

Gala Speech – A Night to Dream, October 7, 2015

1) When we received a phone call on that Sunday morning, we learned that our boy had been in a serious car accident and would be airlifted to Vancouver. The only details we received from the tearful mom on the phone was that he had a strong pulse. She said there was a lot of blood, and it was bad. But it was only his head that had been damaged. The rest of him was OK. It was September 21, 2014 - one day before school was set to begin. He was 12 years old. His name was Anakin.

2) We arrived at the hospital, and learned the severity of his injuries. It was not likely he would survive, but if he lived he would have severe neurological impairment, and likely never walk or talk, recover his vision, or even be able to breathe without a ventilator. Plunged into the crisis of our lives, we were called upon to make a decision. It was for us to decide whether to let our son continue to fight for his life with a severe brain injury, or to allow the hospital to disconnect life support, cutting short his time in this world.

3) We stayed at his bedside to savour these last moments of a short and beautiful life. On the second day his vital signs deteriorated rapidly. My wife, Joleen, awakened me in the hospital waiting room so we could together say goodbye a last time. As she sat and stroked his hair and kissed him, she told him he did not need to be afraid, but that he could go in peace.

4) He did not slip away though, and something extraordinary happened. We learned a life giving medication had been inadvertently stopped. The IV pump was restarted and his blood pressure began to rise. His racing heart gradually found its rhythm, and oxygen levels returned to normal. He became stable for the moment. In some distorted way, we felt a sense of hope. In our new version of reality, all that mattered was that his heart was beating, and that one of us was holding his hand. It was our

conviction to stay by his side and hold on to him.

5) Our daughter Arwyn, four years old, arrived on the fifth day at the hospital. She was her brother's biggest fan. She climbed up onto his bed and sat close to him. Although his face was broken and bruised, and tubes and wires protruded everywhere, she was confident he would get better. She told him everything was OK and he would soon get better.

6) Eventually it was arranged that our family would be provided a room in RMH. We took shifts by our son's bed, alternating to the Ronald McDonald House to sleep. Our daughter found other children to play with in the house, and she loved being there. With toys and lego, games and volunteers, as well as activities like music, arts and crafts, Arwyn's life was enriched and even filled with happiness.

7) One day in the hospital, Joleen took our children's picture. She told Arwyn to smile for the camera, while she sat on Anakin's bed. For an instant, Anakin smiled too. A few days later as I spent the night by his bed in the hospital, I asked him for a hug. To my amazement, his arms lifted up and wrapped around me as I hugged him.

8) Eventually at RMH, we would share meals with other families, and enjoy their company and hear of their journeys with their own children in the hospital. Family meals were frequently organized by volunteers and charitable donors. We missed our friends and life back home, but new friends and the sense of community at the RMH gave some comfort. We soon found we cared deeply for children in the house that were going through so much. In turn, others were inspired by our son's ongoing recovery.

9) Joleen was determined that we would bring Anakin home for Christmas. By now, three months later, the RMH was our second home. Without the amenities and helpful people just a few minutes walk from

Children's Hospital, we do not know what we would have done. The staff gave us a wheelchair accessible room, and provided a new hospital bed that had been donated. Our son was able to come home briefly on Christmas Eve. In January, we began to bring him to the house for weekends. The staff members would celebrate with us as progress was evident each week. They joined us on the journey of hope and recovery, and they became a part of our lives as our son gradually transformed. As we watched, his tragedy miraculously became victory.

10) It is an honour to share our story of dramatic recovery from brain injury, and to thank the Ronald McDonald House and sponsors for your generosity and kindness. You have made a difference. RMH is a place of hope but the real hope in our story is Anakin. Anakin, will you come up too ...