



Sunny Ridge Family Center
2 South 426 Orchard Road
Wheaton, Illinois 60187
www.sunnyridge.org

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Permit No. 717
Wheaton, IL 60187



LeAnne's Miracle

It is hard to believe it has been three years since we started planning to adopt LeAnne and bring her to America where she could receive surgery required to straighten her spine and give her a chance for a happy healthy future. She had just turned seven years old and weighed only twenty six pounds when she arrived December 13, 2003, became our daughter and joined our family. *Continued inside.*



A Sunny Ridge Ornament!

Sunny Ridge announces the creation of a special ornament to commemorate *The Big House!* See page two for more information on how to purchase!

Inside:
Family Photo Album
Reaching Out — With Your Help
LeAnn's Miracle
Adoption Program Notes
Calendar of Events

Looking Ahead: Cookies with Santa, Sunday, December 4th, 1:00 -5:00pm
See back for more information!

LeAnne's MIRACLE

By Robert H. Jackson

(Continued from front cover.)

After months of planning, bureaucratic delays, bouts with pneumonia, extensive medical examinations and testing, LeAnne's first surgery was performed Tuesday, August 23, 2005, a date she had long anticipated; more as a life-long dream than it ever becoming reality.

LeAnne had beaten another upper respiratory infection; her fourth since meeting her mother in China. This one however, postponed her surgery at the beginning of August. LeAnne had worked hard to build up lung capacity again and remain healthy; social and recreational activities were sacrificed to develop medical stability; she understood time was running out for eligibility to receive the Titanium Ribs; (adjustable rods) the only solution available to straighten her body. Her increased lung capacity, nine-pound weight gain, and additional height essential for surgical success, were working against her by further restraining her lungs and ambulation. This time she was not to be denied.

We arrived early at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago to prepare LeAnne for surgery. She was upbeat and accepting of what was to come, more concerned about an infant across from her than herself. Her surgical team came one by one to talk with her, taking vitals, explaining details of how surgery would be performed, answering last-minute questions, and patiently listening to LeAnne proudly brag about her new ability to swim on her back, dribble a basketball, and pedal her tricycle for one mile; all of these were learned skills designed by her father to strengthen her for surgery. Dr. DiPatri promised he would inform us when actual surgery commenced. An hour and a half of anesthesia and positioning was required to insure success. Staff would provide regular progress reports. We watched our daughter go calmly down the hall talking with her escorts. Although she had demonstrated some angst during earlier conversations, we knew she was ready and in good hands as we made our way to the waiting area.

After eight hours of discussion, trips to the cafeteria, and outside for fresh air with a provided beeper, we were informed LeAnne's surgery was finished. She was ok, being prepped in intensive care, and Dr. DiPatri would meet with us shortly. That last thirty

minutes seemed like an eternity, as we waited for word of the final outcome. This was it. *Had we done everything there was to do? Had we made good decisions? Had we planned well?* These questions permeated our thoughts. Dr. Dipatri finally appeared, to inform us LeAnne's condition was far worse than anyone expected. LeAnne's spinal cord was tethered (attached) in two places—not one, as originally diagnosed. This necessitated cutting into the dura (spinal cord protective matter) subjecting her to increased potential of infection. The septum (bone spur) had grown outside the spinal canal in an upward path, and had started to effect blood supply and nerves. The split spinal cord had grown in different directions. In spite of complications encountered, all conditions were successfully corrected and LeAnne had performed far beyond their highest expectations under anesthesia. She was moving all extremities, vital signs were good, and they had weaned from the ventilator. With the exception of a swollen face from lying so long in one position, she had come through without any apparent ill-effects. After a few minutes to compose ourselves, we were escorted to the intensive care unit where we assisted in post surgery routines, and gladly responded to our daughter's requests for movies, hand-fed ice chips, and for once — welcomed emotional outbursts when requests for food and water had to be denied until she was more stable.

LeAnne continued to amaze her doctors and treaters in intensive care. In less than twenty-four hours, they reduced original projections of four days of intensive care, to one day; and two weeks of hospitalization to one week. Things commenced even quicker when they removed her catheter and were able to wean her off oxygen within a few hours. To everyone's amazement and her parents' joy, she was transferred to an observation suite on the neurological floor twenty-three hours after surgery. After putting LeAnne to sleep we were able to leave the hospital and return home for a few hours of sleep ourselves, and a much needed shower. The next morning we returned to the hospital and were greeted by the nursing team. LeAnne had a good night but was refusing to eat or drink. She wanted to go home. Her resulting attitude, although acceptable to the staff, was quickly

changed when her father intervened, helping her to understand that five things were necessary to go home. She had to demonstrate she could eat on her own; be drinking lots of liquid, go to the bathroom, rid herself of the morphine pump, and get out of bed and walk. Within an hour she was taking liquids and had eaten her first food; albeit liquid. We left the hospital that evening to pick up LeAnne's sister, Fumei at our grown daughter Debbie's home. Fumei, by plan, would accompany mom back to the hospital the following day to further facilitate the healing process, while dad would return to work and give LeAnne a chance to think about her options.

LeAnne's third day was much improved. With her mother and sister's encouragement she began eating whole food, was able to wean the morphine pump, remove the IV line from one hand and was able to void on her own using a bed pan. Dr. Dipatri examined her, and advised they would remove her bandages the following day, get her up in a wheelchair and try walking. By the time LeAnne's mother and sister arrived on the fourth day she was up in a wheelchair at the nurse's station, coloring. With a huge smile on her face, she greeted her mother with; "Hi mom! I'm going home." She had completed all five goals including walking to the bathroom independently. Fumei called her dad to say, "Daddy, you don't have to come to the hospital, LeAnne is coming home today." A final CT scan was taken, and LeAnne returned home on Friday. Through the weekend mom prepared favorite nutritious meals, and we continued to work on treatments to keep upper respiratory function healthy. Dr. DiPatri is expected to release her for return to school.

All of this sounds as though this is the way this type of surgery usually happens; given the fact it only took LeAnne seventy-two hours from the completion of surgery to return home, tends to confirm this theory. I have been working with spinal cord injury cases for over thirty-five years and have never seen healing like this. A few days before LeAnne's surgery, I was discussing her condition with

another pediatric physiatrist, neurologist who stated; "Bob, I hope you have good people. Only two out of five cases walk out after this type of surgery. The rest wheel out." LeAnne's surgeons stated at the time of her discharge, "Healing the way LeAnne has done is unheard of in neurology." I watched the look of amazement and appreciation on Dr. DiPatri's face as he constantly examined her over the four-day course of treatment, and heard the astonishment of her next surgical team, as we prepare for the second round.

After last-minute instruction to protect her back and share her excitement, I watched with admiration as LeAnne left for her first day of school. Confident, she wore a smile on her face, knowing she would only be able to attend for a few weeks before surgery again. I had to remind myself of her statement to caregivers in China. There were two reasons she wanted to go to America; to be straight like other kids, and she wanted to be able to go to school. On September 19, 2005, LeAnne will go to Shriners Hospital in Chicago to prepare for her second surgery, scheduled for seven o'clock the next morning. Surgeons will install the Titanium Ribs to straighten her body, and construct a mesh rib cage to contain her lungs. After that, she will require three to four minor surgeries each

year to adjust her rods until she reaches full growth at about fourteen years of age. By then, she will have a final surgery to hopefully remove the Titanium Ribs, fuse her spine and install permanent artificial ribs. I'm not exactly sure what the eventual future will bring for our daughter and we are by no means finished, but I know in my heart this courageous little warrior was given to us by God and He looks after her. Although we don't always understand His ways, when we put our faith in Him things have a way of working out and miracles can happen; just ask LeAnne.

Sunny Ridge is privileged to help find homes for children with special needs. If you have thought about adopting a child in need of love and physical healing, Sunny Ridge can help you give a special child a bright and positive future.

For more information on the Sunny Ridge Special Needs Adoption program, call Bethanne Gennette at (630) 668-5117, extension 226.

Come Support Sunny Ridge!

4th Annual Home for the Holidays Gala

Sunny Ridge Gala Fundraiser Friday, November 18, 2005

6:00pm, Oak Brook Hills Marriott Resort
Reservations \$100 per person

Cash Bar Cocktail Reception
Silent and Live Auction
Dinner/Dance
Live Musical Entertainment

Moms and Dads: Mark Your Calendar!
Get your group together, kick off the holiday season,
and join us in support of Sunny Ridge Family Center!

