

Michigan Editorial

Blessings surface when times most bleak

By JENNIFER VINCENT



UNDOUBTEDLY, the most precious gift in life is to give life and unconditional love to another. A child can touch your heart like no other. So, when things go wrong, it's also the most painful experience in life.

On the farm of Brian and Charlene Wieland in Kawawlin it was getting chilly, but the snow had not yet started to fall in November 2003. I was there to do the cover story for the January 2004 issue featuring their direct marketing of hormone- and steroid-free beef and scratch-hen eggs.

Farming almost always involves family. The beautiful thing about this job is that I usually get to meet many family members on each interview. Oftentimes Grandma and, sometimes, Grandpa are taking care of their grandbabies, while their babies' folks are hard at work. This was the case with the Wielands.

At the tender age of 2, little Matisin Wieland was very much part of the interview, the family and even the farm. With denim overalls, a red jacket and

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a smile to melt your heart, she caught the camera's attention. With a red-wire basket in tow, she was featured on the cover of that January issue of *Michigan Farmer*, helping Grandma retrieve eggs from the henhouse.

I hadn't seen the Wielands since the story, but I caught up with them at the Michigan Farm Bureau's annual meeting in December and got a glimpse of the emotional turmoil the family has since endured.

Shortly after their story was published, Matisin started having problems with frequent urination.

She had too much protein in her urine and was diagnosed with nephrotic syndrome, where the kidneys shut down, pores close up and needed protein is not absorbed. After a trip to the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, she took medications that offered no help.

Eventually, her kidneys deteriorated. On one trip, her father, Mathew, recalls, her kidneys were almost completely

shut down. She went on full-blown dialysis. Matisin's spirit was doing fine, but it was much harder on the family.

After replacing a feeding tube, she had complications and developed peritonitis, a life-threatening illness. Despite the seriousness, Grandma Wieland says Matisin always had a positive outlook and a wonderful smile. For the following months she received dialysis three days a week at the hospital.

When they cleared her for a kidney transplant, family and friends volunteered to see if their blood type matched. Both her mother, Terri, and Grandma Wieland matched, but there were other things to consider, including age and size.

It was a family friend, 23-year-old Jessica Bragiel, the youngest tested and sister-in-law to one of Mathew's closest friends, who proved the best match.

After a couple of months of blood work, testing and more testing, they scheduled the surgery for July 17, 2006.

The surgery went off without compli-

cations.

Matisin now takes six different types of medications in the morning and four at night. The checkups are now monthly, not weekly, in Ann Arbor.

Her progress has been compelling. Grandma Wieland says she never complains and has been very upbeat.

With medical bills piling up, the family was blessed with an enormous outreach from the community. A couple of fundraisers, orchestrated by Jessica's parents, Debbie and Dennis Bragiel and their families, have helped to heal the financial pain.

The power of prayer is a mighty thing, especially when it's done collectively. So, please say a prayer for Matisin, her continued recovery and a healthy future. As her Grandpa Wieland says, it's an experience like this that really reminds you God is in charge.

For as many challenges and heartaches there are in life, there are as many or more blessings. You just have to look a little harder to recognize them!



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