



Dr. McMurry, a Geisinger neurosurgeon, says these are the rewards of treating children with cancer - seeing them graduate. Dr. McMurry (right) stands with Dr. Shah, Geisinger's Director of the Department of Pediatric Oncology, and Craig Yoder of Belleville, Mifflin County. Doctors discovered Craig's malignant brain tumor when he was eight years old.

Craig Yoder's Graduation Is Celebration Of Life

GAIL STROCK
Mifflin Co. Correspondent
BELLEVILLE (Mifflin Co.) — Commencement. It means a beginning.

Whoever coined the ceremony for graduating seniors chose a positive focus — the start of something new. And hopefully graduates by this time have begun anew and have filed the events of high school under fond memories.

On June 10, Craig Yoder of Belleville accepted his diploma like many other seniors but with one difference. Craig had more than the usual team of teachers, parents, guidance counselors, principals and peers guiding him to that graduating point. He also had a medical team.

Part of that medical team traveled from Geisinger in Danville to attend Baccalaureate. Some visited his Belleville home earlier in the week. Many sent cards. All were celebrating the milestone of graduation for someone they first met as an eight-year-old with a brain tumor.

In June of 1983, after five unnerving months of nausea and headaches, Craig faced surgery to remove the malignant tumor, and his family faced the uncertainty of both the resulting side-effects of surgery and possible recurrence.

From that point on, Craig's parents, J. Loren and Wanda Yoder, found out what medical teamwork was all about — teamwork that involved surgeons, radiation-therapists, radiologists, oncologists, nurses, social service agencies and many, many other helpers and healers along the treatment and recovery road.

At Baccalaureate, the piano recessional escorted the seniors, two by two, out of the hot auditorium to where family, friends, and a perfect June evening waited with congratulations.

As cameras flashed throughout the crowd, Craig found his family, then shook hands with two very important members of his medical team, Dr. Shah, director of Geisinger's Department of Pediatric Oncology, and Dr. McMurry, a Geisinger neurosurgeon.

"These are our rewards," said Dr. McMurry looking at Craig in cap and gown. "Craig's tumor was at the base of the brain, obstructing the flow of fluids. We performed surgery to remove the tumor, but there remained uncertainty as to whether it could be adequately treated."

After recovering from surgery, Craig went home to the Yoder's 85-acre Big Valley dairy farm to await the start of radiation treatments. For eight weeks, five days

a week, Wanda, his sister Marcia, and Craig drove an hour and a half one way to Geisinger for extensive radiation treatments to the brain and spinal cord.

This trying time turned out to be a low point in the Yoders' fight against cancer for their son's life. Spring and summer field work and daily milking demanded Loren's time with Craig's other sister, Jaylene, shouldered the role as Loren's right hand helper. Wanda, Marsha, and Craig endured the daily trek to Danville, and Craig's trauma of sickness from the treatments.

But the endurance paid off.

Craig would need no chemotherapy. The X-rays showed no tumor.

Now the beautiful Baccalaureate June evening belied the evil of cancer as the two doctors talked. Dr. Shah spoke of the importance of regular visits with pediatricians for early detection.

"Children must be taken to their own pediatricians regularly to catch it as soon as possible. Children's cancer treatment has come a long way," Dr. Shah emphasized.

His sentiments were echoed by Dr. Clement, associate director, Department of Radiation Oncology at Geisinger, during a telephone interview.

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Craig Yoder's graduation celebration was also a celebration of life. Here he looks on as Dr. McMurry (left) and Dr. Shah (second from left) talk to Wanda and J. Loren Yoder about the past 10 years of fighting Craig's cancer and about the family-like bond that develops from experiencing the trauma, trials, and triumphs together.

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