



I've been an organ donor since I got my driver's license many years ago. I really never understood the impact of that decision until a heart transplant was the only way for my daughter to survive. I know in my heart if it wasn't for our donor family our story would have a much different ending.

Ella Kate was born in March of 2016 after a normal pregnancy. But she was anything but typical. She was dark gray and didn't breathe for the first eight minutes of her life. At the time I thought those were the longest eight minutes of my life. Little did I know. Later that night her oxygen levels dropped very low again and she was air lifted to Levine Children's Hospital. The next day we learned there was a large mass taking up over 80% of Ella Kate's heart. We were told she wouldn't survive the weekend. We decided to make the most of every moment we had with our sweet baby girl and we prayed for a miracle. With no medical explanation, Ella Kate did survive that weekend.

We spent almost 3 months in the NICU. It felt as though we were on a never-ending roller coaster. Somehow, she defied all the odds and after 63 days in the hospital, we were able to bring Ella Kate home. The mass in her heart had not changed but she was able to survive with it there.

When Ella Kate was 6-months-old, doctors told us a heart transplant was her only chance at survival. Those were tough words to hear but I was excited because it was the first time we had ever been given hope for Ella's future. She was added to the transplant list when she was 8 months old. And the waiting process for a new heart began. I'm so thankful we were able to wait at home and enjoy our time together. A few months later, Ella Kate wasn't doing very well. She was gasping for air and not eating. In late January we got up and went to church like any other Sunday. During worship our pastor stopped the music and had the congregation pray over Ella Kate. We begged God for a miracle. On the way home from church that day the call came that changed our lives forever. It was our cardiology team calling to say they found the perfect heart for Ella.

I can still feel the emotions of that day. I remember the joy I felt that Ella Kate had her first real chance at life. I was also terrified of the surgery my precious baby was going to face. Then the emotion came that hit me and completely took my breath away. As a transplant mom you try not to think about the family on the other side of your story. But that's impossible. I immediately began praying for our donor family. I will never be able to express how thankful I am that a family made the decision to save others lives during their darkest moment. I promised myself I would always hold Ella Kate a little bit tighter because I'm holding their baby too.

After her surgery, Ella Kate's doctors said words I had never heard, "Ella Kate is rock stable." And for the first time in her life, she was pink. Within days she was sitting up, playing, and making new noises. Just 11 days after her transplant, we took Ella Kate home.

Each and every day I am thankful for the family that made the decision to save others lives. I hope they know their story didn't end that day. They not only saved Ella Kate's life but they saved mine as well. Organ transplantation is truly a miracle in action. Ella Kate is now a thriving typical 4-year-old girl. She is the best big sister to her 1-year-old twin brothers.

We have been blessed with the very best medical team over the past few years. To anyone who works in the medical field, we thank you for facilitating the miracle of organ donation.

Every time I share Ella Kate's story, I hope that people take away a few things. First of all, if you haven't made the choice to be an organ, eye, and tissue donor, I hope you do. I always pray that when someone hears our story, they never give up, because God is still in the miracle business.