

My Miracle

Alex Hall, 15 years old, Massachusetts

It was Monday, St. Patrick's day 2008. I was getting ready for work when Alex my 15 year old son came home and said, "Hey Mom, it was weird today. I had chest pains and felt dizzy and short of breath." He said he wasn't doing anything stressful. I called his pediatrician. She said to bring him right in. An EKG and a chest x-ray were negative. The doctor said to take it easy.

On Tuesday he complained of a stomach ache. I texted him all day at school much to his annoyance. He assured me he was OK to stay. I called the doctor again to report his new symptoms. She said to call if they got worse.

On Wednesday he called to tell me he couldn't walk home from school – his legs hurt and he felt weak. Again I called the doctor to inform her of the new symptoms. We talked for a while. She told me he most likely had a virus, to keep him home from school and call if anything changes.

Alex said he had to go to school because one of his teachers said "You'd have to be dying," as a big report was due. I made a deal: I told him that he could go to school till 2nd period or I'd drop off the report depending on how he felt.

On Thursday at 4:00 am, Alex was not breathing well, was pale and weak. I brought him into the ER. It took me about 5 minutes to get there. I think I drove 85 mph. The nurse took us right away. I thought he was having an asthma attack. The doctor came immediately. They started medicines and IV and hooked him up to monitors. They asked me tons of questions.

I stepped out of the room to call my husband and oldest son. Within minutes the doctors tell us Alex will be transported to the University of Massachusetts.

The looks on the faces of the EMT, doctors and nurses made me scared. By 5:00 am we were on the way. There was a medical team waiting for us. Again we answered lots of questions. The monitors were going crazy. At UMass, they put de-

fibrillator pads on him. I told Alex he was going to have to fight.

My oldest son looked like he was ready to collapse. There were tears in my husband's eyes.

Within 15 minutes I'm told Alex should go to another hospital. I was thinking WHAT is going on?! They told me there was a machine out at Children's Hospital in Boston that MIGHT save his life. I was in such shock I asked how to get him there. They told me Life Flight was grounded because of the rain, so a special team was on the way.

He was still talking to us – being so brave. My cousin who is a priest was called to bless him. We all held hands and prayed for Alex.

We all took turns telling him how much we loved him and to be strong. I told him that he was only going to sleep but that while he slept he was to think only happy thoughts. I added, "I promise that I won't leave your side for one minute. I won't go anywhere till you can open your eyes again and tell me you love me."

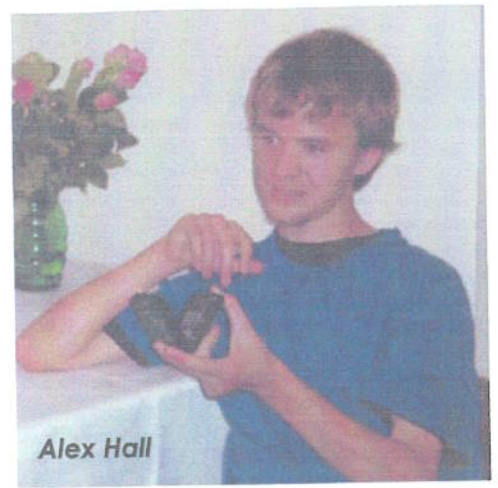
Boston is an hour away. As the EMT team came through the doors I thought I was in a sci-fi movie. They had jumpsuits and their game faces on. They got to work right away switching over to their equipment.

My son and I were going with Alex in the ambulance. We helped carry equipment. A nurse hugged us and gave us water and crackers. I jumped in the front and buckled up. I kept thinking, "Can't you drive any faster?"

I'd never been to Children's hospital. Alex was hustled away. There were 20 people waiting for him. They wasted no time. I was asked all the same questions. A doctor told me that the machine to my right is ECMO, a heart lung machine for Alex.

I went to the waiting room to find my family. They came in every 15 minutes to update us.

The nurses were wonderful. They told us there were vouchers for food. They insisted I get something to eat. My cell phone was dying. I'd had on the same clothes from Wednesday to Friday. I hadn't tak-



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en a shower and left with only 40 dollars, a chap stick and my cell phone.

I was told Alex had to go for a cardiac biopsy which is very risky. It was necessary so they could know what they were dealing with. We told them if he didn't make it, we wanted to donate his other organs. I found the chapel and went to pray. Then we waited.

The biopsy results revealed myocarditis, a disease we'd never heard of; probably the result of a virus.

The next few days were critical. We didn't get any promising news. Days turned into weeks and Alex was still on ECMO.

One morning, Alex had to be taken off ECMO, as the membrane of the machine had to be switched. Alex did amazing. They decided to take him off completely later in the day. Slowly they let him come around – he looked at us and moved his lips. He knew we were there and began making hand gestures. When the breathing tube came out, he gasped for a breath, looked at me and said, "Love you, Mom!" That was the best gift ever.

We stayed in ICU for 3 more days, finally going home 21 days later.

One year later, Alex is doing amazingly well. He is on no medicine at all. He even played soccer this fall. He has a check-up in March almost to the day it happened, with his cardiologist. They call him a legend at the University of Massachusetts Hospital. I call him my miracle. Sue, Alex's Mom.

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