

Season of Miracles

Luke Fossell

by Warren Hughes

Romp and running outdoors in the wonderful spring weather and playing with siblings is a normal part of most little boys' lives. For Luke Fossell, playing outside this spring makes this his "season of miracles". As his mother Karoline, a pediatric nurse, explains, "Luke was only ten days old when he went into congestive heart failure in July 2019 from complications of the common enterovirus. He was rushed to MUSC where he was put on life support and listed for a heart transplant. After a total of more than 200 days of care in Charleston he returned home to Lexington this January, triumphant after a successful heart transplant in December. He was warmly welcomed home with a parade led by Lexington area law enforcement officers and first responders.

For Karoline and Spencer Fossell's family, the anguish of the early days of Luke's illness remains a vivid memory, especially for Karoline. "Having a strong pediatric nursing background was definitely a blessing and a curse," she says. "I was always able to tell if something was wrong or not going well based on lab work and vital signs, as well as by being able to read the doctors and nurses. I am so grateful that I was able to understand the risks and benefits of certain procedures or medications so that I was truly able to make the best decision for Luke without feeling as though I was relying fully on the medical staff," she added.

"Yet, on the other hand, when things were not looking so great, especially when

Luke went into heart failure initially, it was a challenge to be able to fully comprehend the magnitude of the situation when those in my family without medical knowledge, struggled to grasp just how serious the situation was," Karoline recalls. "The biggest benefit to having a nursing background was the ability to explain to Luke what was going to happen or what something meant," she said. "He very quickly let me know that he needed to know and understand, so that he would handle it better. An example would be when Luke was admitted in June for his initial Berlin Heart surgery; we didn't go into detail about what would happen or what Luke may experience. He struggled with being intubated after surgery, and looking back, I really think it was because he had no idea what was happening to him." The Berlin Heart pumps blood around the body in order to keep the brain and other organs healthy, allowing a patient to grow and increase strength.

Later, with additional procedures and the eventual transplant, Karoline made sure Luke was as prepared as possible for what lay ahead. "We let him know that his chest would be sore, we practiced coughing with a pillow on his chest, we informed him about a tube that would be in his throat to help him breathe and that it may be uncomfortable, but it was not going to hurt as long as he could remain calm," she said. "It sounds silly, but it worked." Remarkably, she recalls, "He was so calm after surgery and was able to answer questions with a





“We will never be able to thank Jude’s family in the way they deserve.” Karoline remarks thoughtfully. “Jude gave Luke a second chance at life. We will never forget the hero that Jude is. He will be forever loved and celebrated in our house.”

Mary Grace speaks movingly of how she felt when Karoline told her of Luke’s joy at being able to run free at last, with the gift of Jude’s heart. “To imagine this boy is running free on earth, while my son Jude is running free in heaven. . . . To know that Jude’s heart is sparing a family from this grief; giving this boy life is indescribable,” she declared. “Jude always loved superheroes and didn’t even know that one day he would be one. I can’t wait to meet this family and hug the boy who has my son’s heart. I am so thankful that this family that we prayed for wants to be a part of our lives as much as we want to be a part of theirs. Jude’s heart beats on in this wonderful, little boy and it beats on in me and in all of us. . . . I feel like I am the one who got the real spiritual heart transplant.”

Karoline and Spenser Fossell will always remember the support they received while anxiously awaiting the heart transplant surgery. “Our family and friends who constantly came to Charleston to visit Luke also contributed to his great attitude. He would count down the days until his brother and grandparents would visit for the weekend,” Karoline says. “Every single visit made his day.” The family also remains indebted to MUSC and his home community for the care and attention provided. “The MUSC staff was also beyond incredible and spent an unbelievable amount of time with him. Lastly, everyone that sent gifts, cards, stickers and books truly helped Luke get through every day,” she continues. “The love that we felt from our community was incredible and more than we ever expected. Everyone prayed for Luke, and it was those prayers that got him through those seven months that he spent away from home.”

The future looks bright for the Fossell family. On March 20th Luke received his first negative cath biopsy which means that his body is no longer rejecting the new heart. Now basking in the warmth of spring with renewed strength, “Luke is as happy as he’s ever been, he is healing wonderfully and loves his new heart,” Karoline says. To learn more about Luke’s journey or make a donation in honor of Luke or in memory of Jude, visit the Fossell family’s personal Facebook blog page called “Luke Strong”. ■



simple nod to let us know he was without pain and understood what was happening. We also did the same when it came to dressing changes, shots or lab draws. I was very honest with him and let him know what to expect.”

While news of an available heart was an answer to prayer for the Fossell family, it was made possible as a result of a terrible automobile accident in Texas. Jude Calley was left on life support as the result of a terrible automobile accident. Mary Grace Calley, the mother of Luke’s heart donor, and Karoline have created a lifetime connection.