

From the National Perinatal Association: Grandview's Love Overcomes Tough Beginning to Life

Russell Korando

The National Perinatal Association (NPA) is an interdisciplinary organization that strives to be a leading voice for perinatal care in the United States. Our diverse membership is comprised of healthcare providers, parents & caregivers, educators, and service providers, all driven by their desire to give voice to and support babies and families at risk across the country.

Members of the NPA write a regular peer-reviewed column in Neonatology Today.



Russell Korando is the Sports Editor at Leader Publications. This article originally appeared in the Jefferson County Leader on June 27, 2019. It appears here with permission.

To look at Travis Love today, you wouldn't believe how his life began.

The 19-year-old stands taller than his parents. He's got the lithe build of a state-qualifying track athlete. He graduated from Grandview this spring with a 3.6 grade-point average. He's going to college.

But it almost didn't turn out this way.

His mother underwent an emergency cesarean section operation on May 25, 2000,

a full 10 weeks before her son's expected arrival.

The baby fought for survival for weeks after doctors had given him a 45 percent chance of living through birth.

Love's mother, Kristy, was 23 weeks pregnant and suffering from preeclampsia when she was admitted to Mercy Urgent Care in Kirkwood. Starting at 19 weeks, Kristy and her husband, John, of Lonedell, were bracing themselves for the worst.

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"My protein was low, at a 1 out of 4, and it got worse. When I started showing signs of liver failure, the doctors decided it was time for the C-section," Kristy said.

At birth, Travis weighed 3 pounds, 3 ounces and struggled with respiratory illness because of the blood pressure medication Kristy was taking during the pregnancy. For the first four days, the Loves were told not to leave Travis' bedside because the odds of his survival were still low.

"After four days he started showing he was a fighter," Kristy said.

For nine heartbreaking days, all Kristy and John could do is look at their new baby, who was on a ventilator in the neonatal

intensive care unit (NICU). Although she couldn't hold Travis, Kristy started recovering quickly now that he was out of her body. Delivering Travis was her cure.

John was working on the assembly line at the Ford Motor Co. plant in Hazelwood when he got a page from Kristy that she was about to have the C-section. He rushed to be by her side when Travis was born. He made it.

"After they pulled him out, they tried to get him to breathe," John said. "It seemed like forever, but it was probably just a few seconds. They rushed him off to NICU to start working on him."

As worried as John was for his newborn son and wife, he also was concerned about their daughter, Jessica, who was 8 at the time.

"I had a daughter waiting for us, a son hanging on for life and wife recovering from a C-section. I was trying to deal with that all at one time," John said. "Dads have to be that rock for their family and they can't be emotional. I still tear up talking about it."

John said waiting to get his hands on Travis for nine days was excruciating. Trying to focus on his job while worrying about his family was hard. Most mornings started at 2:30 a.m. so he could be at the hospital for Travis' feeding and to check on Kristy before he went to work.

Travis steadily improved and finally was embraced by his mother.

"You go to hold this fragile baby and you're scared to move," Kristy said. "But the bonding you get instantly when you have a child, when you hold him skin to skin, is amazing."

John tried to maintain normalcy for Jessica, who's now 27 and lives in Union, by taking her to the lake and keeping her involved with the progress of her brother by letting her visit the hospital whenever she wanted.

“Nobody could see Travis before she did,” John said about the day he was born. “Jessica gets off the elevator, our whole family was there. I told her, ‘You’ve got a baby brother.’ And she hugged me tighter than she ever had. Making her a priority was a goal we had. Hopefully we did that.”

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“Watching him in NICU stretching his legs trying to push away from the pain was really hard,” John said. “Some days we’d take a step forward and four steps back.”

When Travis was finally released from the hospital, he was sent home on oxygen and a heart monitor. The Loves weren’t in the clear yet.

Travis went through physical therapy, occupational therapy and

developmental therapy. In a good month during that first year, he had 16 doctor appointments. The visits started tapering off after his first birthday.

At Travis’ first orthopedic appointment, Kristy learned her son had a mild form of cerebral palsy. The doctor told her that he wouldn’t need support to walk, but he’d never be a track star. The irony to that prediction is that Travis qualified for the Class 2 state track and field championships in the pole vault in May.

“I knew nothing about track at that point. In our eyes, we had our son. And if that’s what we had to deal with, we were going to get through it,” Kristy said.

John said they were very proactive in making sure they did all they could to get Travis on his feet. As it turned out, maybe the Loves did their job too well.

“We got down on the floor and stretched him and massaged his muscles,” John said.

By the time Travis was 2, his mom and dad were in a state of wonderment as they watched their little boy run everywhere.

“I put an orange vest on him to keep track of him when he was 3 or 4. Or you couldn’t find him,” John said laughing.

Travis was diagnosed with chronic lung disease when he was born and doctors told the Loves he had the lungs of a 70-year-old who had smoked his whole life. Now that Travis has proven his lungs are fully functional as an athlete who has run on relay teams, cleared 11-6 in the pole vault and played football during his senior year, his parents aren’t too concerned about that prognosis.

“All he’s ever done since he could walk is run,” Kristy said. “When he came home from junior high, he told us he wanted to run track at Grandview.”

After Travis was born, Kristy knew she had to help parents and their children who were going through life-and-death struggles and lengthy hospital stays. When Travis was 1, she wanted to talk to other parents and let them know that there’s light at the end of the tunnel. So she started as a volunteer at the same hospital, in which he was born and was a family advocate volunteer for 11 years. For the last seven years, she’s been paid to be with parents at bedside and she’s currently director of operations for the National Perinatal Association.

Kristy said it’s not uncommon for parents of critically ill children to suffer from PTSD, a condition commonly suffered by members of the military who’ve experienced combat.

“It’s not just for moms. It’s for dads, too,” she said. “We celebrate every milestone, holidays, birthdays. We want to celebrate everything during their journey,” she said.

John Love currently works for the Metropolitan Sewer District. When he worked for Ford, he said his medical insurance through the company paid 100 percent of Travis’s medical bills, which amounted to \$1.5 million. After such a rough beginning, it took the Loves some time before they let Travis compete in sports.

“We had worked so hard to keep him in this world, we didn’t want him to get injured. He was very talented at football,” John said.

While the Loves talked Travis’ early days, he sat nearby in the bleachers at Grandview’s stadium wearing dark sunglasses, new cowboy boots and leather belt, perfect-fitting blue jeans and a T-



Fig 1. Travis Love, center, was born 10 weeks premature. His parents, Kristy and John, never held Love back from competing in athletics despite his doctors' early prognosis.

shirt. He seemed unfazed by his parents' stories.

When it was his turn to talk about how his life had turned out, Travis was humble and respectful of everyone who'd helped him stay alive and thrive. The love for his parents was obvious.

"Whether it's been through sports, or anything else, they've always been by my side," he said. "Everything I've learned is from my parents guiding me."

Competing in sports helped Travis broaden his feelings for his teammates.

"I like the support everybody has for each other. When someone from another team helps you onto your feet and tells you to keep

going, it shows you they care about you and not just about winning," he said.

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At the Class 2 District 2 track and field meet in May, Love finished fourth in the 300-meter hurdles in 45.29 seconds and ran a leg on the Eagles' 4x100 and 4x200 relay teams that qualified for sectionals. Love didn't make the state cut in the hurdles or relays but joined fellow seniors Noah Richardson and Quentin Geist to reach the state championships in Jefferson City. Richardson finished fourth in the triple jump in 43-0 and won Grandview's only medal. Love was 12th in the pole vault.

"My freshman year, I tried the pole vault and it was fun. It's an adrenaline rush," Love said. "(His parents) never held me back from doing anything. They would tell me about both sides of a sport.

"If I'd had the nerve to get on a bigger pole before state, I could have jumped higher. But that scared me. When I plant, I'm not used to being in the air that long."

Love played wide receiver and defensive back on the Eagles' football team last fall.

"I always wanted to play football because you can hit somebody and not get in trouble," he said. "Getting hit – I was like, 'OK, this is real.' Every once in awhile you get hit pretty good but you get up and keep going."

When Travis leaves for State Technical College of Missouri in Linn in August, the Loves will officially be empty-nesters. Travis will study power sports technology and will work on engines for diesel tractors, four-wheelers, boats, chain saws and other small engines. Because Linn is an hour and a half from home, he'll get to visit his parents on the weekends, but won't be able to commute. John and Kristy said they're prepared.

"He's my shadow and always has been," John said. "Whether it's cutting wood, fishing or hunting, he's always been by my side. He's spreading his wings and growing. It will be harder on me than him."

The author has no relevant disclosures.

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