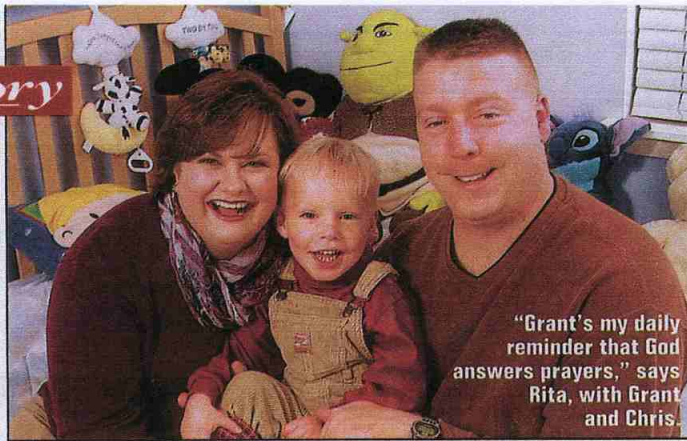


A mother's story

I had to stifle a sob as I stood in the doorway of our four-month-old son's room. It looked more like a hospital room than a nursery!

In place of Grant's mobile, a ventilator hung over the crib. Across the room, a dozen oxygen tanks had taken up residence.

Please God, I prayed, this isn't any kind of a life for a baby! Little did I imagine that Heaven couldn't



"Grant's my daily reminder that God answers prayers," says Rita, with Grant and Chris.

"I hope I never forget what a miracle Grant is"

"Please God, Grant needs a miracle . . ." Rita Manyette prayed for her baby boy, diagnosed with a rare heart defect. But after so many setbacks, she knew better than to get her hopes up. Until one day, Heaven sent her a sign that everything was going to be okay after all . . .

have agreed more . . .

"He's perfect!" my husband, Chris, and I wept when Grant was born. But moments later, my beautiful baby suddenly turned blue.

"What's wrong?" I cried as a nurse raced Grant to the NICU.

"Your baby may have a heart problem," a doctor later told me.

Dear God, no! I wept.

But tests confirmed it . . .

"Your son has tetralogy of Fallot, a rare congenital heart defect that prevents the blood from receiving adequate oxygen," a pediatric car-

When I changed his diaper, he suddenly turned blue again!

diologist told us.

"Will he be okay?" Chris asked.

"These kids can lead normal lives," the doctor answered. But when Grant was a little older, he would need a series of operations.

I was grateful surgery could wait—for a while anyway. But those first few weeks at home, I was so worried, I sat up every night, watching Grant sleep.

But then, at his one-month check-up, when I changed his diaper, he suddenly turned blue again!

"Sometimes a change in position can block the blood supply to the heart," the doctor explained when Grant's color returned to normal.

"What does that mean?" I was shaking.

"Grant's sicker than we realized," he said. "He needs surgery now!"

"I love you, pumpkin," I cried when they wheeled Grant into surgery to implant a shunt in his pulmonary artery, which would allow blood to flow freely to his lungs.

And after three hours . . . "It went great!" the doctor announced.

When we took Grant home, he seemed fine. But then, one month later . . .

"It happened again!" I sobbed into the telephone. "I was changing Grant's diaper, and he turned as purple as an eggplant!"

"Take him straight to the hospital!" the doctor ordered. "It sounds like his shunt failed!"

It'll be okay, I told myself, as they prepped Grant for surgery again.

But later . . .

"There's more scar tissue than we'd expected," the doctor assisting Grant's surgeon told us. "We're having trouble locating the shunt."

Chris and I prayed furiously. And finally, after nine hours . . .

"It was rough," the surgeon told us. "But your baby's going to be okay."

But Grant wasn't okay. Though his new shunt was working, he couldn't breathe on his own. It's possible the nerve that controls his diaphragm was damaged during the surgery, doctors explained.

Nurses taught us how to change his tracheostomy tube and how to perform CPR. And after six weeks, we finally took Grant back home. But the life we were taking him

home to had changed dramatically.

Grant's nursery had been packed away to make room for medical equipment. While I used to rock Grant to sleep, now private nurses took over most of his care. And though I longed to record Grant's milestones, his baby book was filled with details of his surgeries.

And now, as I stood by Grant's crib, I wept. Why is this happening to my baby?

I prayed for a miracle. But instead, when Grant was four months old, my worst fears were realized. His heart stopped beating as he was rushed to the hospital.

After three days, doctors couldn't find anything wrong and sent Grant home. But in the parking lot, his eyes rolled back in his head . . .

"His heart's not beating!" I screamed, starting CPR while his nurse ran for help.

After what felt like an eternity, a team of doctors and nurses took over. "Clear!" I heard someone yell. And for a moment, I thought my own heart would stop.

But then, "We got him back!" another voice shouted. And while they whisked my baby back inside, I stood alone in the parking lot.

I can't take anymore, God! I broke down. My little boy has been through enough. Please, help him!

And minutes later, when I walked back into the hospital, to my amazement, there was Grant, grinning and giggling for his nurses.

It's a sign, I told myself. And suddenly, the feeling of hopelessness seemed to lift, and I felt certain that God had heard my prayers.

A few hours later, when doctors told Chris and me their latest plans to place a new shunt in a different spot in Grant's pulmonary artery, I truly believed he would be okay.

Three hours later, I was relieved—but not surprised—when the surgeon told us he'd come through the operation with flying colors.

And while after his first two surgeries Grant's problems returned, this time, he just kept getting better. As the weeks turned to months, not only did his shunt stay open, to everyone's amazement, he began breathing on his own.

And finally, as the medical equipment disappeared, Grant blossomed into the little boy he was meant to be.

And as I began filling Grant's baby book with happy, normal milestones, my heart filled with joy. And God gave us yet another

I began filling Grant's baby book with happy, normal milestones

miracle when at 27 months old, Grant breezed through his fourth open-heart surgery—to close a hole between the chambers of his heart.

Today, Grant's a healthy, happy four-year-old. But while the reminders of Grant's earliest days—the ventilator and the oxygen tanks—have been packed away and his scars have faded, I hope I never forget. God answered our prayers and gave us a miracle, and my heart is overflowing with gratitude.

—Rita Manyette,
Jacksonville, Florida,
as told to Elizabeth Holzemer

Heart-healthy tips for your kids



The American Heart Association recommends that parents make sure *all* kids:

- Eat a variety of low-fat, healthy foods—save fats, sweets and salty foods for occasional treats.
- Drink six to eight glasses of water daily.
- Eat fish at least twice

a week. Even fish sticks and tuna count!

- Drink four servings of low-fat milk
- Eat five servings of fruits and veggies daily.
- Play hard for at least 30-60 minutes each day.

For more tips, log on to www.americanheart.org.

Do you have a story from the heart to share? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: A Mother's Story, *Woman'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.