



On October 21, 2015, we welcomed our son, Travis Jr., into the world and hopped on a roller coaster of highs and lows that we never could have imagined. As we left the station, we were so excited to embark on a journey as new parents with a seemingly healthy baby boy in tow. We were taking in all of the joys of parenthood.

We hit our first sudden drop on the roller coaster on January 28, 2016, when we took our son to the pediatrician after noticing that he was fussy, breathing abnormally, and throwing up after feedings. We were rushed to the hospital and told that our son suffered from dilated cardiomyopathy. His heart was so enlarged that it was pressing on his left lung, causing it to collapse. A few days later, the doctors told us that our son's own heart would not be strong enough to keep him alive for another month, and our best option was a heart transplant.

My husband and I knew that life would take us on a number of ups, down, and unexpected turns, but we never thought that we would face the possibility that our son may never have a chance to share those experiences with us. On February 5, 2016, he was placed on the transplant waiting list as Status 1A, meaning that he was in the most urgent need of a transplant due to the severity of his condition. Three days later, he had a procedure to be placed on a ventricular assistive device (VAD), also known as a Berlin Heart, that would help his heart pump blood through his body. This machine would keep him alive while awaiting a transplant.

We spent three and a half months in the intensive care unit waiting on the news that a donor heart was available. Things that we took for granted before admission into the hospital, such as an outdoor stroll or enjoying the warmth of the sun, now required doctor's approval and nurse escort.

The day that we received the offer for a heart was extremely bittersweet. We knew that our son would now have a second chance at life - a chance to play his first little league soccer game, a chance to learn how to ride a bike, a chance to simply go to school. Unfortunately, these were memories that our donor and donor's parents would no longer have a chance to create. Grasping the idea that we waited three and a half months for that family to lose their child in order for our child to live was a difficult concept to accept. We are forever indebted to the donor family for making that selfless decision to save the life of another child that they had never even met.

Thanks to their choice to donate life, Travis Jr. is now four years old and full of energy. He enjoys Tae Kwon Do, baking with mommy, going to Discovery Place, and playing with his little brother. What doesn't he like? "I don't like to take naps!" Although our roller coaster of a journey has been full of highs and lows, we can't deny that it is an experience that we appreciate and would never take for granted.