



Jake Kasper - Becoming Jake's Mom

Bonnie and Jerry Kasper were looking forward to the birth of their first child. Bonnie's pregnancy was a healthy one, with no difficulties. Until she went into labor 10 weeks early. She was taken by Metro Life Flight from Elyria, where they lived at the time, to MetroHealth to address an intra-amniotic infection and the complications that would result from a premature delivery.

On August 6, 1992, just seven and half months along, Jake entered the world. He was 3 pounds, 9 ounces with lungs that weren't yet working, bones that were still soft and without enough body fat to keep his tiny body warm. He spent the first 10 months of his life in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

Bonnie spent every day with him. Each month, they hoped to bring Jake home, but each month, there'd be a new complication – respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) being one of them. She recalls crying every day. Members of Holy Cross Church in Elyria at the time, their priest visited with them regularly. Unsure that he would survive, his parents had Jake baptized while he was in the NICU.

But Jake did survive. And when he came home, he brought with him 13 medications, a feeding tube, a ventilator and a suction machine. The only premie

ever sent home on a ventilator from MetroHealth's NICU, Jake needed 24-hour care. On four separate occasions, respiratory complications from chronic lung disease resulted in Jake being life-flighted back to MetroHealth. Dr. Marc Collin, Jake's neonatologist, would do home visits once a month.

Jake's early years were difficult. All of his developmental stages were delayed. He didn't walk until he was three. His tracheostomy (breathing tube) wasn't removed until he was about four years old. He had an eating disorder and difficulties with his teeth caused by not being able to chew for so long. He developed an underbite that required jaw surgery to correct.

So that Bonnie could go back to work, the Kaspers arranged for 24-hour nursing care in their home for Jake. Luckily, it was covered by their insurance.

Bonnie had been fairly shy and quiet before her son was born. That quickly changed. She became his advocate, voicing her concerns for his care and fighting for him to have the kind of educational experience that he needed.

"I went from being Mrs. Kasper to being 'Jake's mom,'" she said.

Diagnosed with ADHD early on in elementary school, Jake was placed in a program more suited for students with autism. While Jake does have lower cognitive ability, he is not autistic. Bonnie quickly moved him to a more appropriate program at Summit Academy.

Jake served as an altar boy at church. He was in Cub Scouts and participated in the Special Olympics. Seeing how social Jake was, Bonnie realized that he would benefit from the more structured activities of a public school. In the sixth grade, Jake transferred to Sheffield City Schools, taking advantage of

resource rooms, inclusion classes and vocational programs. When he graduated from Brookside High School in Sheffield in 2011, Dr. Collin and nurse Debbie Lawson were on hand to see Jake receive his diploma.

Once a part of the maintenance staff at Walmart in Avon (holding down the night shift), Jake has been employed at the Lorain County Solid Waste Management Collection Center since September 2017. Charming, funny and happy, Jake loves bowling and basketball, country music and Elvis. He and his mom are “concert buddies” who see live music as often as they can. When the new NICU opened in 1998, Jake returned to MetroHealth to participate in the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

