

Dear Burdick Family,

First of all, I would like to offer my prayers and sympathy for your daughter, Dempsey. I watched her video and slideshow. She was and will always be a beautiful little girl.

Allow me, please to introduce you to my own angel. His name is Tommy. Thomas "Tommy" Lee Dereksen. Tommy was born September 25, 2006. He was 7 weeks premature and was born with severe congenital heart defects and birth defects to his esophagus that prevented him from swallowing properly. Despite these hurdles, Tommy was a fighter. At 4 weeks old, he had his first open heart surgery. He coded and the surgery was an emergency. I didn't even make it to the hospital in time before he was taken to surgery. Tommy survived his surgery, but his recovery was filled many obstacles. He finally made it home for the first time after 79 days in the hospital. He came home with some extra hardware. A tracheostomy and a G-tube.

For the next 6 months, we watched Tommy grow stronger and weaker all at the same time. At 8 months old he was sick enough again for another heart surgery. A cardiac cath was done and the news was not good. Tommy's lungs had developed chronic lung disease and pulmonary hypertension. The surgery he needed would have to wait and instead another procedure would be done. Tommy came through surgery again, but the price would be him becoming oxygen dependant. He could not go anywhere without being attached to a tank or concentrator. Our home became a small hospital, full of machines, therapists and medical supplies.

Through it all, Tommy grew and developed the most beautiful personality. He was a loving child who never had a tantrum. He had a constant smile and loved to blow kisses. His favorite movie was "Finding Nemo" and he loved for us to blow bubbles for him to catch. He loved for us to take his picture. I have countless pictures and videos of our precious boy. His older brothers hovered over him and taught him things that only brothers can teach. Among those things were to sign "I love you", and helping find his voice.

Tommy endured many surgeries and procedures in his short life. Always with a smile. In July, 2008 Tommy was admitted again to the hospital. He was treated for a bacterial infection in his trach, then after he recovered, he had a month long stay in the hospital that cumulated with Tommy being not only weaned from oxygen but his trach removed as well! It was a very happy time for our family and something his doctors had fought so hard to make happen.

On August 15, 2008 just 5 days after his trach was removed, Tommy would be readmitted to the hospital in respiratory distress. He was retrached. He was sick, but nobody could seem to tell us what was wrong. On August 20, 2008, he seemed to be improving, when suddenly, he went into respiratory distress again. Tommy looked into my eyes and took his last breath. The doctors were immediately at bedside performing CPR and administering drugs to restart his sick little heart. 45 minutes later, his doctor called for Time of Death. Tommy was 22 months, 25 days old.

My sweet Tommy had lost his courageous battle with congenital heart defects and lung disease. Cause of death would later be determined as undiagnosed bronchopneumonia. Our family remains beyond devastated. How could our determined little fighter leave us? But leave us, he did.

We are asking for help with a headstone for Tommy. Our financial situation is grim. My husband cannot work because he suffers from congestive heart failure. He's only 35! I work a full time job, but put more money in the gas tank to get to my job than I bring home. We do the best we can, but our bills exceed our income by about twice what I bring home. We cannot afford a stone for Tommy. The one year anniversary of Tommy's death is fast approaching. It would be an honor if you chose us as one of your families to receive a stone.

Tommy is laid to rest in the Bardstown City Cemetery in Bardstown, KY. I have attached a picture of Tommy. Thank you for your consideration. God Bless!

Sincerely,

Chanin Rene Dereksen  
Mom to our angel Tommy Dereksen