

A hopeful start

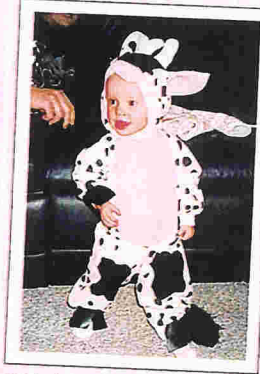


"Patrick and I panicked when we were told our unborn baby was going to need a pacemaker, but doctors assured us she'd be fine," says Amy.

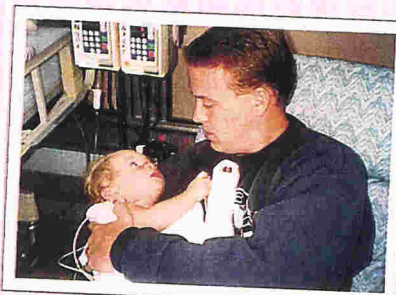


"Princess Kyle, that's what we called her. Even our dog, Baxter, let her do whatever she wanted. If he only knew the ear- and tail-pulling he was in for!"

A hard step



"Kyle's first year was so normal. We even went trick-or-treating."



"But by 18 months, her heart had grown weak. It was time for surgery. We were grateful she was too young to realize what was going on."

"It turned out Kyle also had a hole in her heart. But, thankfully, doctors were able to repair it when they put in the pacemaker. She really was going to be a normal little girl!"

A mother's story Scrapbook

A special little

"It's a simple procedure," doctors told Amy Petrlich when they first diagnosed a heart condition before her baby was even born. But nothing would be simple about the terrifying turn things would take—or the miracle gift that would give little Kyle a chance at life . . .

It was Amy Petrlich's fifth wedding anniversary, and she'd just given birth to her third child.

Yet the mood in the delivery room was somber.

"This is so hard," Amy wept.

"I know," her husband, Patrick, choked.

For while their beautiful, healthy newborn son took his first breaths, three floors up, the Grandville, Michigan, couple's firstborn, two-and-a-half-year-old Kyle, lay in the pediatric intensive care unit, fighting for her life . . .

From the moment they learned they were expecting their first child, Amy and Patrick were filled with excitement. But 18 weeks into her pregnancy, at her first ultrasound . . .

"The baby's heart doesn't seem to be beating properly," the doctor said. "It could be nothing, but . . ."

Amy went home clutching the name of a neonatal cardiologist in her hand. That night, she and Patrick held each other, a thousand "what ifs" swirling in their minds.

A few days later, after tests . . .

"Your baby has a heart condition called complete heart block," the doctor said, explaining that the top and bottom of the heart weren't pumping in sync. "But it can be corrected with a pacemaker."

The baby wouldn't need it immediately after birth. The heart

would be strong enough to function on its own for a couple of years. And then . . .

"It's a simple procedure, and once implanted, your child will have a normal life," the doctor assured them.

Thank God, Amy and Patrick breathed.

And when Kyle was born—pink and weighing eight pounds—they relaxed even more.

For the first several months, Kyle behaved like a normal, healthy baby. But by her first birthday, she'd slowed down—in growth and activity. And when she was 18 months old . . .

"It's time," the doctor told Amy and Patrick.

The couple nodded, certain the pacemaker would soon put Kyle's ordeal in the past.

But just before the procedure, doctors did a full-body scan on Kyle. And what it revealed was terrifying: a hole in Kyle's heart.

"No!" Amy trembled.

"Please, don't panic. We can repair it," the doctor soothed, trying to calm Amy, who was eight months



"A day doesn't go by that I don't look at Kyle and thank God," sighs Amy. "She's so full of life, and brings so much joy to mine."

A fight for life



"But just four months later, Kyle got a virus—in her heart. The news was dire: Kyle needed a transplant. The doctors didn't know if her heart could last until a new one became available."



"She was such a little trouper—always laughing. But inside, her heart was slowly dying. After five months, time was running out. And then... 'We have a heart!'"



Healing at last!



"She had a new heart—and a new favorite game: playing doctor."



"The surgery was a success! Just 10 days later, Kyle was home with her two brothers."



"It was incredible, we had almost lost her, yet in no time, she was swimming, running, playing—a normal little girl."

girl named Kyle

pregnant with her second child.

"We can close the hole and put in the pacemaker, all at once," he assured her.

Amy was terrified, but her pregnancy and the birth of her son, Griffin, helped keep her focused while they waited for Kyle's surgery.

And when the day finally arrived, the doctor appeared with news that all had gone well. "Our nightmare is over!" she breathed, hugging Patrick.

Three days later, they took Kyle home. Slowly, she regained strength, and just three months later, "Yeah!" two-year-old Kyle squealed in delight on Christmas morning.

As they welcomed the New Year, Amy and Patrick looked forward to brighter days. They even had another baby on the way.

Then, just a few weeks later, Kyle spiked a fever and began wheezing and vomiting. Amy and Patrick rushed her to the hospital.

"Kyle's in heart failure," the doctor told them.

"This can't be happening," Amy cried. "She was going to be fine."

"Yes," the doctor nodded. But a virus had invaded Kyle's body and was attacking her heart, which had swollen to four times its normal size. "It's just a matter of time until it stops working," he said somberly. "Oh, God, our baby's going to die!" Amy shrieked.

The doctor took a breath. "Her only hope is a transplant," he said. Amy felt like someone had punched her in the stomach.

Kyle's heart was so weak, she'd need 24-hour IV medication while she waited for a heart. How long that would be, the doctor couldn't say. Nor could he predict how long Kyle's heart could hold out.

With grandparents taking turns watching 10-month-old Griffin, Amy and Patrick spent all day, every day, at Kyle's bedside.

Amazingly, she remained alert and happy. Sometimes, though, the tubes and IVs that poked out of her tiny body irritated her, and she'd cry. "It's going to be okay. They'll take them out soon," Amy would soothe.

But weeks became months. Kyle's

heart grew weaker. She grew pale.

Please, God, don't take our precious girl from us. Amy would weep.

But now, after five months, as Amy and Patrick welcomed their new son, Mitchell, into the family, time was running out for Kyle.

When I look into the future, it's so bright it burns my eyes... we each should allow our excellence to come forth and serve the world.

Oprah Winfrey

Her heart had grown so weak that she could have a heart attack at any time. And if she did, "The pacemaker, already overworked, won't be able to save her," the doctor said.

When the phone rang one night, Amy braced herself for the worst... "How would you like to take a trip to Ann Arbor?" Patrick asked.

"What?" Amy groaned. "Ann Arbor," he repeated. "To the Mott Children's Hospital. They have a heart for Kyle!"

"Thank You, God!" Amy cried. Then, she sent up a special prayer

for the angel in Heaven who had saved her little girl and for his grieving family.

A few hours later, Amy and Patrick kissed Kyle as she was wheeled into surgery. "We love you," they whispered.

Please, God, watch over her, Amy prayed.

Patrick prayed. The 37 relatives who'd come for support prayed. The nurses who'd been caring for Kyle offered their prayers. And, finally,

after six hours, the doctor appeared—smiling.

"The heart is in and beating on its own!" he announced.

Amy fell into Patrick's arms as the waiting room erupted into cheers. "At

last, it's really over!" Amy sobbed.

Incredibly, just 10 days later, Kyle went home. "My house!" she squealed, and raced to her bedroom.

Today, Kyle is a typical, healthy five-year-old. She goes to kindergarten and loves playing big sister to Griffin and Mitchell.

"We treat her special," Amy admits. "We can't help it," Patrick agrees. "After everything..." Amy says with a smile. "We're just so very grateful to have her with us."

—Elizabeth Holzemer
with Kathy Fitzpatrick

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.