

There are times in life when you need a miracle.

In February, 2010, my six-month-old son, Isaac, was finally catching up developmentally after a rough start in life and two-months in the NICU at Arkansas Children's Hospital. But now his physical therapist was worried that his feet were rigid and oddly shaped and might present a problem as he prepared to walk. She suggested he be evaluated by an orthopedic doctor. The doctor diagnosed "rocker bottom feet," told us to continue with PT, and to come back in a month. His perfunctory examination did little to allay the PT's concerns, so I decided to do some research on my own. With the words "rocker bottom feet" and a few hours on the internet I realized the extent of Isaac's condition. It was congenital vertical talus(CVT)—basically the reverse of clubfoot, caused by a misalignment of the bones and requiring months of serial casting, surgery and years of leg braces for correction. I was floored.

Knowing this new challenge would present yet another set-back to Isaac's progress, I wanted to get the correction process started immediately. Physical therapy did nothing to allay the condition, as it was a bony abnormality. I tried for weeks to consult with the doctor Isaac had originally seen, but was finally told to go elsewhere. From the internet I knew the condition was rare, and that progress had been made in its treatment in the last few years. Where a total dissection of the foot and massive tendon release had once been the treatment, now the surgeries could be much less invasive and more effective. I wanted to find someone who was experienced in the latest techniques, but didn't know how—much less how to get insurance to pay for whoever we found. We got a referral to Arkansas Children's Hospital, but there he couldn't be seen until the following August, and no one could tell me how much experience that doctor had with CVT—no one I spoke to there had even heard of it. I spent a month and a half making calls, doing more research and getting increasingly worried as time ticked on. I needed a miracle for my son.

In June I met a new family at church, noticed their son was casted, and asked his mom about it. She told me he had club foot and was being treated at the Shriners Hospital in St. Louis. She had done research to find the best treatment available, and that was it. That evening, I got on line and discovered that the very doctor who had been making advances in CVT treatment —the national expert—saw patients at the Shriners Hospital in St. Louis. I learned that the Shriners Hospitals were free and open to any child who needed orthopedic help. My answer had finally come. I knew that this was our miracle.

Monday morning I sent in an application for Isaac to be seen. I appreciated everything about the system the Shriner's had created. The application process was quick and easy, and we heard back from the hospital to let us know we'd been approved and make an appointment within a week. And when I thought I couldn't be any more grateful, the local Shriner's club stepped in and got involved, offering help in every way, from transportation and lodging to social/emotional support for our family. It was humbling to be the recipient of so much care.

Isaac was in to the hospital to see Dr. Michael Dobbs within weeks of sending in the application. We loved the Shriner's Hospital—which was kid-friendly in every way—especially because of the Shriners themselves, who talked and played with the kids, handed out treats and stuffed animals, and whose cheerfulness made the long road ahead seem bearable. Isaac's examination was thorough, including x-

rays and stretches, pictures and more. It was such a relief to have Isaac in the hands of an expert, I again felt overwhelmed with gratitude.

Isaac's treatment began that day in June, with full leg casts applied to stretch tendons and reposition bones. Once a week for the next 8 weeks we made the 6 hour drive to St. Louis for new casts to be applied. It was a stressful time, but seeing the incremental improvement in Isaac's feet, and knowing that he was receiving the best care possible made it worth the effort. Dr. Dobbs and Kristina, his nurse practitioner, were excellent, and were immediate in their responses with every question and concern that I had about Isaac's care.

I came to love being in the Shriner's Hospital. There, watching children with many conditions, some far graver than Isaac's, in a setting of care, hope, and love, I felt comforted and hopeful, too. Seeing what good was being done to help the smallest and weakest of our society made me hope not only for Isaac, but for all of us. I had needed a single miracle for my son, and was instead able to witness a host of miracles, and one miracle greater than all—the miracle of compassion, and the good that can be done with love in our hearts.

Isaac's treatment of serial casts and two minor surgeries is over now, and he is finally beginning to walk! The correction of his feet was totally successful, and he will be able to do everything he would like to do, without pain or hindrance. He still wears braces when he sleeps, and we will make trips to the Shriner's Hospital every few months for check-ups, but Isaac may not remember much of the miracle that set his feet free. I will remember, though, and teach him how others' compassion changed his life. We will always be grateful for our Shriner's Miracle.

Written by Julia, mother of Isaac.