

Farm Family Donates Calf To Help Support Four Diamonds Fund

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But, she said that Robert's recovery seemed slow, and his breathing difficult. A trip to the doctor revealed a swollen spleen, an indication of serious infection fighting.

Within a week, Robert was back with the doctor and on his way toward a diagnosis of leukemia, and a stay in the hospital. Marilyn said he had grown pale and weak.

With all their concern of realizing they were in a battle for their son's life, Marilyn said they were more or less in shock during the first couple of days.

She said that about the second or third day, Robert was in the hospital a social worker came in and said, "You have a lot of things to worry about. Don't think money has to be one of your concerns right now."

Marilyn said that she didn't understand what the social worker was talking about, but the words were comforting. The Hersheys have major medical insurance for such crises, but it also carries a high deductible.

Several days later, the Four Diamonds Fund was explained.

"In our case, they have picked up everything financially that insurance company wouldn't," she

said, quick to add that their insurance company has been loyal.

"The insurance company has been very, very faithful," she said, noting that she has known people whose insurance company stopped paying about halfway through treatment.

But the Four Diamonds Fund provides more than financial grants. It provides a program of support for the young victims of cancer.

It provides a program called Child Life, a program that uses play therapy to help children confront their fears about treatments, such as spinal taps, bone marrow extraction and chemotherapy.

Marilyn said that prior to going to the hospital, Robert was shy around people he didn't know, though he was not timid. In fact, both Duane and Marilyn laughed this week when talking about how strong-willed and tough their son is.

However, Marilyn said Robert lay on his hospital bed, not looking at anyone, not talking.

Then one morning, a play therapist came into the room and read a book to Robert. He did not respond to her presence, but she finished the book, Marilyn said, not skipping a word.

Though Robert didn't flinch when the therapist got up and told

him that she would be back later, as soon as the therapist was out of the hospital room, Robert turned to Marilyn and asked, "When is she coming back?"

That afternoon, the therapist returned, reading another book to Robert, who still refused to recognize her presence.

The next day, he was invited to attend a pizza party in the play room. That was it, he was out of his shell, Marilyn said.

In fact, except for the pain that goes along with his monthly spinal taps, she said that Robert actually looks forward to his trips to the medical center, which is the medicine and medical research school for Penn State University.

Robert underwent six months of intensive chemotherapy, losing his hair and suffering some side effects normally associated with the treatment. He continues on several different chemotherapy treatments that are to last until January 1998.

If everything continues well, he will be a regular visitor to the hospital until he's 18, and then his checkups may eventually drop to once every five years.

In the meantime, the Hersheys wanted to find a way to help bring attention to the good service provided through the Four Diamonds Fund, and how people can get

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Robert Hershey shows an all-black woolly bear caterpillar. Robert is being treated for leukemia and has benefitted from programs made available through the Four Diamonds Fund, a nonprofit program at the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center to help children being treated for cancer.

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