

# NO EXCUSES: TAYLOR SEAVEY'S ROAD TO BETTER HEARING

By Sarah Bricker on Apr 7, 2015



Taylor with Starkey Hearing Technologies Founder and CEO Bill Austin.

In the front room at Starkey Hearing Technologies' Center for Excellence in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, a young man sits in a raised leather chair. He stares fixedly at the TV screen on the wall before him, his hands resting calmly on the tops of his faded jeans as a slender scope is inserted into his ear. The tiny camera travels along the canal of his right ear, magnifying small inner ear hairs and peachy skin. It exits and proceeds to enter his left ear.

Taylor Seavey, 23, smiles at the screen, and his mom, Siri Seavey, laughs. "You're not supposed to take the beach home with you," Taylor's father, Darian Seavey, says. Tiny particles of sand sit in Seavey's ear, a reminder of a beach swim from awhile back.

As a triathlete, getting sand in his ear just comes with training. Being profoundly deaf doesn't.

## Living in Silence

Taylor was born August 17, 1991 in Seward, Alaska. He lost his hearing when he was less than a year old, and while a sure cause is unknown, Taylor's father said his best guess is a negative side effect from infant vaccinations.

"He could hear things when he was really little, and then all of the sudden he couldn't," Darian said. "We'll never know for sure, but he was a healthy baby so it being a side effect was really the only option left."

"The hardest part was finding out initially," Siri said. "It was indicated at seven months and confirmed at 11 months ... it was just getting over that shock that was so hard."

As a child, Taylor wasn't completely deaf, but he couldn't hear normally either. He was sort of stuck in the middle in a town with a relatively closed off deaf community, according to his mother. Siri taught herself sign language from videos and said a lot of her motivation came from a conference for persons with disabilities where some

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people came up to her and told her to give her son up to a deaf family.

“They said we’d never be able to truly understand what Taylor was going through,” she said. “That was such motivation to me to really learn sign language because he was only going to learn as fast as I could learn.”

Today, Taylor speaks English sign language (Signed Exact English) and some American Sign Language (ASL). He said he prefers English sign because it’s more exact while ASL has its own rhythm and doesn’t give him the exact words or meanings in a conversation. “It’s hard to understand and really get to know someone when I don’t know exactly what they are saying, which is why I prefer English,” he said.

What makes Taylor unique is that he’s an accomplished triathlete, and he is often the only deaf athlete competing.

### **Running in Silence**

Taylor ran his first triathlon at 16: a sprint triathlon in Seward, Alaska, that included a 500-yard swim, five-mile bike ride and a 5K run.

“I was bored with competitive swimming and wanted to do something else,” he said. He’d been swimming since he was 14 and had decided to try the triathlon for a change of pace.

As of April 2015, Taylor has competed in more than 50 triathlons. His original dream was to be a professional triathlete, but after founding [Life Force Multisport](#), He said he also wants to continue his coaching career and work more with other deaf athletes and individuals.

“I want to be there for them,” Taylor said. “There is always a way to work around the hearing loss. If I can do it, anyone can. You just have to find a way to make it work for you so that it can be a benefit. I use mine for better focus, so I don’t get distracted during races.”

Even with incredible focus, competing and training present difficulties for Taylor – and sometimes dangers. When he was training in Alaska, the dangers were bears and moose. In Seattle it was cars — he was hit by a car once — and now that he’s in Maine, he says the dangers are bears, moose and cars.

“It’s just one of the things that comes with it,” Taylor said of the difficulties he faces while training and competing. “You can’t always know what they want you to do during a race, and I’ve had people send me the wrong way. If a mountain biker is behind me, I try to be as good as I can to move over, but it gets hard, especially on a single lane track, and I get distracted because I have to look back. I’ve hit a few trees doing that.”

Taylor has competed in triathlons across the U.S., including the Maui Off-Road World Championships, multiple XTERRA Championships, the ITU Cross Triathlon World Championship and more. One of his most memorable competitions was the 2014 Lobsterman Triathlon in Maine. He placed second overall out of 600 competitors, and he was first out of 32 competitors in the 20- to 24-year-old age group.

It was Taylor’s determination, passion and professional triathlete ambitions that resulted in his entry winning Seattle Seahawks Derrick Coleman’s NO EXCUSE FOUNDATION essay contest in the summer of 2014.

### **On the Way to Hearing Aids**

“I applied for the contest because I saw how many people Starkey was helping and Derrick Coleman inspired me,” Taylor said. “I thought ok, here we go, let’s see what we can do with this.”

In his essay, he wrote about training and competing as a deaf athlete. He wrote of the challenges he faced, the hazards and obstacles he had to face and his initial experience with hearing aids.

The following is an excerpt from his essay:

*"Being deaf and doing triathlons has taught me that no matter what, if you have enough focus, passion, and determination, you will reach your goals and go beyond what you thought your limits were ... Learning to hear with the help of hearing aids could possibly be the biggest challenge in my life that I will have the opportunity to overcome."*

As a result of winning the contest, Starkey Hearing Technologies worked with the NO EXCUSE FOUNDATION to bring Taylor to the Starkey World Headquarters to be fitted with Starkey hearing aids.

Taylor had tried hearing aids when he was younger but gave up on them due to their ineffectiveness.

"He wasn't getting a lot from the hearing aids at that point," Darian said. "We tried again when he was 11, but he didn't like the noise they made. He told us he'd wear them if everyone was quiet. When you're deaf you don't really know if what you're hearing is supposed to sound that way or not, so it really is just a matter of deciding if the sound is worth it or not."

Cochlear implants were also an option when Taylor was younger, but his parents decided not to do them. "We've always just wanted for him what he's wanted for himself, and cochlear implants are such an invasive thing," Darian said. "We said we'll let him make that decision on his own when he's older, because you can't go back from it."

Suma Khalil, Au.D., tested Taylor at the Starkey Hearing Technologies Center for Excellence on April 6. The test results showed that he was completely deaf in his right ear and has a profound sensorineural hearing loss with some ability to hear a few low-frequency ranges in his left ear. Khalil's goal was to give Taylor as much sound as possible.

"Having a little sound to double with his lip reading will help him pick up speech better," she said.

Taylor's left ear was fitted with a high-powered receiver-in-canal (RIC) hearing aid.

### **Working With a Hearing Aid**

Starkey Hearing Technologies CEO Bill Austin explained that the hearing aid should make listening easier for Taylor. "If he can see you and hear some of the sounds, he will have an easier time listening and understanding words. He has zero speech discrimination, but he can hear the rhythm of the sounds. It's better than just seeing and hearing nothing."

Siri said that his voice sounds different and that she can see he's hearing things he's never heard before. "It would really be amazing if it works," she said. "It could really benefit him to have that confidence, to feel like he could fit in better and to be able to communicate better."

But for Taylor, it's not about confidence or fitting in. It's about doing what he loves and doing it better.

"It's more about interacting with people than anything else," he said. "I want to be able to do more than just coach via email. I'm hearing things I've never heard before. I used to be afraid to go out on my own, but I'm not anymore."

By: [Sarah Bricker](#)

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