

Tara

It's nice to believe in miracles on Christmas Eve.

That was the feeling of many people at Borgess on December 24 when Tara Marion, 10, asked for a drink of water following ten hours of surgery on the right side of her brain for an arterial venous malformation.

Miracles are elusive, however, and, by the time New Year's Eve arrived, Tara was back in the operating room for nine more hours of surgery to remove a remaining, thumbnail size portion of the congenital malformation of blood vessels that originally was the size of her fist.

"You have many chances to die during an operation like this," said Chief Neuro Surgeon Dr. Robert Fabi, Tara's surgeon, but "it was no miracle." Fabi has performed about a dozen such operations in his career at Borgess.

Both surgeon and patient agree that "it was a lousy way" to spend Christmas and New Year's Eve. "I don't plan on doing the same thing again next year," Dr. Fabi said.

"I was more worried about missing Christmas than I was about coming to the hospital and having surgery," said Tara, a slim, brown-eyed brunette who is a fifth grader at Waylee School in Portage.

"Now that Dr. Fabi said I can go home, I'm worried about my vision," Tara said, confessing that she is depressed by the fact that she cannot see well to her left side, which Dr. Fabi told her might happen.

Dr. Fabi outlined the risks of surgery for Tara and her parents, Karen and Jack Marion, including the probability of Tara losing peripheral vision on her left side, according to Tara's mother.

"We have cried a lot and prayed a lot through this whole experience," Karen Marion said. She was with her daughter day and night during Tara's nearly month-long stay at Borgess.

Karen explained that in September when Tara began having two or three migraine headaches consecutively, about once a month, she and her husband became worried and took her to their doctor.

When the headaches continued through November, arrangements were made for further diagnosis. A neurologist was consulted and a CAT scan showed "a mass shaped like a pie the size of my fist," said Tara's mother, adding, "it looked like a mass of worms."

The doctor told them it was an arterial venous malformation.

"Jack and I went to the library and did some research on Tara's condition. You learn a lot in a hurry, and by December 19, when we saw Dr. Fabi, we knew it was serious."



Following her 10-hour surgery on Christmas Eve, Tara was in the Neuro Care Unit when Dr. Fabi entered to check on her condition. She sat up and hugged him and thanked him for doing such a good job. He told her that an angiogram in a few days would tell if he had been able to remove the "mass" entirely on Christmas Eve.

Tara was apprehensive about the test, according to Tara's mother and Judy Emmons, LPN, Tara's day nurse on the pediatric

floor. Judy crossed her fingers as did most of her colleagues on the unit on December 28 when Tara went for her second angiogram. The results were not entirely favorable and Tara was scheduled for surgery to remove a small remaining section of veins and arteries.

Tara proved that she was made of "the right stuff" and the second surgery was successful. Dr. Fabi explained "I got all but a small portion on the brain stem, which may clot and fall away or not, I don't know."

ters of support from her classmates and friends. Because her family celebrated Christmas early, for her benefit, she got her presents, even though she "slept through Christmas."

She received a "mouse door-stop" from Mrs. Frisbie, her piano teacher for the past three years. "I practice piano every morning before school," Tara said.

When she was able, Tara put on a royal blue and black-checked sweater given her by her "best friend" Meri Lee. "Spell it with an 'I' because it's short for Merideth," said Tara.

Meri visited Tara in the hospital and they talked about things that fifth grade girls talk about: "We talked about Jeremy, who is cute and Brett, he's cute, but a wise guy. He knows how I'm doing because he asked my brother. His name is Brett, too."

"We talked about how the teacher gives too much work," said Tara, who has missed about two weeks of school and will probably have to miss another month.

Tara said that she recently got to go to use the piano at Borgess and she played "lousy." She thinks it is because of her vision. She's upset about her vision and wants to sleep most of the time, but her mother won't let her.

Karen Marion has a pair of glasses with black paper over the left half of each lens to know what Tara is experiencing, she explained. She feels Tara's piano playing will improve at home.

Tara gave presents to the nursing staff and Dr. Fabi before "going home" on January 17. Among the items she packed was a white fur dog, a present from Dr. Fabi.

She also requested some hospital-type equipment so that she could be the doctor at home with her cabbage patch doll. She has a "heck of a scar" on the right side of her skull, but when her hair grows back it won't even show.

At home Tara practices her piano and is getting used to her change in vision. "She has not shed a tear since she walked in the door and is not nearly as tired as she was in the hospital," said Karen Marion, over the sounds of a piano being played in the background.

"I told Dr. Fabi that he better get it all the second time or he would have to quit smoking," said Tara. "I told him I would get him something if he got all the malformation."

Dr. Fabi confesses that he still owes Tara a debt to quit smoking. After he told Tara that she could leave the hospital she began looking forward to returning to her own room in her own house and seeing her friends.

During her stay at Borgess Tara received stacks of cards and let-