

Todd Ricketts, my (very) big brother

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It's been such a long time since I first met or heard of Todd, I actually don't remember when it would have been. It just seems like he's always been there as a cornerstone of the hearing aid research community. That said, my oldest specific memories happen back in the day when the famous Vanderbilt Hearing Aid Workshops were going on. The group at Vandy held four of these a year, two on adult fitting and two on pediatric fitting, in the late 1990's through early 2010's or so. They were led by Gus Mueller, and featured Todd for his review of cutting-edge hearing aid technologies every time. For a decade or so, our team was invited down for a hands-on DSL day as part of the pediatric workshops. Typically, two of us would travel down to Nashville and land just in time for Gus's Divey Bar Tour, which was a guided walk through the honkytonks that gave various country music stars the kickoff to their careers. This was when I first learned that no matter where you are in the world, if you are out late in a strange city, there are way worse people to have around than Todd, who is able to keep one eye on the fun and the other eye on making sure everyone is ok! Back then, it was pretty common for conversation to turn to his past experiences as a college cheerleader, followed by an offer of a demo. Many are we who have been twirled over Todd's 6'7" frame on a downtown street after he says "Ok stand stiff", followed by what can best be described as a vestibular assessment.

Unless you have been living under a rock, you already know that Todd is also a legend in hearing aid research. My favourite in this is his work on directionality. If you know anything about which directional microphones work well for whom, when, where, and why, you probably have Todd to thank. Is the directional array oriented to the frontal-incidence speech signal? Todd knows why this matters. Should the directional program use low-frequency gain compensation? Todd told us what to do. How do directional hearing aids work across distances or in reverberation? Todd's studies picked those factors apart. If this was his only line of work it would be impressive on its own, but remember that he's also worked on listening for kids in classrooms, bilateral cochlear implantation, and listening effort. These topics are tackled with an impressive team of colleagues, speaking to his collaborative nature. It's not only the quality of his work or the expertise of his trainees, it's his generosity. Let me explain... although we expect that organization of conferences, journals and textbook writing are things that "professors do", we actually don't get much dedicated time for these things. Instead, we wedge them in around our teaching, departmental meetings, and research student supervision. In this, Todd has been nearly super-human. He has chaired the International Hearing Aid Conference (IHCON), which is a great honour that indicates the immense respect of his peers around the world. His contributions to evidence-based practice guidelines through the American Academy of Audiology and to industry standards through the American National Standards Institute have been sustained and substantial. Overall, Todd is one of only a handful of hearing aid researchers in the United States who have demonstrated this level and nature of leadership. Every time I use his textbook in my course, I am simply amazed by the wealth of

information and therefore the amount of work that must have gone into it from Todd and from his co-authors Gus Mueller and Ruth Bentler. Writing this book had to have been nothing less than a labour of love. For sure, he's a giant in our field.

Balanced against his love for his family, I look at what he's given us and am only amazed. It speaks to his ever-present kindness and mentorship. Todd served as a reviewer for my own PhD, creating a kind of bond that stems from knowing that you share knowledge of a big chunk of chapters that few others have actually read. Maybe that's why, especially in the early days of my career, if I had a tricky question or a difficult problem, I always knew that I could reach out to Todd for some sage advice from my professional big brother. He always said yes to a phone call when I asked, even though I am sure he was really busy. I have since spoken with him about the future careers of his trainees, and seen over and over how much he cares for their future successes. Thank you Todd for your work, for your constant encouragement and words of wisdom, for getting me out of a smoke-filled bar in Amsterdam when I was pregnant ("We gotta get you outta here!"), and for giving me the only cheerleading experience I ever had and ever will have.