

Home for Christmas

Plucky Treva, 16 months, triumphs over illness

By Denise Davy
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There's a red velvet stocking hanging from the Bassetts' fireplace that reads Princess.

It's a simple gesture, one that parents everywhere will make for their child this season. But here it has special significance.

It's for Treva Catherine Bassett, who has battled life-threatening infections and surgeries since she was born 16 months ago, and she has finally come home.

"Last year, we were opening presents at Ronald McDonald house," said Susan.

"This year, the four of us will wake up under the same roof and celebrate together. It's super."

The past 16 months have been full of uncertainties for the Bassetts. Their daughter was born weighing seven pounds, six ounces after a normal pregnancy and delivery.

Doctors immediately sensed problems and whisked Treva away. Husband Randy caught sight of his daughter's sunken chest.

Both heard the wheezing sound of their child struggling to breathe.

"I knew right away something was wrong," said Susan.



Cathie Coward, the Hamilton Spectator

Treva Bassett, 16 months old, touches the face of her father, Randy, as the pair play at home, at last. Treva has been in hospital for the past 15 months and will celebrate her first Christmas with her family in her own home.



Cathie Coward, the Hamilton Spectator
Treva Bassett, 15 months old, has DiGeorge syndrome, resulting in open heart surgery, 32 blood transfusions and at least 500 injections.

Two days later, baby Treva, named after a much-loved grandmother, was diagnosed at McMaster University Medical Centre with DiGeorge syndrome, a medical condition associated with heart defects, immune system problems and recurring infections that can lead to paralysed vocal cords.

At two weeks of age, doctors performed open heart surgery to repair the holes in Treva's heart. Three more surgeries followed to insert ports and tubes into Treva's stomach and throat to allow her to feed, breathe and take life-saving medication.

There have been many setbacks, the darkest of which was the day Treva's heart stopped.

"I stood in the corner and watched it all. I thought we'd lost her," says Susan.

But Treva always made it through. And while most new moms were counting feedings, Susan was keeping track of her daughter's medical needs.

She's counted 32 blood transfusions, at least 500 injections and more than 80 tests.

She's had her arms, legs and scalp poked for blood at least 120 times.

It's been exhausting for Susan who stayed by Treva's side for four months when she was sent to Toronto's Sick Kids Hospital.

When she was transferred back to McMaster, Susan slept in a chair beside her bed for seven months.

"I burned myself out. I finally had to go home and sleep in my own bed," says Susan.

It's also been hard for their son Atticus, 3, who is just getting to know his little sister.

Says Randy, "After Treva came home he said, 'When is she going back to the hospital?' He's so used to her being there."

They've been home a month and have settled into a routine, aided by night nurses who take over medical care so Susan and Randy can get some rest.

The financial toll has also been tough. Susan estimates they spent \$18,000 on parking, hotel and food.

Keeping Treva home requires round-the-clock care. Each day starts and ends with 90 minutes of injections plus constant suctioning through Treva's tracheotomy tube so she can breathe.

A loud gurgling sound sends Susan grabbing for a medical bag. She unzips it, takes the plug out of Treva's tracheotomy tube and inserts the suctioning tube into her throat.

There are several suctionings needed daily. There's an oxygen tank beside her crib and above that a video camera which allows them to watch Treva from another room.

A box on the change table is filled with syringes, tubes and bandages.

"What keeps us sane is being organized," says Randy, pointing to a list of medications Treva takes with a schedule beside it.

There are more lists on the fridge door, nursery change table and Randy's desk.

They've been buoyed by the generosity of family, friends and strangers. So much so, it prompted Sue to found an online support group for parents who have a child with this syndrome.

It was her way of giving back and she relies on it for help.

As Susan says, "It's amazing because I don't really know these women, but I really rely on them."

Perhaps what's helped most, though, is their attitude.

"I wouldn't trade any of it. If I could take away anything, it would be her suffering. But I really feel it's made us so much stronger as a family," says Susan.

A few days ago Randy heard a noise coming from the crib. He thought it was the radio then realized it was Treva.

"That was the sweetest noise I've ever heard. It was my welcome home gift," he says.

That Treva is able to make noises means her vocal cords may not be permanently paralysed. That means she may someday be able to talk and not rely on the tracheotomy tube.

The one certainty is that Treva will face at least two more open heart surgeries in a few years then another as a teenager.

They don't know if she'll be able to walk or how far she'll develop mentally.

"One thing we know for sure is that whatever burdens are imposed on Treva, we're going to make sure she functions to the maximum.

"We feel if she can put a smile on her face after all she's been through, we'd be doing her a disservice if we couldn't do the same," said Susan.

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