

Hello Everyone,

This is Briana Alba and I would like to thank all of you for keeping me in your thoughts and prayers. I would also like to thank everyone for their donations, every little bit helps. Sorry for not writing sooner but I have been so busy. I know there are a lot of questions, so here is my story of how this all started.

It was a week after graduation and I got sick. I had the cold: stuffy nose, cough, sore throat. Like any other rational person I took cold medicine and just sweated it out for that week. Consequently because of my illness, I had to miss soccer practice. The following week I returned to practice, still not feeling 100%. I had a game that Sunday which I played in. During the game an opponent fell on top of me and I injured my shoulder. We went to the doctor the next day and I found out that I just sprained it, but I had to miss another week of practice. Thus the following week I returned to practice once again. I had gained some weight and I could not run as long as I used to because I would run out of breath. My dad and I thought this was due to all the weeks I missed of practice. We thought my shortness of breath and weight gain happened because I was out of shape. In turn I started running in the morning. During this period I began to throw up after my meals and my stomach hurt constantly. I was getting worse and started to worry.

I was losing my breath more frequently and I literally could not run. At one point I could not walk without losing my breath. Finally I went to the doctor after about four weeks after graduation. The doctor examined me and said I looked fine even though I felt like crap. She sent us to the emergency room and that was our wake up call. In the ER the doctors performed every test imaginable and the next morning we heard the news that would change my life forever. After all the test results were in the doctors came in and talked to my family and I. They said I had cardiomyopathy (an enlarged heart) and that because of this my ejection fraction was 15% instead of being 65%. They said that they would try to find out how and why this happened to me. Of course this hit my family and I like a ton of bricks. We would have never guessed that this could happen to a healthy 18 year old. I left Mountain View Hospital after a week with about five new doctors including a cardiologist and about five pills to take twice a day.

By this time it was late July, early August. I went to check ups with my cardiologist with hopes my heart was getting better, but to my dismay it wasn't. This was when we got the news that I would not only need a heart transplant but I would also need a diffibulator/pacemaker (a device that will shock you if your heart hic-ups or v-tecs). The news was almost unbearable for my family and myself. I still could not believe what I was hearing. I kept thinking why me. Well after that appointment we were sent to UCLA to discuss my case with the pediatric doctors and to be evaluated for the heart transplant. All the doctors were very kind and they all said I was the perfect candidate for a transplant. We left UCLA with a lot of new information and even more responsibilities.

The doctors at UCLA wanted me to get the diffibulator placed by one of

their doctors, which I agreed. On September 25, the diffibulator was placed in my chest. I was so nervous because it was my first surgery, not to mention I was having a machine put in me to shock my heart. Personally I have a very low tolerance for pain so at first I was against the entire thing, but once I realized that this \$20,000 machine could save my life I felt better about it. We had to stay at UCLA for a week after just to make sure everything was okay.

About a week after we returned home we got "the call". The heart and lung transplant coordinator called us with the news that I was on the heart transplant list. Because of this I needed to be an hour away from the hospital so that when the heart came in I would be there in no time. Consequently my mom and I packed our bags and moved to Los Angeles. Luckily I have a cousin that lives only forty minutes away from the hospital so we stayed with her and her boyfriend in their apartment. During this period I realized that God chose this for me for a reason that I am not aware of, but because he chose this life for me I was going to make the best of it. A couple weeks went by and I started to throw up after my meals, but instead of gaining weight I was losing weight. I knew that this was a bad sign and therefore we went to the hospital.

I was admitted to the hospital on the 23 of October. I was placed in the PICU, the pediatric ICU. There I met many wonderful people including very kind and talented nurses with which I still try and keep in touch with. Because everyone knew I was going to be there for a while, instead of having an IV in my arm they gave me a pick line. This was done because a pick line can stay in your arm for months without it having to be changed, unlike an IV. I was also put on about five drugs, but what made this stay intolerable was the fact that I was confined to my bed, not to mention the food. I could not even get up and walk beyond my curtain that divided the beds and the food was unbelievably horrid. Every day I began to get worse and had many v-tecs. The next event could not have happened any sooner.

On the 12th of November my mom and I received the news that I had a match for my heart. I was in shock and could not believe it as my mother and I started to cry. The following morning I went into surgery. After they put me out the next thing I remember was that I was being wheeled into the operating room for the second time. Later after I woke up from the second surgery, I was told what had happened. The first match looked great until the doctors transplanted it. The left ventricle was not pumping the blood like it was supposed to. Instead of working 100% it was working 80%. My doctor, Dr. Ardehalli, tried for hours massaging it to make it work but it just wasn't meant to be. They decided to wait a few days to see if it would wake up and do the right thing but in the end the doctors had to hook me up to machines that kept me alive. I was put on an eckmo machine and many others for about eight days. At this point I was moved to the top of the transplant list heavily sedated and could have died at any time but I survived. I believe if it wasn't for the prayers and my family I would not have made it through. So THANK YOU THANK YOU to everyone who has helped me in any way. On that eighth day my mother got the call for my second match. This heart was placed on November 21, my second birthday, and thankfully the next morning I woke up.

When I woke up I had tubes sticking out of my body everywhere and had gained an extra twelve pounds. I was in shock because I didn't know what, why, or how all of this happened. Thankfully my entire family came down that Thanksgiving day and kept my mind off of everything that had happened to me. After that day I slowly got better and by the next day I could walk. On the fifth day I had my first biopsy and echo of my new heart. Everything turned out great and thus the next day I was released. It was the 27th of November and I left with a completely new outlook on life. My family and I stayed on the beach in my dad's trailer for about a week until my dad left. Once again my mom and I packed our stuff and moved back in with my cousin. At this point I was taking about 18 different pills in the morning and at night. I had check ups about every week to make sure my body was not rejecting my new organ. After one of my check ups my mother received news that someone had offered us the use of their house in Newport. This was great because it was a lot bigger and my family could stay together for Christmas. When the time came my family traveled down for my first pediatric heart transplant holiday party. It was so wonderful to see all these little kids who were alive and thriving with their new hearts. It was also quite emotional because they had a special ceremony for the donors.

About a week later Christmas was here. Newport Beach was full of warmth and joy as was I. My family and I had the best Christmas anyone could imagine. About two days later I started to have symptoms of the flu, not to mention I also had a migraine and began to throw up. With it being just two days after Christmas and having my family by my side I did not want to go back to the hospital. In the end I realized that I had no choice but to return to UCLA in fear of rejection. When I arrived they put me in a room and ran tests. The tests proved that my prograf level (prevention of infection) was three times as high as it should have been. Thankfully I was released the day before new year. With all the drugs I am taking it is hard to predict how my body is going to react. Thus my medications will be constantly changing.

After this incident I am more aware of what to do when I start to feel a little weird. I had to get another biopsy and go to another clinic appointment. Everything proved to be okay and we were allowed to visit home for Super Bowl weekend. I kept going to my check ups and every thing was looking good. My family came down one last time before I had my first angiogram. It was very nice to see them one last time before I went in for my final test.

The angiogram procedure also included a biopsy and the extraction of my difibulator. I was so excited about having this machine taken out. When I awoke from the procedure I discovered that the difibulator could not be taken out because my white blood cell count was 200 when it was supposed to be 500. I was disappointed and happy at the same time because my angiogram showed that I was healthy. Because my white blood cell count was low the doctors changed my meds again. Since the angiogram came back fine and it had been three months since my transplant, we received the okay for my mother and I to return home for good. I am lucky enough to have doctors who know a great cardiologist pediatrician in Las Vegas. The doctor that I will be seeing actually

started at UCLA and taught one of my doctors at UCLA “everything he knows”.

My mother and I are very excited to come home, but we will have to return to UCLA for the extraction of my difibulator. We may have to come back for the more important procedures as well but we have no bad feelings. I have been through a lot and I want to thank everyone for their prayers and support, but the battle is not over yet. One in five people face rejection in the first year post-transplant, so please keep me in your prayers. And of course I owe a special thanks to all the doctors and nurses who took care of me because they ultimately saved my life. Lastly to anyone who might have to get a heart transplant do not worry. What happened to me (getting two transplants within a week) rarely happens. You are in good hands just keep your faith in the lord.