

Craig Yoder's Graduation

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"In radiation therapy, there is quality treatment. With a major childhood illness, go for the best treatment possible and stick with it. Sometimes you don't want to go any more, or the child doesn't want to go on, but with pediatric cancer the results have changed so dramatically in the last 20 years. So many things are treatable now. In the old days with radiation, there was less than 50% of a 5-year survival rate. Now with chemotherapy, the survival rate is greater than 90%."

Dr. Shah also spoke of a multi-

disciplinary approach to treatment — help from many different departments.

"We treat the whole person," Dr. Shah explained. Siblings may feel they've caused their brother or sister's illness. There are support groups for them. Parents of children with cancer are available to talk to other parents.

"We couldn't handle these cases (of children's cancer) without the children's cancer team," replied Dr. McMurry.

"We look for treatment that can offer hope. In Craig's case there was a lot of uncertainty. We focused on part of the problem,

the most treatable, and centered in on the most long term dividend."

So what did and does Craig have going for him?

Persistence was Dr. McMurry's quick reply. Dr. Shah said persistence. And Dr. Clement, who visited Craig at his home earlier in the week, said, "Craig has a strong spirit. He pushed his way through and put up with a lot, never complained. He did go through a lot of treatment".

"Craig never complained once!" Dr. Shah added. "He knew he needed help and he never lost his faith and hope."

Even when his headaches

returned three years later.

In the Yoders' agonizing decision, they chose chemotherapy over a shunt that would drain possibly cancerous fluids into his stomach. Either way, they knew Craig would suffer.

But Craig became so violently ill from the treatments that chemotherapy was discontinued and the building pressure was relieved through a shunt.

Craig's remarkable recovery since then has lasted seven years. And Craig's new beginning began the day after Commencement with a trip to Alberta, Canada with Loren and Wanda.

"Craig illustrates the trade-offs that are made to try and cure a child," Dr. Clement continued. "The short stature and thin hair. But a 10-year-old (for example) has another 70 years to live."

His advice to parents with such agonizing decisions?

Forget all else you have in your life and center on supporting the child.

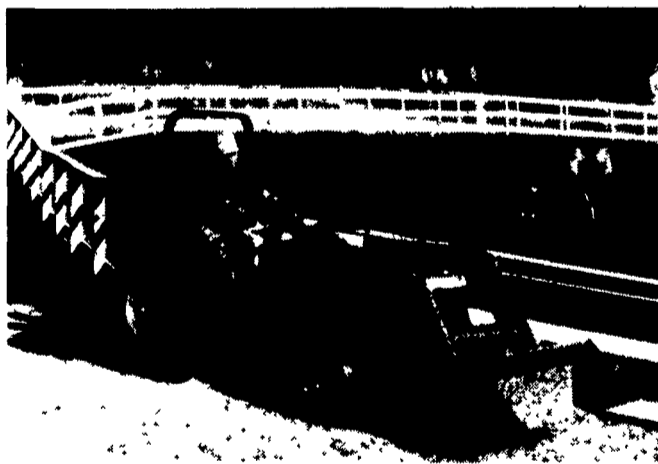
All three doctors saw the support Craig received from his family and the support his family received from their church and community.

"There are so many broken families now that many children don't have that kind of support," Dr. Shah adds.

The discovery of cancer in a child can rock a family to its core. But children surviving the battle tend to be mature beyond their years. They go through so much to survive their brush with death.

Dr. Shah says children living with cancer learn an important lesson — to enjoy the minutes they do have. It's a lesson we all need reminded of.

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