



Aubrey Reeves, 7, and her mother, Cheryl, sit together on the ground, drawing chalk pictures on the concrete of the Children's courtyard. The duo maintain a busy schedule most afternoons, spending time outside and in the playroom, working on school work, and reading and watching movies in their room. Reeves took time out from playing with Aubrey to share their testimony in an on-air interview during the 2005 Children's Miracle Network Radiothon. Their story helped depict for listeners the expert level of care provided every day at Children's.

Patient makes hospital home while waiting for heart transplant

Editor's note: Aubrey Reeves received her heart transplant in late June. At press time, Aubrey had moved from the pediatric ICU to a regular patient room and according to her parents was doing well.

Seven-year-old Aubrey Reeves and her mother, Cheryl, have been living at Children's for the past five months, waiting for Aubrey's third heart transplant. Theirs was one of 17 patient stories shared in a series of on-air interviews during the Children's Miracle

Network Radiothon in February at Children's.

In the time the pair has been at the hospital, they've found ways to make Children's feel like a home away from home. One of Aubrey's favorite afternoon activities is to draw chalk pictures of butterflies on the concrete of the courtyard at the hospital. In her patient room on the eighth floor, Aubrey has added a pink doorbell, finger paintings and inflatable Barbie furniture to make the space her own. The Reeves' philosophy for the room: "Everything in here is all about Aubrey." And she will remind you if you forget.

Born in Wichita Falls, Aubrey was believed healthy until at 14 months old, she caught a cold and was taken to the doctor. Thirteen days and five doctors later, she was diagnosed with Epstein's Anomaly, a heart valve problem causing backflow of blood, overworking the left ventricle which pumps blood to the body.

"The most painful part of our story is that if this problem had been discovered at birth, it could have been fixed. But by the time it was detected, the damage was irreversible," Reeves said. "The doctors gave me a prognosis of her maybe living until age 5, so we feel blessed to have made it this far."

At age 3, Aubrey received her first transplant. At her annual post-transplant checkup, everything appeared fine. But in the following months, Aubrey was in and out of the pediatric intensive care unit at Children's, culminating when she went into full cardiac arrest. Physicians worked almost 20 minutes on Aubrey before reviving and stabilizing her. A subsequent heart biopsy showed that rejection was imminent.

While staying at the Ronald McDonald House, waiting for a second transplant, Aubrey and her mother met a family whose daughter had been in a car wreck and was in critical condition in the Children's pediatric ICU. Their

chance conversation revealed that the family's dying daughter might be the heart donor Aubrey needed to survive. When the daughter was confirmed as having no brain activity, doctors performed cross-testing to confirm the match.

"The morning the little girl was scheduled for surgery, her parents came in and watched Aubrey playing. Then we got together and said a prayer over both little girls. They had to say goodbye to their daughter and wanted to be a part of where this precious little girl's heart was going," Reeves said.

Aubrey received a second transplant and was released a week later.

This time last year, Aubrey was at home in Wichita Falls, often wandering around the house carrying her favorite gift received at Children's, a tool chest, and using her toy hammer to tack drawings to the wall. The youngest child and only daughter in a family of six kids, she is a precocious tomboy when she's feeling well.

In December 2004, however, Aubrey showed signs of rejecting her second transplant and was readmitted to Children's.

Children's Miracle Network Radiothon brings in \$413,000 for local pediatric hospitals

The Children's Miracle Network Radiothon, which took place Feb. 24–26 at Children's, raised \$413,000 for the two local not-for-profit pediatric hospitals: Children's and Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth. The funds raise the four-year total to almost \$2 million. The radiothon was a collaboration between Children's Miracle Network and KDMX MIX 102.9 FM.

Highlights of the radiothon included interviews of parents and patients undergoing treatment at Children's. Also broadcast were 18 prerecorded Miracle Stories, based on interviews with patients from Children's and Cook Children's.

Employees and members of the medical and dental staff helped to facilitate the radiothon by volunteering at the phone banks, by dropping by the MIX 102.9 FM booth in the lobby at Children's and by wearing their CMN Radiothon T-shirts, proceeds from which also went to support the hospital.

“My first thought in the ICU was that another transplant was out of the question,” Reeves said. “But heart transplant coordinator Susan Daneman told me that Aubrey still had a chance. Daneman explained that both rejected hearts had a common antigen that Aubrey’s body had developed antibodies against, causing the rejections.”

Reeves knows that it will take another miracle for Aubrey to get another heart. A highly specific donor match is required to meet all the testing criteria. But the family hasn’t lost hope.

“We are looking for the needle in the haystack. But look at her – some days you can’t tell anything is wrong,” Reeves said.

In the meantime, Aubrey’s favorite escape is to go outside where she can best be herself. Sometimes she goes with a full entourage of her physical therapist, child life specialist and nurse following along behind her wheelchair.

“We take crackers and crush them up and feed the birds. Aubrey chases them, screaming and pushing her wheelchair toward them before they’ll fly,” Reeves said. “She takes her music with her, puts on her headphones and purple heart-shaped sunglasses. She looks like a movie star.” ■