



Ben

MY Son. My Little Mate. My Donor Hero

My son came into this world with a great big bellow at 2.17pm on the 29th September 1982. He bellowed not just because he was born, but because things were just not going his way.

Unfortunately, Ben's windpipe and oesophagus had not formed properly, so, at 4 hours old, he was transferred to Camperdown Children's Hospital for an

emergency operation.

Sadly, Ben had yet a further challenge which would eventuate in him being my Donor Hero. Ben was also born with severe scoliosis. During his growth spurt at 10 years old, Ben's orthopaedic surgeon informed us that Ben needed major surgery to control the curvature of his spine.



In preparation for the operation Ben needed a polyurethane clamshell moulded around his chest front and back, fitting over his head and velcroed around his waist. This had to be worn for a month before surgery so that Ben would be comfortable wearing it 24 by 7 for the 3 months following the operation. Did he complain or throw a tantrum? No. He was a true champion wearing it without complaint. He was My Hero.

He came home from school one day and said that he had a fight with the school bully. I was horrified, but Ben had a grin from ear to ear. Evidently the bully did not like all the attention Ben was receiving and decided to punch him hard in the stomach. Ben had been



wearing his school shirt over his chest plate. The bully gave Ben one almighty wack in the chest, while Ben just looked at him. I was told by Ben's friends that all that Ben said as the bully walked away cradling his hand – "you can't hurt me because I am protected by my shining armour".

When the day of surgery arrived, I waved good-bye to Ben not knowing it would be for the last time. In preparing Ben for the operation, the cardiologist cracked open Ben's chest and started to move his aorta to one side to expose his vertebrae ready for fusion. Almost immediately his aorta tore. Ben went without blood to the brain for 12 minutes before he could be connected to a heart-lung machine.

Ben was placed on a ventilator in ICU from mid-day Monday with Elayne and I at his bedside hoping for a miracle. Hope eventually evaporated early on Tuesday morning when the Registrar told Elayne and I that they believed Ben was brain dead. Elayne and I had lost our only son, our little mate.

By mid-day Tuesday we met with the two principal surgeons to be formally told the status of Ben's brain death condition. We both said as one that we wanted to donate Ben's organs and tissue. We would rather do everything we could to spare other families from the grief we were experiencing by donating Ben's organs. We signed the papers to release Ben for organ & tissue donation at 4pm on Tuesday afternoon. It was a further wait until 6am Wednesday morning before we could walk Ben to theatre for the retrieval process. Hours later we were shown to a quiet room where we were able to cradle Ben and say goodbye to our son, our little mate, Our Donor Hero.