

Over twenty years ago, our newborn son Nick, our youngest of four, was admitted to Egleston. Andy, and I were told Nick had a horribly messed up heart. Dr. Kanter performed Nick's first heart surgery when Nick was five days old, another at three and a half months and another at one year old. Two weeks before Nick's second birthday he received his heart transplant and became the 15th one at Egleston. That was almost nineteen years ago.

With a heart transplant, Dr. Kanter promised me that Nick would have quality of life. Part of that quality of life has included attending preschool, catching the bus with his two brothers and sister on the first day of elementary school, attending middle school, where he was on the wrestling team and won second place in the county in his weight class. The quality of life was playing on the middle school and high school tennis team, being the manager for the high school football team, graduating from high school and now attending college. In August, he added being in his sister's

wedding to the list. Nick has learned to water ski, snow ski, drive (that was almost worse than the heart transplant), seen 49 of the 50 states, visit 13 countries in Europe and attended the 2008 Pro Bowl where he met Payton Manning, including girlfriends and learning to ride a bike while in France.

For me that quality of life has meant having all the chairs filled at the table when our family sits down to dinner, the birthdays celebrated, all the headlocks Nick puts me in before wrestling me to the floor and making him kiss me and whisper in my ear that he loves me when he wants something. Nick's transplant not only added quality of life to his life, but to his family and friends lives also.

We are grateful everyday for the gift of life Nick has been given. To his donor family we say thank you. Those aren't, nor will they ever be, adequate words to express our family's gratitude. But they are all we have. And we mean them from the bottom of our hearts.

Many people see a hospital as a negative place, but for us Egleston has always been a place where Nick was treated like a king

and where the staff cared about him. We are thankful such a quality hospital was close when Nick needed a transplant and care since.

I think the heart transplant team knows how we feel about them. You've not only cared for Nick but you have become part of our family. You've helped to raise Nick. You showed your best again this past March when Nick needed a new aorta after disease had damaged his old one. Once again you were there for him. You do good work, never doubt it. Our family appreciates and loves you all.

It has been a wild and often scary ride having a child with a heart transplant but all those quality of life moments have made it worth it.