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A Fighting Heart



When Katie Brenan and her husband Kevin went in for a 20-week ultrasound of their second child in 2002, they learned their baby girl had a malformed heart. Katie's next 20 weeks of pregnancy were filled with countless pediatric cardiology consultations—and doctors warned them that their daughter might not survive the pregnancy.

Casey Brenan did survive, but she was born with multiple heart defects known as Tetralogy of Fallot. She appeared slightly bluish in color because of low oxygen levels in her blood, and she struggled with horrible reflux that caused episodes of extended loss of breath.

"When we first heard our baby had congenital heart disease, we thought we'd have to go to a bigger city to get the best care," said Kevin, who is the Chief Financial Officer at Saint Joseph's Hospital. "We were relieved to find the best pediatric cardiology care is right in our backyard at Children's."

Six weeks after she was born, Casey underwent open heart surgery at Children's at Egleston. Kirk Kantor, M.D., performed the complicated six-hour procedure. "Casey's heart was the size of a walnut and her arteries were as thin as the power cord to a cell phone," Kevin said.

Ten days after her surgery, Casey went home. But, after just two weeks, another reflux spell left Casey struggling to breathe. She went back to Children's at Egleston via ambulance. After two weeks of evaluation, Mark Wulkan, M.D., performed a fundoplication surgery to narrow the entrance to Casey's stomach—and promote blood flow to her lungs—to resolve her reflux issues.

Casey's been fine ever since. Her heart now functions without a pulmonary valve, so she may need corrective surgery in the future, but today there's no slowing the spirited little girl with a strong heart. Now 8, Casey even competes on a neighborhood swim team, as well as on the soccer and lacrosse fields.

"Everyone we met at Children's made a difficult situation easier by virtue of their knowledge of the clinical condition and understanding of what we were going through," Kevin said. "She was born with a strong spirit, and she received great care at Children's. Today, she's a normal, thriving second-grader with no limitations." ♦