

Our Sawyer Girl

As told by mom Becky



Our girl is our sunshine. Sawyer's gorgeous and funny. She's sassy and smart. And when she was one year old, she fell off the growth chart. Her doctor was concerned, but Brian and I were not. Both of our families are fairly small and her being tiny seemed pretty likely to us. But then she started throwing up. A lot. Multiple times a day and we just couldn't get anything to stay down.

We started meeting with gastrointestinal (GI) doctors, as she was labeled "failure to thrive." Despite all our efforts, we could not get her over 15 pounds. We spent months working with GI specialists, running tests, and finding very little. Finally, we ended up in the hospital. She was 16 months old at the time. And I was five months pregnant with Sawyer's soon-to-join-us little sister.

Doctors swirled in and out, trying to figure out the puzzle that was our daughter. Finally, the doctor said we needed to do an MRI of Sawyer's brain. The MRI was December 16, 2014. Afterwards, there was a team of doctors assembling in our room. We didn't know much about hospital protocol, but we did know when doctors start entering and pulling up chairs, it may be time to take a deep breath and take a seat.

We were told there was a mass near our daughter's brain stem. We stared at the MRI image in front of us. A grey mass was on the center of the brain and likely causing Sawyer's mysterious symptoms. Sawyer would need to have brain surgery to remove it.

On December 18, 2014, we walked our tiny, dancing daughter into the prep room for her surgery to have a brain tumor removed. During seven hours of surgery we wandered and cried and prayed. The doctors removed most of the tumor, though were unable to remove all of it due to its location on the brain stem.

After surgery, she was cross-eyed and her eyes twitched continuously, she was unable to lift her head or walk. But she was our gorgeous cross-eyed beauty and I will tell you that never has anyone cared for a baby with more fierce a love than we did those nights after surgery. We finally brought our girl home.

The road would be long. But we were home. Ever the trooper, Sawyer went to physical therapy to re-learn to walk and balance. And for a time, things seemed headed in the right direction. However, the symptoms continued, far past what we were told to expect.

In February we checked into the hospital again. She was still throwing up and not gaining weight. We needed more answers. Another MRI showed that her tumor had changed slightly, and its location was likely causing the symptoms.

It soon became clear that our road had shifted and that we would now be embarking on chemotherapy with our daughter. One year of it. Twelve cycles. Thirty six chemo treatments. I remember holding Sawyer against my pregnant belly, crying about the hair she twirls when she falls asleep. Her curls that would likely fall out. There were so many things to cry about, but there I was crying about her hair.

We had our plan. Sawyer was to receive IV nutrition through her pic line for 105 days. It was 105 days of flushing lines and chasing her around with the bag of fluids she was attached to, because after all she had been through, she was not slowing down. She was a beautiful, busy, tiny one-year old.

In April 2015, after two months of chemo, IV nutrition and feeding tubes, Sawyer's little sister, Oakley Grace, joined us. And oh, what a joy she has been for us and for her sister...

Sawyer has now endured 30 chemo treatments, 32 nights in the hospital, and countless trips to the ER. She has six more chemotherapy treatments to go. She's almost 22 pounds, which does not get her back on the growth chart yet, but she's close! And her remaining tumor has been reduced by 95%. Her crossed eyes have righted themselves. She now runs, jumps and dances again. She has taught us of resilience, faith, strength, and heartache and of never-ending hope.

Cancer sweeps in and changes everything. It changes the light and the air. Everything shifts with its arrival. We will always be grateful for those who rallied around us during the most impossible of times. There With Care was indeed one of those for us.

There With Care provides a breath when it seems there's not a breath to be caught. Throughout our year and at our most difficult times, they brought groceries and diapers. They provided gas cards for our many trips to the ER with chemo fevers.

Our There With Care deliveries reminded us of kindness and warm folks who were pulling for us. It was especially appreciated during the hard days, when I would arrive at the door un-showered and exhausted with a newborn on one hip and my Sawyer on the other.

We will always be grateful for the sheer kindness and generosity of everyone involved with There With Care. And the future is bright for our gorgeous girl, singing and dancing her way into toddlerhood...

