

Bryan's Story

Luisa Piccarreta's Intercession for the Cure of Bryan Joseph Dobak

There was nothing unusual about my pregnancy while I carried Bryan to term on August 12, 1996, until 5 days before his scheduled C-section. On August 7, 1996, I experienced an unusual pre-birth event, described in this document, which was to become a significant day as it marked in advance the healing day of Bryan's chronic and fatal condition.

The reason for the C-section was that during my previous pregnancy and birth of my fifth child, Kate Rose, I had experienced a complication due to a fibroid, which was actually blocking the natural birth canal. After the C-section birth of Kate, my doctor, John Bruchalski, M.D., could not close my uterus due to the fibroid's size, a condition that literally turned my uterus inside out. At that time, he had been able to save my womb, although he told me its integrity had been greatly compromised. So, just the fact that I had conceived Bryan was extraordinary.

As mentioned above, on August 7, 1996, five days before the scheduled C-section for Bryan's birth, sometime after midnight, a violent in utero pain shot through my whole body. It felt like a huge sword being thrust into my uterus. The pain was so intense I began to experience a cold sweat. This was the first time I had experienced such an event, so I immediately thought something could be terribly wrong. But, the episode ceased just as quickly as it had began, so I calmed down. Only minutes later when it reoccurred as an identical horrific ripping pain, I decide to call Dr. John Bruchalski. While I was waiting for him to return my call, I experienced a third violent agony in utero. Dr. John Bruchalski reassured me that I could go back to sleep and dismiss these events. To my surprise, August 7th would become a very significant date in relation to Bryan's healing, as I will relate here below.

Five days later, on August 12, 1996, I arrived early at Fair Oaks Hospital, in Fairfax, Virginia, to begin preparations for the C-section. Dr. John B. was pleased with the progress during the operation. He even commented on the fact that my womb had miraculously healed from his previous incisions, which he had made to remove the fibroid after Kate's birth. What good news to hear as I quickly tried to forget those three mysterious pains I experienced five days before.

I remember resting on the delivery table, anxious to see my newborn baby. Dr. John Bruchalski lifted Bryan Joseph up to extremely proud parents and gave him to the nurses. After a while, I began to realize that something was wrong; the nurses were spending an inordinate amount of time to help Bryan take his first breaths. I can still hear the sound of the rubber mallet beating down on Bryan's little back. A nurse was using the mallet to clear his lungs. Bryan's father was anxious about this and even asked the nurse to please stop pounding his son's back. But, of course, the nurse reassured him that Bryan loved being helped like that to breathe fresh air.

Without being able to hold him, I was allowed to see his little face before he was rushed to the Neonatal Intensive Care (NIC) unit. I will always remember what I saw in Bryan's face the very first time - it was ashen colored and his cheeks were puffy with infection, but his eyes were clear and serious. I recall thinking that Bryan was in this fighting for his life, and with his eyes he told me, "I am here, Mama, and I'm going to win!"

Bryan's Apgar Scores were 4 - 5, which were not normal. I was assured that Bryan was in the right place, and the neonatal intensive-care doctors were working on him. In order to see Bryan, I had to walk to the NIC unit from my hospital room. (I had decided to endure the pain from the C-section, just to be near my precious baby. A grueling two weeks passed with my numerous daily visits to the nursery, watching Bryan being weaned from oxygen. It was so hard to watch him have to fast for an entire week before he could be given any kind of protein intravenously. I ached so much to be able to nurse him. Finally, the second week passed, and we were allowed to take Bryan home, with the hope that everything would improve.

A full workup and analysis of Bryan revealed he might have been exposed to a virus two weeks before birth. An x-ray revealed a normal heart, a horseshoe-shaped kidney, and an enlarged liver. He had a torqued foreskin, preventing a circumcision. A sample of Bryan's blood was sent to Richmond, Virginia, to be titrated for over fifty viruses, but all tests came back negative. However, this was just information, not a diagnosis. I felt completely helpless that with all our modern technology, the doctors could not explain Bryan's condition. All I knew is that Bryan had some congenital internal malformations and could not breathe on his own. In addition, he was not allowed to take any food by mouth for an entire two weeks.

At his two-week check up, Bryan's pediatrician was not pleased with his weight gain. He still was not back to his original birth weight, which was 8 lbs. 14 oz. Thus began an unimaginable period of counting calories and changing formula three different times. Still at his one-month checkup, Bryan was underweight. Even after switching formulas three times, Bryan still was not thriving. Finally, the pediatrician was concerned enough to refer him to Children's Hospital Center in Washington, D.C. The on-call physician, Dr. Stephen Latimer, gave me a minimal schedule to keep for the next three days, wherein Bryan was to receive the minimum allowable ounces of concentrated formula to balance both nutrition and hydration. After the three days, I frantically called Dr. Latimer and had to report that we couldn't even make the minimal schedule. It was clear to Dr. Latimer that Bryan was now at great risk. Bryan would simply refuse his bottle, and I was devastated. Why wouldn't my child eat?

[It was about this time in November, 1996, when I attended a conference about Luisa Piccarreta and Divine Will. A friend of mine, Kathy E., restricted to a wheel chair, felt inner promptings to attend the conference, but needed someone to help her with transportation. I remember feeling overwhelmed at the time trying to keep up with Bryan's care. But something in me made me say "yes" to Kathy E.'s request to go with her. Arriving at the conference, I suddenly felt an inner calm and understanding that everything would be okay. During a break at the conference, I approached Father Thomas Celso to ask if he would pray for my son Bryan. Even as I was asking him, he said to me, "Let me see, I think we should open this book of messages (Luisa's writings), and see what we find." So Father, without much fanfare, simply opened the book to whatever page he happened to come to. To my utter astonishment, he happened to start reading from a message dated August 12. Without thinking, I interrupted Father, and exclaimed, "Father, that's Bryan's birthday!" He just looked at me with complete serenity, smiled, and continued reading. That was my first introduction to the Little Daughter of the Divine Will.]

Dr. Latimer was rather concerned that Bryan wouldn't eat, and admitted him to Children's Hospital Center for evaluation. It was the beginning of December, 1996. Thus began another battery of tests: testing from simple disorders to gruesome metabolic genetic disorders. But still no conclusive diagnosis; all the tests came back negative. The only diagnosis we had was Gastro reflux. In order to get extra calories in Bryan during this time, he was given a nasal feeding tube. And so for the next four months, there was a huge effort to keep enough calories in him. The feeding pump helped put extra calories in Bryan, but his Reflux condition would cause him to regurgitate. Bryan's condition was getting progressively worse. He was further diagnosed with motor delay, low muscle tone, and a fatal condition if not reversed called "Failure to Thrive (FTT)." A condition in which a child fails to maintain a weight gain that can provide normal growth and development. Hence, he was missing too many of the normal developmental milestones. By seven months, Bryan's growth had slowed seriously he was off the low end of normal growth charts. The doctor decided to act quickly. The soonest available date for surgery happened to fall on Good Friday, 1997.

To keep food in Bryan and treat his gastro reflux, the doctor inserted a Gastro tube, and performed a Nissen fundoplication (a procedure in which the top of the stomach is wrapped and then stitched in place, creating a one-way valve). Furthermore, according to protocol when operating on children, the doctors said they would perform all necessary surgeries at one time. So, they also circumcised Bryan, which as you may recall, had not been done previously because of the torqued foreskin. This operation involved the doctor cutting Bryan's penis, twisting the skin and bell into the proper place, and then stitching it into position. I remember being thankful that he would be able to develop normally, but felt such sorrow at the same time for all his little body was going through.

[At this point in my life, I consigned my entire motherhood over to Jesus. I remember telling Him, "Yes Lord, I have my motherly instincts which You so graciously gave me, but if Bryan isn't of this world, You can take him. But, if you want me to continue as his mother, I gratefully accept Your wishes. I am here to do Your Will, Lord Jesus."]

The procedures were successful, Bryan lived through the operations. So, I had my answer - the Lord wanted Bryan and I to remain together. It wasn't until Easter Sunday, that I got a chance to hold Bryan, and take off his clothes to change him. To my utter astonishment and mortification, I saw his surgery wounds for the first time. Bryan's hands, feet and head all had wounds from unsuccessful attempts to establish an anesthetic IV. Therefore, he had had to endure thirty minutes of poking and stabbing before any painkiller could be administered. (To this day, I sense in a mysterious way that on Good Friday 1997, Bryan shared in the wounds of Jesus' Crucifixion in the exact same parts of the body — fully awake and without "wine mixed in myrrh." What further amazed me was that during the operation, a priest from the nearby Franciscan Monastery was on leave, having been given permission to study for his medical doctorate. Father Kevin Flanagan wished to obtain his doctorate in order to administer healthcare, as well as the sacraments, to people in Africa where he was planning his missionary work. I gave Father Flanagan a relic of Luisa's that I had received from Fr. Celso for him to take to Africa. I was so grateful that Bryan was able to be operated on with the assistance of one of Our Lord's own priest available at all times!)

Bryan was released from the hospital a week behind schedule, probably due to his weakened state before surgery. To the doctor's disappointment, his rate of weight gain did not improve. It was now obvious that Bryan's gastro-reflux condition was not causing his FTT condition. Two months later while on vacation at the Outer Banks, North Carolina, Bryan's condition took a turn for the worse. Our family was walking on the beach, with Bryan perched on his father's shoulders. I looked up at Bryan and unexpectedly noticed a greyish-blue streaking in his arms and legs. It looked like a marking pen had been used to trace lines underneath his skin. Without knowing why, immediately I thought "cyanosis," even though I had never before used the term. But, for some unknown reason, the seriousness of this possible condition worried me greatly. Immediately Bryan was taken to an urgent care facility. The news was not good - Bryan had an extremely low oxygen level. The medical crew administered oxygen and his condition stabilized. Bryan and I were taken by ambulance to the Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters, an hour's drive from the beach. After seventeen days, and more tests, Bryan was sent home with a prescription of oxygen to be administered during his sleeping hours.

We were home for a week, when I suddenly noticed the blue streaking again. By the time the EMTs arrived, I had given Bryan oxygen and he appeared much better, with no noticeable streaking. But, the EMTs didn't like his color, so we were taken to Prince William Hospital in Manassas, Virginia. After consulting Bryan's doctors at Children's Hospital, a special pediatric ambulance was sent for transfer. During our twenty-one days there, Bryan had another battery of tests, and just as before, nothing could be found that caused his failure to thrive. Worse yet, a sleep test revealed Bryan had a sleep apnea. In part of his sleep cycle, Bryan's breathing was so shallow that his heart rate dipped dangerously low. The doctors prescribed a Pulse-oximeter and an apnea monitor. Now, reclining in his little hospital crib, Bryan had four leads emerging from his body: a feeding line, the pulse-ox lead wrapped around his little toe, an oxygen harness around his nose and ears, and the apnea monitor. He was quite a spectacle in bed but interestingly, he still had a small sparkle in his eyes, which had never left him during all the previous months of his agonizing afflictions. But, the failure to thrive condition was now at a severe level; he was slipping away. Without a minimal weight gain an infant cannot develop properly. Bryan was almost a year old and could only sit, and not crawl. He weighed only 13 pounds, and his body was the size of a 6 month old. He had missed many developmental milestones.

Finally, Bryan and I were sent home. A week later, on August 7, 1997, (exactly one year to the day of those three violent in utero movements I described in the beginning of our story), Bryan experienced the worst cyanosis episode to date. He was retching and turning blue in his arms and legs. I had to vent his feeding tube twice before I could give him oxygen. When the EMTs arrived, they didn't like Bryan's skin color. Immediately they transported him to Prince William Hospital. This time, I could not accompany Bryan because of my three small children at home. However, I called his father who was able to leave work right away and meet Bryan at the hospital.

For the first time in Bryan's young life, I felt desolation and helplessness. My baby was having cyanosis occurrences too frequently for his small body. It took all I had to again offer him up to Our Lord Jesus for the taking. As I was climbing the stairs, to go collapse on my bed, a thought

came to me to call a good friend, Mary Ellen V. But, I was too distraught to follow through on this intruding thought. Suddenly the phone rang. Incredibly, it was Mary Ellen V. She called to ask how I was doing. I blurted out the news that Bryan was on his way to the hospital again. She insisted on going to the hospital with a third-class relic of Luisa Piccarreta - a crucifix that had been touched to her bed. Later, Mary Ellen related to me that before she could leave her house, her phone rang. It was Father Paul Berghout., a mutual priest friend of ours. She, of course, relayed the message to him, and Father, in turn, said he would immediately leave for the hospital.

At the hospital, Mary Ellen offered her relic to Father Paul. He took Luisa's relic and blessing Bryan with it, (witnessed by the doctor and nurses), prayed, "*I bless you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and through the intercession of Luisa Piccarreta and for a first-class miracle for her cause of beatification, I ask for a miraculous healing.*" As Father later related to me, he had at that time a relic of the then-Blessed Faustina in his pocket. Father had pulled her relic from his pocket, but then with singularity, placed it back in his pocket and said aloud, "*Luisa, this one's for you!*" Everyone present, including the doctors, immediately noticed Bryan stabilize and his skin color turn pink.

Then a series of unusual events began. Instead of following the required hospital protocol of sending Bryan to Children's Hospital for further evaluation, the medical crew discharged Bryan to return home. When I got the call from the hospital and said Bryan was being discharged, I strongly reiterated that the procedure was for Bryan to go immediately to Children's Hospital. Suddenly, the voice on the telephone changed. It was Father Berghout. He emphatically told me, "Bryan is doing well and he's coming home."

From that moment on, Bryan gained a half a pound a week (approximating newborn growth). Soon afterward, he could stand with the support of his own two legs, whereas days before he could not. He began to crawl and in eight months he began to walk. At four years of age, the time at which I first had submitted this testimony, Bryan had above-average energy for boys his age; he was very agile and ran like the wind. He carried no medical labels at all.

On that day, August 7, 1997, (truly a significant date in his life), Bryan Joseph Dobak was finally on the road to recovery. As you would expect, I am completely convinced that Luisa Piccarreta, the Little Daughter of the Divine Will, obtained Bryan's miraculous healing, a healing which could not be explained scientifically. Therefore, I resubmit this testimony as true and factual, and place my signature below in the company of a Notary Public.

As a final update: Bryan Joseph D. has a healthy normal life, graduating from high school from Chase County Schools in 2015 and currently lives in Lamar, Nebraska.

Kristin A. Schueler

Date

Notary Public:

Date

My commission ends: _____

Witnessed by:

Date: _____

Date: _____