



## Melissa Berg



The Children's Hospital

For Melissa Berg of Casper, Wyo., the summer of 2006 was filled with soccer tournaments and the anticipation of a family vacation. Then 15, Melissa was healthy and active. She had no idea that her life was about to change in a very drastic way.

A few days into a family vacation, Melissa began to feel fatigued. She started to retain a massive amounts of fluid – gaining more than 30 pounds in a short time – and experienced pain and ruptured blood vessels. Her parents immediately knew that something was wrong and decided to cut the trip short to head back home to Wyoming.

They scheduled an appointment with her primary-care physician, who instructed the Berg family to travel to The Children's Hospital in Denver the next morning.

Upon arriving at Children's, Melissa endured extensive blood work and a liver biopsy, which resulted in the diagnosis of autoimmune hepatitis. This disease, which largely strikes females at puberty, occurs when the body's own immune system attacks healthy liver cells, causing severe scarring of the liver and liver failure. Melissa was given a course of treatment, responded well to the medication and was released from the hospital.

The progress was short-lived. The following week her symptoms reappeared with even more intensity. She had a severe infection throughout her entire body and was in danger of multiple organ failure. There was no other course of action but to have her air-lifted to Children's for further treatment.

Melissa would spend the next six months at Children's. Less than 20 percent of her liver was functioning and in order to save her life, she was added to the liver transplant list. While waiting for her new liver, Melissa battled pancreatitis and a severe fungal infection that almost claimed her life. Both her liver and kidneys began to shut down and fluid began to fill Melissa's lungs. She spent 27 days in the intensive care unit, clinging to life.

Finally, her family received the news they were waiting for: a liver was available. Had the liver come a few hours later, Melissa would not have survived. After twelve long hours in surgery, Melissa awoke with a new liver.

At her one month check-up, doctors delivered the unfortunate news that Melissa's liver was not functioning properly. She would have to go back on the transplant list.

Six weeks later, Melissa received a call that another liver had become available. Her second liver transplant went off without a hitch. Melissa's recovery was swift with no further complications.

Today, Melissa is a normal 16-year-old. She loves art, plays the piano and viola. She participates in Student Council and even made the Varsity soccer team as a freshman. She tries to live each day with one of her favorite quotes in mind, "With our thoughts we make the world."



Helping Children in Your Neighborhood