

Anesthesiologists are usually the doctors that flit into the hospital room the night before surgery, spend a few minutes explaining they will be putting you to sleep and are never seen again.

Not in my son, Nick's case. He has a personal anesthesiologist, and an exceptional one at that.

Nick had three heart surgeries and a heart transplant all before he turned two. After the transplant and up until his fifth birthday, Nick was put to sleep before each heart biopsy. These occurred regularly; therefore Nick had the opportunity to get to know Dr. Bruce Miller well. When Nick was due for a biopsy I would inform Dr. Miller. He saw to it that he was scheduled to take Nick's case.

One time I was present to see the interplay between Dr. Miller and Nick. Dr. Miller put his mouth close to Nick's ear and spoke softly to him. Nick said something in return and grinned. Some years later, I asked them what they talked about when they got together. They looked at each other, Mona Lisa grins forming on their lips, and told me straight out it was none of my business.

Another trip to the hospital Nick needed ear tubes. I asked Nick's ENT doctor to see if Dr. Miller would be available to put Nick to sleep. I was told no, that Saturday was Dr. Miller's day off. I spoke to Dr. Miller later that evening and he said he would be in to take care of Nick the next morning. This type of thing happened a number of times over the next eighteen years: Nick needed his wisdom teeth out and Dr. Miller was there, broken arm, Dr. Miller was there.

At twenty, Nick was diagnosed with an aortic aneurysm caused by endocarditis. Nick was dying. He needed a new aorta. The surgery day was planned. All the players were in place. The heart surgeon who had done all Nick's surgeries, Dr. Miller and many of the same CICU nurses that had been there when Nick was a baby.

Nick was told the evening before surgery that it was going to be postponed for two days so that an adult heart surgeon specializing in aortas could be present. The only problem was that Dr. Miller

couldn't be there. He had already schedule the day off because his daughter was getting married that weekend.

Dr. Miller assured Nick that having the additional surgeon was much more important than him being in attendance. I didn't disagree, but Nick and our family wanted Dr. Miller there also. I explained, "You're part of Nick's comfort zone. You're the last person he sees before he goes to sleep. He knows and trusts you. To a scared guy who thinks he's going to die, you're real important."

The next day Nick's heart surgeon came in to discuss the surgery plan. I asked for the good news/bad news. He said the good news, which we had heard precious little of, was that Dr. Miller would be taking care of Nick during surgery.

I don't know what was said in Dr. Miller's house the night before, but as a mother of a soon-to-be bride I had a pretty fair idea. I'm sure it started out something like, "There're plenty of other good anesthesiologist that could put him to sleep. You only have one daughter..." For Nick and our family that wasn't true, just knowing that Dr. Miller was a part of the team caring for Nick made all the difference in the world. I sent flowers to Dr. Miller's wife while Nick was in surgery. The note read: It means everything to our family to know that Dr. Miller is in surgery with Nick. Thank you.

Nick came through his sixteen hour surgery with flying colors. That night I saw Dr. Miller at 10:30 and again the next morning at 8:30. During the rehearsal dinner, he texted Nick's nurse to see how Nick was doing and called throughout the weekend.

You can bet anesthesiologists are special at our house, and Dr. Bruce Miller in particular.

Susan May lives in Georgia and shares her son story in *Nick's New Heart*. [www.susanCmay.com](http://www.susanCmay.com)