

NICK'S NEW HEART

BOOK EXCERPT

There was a pause in the conversation, and then Dr. Kanter asked, "Susan, are you sitting down?"

"No, but I can be." I moved to the kitchen table and sat on a chair. Nick reached his hands up to be held from where he crawled on the floor. I situated him in my lap.

"I'm sitting now."

Dr. Kanter calmly asked, "How do you feel about a heart transplant?"

"I think they're nice things if you need one," I told him after a full minute. I said the first words that popped into my head. I was being flippant to cover my surprise. He was serious, I knew. We never thought that Nick might be considered for a heart transplant so young, maybe later in his life, but not then.

"I think we need to consider it. Can you and Andy come to the hospital to discuss it?"

"They say it is supposed to snow tomorrow. We'll be there if it doesn't," I said. My mind spun. It required effort to think.

"What are you going to do if it does snow?" he asked.

"I'm going to play in it with my kids."

I immediately called Andy and asked him to come home early. I only told him it was in regard to Nick, not what Dr. Kanter had asked. Andy was as surprised as I was at

NICK'S NEW HEART

this turn of events. We decided that we would hear the doctors out and try not to close our minds to the idea. It did snow that night, so I phoned Dr. Kanter's office the next afternoon and made plans to meet him two days later.

“Nick will need to have an antibodies test. So come early enough to go to the lab,” Dr. Kanter said. “If he has a high amount of antibodies it will be hard to find a match.”

Not long after the chest incision was made, the team harvesting the heart called to say, “It's a go.” The heart looked great, and the team was on their way back to Atlanta. At 11:45 P.M. the heart arrived by helicopter on the roof of the hospital. This moment was when the whole thing hit me. “This is for real.”

Nick's new heart is here. Will the heart be good enough? Will it start on its own? Is Nick doing all right?

Andy whispered to me, “How much longer until we know something?” We wondered for twenty agonizing minutes.

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At 12:10 A.M., March 21, 1991, two weeks before his second birthday, Nick received his new heart.

Yes! It was the first day of spring, a new beginning in more than one way.

Andy and I still have questions that cannot be answered. We probably will never know why Nick was born with a defective heart, but we know it was not something we did. We cannot live in the past. We must live with how things are. I read somewhere that you have to think of it as not crying because it happened, but smiling because it did. We did not like the idea of a transplant, but we did and do like the idea of Nick living. Andy and I hate the idea of Nick dying, but we do love the fact that he has lived long enough for us to get to know him as a person. We choose to smile. We are hopeful and enjoy the time we have with Nick and do not spend it worrying. We live and laugh -- loud and often; it is good for us and our children. Andy and I pray because when we can depend on no one else; God is there. The best advice I can give is to revel in your child's life. We are thankful for the health a new organ brings. Here is a statement I heard on the old sitcom "Doogie Howser": "When the tool of science meets the mystery of faith the greatest medicine is formed -- hope."

We are hopeful that Nick has a bright future.

Tell your family you wish to donate your organs. It saves lives. Before me stands a young man who lives and loves because someone agreed to organ donation.