



The Miracle Year

It was a typical autumn evening at our house.

My wife, daughter and I were making deer sausage at the kitchen counter as our fat lazy cat lie on the counter stool. Everything was moving along fine until the phone rang. It was the call that all parents dread receiving. On the other end of the line was an emergency room doctor in Rapid City where our son was a freshman in college. I watched as my wife scribbled on the back of an envelope. "Heart rate: 150-plus, respirations: 60, hemoglobin: 3.1, lactic acidosis, and septic shock."

All this information rang hollow, as I still hadn't started to comprehend the severity. "Come quickly," the doctor told her. "Your son might not make it through the night." We quickly packed a bag and made the normal five-hour drive in three. By the time we arrived, Andrew had been moved into an ICU room.

Heavily sedated and on a ventilator, his trim, muscular body heaved and pumped for every breath. I remember sitting there, trying to make my own body breathe those sixty breaths per minute – impossible.

Andrew stayed in his drug-induced paralysis for four long days and on the ventilator for ten. If it weren't for constant blood transfusions his oxygen-starved organs would have surely failed. These were terribly long days, as we weren't even sure if Andrew knew we were there for him. How ironic, I thought; one of these days was Thanksgiving.

Andrew was diagnosed with Philadelphia chromosome positive acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Our oncologist explained in his best layman's terms how two chromosomes responsible for cell reproduction began to rapidly overproduce cells. In

Andrew's case, 69% of his blood cells were immature lymphoblasts or non-oxygen carrying cells. The oncologist went on to explain that only by fixing this underlying genetic defect would Andrew be cured. This would require an intensive pretreatment of radiation and chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant. History had shown a 30% survival rate, quite a shock for a 19-year-old with such big plans.

Three long weeks passed in ICU. I stayed by Andrew's side that entire time, watching, listening, praying, and thinking. At the same time my wife Julie was forced to split her time between being with Andrew and being home for our daughter Katy in Bismarck.

Chemotherapy was started and Andrew began to stabilize. With the generous use of a donated company plane and pilot and the



Katy and Andrew during the stem cell donation process.



Bourg-Royal's Roughrider Teddy at five months.

assistance of medical friends, we were finally able to move Andrew to Bismarck. By Christmas, Andrew had finished the first round of chemo treatments and his cancer was deemed in remission. This Christmas was extra special as Andrew was home with us.

It was shortly after Christmas that I received an email from Gilbert and Renee at Elevage du Bourg-Royal. A litter of Griffon puppies was born to VC Toulouse des Bords du Dan and Duchasseur Moustache. I had almost forgotten my conversations with Gilbert earlier that fall before Andrew had become ill. I had done my homework well and I felt lucky to have one of these fine pups reserved. Then, of course, reality set in. How could I possibly think about a puppy with so much still ahead for Andrew and our family? I notified Gilbert of my situation.

A winter of waiting

January came and our family packed and made the trip to Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Our daughter Katy had been tested, and luckily was a perfect match for Andrew. She would be our stem cell donor. After a week of preparation and testing, Katy started her donation process. She did so without hesitation or concern about her own pain or inconvenience. We were so proud of her bravery and her willingness to give to her brother.

Once the stem cells were safely stored and frozen, Andrew's pre-treatments of full-body radiation and intense chemo could begin. No child should ever have to bear this, I thought, and yet he did with hardly a complaint. The day of the transplant was almost anticlimactic. Collected stem cells were thawed, collected into large syringes, and then slowly injected into a port, which had been placed in Andrew's chest. It was over in a matter of a few minutes.

Then we waited. The recovery was long and painful as Andrew's blood type and DNA slowly changed to that of his sister's. Nausea and vomiting were the norm. It pained us to watch so helplessly.

Andrew and Julie would spend the next 100 days in Rochester. Meanwhile, I returned to Bismarck with Katy so she could continue her sophomore year at Century High. I would make the eight-hour drive to Rochester about every two weeks to spend a few days with Julie and Andrew.

Sanity time

After much consideration and a lot of negotiation with my conscience, I finally decided to take that pup I had been talking about. Gilbert and Renee worked things out perfectly, timing the pup's delivery into Minneapolis in conjunction with one of my trips home from Rochester. When I arrived at the Northwest freight terminal, the counter girl greeted me, holding my cute little Griff pup. The new pup, finally overcome by all of the travel commotion, slept on the seat beside me as I drove the six hours home. For the first time in months I smiled, a real smile. Puppies make us feel good.

It was like that with Teddy. She made me momentarily displace the thoughts of our separated family and Andrew's cancer with thoughts of hope and youth and all that energy. I found myself actually relaxing and enjoying my evenings at home working with her in the yard or walking in the fields. We spent countless hours together in those first few months. It was my sanity time in an otherwise insane world.

Since Teddy is my first versatile dog, I had already decided to join the local Central Dakota NAVHDA chapter. I remember

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"The kids," one year later.

Dan and Teddy at the Natural Ability Test.



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going to that first meeting. Everyone was very nice, and I quickly realized how much hard work and dedication each member put forth. I decided I would do my best to be an active participant and try to give back as much as I received.

Teddy and I became regulars at meetings and enjoyed going to summer training sessions. We learned a lot from just being around and talking with the more experienced members. I'm sure the NAVHDA friends I made this spring and summer don't realize what all I had going on in my life, or how important it was to me to have this mental escape. So I just wanted to take this time to thank them all and to let them know how much I valued their help, advice and friendship this past year.

On September 22nd, Bourg-Royal's Roughrider Teddy went on to earn a Natural Ability Prize II at nine months.

Now it's fall again, the deer sausage still lies frozen in the freezer just like we left it a year ago. My daughter Katy is back busy with school activities and friends. I'm hoping Julie finally finds some time for herself and the quilting she loves to do. That son of mine, he returned to South Dakota School of Mines this fall and is continuing his major in Electrical Engineering. And Teddy and I, well, we're just relaxing and dreaming of all those good pheasant hunts to come. What a miracle year it has been!