



HeartKids

DAVINA AND PAUL'S STORY



My name is **Davina Quartermaine**.

I live in Geraldton Western Australia with two of my grandchildren, Paul and Nataya.

Paul is a heart kid. He was diagnosed with congenital heart disease when he was three months old.



Going to Perth for Paul's surgery

When he was 20 months old, Paul and I travelled to Perth for open heart surgery.

He went into surgery on 1 October 2019. My mum passed away on 30 September 2019. That's how I remember the dates. She died the day before he had to go in for open heart surgery.

Paul was knocked out for about 20 days, in intensive care. It was so heartbreaking to see him with all the wires hooked up to him. I took a photo of him.



I still have the photo now because it's a reminder of how lucky we are. My Mum was looking after him. That's what I think. Because as soon as she passed away, she just watched over him. That's what I believe.

We were down in Perth for at least two months. It was hard to be away from home. I had Paul's big sister with me, Nataya. She was supporting Nanna. She hasn't left my side either.



TAKE SUPPORT

If you are travelling away from home for treatment, bringing a family member or friend with you for support is helpful.

Nataya was the second one he saw. Not the nurses or doctors, it was us. That's why I can't have them apart. They're too close. We need each other.

Even Nataya now, she won't let me go anywhere either. 'Where are you going Nan? I'm coming!'



After the surgery, Paul couldn't talk. All he made was a small sound, like a pussycat.

When the nurses came near him, he would scream. I said to them, 'Get used to it because when he gets his voice back, he's going to be screaming even more!'

Sure enough, as soon as he started talking, he screamed his top note.



Paul's recovery from surgery

When he opened his eyes after surgery, I was the first one he saw. He started crying. I said, 'Don't start crying, you'll make Nanna cry.'

Ever since then he hasn't left my side. I can't go to the toilet. No one is allowed to hug me, even my partner. Paul gets all jealous.

He had to learn how to walk again.

That didn't take long. Picking him up felt like picking up a ragdoll. Even his arms couldn't move. That's how his body was. When you sleep for 20 days (in intensive care), your muscles relax.

How we got through it

It was so heartbreaking at the time. I had to stop myself from crying. When you see your little grandchild like that, or anybody like that, you think, 'Why? 'What happened? Why is it like this?'

In life, we just have to take each day as it comes. Over time he got through it all.



Not knowing things about Paul's condition is what made me worried. Speaking to the doctors and getting my questions answered made me feel much better. If you have questions about what is going on with your child, ask the doctor.

ASK QUESTIONS

Getting more information from the doctors can help you to understand the situation more and feel more in control.



Life in Geraldton

I've been living in Geraldton since 1981, off and on. When I was going to school here, I was cutting through the bushland to come home. Now you can't do that because there's houses and everything there.

Geraldton is on the beach and the sunsets you get here are beautiful. Yesterday was a pink sunset. Nataya came in and said 'Look Nan, the sky is pink.'



Paul's appointments

Perth is a 4.5-hour drive away from Geraldton. With Paul and his appointments, we never missed one, not once.

He has regular check-ups. The specialist comes up to Geraldton every now and then. We see the paediatrician every now and then too.

Even though he is healthy now, we keep on going to the appointments. This is so we can make sure Paul stays healthy.

ATTENDING APPOINTMENTS



It is important to keep on attending the check-ups and doctor appointments, even when your child is healthy.



Our life now

Today, you wouldn't even know he went through all that. He is a full-on, active little 3-year-old. He's got so much energy.

No sense of fear this one, none whatsoever. He always looks to get up to some mischief. He's a daredevil. We wouldn't change him.

I think because I was the first person he saw when he opened his eyes, since then he's just been stuck to me.

I don't know whether it's something for him. Or for me. Or if it is for both of us. I'm pretty sure we needed each other.

Without the two that I've got here, Paul and Nataya, life would be pretty boring. I'd do anything for them.



KEY POINTS FROM DAVINA'S STORY:



1. Take family to the hospital with you for support if you can



2. Don't be afraid to ask the doctors questions if you need more information



3. Attending check-ups and appointments is really important

This information is general. It is based on the experiences of one family in our community. This information is not a substitute for medical advice from your doctor. Always talk to your doctor about matters that affect your health. This story was told to HeartKids in May 2021.