

Excerpts from What Makes Them Amazing

From Janine De Tillio Cammarata's **Fight to be Healed Blog**—June 11, 2012

You hear your child's voice every day. When they get home from school, when they yell, laugh. You notice they sound younger on the phone. You want to memorize the baby babble, the squeaking of puberty, the funny jokes or stories they tell. You videotape them to hear them sing, remember their words, their thoughts.

Voice is how we communicate and show our love. Saying "I Love You," "See You Later," "I Miss You," even humming. It's part of what makes us unique as people.

Imagine knowing that you won't be able to hear that voice for a while. I'm talking about a couple weeks at least, maybe more. There's that fear that it might be forever. You talk and talk, not wanting to stop, because in the morning your child--the one you raised through loving words--will be having surgery to remove cancer from his tongue. Part of what he uses to speak, to share his views, his feelings will be gone. It's anxiety-provoking, isn't it?

Today, this is happening to someone who I now consider a friend and is very special to me. As I write this Nick Heald is in surgery. Will I hear his light laugh again--Will his family? The surgeon will repair his tongue so that he will be able to speak, he will be able to laugh, cry, eat, drink--all that we take for granted. But Nick will need to learn to do everything all over again. And this is the second time he will have to go through this incredibly hard journey.

I'm thinking about all that Nick has to offer this world and it's immense. Nick's smile warms a person's soul and he easily welcomes you into his life. His family has such a happy and positive synergy that I love being around them. Right now his world is filled with uncertainty. But I am certain of one thing. If love can cure cancer, certainly Nick will be home in a couple weeks recovering and he'll be talking, eating, and laughing. Life will settle again so that he can tell his family how much he loves them. Of course they already know that, but they will cherish hearing him say the words.

I wrote this blog entry on the day that Nick Heald went into surgery the second time at Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan. Nick had surgery to remove the tumor, with reconstruction done on his forearm and leg at the same time. Dr. Mark Urken removed muscle from his forearm to put in his tongue, then skin from his thigh to fix his forearm. When he woke up, he couldn't talk because he had a trach connected to a ventilator, but he was able to move his tongue around. He wrote his mom a note, gave his uncle a fist pump, and was very happy to see Courtney. The nurses were surprised to get a smile from him. Nick had a cast on his left arm, a bandage on his thigh, he was trached, had a feeding tube, and many IV's. But yet he smiled. Nick has gotten where he is today because of his resilience. His positive attitude pulled him through one of the hardest cancer journeys I have heard about.

From Introduction--The community, our families, and these amazing young people that I am blessed to meet get me through to the next day. They give me the fire to keep fighting, the energy to keep battling for a cure, for healing, for a world without cancer. We are here to make a difference. I know this. I just didn't know it would be so hard. When I see a young person smile because she has received gifts that will help distract her from the pain of a spinal tap; when I hear that a child has been cancer free for five years; when I see a bright young man walk again, talk again, and reach another milestone, I know this is my purpose in life. My wish is that every child will live to enjoy their life in the best way possible and make this world a better place than they found it. I strive to do that every day and I hope What Makes Them Amazing will inspire others to lead the way.