

## Medical Miracle

A rare, massive tumor had wrapped itself around eight-year-old Hannah Olsen's heart—and only an extremely risky surgery could save her . . . if even that would work. Please, God, Hannah's mom, Suzi, prayed, if my little girl needs a miracle, send her one!



**"Dr. McConnell [inset] is Hannah's miracle man," says Suzi.**



# "He gave us back our miracle girl!"

Maybe it's pneumonia," Suzi Olsen's husband, Tony, speculated as the couple waited for their daughter's pediatrician to phone.

"I'd almost be glad if it was," the Seal Beach, California, mom said. "I just know it's more than that. . . ." Suzi could never have imagined just how sick her little girl was—or the miracle it would take to make her well. . . .

Over the weekend, Hannah, eight, had developed a cough and slight fever. By Monday morning, Hannah still seemed pale, and Suzi took her to the pediatrician, fretting: maybe she has the flu.

### How I wish she didn't have to be so brave! Suzi thought

The doctor said no, "But she may have a small heart murmur."

"What?" Suzi asked, stunned. "We'll have the lab take some X-rays, and I'll call you," he said. "It's probably nothing to worry about."

He's right, Suzi told herself. But after Hannah's X-rays, Suzi noticed the lab tech suddenly shoot her a sad, telling look.

And now, Suzi and Tony waited nervously for the results. Finally, the phone rang—and Suzi froze as the pediatrician said grimly, "I'm sorry, but we found a massive

tumor on Hannah's heart. Get her to the hospital immediately."

"Dear God, no!" Suzi gasped, bursting into tears. But she pulled herself together to tell Hannah, "You're so special, the doctors want to do more tests at the hospital."

"Okay," Hannah said agreeably. At Miller Children's Hospital, they were directed to the pediatric oncology floor. Does this mean my baby has cancer? Suzi panicked.

Doctors couldn't say. The rest of the day and far into the evening, they put Hannah through test after test.

Finally, Suzi tucked her into her hospital bed. With their older daughter, Devin, 13, staying with friends, Suzi and Tony stayed by Hannah's side through the night.

And in the morning, they learned from thoracic surgeon Dr. Douglas McConnell that Hannah was suffering from a teratoma, an extremely rare tumor.

Bigger than any he'd seen, it stretched from Hannah's diaphragm to her left shoulder, attaching itself to her heart, left lung and windpipe, displacing and threatening to crush all of them.

"The surgery she needs is extremely risky," Dr. McConnell cautioned. "And we won't know if it can work until we get in there."

"This can't be happening!" Suzi sobbed. Hannah had never suffered more than an occasional cold.

But Dr. McConnell explained that because the teratoma was so slow-growing, Hannah hadn't shown

any symptoms until her breathing and circulation were affected, causing her cough and fever.

"Will it hurt?" Hannah asked timidly, as a counselor explained what would happen the next day.

"A little, but then you'll be fine," the counselor assured her. "Okay, then," Hannah agreed.

My brave little trouser, Suzi thought. How I wish she didn't have to be so brave!

That night, as she and Tony watched their little girl sleeping, clutching her beloved Angel Bear, an icy fear pounded in Suzi's heart: are these the last moments we'll ever have with our precious angel?

The doctors had been frank about the surgery's risks. With the teratoma affecting Hannah's small lungs and windpipe, the anesthesia could kill her before the operation even began. And even if doctors got Hannah safely asleep, if the tumor was malignant, there would be nothing they could do to save her.

"And if the tumor is benign," Dr. McConnell explained gently, "the position of the teratoma makes it

extremely difficult to cut away without damaging any of Hannah's vital organs—or bursting the tumor. . . ." Which would kill her instantly, Suzi read the rest in the doctor's eyes.

Please God, she now prayed, don't take our little girl from us!

In the morning, Suzi placed Hannah's Angel Bear on the stretcher beside her, then kissed her gently.

As soon as Hannah disappeared behind the OR doors, Suzi buried her face in Tony's chest and sobbed, "Tell me she'll be okay!"

"She will," Tony choked. "We need her more than God does."

In the waiting room, surrounded by family and friends, Suzi prayed, "If it's a miracle my baby needs, please, God, give it to her!"

Finally, after three agonizing hours, Dr. McConnell appeared.

"The surgery was more involved than we expected," Dr. McConnell began slowly—then broke into a big grin. "But it was very successful. We got it all and Hannah's going to be fine!"

"Yes!" Devin cried.

"Thank God!" Suzi sobbed, hugging Tony, then rushing to embrace Dr. McConnell. "You're a miracle man!" she gushed.

Hours later, Hannah woke up. "Hi, Mommy, Hi, Daddy," a tiny familiar voice squeaked.

"Oh, Hannie Banannie," Suzi

### "Oh, Hannah," Suzi cooed, kissing her little girl. "You're amazing!"

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Dr. McConnell agreed, stunned by Hannah's quick recovery. Just three days after her lifesaving surgery, she went home. And less than two weeks later, she returned to school!

Today, Hannah is fully recuperated. She's back to dressing up her Barbies and playing soccer. And at her first game, a special fan cheered her on—Dr. McConnell!

"It's hard to believe that such a thing could have been growing in Hannah and we never suspected it," Suzi says. "But God sent us Dr. McConnell, who did something even more incredible. He gave us back our miracle girl!"

—Elizabeth Holzemer

### When to call the doctor about your child's fever

While most fevers aren't a sign of a serious problem like Hannah's, call a doctor immediately, say experts at the American Academy of Pediatrics, if your child has a fever and:

- Is unusually drowsy.
- Has been in an extremely hot place, such as an overheated car.
- Has a stiff neck, unexplained rash, persistent vomiting or diarrhea, or a severe headache, sore throat or earache.
- Has had a seizure.
- Is younger than two months and has a rectal temperature of 100.4°F or higher.

For more info, log onto [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).

Have you or someone you love survived a health crisis against the odds? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: Medical Miracle, *Werner's World*, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.

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