

we were
There
FOR YOU

Family members
share memories of
Elizabeth Rolfs



photos courtesy of e. rolfs

HAPPY HEARTS TODAY. Right before Elizabeth went into surgery for her heart transplant, her father Scotty, mother Janice, and sister Sophia, take a family photo at Children's Hospital on Aug. 5. "Our prayers had been answered. It was so heartbreaking seeing my daughter suffer each day," Janice said.



LISTEN TO MY HEART. After her heart transplant, Elizabeth Rolfs '23 sister, Sophia Rolfs '20, listens to her new heart with a stethoscope at Children's Hospital on August of 2018. "When she had her VAD in her body before her heart transplant, her chest sounded like a robot," Sophia said. "Once I heard her heart, it made me so happy."

the moment
I WILL NEVER

Forget

story by s. rolfs
design by a. slanis

Elizabeth Rolfs '23 undergoes heart transplant after surviving stage four kidney cancer

"WHEN I FOUND OUT I WAS GETTING A NEW HEART, I WAS SUPER HAPPY. IT WAS BITTERSWEET THOUGH BECAUSE I COULDN'T HELP BUT THINK ABOUT THE TIME I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO SPEND IN THE HOSPITAL. IT WAS A TOUGH ROAD TO GET TO WHERE I AM BUT I AM FINALLY HEALTHY."

ELIZABETH ROLFS '23



JUNE OF 2017. Elizabeth Rolfs '23 walked in for a normal check up in the Hope Clinic after being 10 years in remission from surviving stage four kidney cancer. According to Rolfs, her family left with news they were not expecting - her heart had started to deteriorate from the chemotherapy that once saved her life.

"I was in pure shock. All I could do was start to cry because I knew it was a matter of time before I would need a new heart if I was able to get one," Elizabeth said.

APRIL 18, 2019. At a doctor's appointment, Elizabeth was told in order to survive, she would need a new heart. In the meantime, she would need a permanent IV called a picc line and a ventricle assist device or a "VAD."

"Actually, I wasn't completely overwhelmed by anything at first given what she had already gone through. Crazy that I wasn't more worried," Scotty Rolfs, father, said. "Later down the line, when things started to get worse is when I started to get more concerned because of the VAD going in and what that meant for us."

MAY 12, 2018. After appointments with different cardiologists, Elizabeth left the following morning with a picc line to give her a constant supply of medicine to keep her heart beating until she got a donor. With no donor, a VAD would be put in.

"The part that made the picc line so hard was she had to have it in 24 hours a day. It made doing every day tasks more difficult. She needed a lot of help. What made that stage so much better was knowing that the picc was keeping her home and healthy," Janice Rolfs, mother, said.

JUNE 28, 2018. The VAD had to be put in. The doctors

had put it off as long as they could but it wasn't an option.

"Being the sibling I think is the hardest part because I care as much as anyone else. The doctors don't talk to you. They talk to everyone but you which made the VAD so much harder because I wasn't even sure what was happening until it happened, and I just kind of had to deal with it," Sophia Rolfs, sister, '20 said.

AUG. 1, 2018. Because the VAD surgery was so hard on Elizabeth, she had to spend two months in the hospital.

"Carrying around the VAD was hard because it weighed down my whole left side since it was on that shoulder and a lot of the time it made me not even want to go out," Elizabeth said. "Because my heart was so small, they had to put my VAD in like they had never done before."

AUG. 5, 2018. Just four short days after finally being home, Elizabeth and her family had to go back to the hospital for the day they had been waiting for.

"My mom was the one that told me I had a heart and she just started crying. At first I thought she got a new job, but then she told me, and we just hugged because I was relieved," Elizabeth said. "I wasn't scared to go into surgery. After surviving cancer, I believed everything would be OK."

AUGUST 2019. Elizabeth and her family all celebrated her one year anniversary of having a new heart with a party. Everyone who visited in the hospital attended the party so Elizabeth could say thank you for their support.

"I have scars on my stomach from the cancer surgery and a scar on my chest from my heart transplant. Though they are daily reminders of what I went through, I choose to remember that they are scars that represent how strong and healthy I am. I can overcome anything," Elizabeth said. photo by a. slanis