and re-instruct new teachers about preferential seating and noises in the classroom, Maggie has been a cheerleader, has lots of friends and hobbies, plays soccer, and plans to learn to play guitar. She's doing great.

In the real world, if you're a princess, it's good to have a queen who loves you!

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2. Smaldino J, Flexer C: Classroom acoustics: Personal and soundfield FM and IR systems. In Madell J, Flexer C, eds., *Pediatric Audiology*. New York: Thieme Medical Publishers, 2008: 192-202.

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