San Antonio (March 21, 2005) – Dr. Charles Moore, surgical director of heart transplant and assist devices at the CHRISTUS Transplant Institute (CTI), drove to Austin in inclement weather to harvest the heart of the deceased young woman who had bequeathed a rich legacy as an organ donor. Her heart would be transplanted into 19-year-old Wendy Bailey, a college student with dreams of becoming an architect.

After the trip back to San Antonio, he took the donor heart to the operating room where Drs. John Calhoon and Daniel Martinez of The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio were waiting to transplant it into Wendy. They knew her body housed a rare set of congenital anomalies that they had read about in the medical literature but never seen – a heart facing the wrong way on the wrong side of the chest and equipped with only one receiving chamber and one pumping chamber.

In her room at CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Hospital-Medical Center, Wendy received visits from CTI heart transplant recipients who knew what she was feeling. She had been in the hospital since Nov. 17, when it became obvious she could no longer continue her studies at The University of Texas at Austin. She waited until the end of January, when she was told about the donor organ. “I was shocked, scared, nervous, happy,” Wendy said. “I thought I was ready, but I wondered about the donor and the family, about their pain.”
“It’s a very hard moment,” agreed her mother, Enedina Bailey of Edinburg. “You think of the family and what they have lost, but this is what she needed to keep living. When I see that her lips are now pink (with oxygen), I think of that wonderful family.”

Both mother and daughter agreed that if one day the donor’s parents want to write a letter to the Baileys, they will invite the donor to “come and see what your gift has done.”

Wendy loves the beach and enjoys the challenge of architecture. She plans to resume her studies, this time at UT Pan American at home in Edinburg. The transplant made such a difference that she is ready to leave behind the nightmarish ordeal of 2004.

She was working a part-time job and going to classes when she began to swell and grew short of breath. She flew home at her mother’s urging and was in and out of hospitals in McAllen and Corpus Christi, finally ending up in San Antonio in November. Now, a few weeks after her transplant, she is coming to the Alamo City only for routine biopsies to ensure her body is not rejecting her new heart.

It is all Enedina can do to keep her daughter from overdoing it. “I feel wonderful,” Wendy said at a follow-up visit. “This lady over here tries to keep me locked up. I want to go to the mall.”

“I am a mama chicken, wanting to protect her,” Enedina said.

The seriousness of her condition has permeated their lives. Wendy admits she denied her situation at times and didn’t always take care of herself. Enedina said she always made a conscious effort to treat her daughter the same as Wendy’s younger brother, Jeffrey, 15, who after going through Wendy’s roller-coaster year has decided he wants to become a physician.

Together, Jeffrey and Wendy someday would like to establish a foundation to help people.

“They are such a great family and Wendy has done so well,” said Bonnie Athanatos, R.N., transplant nurse coordinator at the CHRISTUS Transplant Institute. “She is the sweetheart of the hospital. Everybody knows her.”

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