

Spotlight

Yale
NewHaven
Health
Yale New Haven
Hospital

**BECAUSE
OF YOU,
Theo made it
through!**

Theo's terrifying journey from healthy to unthinkable ... and back again

Some things are beyond even the most careful parents' control.

Elisa and Ben Mazzaresse learned that the hard way. Despite doing everything possible to keep their baby, Theo, safe, "We couldn't protect him from the air," says Elisa.

YOU PROBABLY HEARD ABOUT THE "TRIPLEDEMIC" in the news last fall. COVID-19, RSV, and flu were peaking simultaneously, flooding hospital ICUs everywhere.

Any of these viruses can cause serious breathing difficulties - or worse - in children under three, because their lungs aren't yet fully developed.

Right before Thanksgiving, Theo developed a persistent cough and was diagnosed with RSV. There is no specific treatment for RSV, so Theo's pediatrician told Elisa and Ben to monitor him closely. They kept

him home from daycare, and before long, he seemed much better.

"Things were about to get much, much worse," says Theo's dad.

In December, Theo began coughing again. This time it was different. "He was visibly struggling to breathe," says Elisa. Theo's pediatrician sent them straight to the pediatric ER at Stamford Hospital. Theo was admitted, but after 24 hours, he showed no signs of improvement.

(continued inside) 

>> continued from page 1



ABOVE: For three days, it was touch and go for Theo — his parents' worst nightmare.

Theo's doctor thought it would be prudent to move him to a pediatric intensive care unit, and began making plans to transport him to Yale New Haven Children's Hospital (YNHCH), one of the only hospitals in the region with a PICU.

And then – it seemed impossible – Theo took a turn for the worse. “He suddenly started gasping for air,” says Elisa. “It seemed every breath might be his last.”

Hospital staff raced to get Theo on one of YNHCH's SkyHealth emergency patient transport helicopters. He took off with his care providers, but Elisa and Ben were crushed to learn that there wasn't enough fuel on board to carry them too.

Following by car in rush hour traffic took nearly two hours. Elisa and Ben tried to tamp down their panic, but they had no idea what they'd find when they reached the hospital.

The New York Times published a video-story on the impact of the tripledemic on health care systems. It tells Theo's story and you can watch it here: www.givetoynhh.org/ynhchpicu

For three days, Theo's caregivers provided him with every possible supportive measure. There was nothing more to be done, except wait and hope.

And then ...

“All of a sudden, he started to get better,” says Ben. “We saw him gradually turn back into our son. He was breathing, laughing, playing again.”

A day or two more to stabilize, and Theo was released. Today, thankfully, he is healthy, happy, and thriving.

Heroic caregivers never showed the strain

It was the height of the tripledemic, and YNHCH's PICU was overflowing with sick kids. The physicians and nurses were exhausted, pushed to their limits. But they made every effort to keep that knowledge from their patients.

“I don't think we knew the hospital was having any hardship, because they really did not let on,” says Elisa. “The care was so extraordinary that you would never know they were stretched so thin.”

Ben agrees. “I'm not even sure we'd have our Theo right now if it weren't for YNHCH.”

THANK YOU, DONORS! Your *donations help save children like Theo every day!*



It takes an average of only 5 to 7 minutes from the time a call is received until our SkyHealth Helicopter lifts off. That speed was key in saving Theo's life.

Watch an exciting video about our amazing Emergency Transport Helicopter service.

Visit www.givetoynhh.org/skyhealth.

Critical care
in a matter of
minutes



The new normal: stretched thin in the PICU

“IT FELT LIKE ARMAGEDDON,” says Erika Setzer, recalling the first days of the tripledemic. Erika is the Clinical Program Director of Pediatric Critical Care Services. She oversees the nurses in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU).

“We didn’t have enough beds,” she adds. “Patients were waiting for hours in the Emergency Department. There were not enough of us to go around.”

The worst of last fall’s unprecedented respiratory viral season – with COVID-19, RSV, and flu converging – is over. But the surge of patients, and the resulting pressure on the PICU staff, is not.

“So many children’s hospitals have shut down across the nation,” says Erika. “Access to care is a problem, and many states aren’t equipped to handle pediatric intensive care.” YNHCH, as one of the only PICUs in the region, must accommodate the overflow.

As Theo’s parents learned (see cover article), these dedicated nurses never let the intense stress of their jobs spill over into patient care. “They do their best not to let the family feel the pressure they’re feeling, while still providing the exceptional quality of care we’re known for,” says Erika.

But underneath that professional exterior, the ongoing surge of patients combined with the emotional demands of caring for gravely ill children is taking a heavy toll.

“I feel their frustration, burnout, and exhaustion,” says Erika. “My goal is to keep them going, to give them the support they need to carry on.”

We can’t stem the tide of patients or change the nature of the work, but you can help our nurses stay strong with your generous donation. Funds will be directed to a variety of stress-reducing resources like chair massages, reiki, and self-care packages.



ABOVE: “I am overwhelmed by the level of grit and resilience these nurses have, dealing with sick and dying children every day,” says Erika. “My goal is to keep them going, to give them the support they need to carry on.”

“These are the toughest, most skilled individuals you will ever meet in your life,” says Erika. “It takes a tremendous amount of dedication and personal sacrifice to do this work. There’s no way to describe it – they’re just special people inside.” ♥

**Our nurses never quit when caring
for our youngest, sickest patients.**

Today, *they* need your help.

A surge of pediatric patients has become the new normal in the PICU. Your generous gift to the Employee Wellbeing Fund will help our nurses stay strong. Funds will be directed to wellness and stress-relief programs.

Visit www.givetoynhh.org/emplwb
to donate now, or scan this code.



They lost their precious Lindsay but found a passion to help others

Lindsay's Legacy Foundation brings hope, research, and healing to cancer patients

JUST A FEW DAYS before she passed away from acute myeloid leukemia, 28-year-old Lindsay made a last request to her family. "Promise me you will live your lives and try to be happy."

"I couldn't deny her the one thing she asked of us," says Lindsay's mom, Carla. "I promised."



ABOVE: Lindsay, seen here with her sister, Stephanie. "We all knew how serious her diagnosis was. But she always had hope. So we had hope," says Carla.

says Carla. "We had her home and she was thrilled."

The trial gave Lindsay one more year to live her life and be with her loved ones before she passed away.

Keeping an impossible promise

When it was over, Carla and Stephanie struggled to find a way to keep their promise to be happy. "When you lose a person you loved so much, your heart is broken," Carla says. "To try to heal and find purpose, we started Lindsay's Legacy Foundation to raise funds for Smilow Cancer Hospital."

Lindsay was a strong, vibrant daughter, sister to Stephanie, and mother to then 5-year-old Landen. Her battle with cancer began in March 2016, with what she thought was just a stomachache. Lindsay's family and her fiancé, Sean, were with her on every step of her journey over the next 16 months.

Lindsay immediately started inpatient chemotherapy when she was diagnosed, but it didn't help. Her prognosis looked grim, until Smilow Cancer Hospital accepted her into a clinical trial.

Lindsay was able to receive this new treatment as an outpatient. "It was miraculous,"



ABOVE: Lindsay's son, Landen, 11, at the 2022 Be Happy 5K Run. "Anyone who knew Lindsay will tell you that he looks like her, acts like her, and has her loving, kind heart," says Carla.

Stephanie and her husband, TJ, are dedicated runners, and after Lindsay's death, Sean began running too. They decided to launch the foundation in 2019 with the Be Happy 5K Run in Windsor, CT. Each year, more than 300 people participate.

All proceeds from the race are directed to research and clinical trials. The family knows how critical these trials are to help patients and their families sustain hope. "The clinical trial is the only reason Lindsay ever got to come home when there was nothing else for her," says Carla.

Lindsay's Legacy Foundation also hosts monthly events to raise funds for direct patient support, including craft supplies and programs to divert and distract inpatients and their families.

"Lindsay's Legacy was created to honor Lindsay by making the lives of those on a cancer journey a little bit better," says Carla. "I could not have imagined that in helping others, my life could be impacted to the degree it has."

This August, the foundation will host its 5th annual run. Visit lindsayslegacyfoundation.org to register for the Be Happy 5K Run and learn about monthly events. ♥