



Our Story

Faith, Family and HHT

By [Lauren Linhard](#)

It was a regular school day for Dawn Rice and her family, complete with after-school haircuts, dinner on the go and batting practice. Nothing seemed out of place until Dawn left her son, Austin, 10-years-old at the time, at the batting cages with his team.

“I heard this strong voice in my head telling me to get to the batting cages now,” Dawn recalled. “I rushed back to find Austin on the bench with his coach, holding his head with a really bad headache. I just kept reminding myself that God was with me and to stay calm.”

Austin had lost control of his left side and significant strength in his right by the time Dawn arrived. And as she raced him to Acute Kids Urgent Care, he started having seizures and she rerouted directly to the hospital.



What began as a completely normal day for the Rice family became the day a blood clot was discovered in Austin’s brain, caused by a ruptured AVM. It wasn’t until the next day the family learned of the condition called HHT.

“Calls started coming in as people heard the news, and my husband’s cousin told us that Austin might have HHT, a disease that runs in their family,” Dawn said. “We weren’t aware of it, and when I Googled, everything was related to nosebleeds. I think Austin has had maybe two nosebleeds in his entire life.”

As the pressure in Austin’s head got worse, the surgeon decided to put him into an induced coma, which lasted for 10 days while he underwent surgery to remove the blood clot, a drain was inserted to remove excess fluid and his levels were balanced out.

There was a lot of prayer and faith, Dawn said, adding that friends, family and neighbors truly stepped up for them during this incredibly difficult time. When people weren’t lending support at the hospital, they were cleaning the house, driving Dawn’s daughter, Kailey, to school, or making meals for them.

It was two-and-a-half weeks in the ICU before Austin was deemed healthy enough to move to a general hospital floor. And it was another five days before he was released, followed by three weeks in a rehab facility.

“The experience was exhausting, but Austin had a passion to be up and moving and to get better,” Dawn said, reflecting on how she was originally told this could be a fatal situation. “Everyone was amazed at the strength he had, and the doctors kept saying how Austin exceeded their expectations.”

Now, three years later, Austin is extremely lucky, having walked away from what most consider a non-recovery situation with only slight issues in his peripheral vision and a small limp on his left side, a result of the initial paralysis.

Austin continues to be monitored closely, having had the ruptured AVM removed in June of 2012 as well as two smaller brain AVMs removed with gamma knife treatment, but he remains the outgoing, positive boy he was before being diagnosed with HHT.



Though Dawn said she knows Cure HHT is doing great things to get the word out about the genetic disease, the seriousness of it is still not fully understood by most people.

“I wish I had known about HHT when Austin was born, so he could have been monitored from the start,” Dawn said. “And it’s a heavy weight not knowing how HHT will affect him in the future, but we have our faith and Cure HHT is working to find the answers.”

Donations to Cure HHT can be sent to:
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