

Natalie Tanner

1 Year Old

DIAGNOSIS:

Natalie was found to suffer from medulloblastoma, a type of brain tumor.

NATALIE'S STORY:

On Mother's Day 2007, Natalie's mom noticed that her daughter, who had been such a happy, active baby since she was born three months earlier, could not lift her eyes upward. Natalie's parents knew something wasn't right. The next morning, Natalie's mom took her little girl to the pediatrician. Just 24 hours later, Natalie was in the local hospital, diagnosed with medulloblastoma, a rare and deadly brain tumor.

The doctor told the family that medulloblastoma in infants is virtually untreatable. Radiation, effective at fighting the cancer, would be too toxic for little Natalie's developing brain. Local doctors performed surgery to remove 95 percent of the apricot-sized tumor. But it was up to Natalie's parents to find a place for her continuing care.

The couple searched desperately for answers, and they were encouraged by the groundbreaking research being done at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Natalie's mom contacted a St. Jude oncologist and asked him to level with her: With such grim odds, was it even worth it to make the cross-country trip to begin treatment at St. Jude? "Natalie could be the first one to survive," he told her.

With that one sentence, the family's decision to come to St. Jude was made. "That was the type of person I wanted caring for and treating my daughter," explained Kristen.

AT ST. JUDE:

At St. Jude, the family was overwhelmed with all that was provided for them, from Natalie's medical care to the free housing and meal cards. "The nurses, the doctors, the staff just took us in," said Natalie's mom. "They provided for all our needs, emotionally and physically."

Natalie received months of chemotherapy, but a scan indicated the cancer had spread to her spine. In September, the Tanners put their daughter on hospice care and treasured the time they had left with their precious girl.

Then something amazing happened. Natalie came back to St. Jude for a follow-up scan that showed the cancer was shrinking. Natalie's doctor said that her turnaround was like nothing he'd ever seen before. Natalie resumed her chemotherapy so that hopefully, the cancer would stay away for good.

Natalie is back home now and thriving. She loves talking, crawling and playing with her older brother.

As strange as it sounds, Natalie's mom says she's grateful for all that they've experienced. "St. Jude wants their families to have a lot of hope, and to be in a frame of mind where you think good things can happen," she said.

