



All Signs are Pointing Up

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Riverview teenager's life is turned around thanks to some innovated surgery.

RIVERVIEW - There were moments during the eighth grade when Brian Laxton's life was an absolute misery. The only thing worse than the agony coursing through his back, was the cruelty of fellow students who bullied and teased him with names like "Hunchback" or "Humpy."

Suffering from Scheuermann's Kyphosis, a serious curvature of the spine that made walking, standing, even sitting for any period of time a nightmare, Laxton's spine would finally get to a 110% arch, considered an extreme form of disability, and a painful one.

Still, the bullying continued.

"As my back started getting worst, I started to get called names just because of my disability," said Laxton, now a junior at Newsome High School. "I couldn't do anything about it. I started to get ticked off and I didn't want to let my true emotions out. I would keep it bottled in. I was getting more stressed, more angry. I wasn't my normal self. I got so fed up. I just wanted it to stop."

Stop it did. On August 1, 2011, the summer entering his 10th grade year, Laxton turned over his spine, and his emotional future, to surgeon Gregory Hahn, MD of Children's Orthopedic Scoliosis Surgery Associates, LLP, a group of five surgeons who operate out of three hospitals in the Tampa Bay Area. After nine hours, 28 screws and two rods, using an innovative surgical method that uses a navigational system, a once unimaginable curvature had been reduced an incredible 55%.

But more importantly, a teenage life previously tormented with physical pain and social ridicule was standing, tall, once again.

"It changed me entirely," said Laxton, who stood 5-foot-8 before surgery and now towers in at 6-foot-2. "Looking back, I was not the same person I am today. To be honest, I hated myself, absolutely hated (the way I looked). Now, I have so much self esteem, I had none in 8th, and even the 9th grade. Now I can say I will always be able to do something. I will never let anyone tell me that I can't do something."

For mother Vicki Laxton, a respiratory therapist at Brandon Regional Hospital, the choice of surgery was a last resort. Vicki knows all too well the risks of surgery, but when it became

obvious that the alternatives were insufficient for her son, the choice seemed destined by a higher power.

"For me, being in the medical field, the red flag went off," Vicki said. "You want to make sure you're doing the right thing. It is such a delicate surgery, with risks. So, I wanted to entertain the idea of the brace. But he's claustrophobic. He couldn't tolerate it. He couldn't wear it."

So a teenager's back and a mother's fears were put in the hands of Dr. Hahn, and well, some pretty neat modern technology.

Operating room? Meet GPS!

Using the CT-based form of inter-operative image guidance, Dr. Hahn, and his fellow surgeon Jeffrey B. Neustadt, M.D. have been on the front page of this science for 12 years. Their commitment to meshing 30 years of combined surgical experience with modern technological advancements has resulted in over 1,200 relieved clients and put new meaning to the term "cutting edge."

In layman terms, here's how it works. Once a patient is diagnosed as requiring surgery, a CT scan of the spine is "merged with anatomical reference points." The pin point mapping allows surgeons to place screws into the spine - a process that has zero room for error - and correct the debilitating curves.

Today, this progressive marriage of technology and surgery is widely used by surgeons across the Tampa Bay area and throughout the nation. But credit Dr. Neustadt and Dr. Hahn for being among the pioneer's of the approach, at least here in the Tampa Bay area.

More importantly, the willingness to take such bold steps has improved the quality of lives for so many who, for so long, could do so little.

"Being a pediatric orthopaedic spine surgeon is very rewarding," said Dr. Hahn. "The most rewarding part is seeing how the surgery we perform creates a positive impact on a child's life."

Lives like that of Brian Laxton, who remembers waking from surgery and feeling like a new person.

"I started feeling a little different," said Laxton, who remembers not being able to enjoy a day at Universal Studios before surgery. "I could see that I could get up and down more, sit down in chairs. There were mirrors all around the (recovery) room and I could see how I was standing.

"It brought me to tears. I was at 110 degrees and thought I had no hope. I thought I was always going to be like this. I thought, 'I can't believe I actually did this. I actually look like a normal person, just with a scar on my back.'"

Vicki said there were no complications with the surgery and she could immediately see a difference in her son, from the most unusual of places.

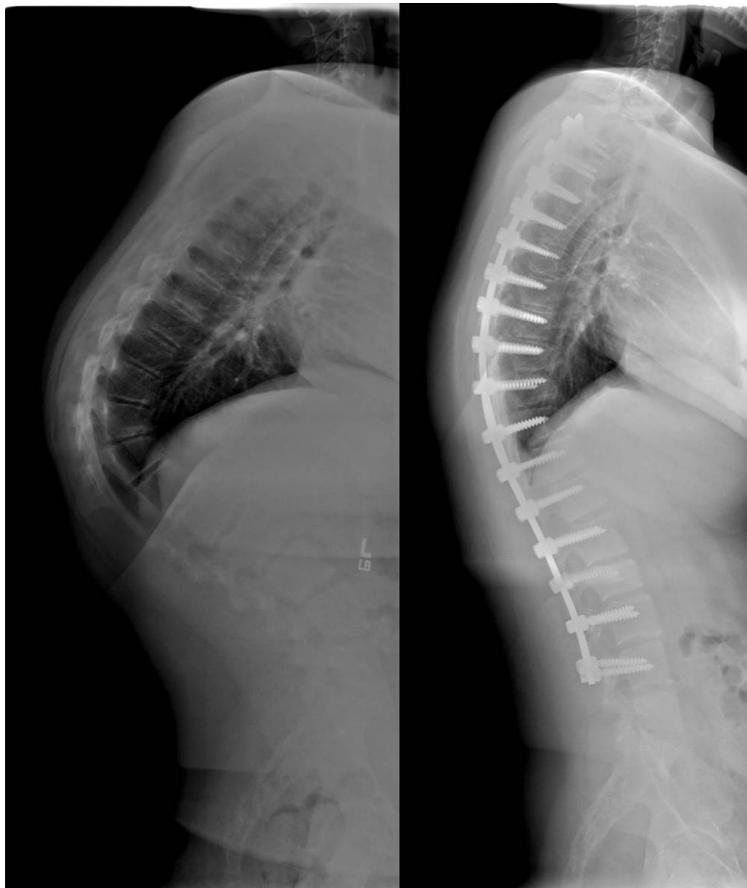
"The first thing I really noticed was that he could no longer fit in his bed," she said. "He was too tall for the bed now.... He's happier now. His self confidence is definitely there. He was back to school in one month, back to bowling in three months."

Today, thanks to surgery and prayer, Laxton is forging forward. He is part of Stand for the Silent, a club of about 200 students at Newsome that champions the cause against bullying.

"Over 164,000 kids miss school every day in America because of bullying," said Laxton, who has been approached by the football coach to join the team. "I want other kids to feel like they are in a safe spot."

As for football?

"I don't know about that," Vicki said.



Pre-op x-rays

Post-op x-rays