

Hi, my name is Glenndon Whitaker. I am telling this story as part of a course I am taking at Boise State University in multimedia as part of the Masters of Educational Technology program.

For this assignment, I have decided to tell a bit of the story of my son, Philip.

Right now Philip is a happy young 8 year old who loves life. He enjoys going to school and playing with friends. He loves playing video games with his brother.

Before he was born, we were told there was something not right. They couldn't find his stomach bubble. After many ultrasounds, we were told it could be esophageal atresia or tracheal esophageal fistula. This was all news to my wife and I. Up to this point we had two healthy children before him, now we were worried about our next baby.

The next few months were a challenge, but one day Philip decided it was time to be born. My wife had more fluid than usual due to his condition and the umbilical cord got wrapped around him. So on January 5th, 2009 he was born 5 weeks early.

After Philip was born, it was apparent what he had: pure esophageal atresia. His esophagus didn't connect to his stomach, but ended in a pouch. He couldn't eat or swallow anything, and if his spit wasn't sucked out he could drown. This was the beginning of my family's involvement with the children's hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the IWK Health Centre. Over a period of months, we spent time between the NICU, the PICU and the 7th floor where the surgical children are kept.

This was a huge learning experience for my family. Until you have a sick child, it is hard to understand what it is like. While we were there, Philip underwent multiple surgeries to repair his esophagus. We had to deal with health insurance. Feeding tubes. We had to do all this at a hospital that was almost two hours away from where we lived. Our other two children still had to go to school, I had to go to work. And of course Philip was born during one of the worst times for travelling around Nova Scotia because of snow and snow storms. Luckily my wife was able to take a year off of work and have great benefits though work. We managed to find her a place to stay in the city while I took care of things at home. Even though we lived provinces away from our family, they still provided a lot of support that we appreciated.

After 5 months in the hospital, we finally took Philip home with us, a very happy day for our family. This didn't mean the work was over. He had to learn how to eat, how to drink. Our family had to adjust to having an active 5 month old in the house. We had many appointments to go to. The feeding team, dietician, paediatrician, surgeons. It never ended. Philip had issues. He needed dilatations frequently because his esophagus kept closing up. To dilate his esophagus he needed to go into the Operating Room, be put to sleep and have the procedure done. To try and stop this closing from happening, the surgeons eventually did a Nissan fundoplication. Basically, they wrapped the top of his stomach around itself to provide pressure to keep his reflux down. This keeps the stomach acids away from the repair site in his esophagus, which kept repairing itself in response and closing in on itself.

One time, his intestines came out of his stomach from where his feeding tube was placed. He needed surgery to replace it. One time, I picked him up, and my foot got caught on his feeding tube and pulled it right now. He needed surgery for that (my wife has never let me live it down).

Over time though, my son has gotten better. He hasn't been in the operating room for a while. He can eat almost anything. He has scars all over his mid section, but he is a normal 8 year old. A couple of years ago he qualified for a Make-A-Wish trip. His wish was to go on the Spider Man ride with Spider Man. He didn't quite get on the ride with Spider Man, but our family was sent to Florida to Universal Studios where he was able to meet all his favourite superheroes.

My son has taught me a lot. Before him, I didn't know what it was like for parents of sick children. I met other parents and children during my time, it is heartbreaking. The dedication of all the staff at a Children's Hospital is amazing. It taught me a lot about relationships, and what we will do for our family and children.

In the end, having a child is a life changing experience. Having my son Philip who wasn't born completely healthy changed that experience, which changed me.