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A Mentor to Us All

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I met Marlene Bagatto at Western University in a stats class in 1999. I was in 3rd year, and she was in 4th. Since she was close to graduating, I asked about her intentions when she was done. She said she was going to grad school for Audiology. Embarrassing as it is to admit now, I had never heard of the field. But, she told me that Western was one of the best schools in the country for Audiology. So, I looked into it, and after a gap year (I needed a break from school), I applied and was accepted. Marlene deserves to be featured in a special issue like this on her own accord and celebrate her accomplishments. But, for now, she was my gateway to a profession I love and the people who make it so great. In this special issue, we celebrate one of the greatest humans in our field, Susan Scollie.

I first met Susan in the summer of 1999. At the time, I had been hired for a summer job in Don Jamieson's lab developing online modules for a hearing science class. Susan was working as a research Audiologist with Richard Seewald and had a project she wanted some help with over the summer. I was thrilled. Susan wanted to explore the maximum output of hearing aids and whether there was likely any long-term risk of damaging hearing. The project's outcome has faded into the graveyard of my mind, but the real outcome was that I had found an incredible mentor. She was brilliant, funny, caring, and just plain cool.

Over the course of my training, Susan was always there to help explain concepts, teach me new

spreadsheet tricks (she is the spreadsheet master), and, most importantly, inspire in me a desire to be curious about everything. I wanted to be a researcher too!

Fast forward to 2001. I graduated and took a joint position 50% in the HA Leeper Speech and Hearing Clinic and 50% working as a research Audiologist on a grant with the National Centre for Audiology. That year a position had come up for a research audiologist (preferably with a PhD that I did not yet possess) in Edmonton at the Institute for Reconstructive Sciences in Medicine. One of their core activities was Bone Anchored Hearing Aids (BAHA). Several colleagues slid this advertisement onto my desk, and each time, I thought…" yeah, but who does BAHA?"). Then our graduating class brought a representative from Entific. At the time, they were the sole manufacturer of bone-anchored devices, and their president described how wonderful the outcomes were with these devices and how happy the patients were (I can attest quite fully that this was and is true). However, afterward, Susan and I talked about things like how do you set the output? How do you replicate a successful fitting? What units are we considering? Can we prescribe and verify these things? You may know that I took that position out west and have been here for the last 20 years, trying my best to still answer some of these questions.

A big part of why I came here and a huge part of why we've been a little successful improving some of our knowledge in the bone conduction field, is because of the near-constant and never properly recognized mentoring of Susan Scollie. Susan kept providing guidance whenever I asked. Even though she herself has such a busy research program and a busy life, she always took a call from out west when I was stumped.

It may look on paper like we are collaborators in some of our published work, but I always think of her as a mentor who has never been properly recognized for all the support, guidance, and friendship she has given. Susan was never formally a part of my training, so I have never written in a document how much I cherish and value the guidance that you have provided me these last 23 years. I hope that this small letter of thank you comes close to serving that purpose. I'm guessing many of your other mentees are reading this and share a similar journey with Susan. Whether in a lecture she gives, a formal meeting or over a beer at the bar, you leave feeling smarter and more steady in your approach to addressing whatever you discussed with her. Susan, I thank you for all your help in my career. I'm guessing others reading this likely feel the same. You are a mentor to us, and I cannot thank you enough.