



Teaching Puppet Lends A Hand

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Updated:

TEMPLE TERRACE Allison "Allie" Blain and Daisy share a unique bond.

Allie, at age 3, was diagnosed with idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura, an immune disorder in which her spleen attacks her body's platelets, the blood-clotting agents that help protect her from illnesses and the life-threatening risk of internal hemorrhaging.

As a result, the Temple Terrace girl and her mother, Renee, have made frequent visits during the past 18 months to the All Children's Specialty Care clinic on Bruce B. Downs Boulevard. It is a place the child regularly has blood drawn from her fingers and intravenous administration of medication.

In the beginning, Allie was frightened and weepy throughout the ordeals she neither understood nor wanted to undergo. It wasn't until she met Daisy that her tears and fears began to subside.

Daisy is the clinic's teaching puppet, equipped with visible "veins" that can be prodded, a port that allows medicine to be delivered to internal organs, hair that can be removed to mimic a side-effect of chemotherapy and a catheter that shows how urine is collected from the bladder.

"Today's Allie is not at all the Allie we first saw," said Nancy Hillgruber, the clinic's hematology nurse supervisor, who noted that Allie's constant companion at the clinic, Daisy, has been a terrific coping mechanism for the child during her once-dreaded treatments.

With Daisy at her side, Allie has gained a better understanding of what she must endure and has reached a greater comfort level than what she initially experienced, her mother said.

"She's pretty cool," said Allie, as she pointed at the teaching puppet's veins that, similar to hers, protrude when the nurse puts a tourniquet on her forearm before drawing blood.

Last year, when the clinic celebrated Allie's fourth birthday, Allie decided it would be nice to also plan a birthday party for Daisy. However, due to pending hospital stays, it was postponed until today. Allie turned 5 on April 4.

The First Baptist Church of Temple Terrace is hosting an open-to-the-public Family Fun Day to raise money to buy a "brother" puppet for Daisy, a gift Allie would like the pediatric care clinic to have for its young male patients. Additional proceeds will go toward Clouds of Hope, a nonprofit foundation created by the Blain family to help other families dealing with life-altering illnesses.

"We've been through a lot over the last 18 months, but we have been supported by so many people, and we want to give back," said Renee, also the mother of Allie's 7-year-old sister Abbie whom Renee said is protective of Allie.

The backing from fellow church members and friends from throughout the county is evidenced by their contributions to the event, an afternoon aimed at kid-pleasing activities such as carnival games, a bounce house, Star Wars characters and Tampa Bay Lightning mascot Thunderbug.

A concert featuring the band Chris Kuti is planned for 2:30 p.m.

In addition, flower pots, decorated by Abbie and her friends and filled with daisy seeds, and baked goods will be for sale. There also will be refreshments available for purchase.

The Durant High School basketball team and coach Jeff Shotwell have become Allie's biggest supporters. They met her in December when they visited the clinic to deliver gifts for children undergoing care.

"Allie is just the sweetest, cutest kid in the world, and the kids got to hang out with her and see how Daisy totally relieves her anxiety," said Shotwell, whose students in turn held a pancake breakfast March 15 in Valrico that netted \$3,400 for the foundation.

Allie's father, Wally Blain, was overwhelmed by their generosity.

"They've been a tremendous help to us. Without their help, we would not be where we are today," he said. "What really impressed me is that the clinic is not even in their area."

Renee Blain said one of the family's greatest difficulties is living with "what ifs" and unknowns of Allie's disorder, one that affects about four in 100,000 children. Most sufferers' symptoms disappear within six months.

Her parents withdrew Allie from preschool when she was diagnosed but plan to enroll her this summer in kindergarten at Lewis Elementary, the school Abbie attends.

"But, she will require a full-time aide to be her bodyguard and keep her protected," Renee Blain said. "It's hard for her, too, because she can't ride a bike, climb, swing or slide."

Her family's faith and friends who have offered their help and understanding have given Renee Blain the strength to deal with each day, she said. "One of the things we believe is that God answers prayers," she said. "The Family Fun Day is living proof that he answers them in his way."

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Family Fun Day

WHERE: First Baptist Church of Temple Terrace, 10002 N. 56th St.

WHEN: From 1 to 5 p.m. today

INFORMATION: Call (813) 988-1138

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