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Ohio Heart Transplant Recipient Now Among Record-Breaking Freshman Class

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Cedarville University welcomed a record-breaking freshman class to campus beginning August 16 for its annual Getting Started Weekend. Approximately 1,000 freshmen started their 1,000 days at Cedarville August 16-18, exceeding last year's record-breaking class of 911.

Tears were shed, hugs shared, and high fives exchanged. And for one family in particular, thanks were given for an achievement that seemed beyond comprehension nearly 18 years ago.

Lauryn Gibson, 18, of Greenfield, Ohio, a rural community between Cincinnati, Columbus, and Dayton, received a heart transplant when she was three days shy of her first birthday. Her mom, Heather, noticed labored breathing in baby Lauryn at age 6 weeks. On a visit to her pediatrician's office, what was first thought to be the flu was quickly diagnosed as congestive heart failure. Lauryn was dying.

The pediatrician told Heather to immediately take Lauryn to Clinton Memorial Hospital in Wilmington, where an emergency helicopter would meet them for transport to Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Lauryn's father, Chet, a recently retired Highland County Sheriff's Deputy, and grandma came by car to Cincinnati and joined them there.

"While we were in the helicopter, Lauryn's heart stopped beating," Heather explained. "The pilot turned off the intercom so I couldn't hear the medical staff talking, and then he began talking with me about what we'd experience when we landed, the sea of people who would be waiting for us, and to try and remain calm. He was phenomenal."

The medical staff revived Lauryn, but she was quickly put on life support at the hospital. Her heart function was 8%, and the head of cardiology politely but frankly explained that the only way Lauryn would be able to leave the hospital was with a new heart.

"I said, 'I'm not going home without her,' Heather said. "He told me, 'We're going to have to put her on the transplant list,' and I said, 'My God is bigger.'"

The cardiologist sat down with Heather and Chet and talked about Lauryn's future with a new heart, what life would look like. "And then she started getting better," Heather said. "Her heart function went to 13%, then 15%, and then we're thinking, 'Wait a minute.' Two weeks later, the doctor was saying, 'I don't know how you're going home.' On paper, she looked terrible, but she was defying the odds."

Lauryn was eating, sleeping and being a fairly normal baby. Her maximum heart function plateaued at 18%, but she was healthy enough to be released from the hospital. "She was listed for a heart transplant when we got home," Heather said. "She stayed at home the whole time, which is rare."

Lauryn received the heart transplant 278 days after she was placed on the transplant list.

Though life started quite traumatically, she has lived, for the most part, a fairly healthy, happy life. She is a sister to one older brother and two younger sisters. She was a football and basketball cheerleader at McClain High School in Greenfield. She enjoys riding horses.

Lauryn will be on autoimmune drugs for the rest of her life. The drugs are necessary to suppress her body's natural tendency to protect itself from a foreign body, such as her transplanted heart. The drugs make her more susceptible to germs and illness, so she has to be careful with enclosed environments, which is the main reason she will be commuting to Cedarville this fall rather than living in a residence hall.

"I don't have restrictions otherwise," Lauryn said. "I just try to do as many once-in-a-lifetime experiences as I can. I'm really grateful for this second chance."

She will enter Cedarville as a junior because she took dual-credit college classes her last three years at Greenfield. She has already earned an associate of science degree and will begin classes as a third-year prepharmacy major. She hopes to earn her Doctor of Pharmacy degree by 2023.

Lauryn looks forward to starting her prepharmacy program at Cedarville. "I'm going into a scientific field, and I wanted an education from a Christian-based college," she said. "I got a tour of their state-of-the-art pharmacy lab when I visited. It looks pretty amazing."

As for mom, it will be a tough transition, harder in certain ways than it is for most parents.

"It's really hard," Heather affirmed. "Just relinquishing control over things that we've controlled for so long, like her medicines and her environment. I've spent a lot of time teaching her how to advocate for herself, and you hope that you've done those things well. We've trained her in the way she should go, like the Bible says, but some of it is not just normal parenting things. There's a lot more at stake, and it could cost her life, like being compliant with her meds and following through with what her doctors have to say."

Even with these concerns, Lauryn's choice of university has eased some of that trepidation. "We've just been really encouraged by the response of Cedarville," Heather said. "Lauryn toured other colleges, and she was recruited by and accepted by other colleges, but Cedarville's biblical approach was huge for us. They also came through with an amazing scholarship package. Even getting the Bible they mailed out, those types of things have really encouraged us that she made the right decision."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including its [Doctor of Pharmacy](#) program, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.