



Madeline Okano

On the crisp, clear, spring day of March 9, 1998 in Laramie, Wyoming, Madeline Okano graced the world with her presence. Shortly after her birth it became painfully obvious that something was severely wrong with little Madeline. Her blood oxygen levels fell to a dangerously low count and her skin tone shifted to blue. Her pediatrician recommended that she immediately be transferred to The Children's Hospital in Denver.

Madeline was born with a small hole in each lung, making helicopter transport too dangerous. Since she couldn't make the trip to The Children's Hospital, Children's came to Madeline in the form of Dr. Kinsella, a neonatologist who flew from Denver to Laramie to help stabilize and evaluate Madeline.

Along with the small holes found in each of her lungs, Dr. Kinsella diagnosed Madeline with a rare condition called double chamber right ventricle. This condition prevented the right side of her heart from pumping properly. Dr. Kinsella stabilized Madeline's heart and lung complications enough to make the journey to Children's.

Unfortunately, the damage to Madeline's heart was so extensive that her only hope was to have a heart transplant. Her name was officially placed on the transplant list on Nov. 16, 1998. While Madeline waited for her new heart, she required a continuous influx of medication on eight-hour intervals as well an oxygen machine and monthly check-ups at Children's. For six long months, while Madeline waited on the transplant list, her small frame stayed at just 11 pounds.

It was May of 1999 when Madeline's health and spirits took another turn for the worse. She was experiencing end-stage heart failure, which meant she would have to be stabilized via medication until a donor heart was located.

June 1, 1999, the Okano family received a phone call that it was Madeline's turn to receive the miracle of a new heart. By mid-afternoon, Madeline was in the hands of a capable surgical team at The Children's Hospital. Celeste describes the first time she saw her daughter after surgery as "a tiny girl in a sea of some of the best technology that medicine has to offer. But most importantly, she was pink." For the first time in her 14-month life, Madeline had a healthy heart.

Madeline's mother wears a heart-shaped charm bracelet engraved with her daughter's special re-birth date. Each year on the first day of June, Madeline and her family celebrate the anniversary of her miracle heart.

