

Episode 30: Travis lost his son

My guest today is Travis. He lives near Bismarck, North Dakota. Travis is a man in pain. You'll hear it in his voice. He just lost his 16 year old son, Brandon.

Brandon had asthma. That in itself is not really anything unusual. The CDC says that 1 in 13 people have asthma. Here in the US, that means more than 25 million Americans have it. And it's actually been increasing for the past 40 years.

Brandon had had asthma for almost his whole life. He knew what it was like and how to deal with it. He always had his inhaler handy for when his breathing felt restricted. On some occasions when it was bad, Travis would take Brandon to the ER for some special treatment. It was just a way of life, something they were all used to.

But one evening it was different. Brandon was at home, and the only other person at home with him was his younger brother, Aaron. Aaron is 14. That night, Brandon's asthma flared up worse than it ever had before. His inhaler didn't help, and he ended up unconscious while Aaron performed CPR until the ambulance arrived. Brandon never woke up. But before he passed out, Brandon told Aaron something that Aaron kept secret until he told their dad a few days later. I'll let Travis tell that part of it.

And when did this all happen? Father's Day weekend.

At the time I had this conversation with Travis, Brandon had only passed away about 6 weeks earlier. I wondered if it might be too soon. But Travis wanted to tell this story, because he wants other parents to be aware of the limitations of the medical facilities that are near where you live. And he wants everyone to be aware of the importance of being an organ donor. Brandon was able to donate several of his organs, including his heart. And his liver saved the life of a 10 year old girl. That's the part of this story that Travis hangs on to, knowing that Brandon's death meant that others were able to have life.

I'm a parent, and this story had an effect on me. If this episode affects you, whether it makes you think about life, or cry, or just give your kids an extra hug, then it's a success. If you'd like, I invite you to support this podcast by becoming a patron for as little as \$1 per month at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/support).

And now, here's my conversation with Travis.

Scott

Did Brandon have asthma since birth?

Travis

Yeah, it was caught very, very earlier on in his childhood. Both he and his brother, Aaron, have it.

Scott

Okay. Aaron is his younger brother who is 16?

Travis

He's 14.

Scott

Oh, okay. So, Brandon is 16.

Travis

Correct.

Scott

Okay. For people who don't know, can you describe what asthma is? I count myself among that group - I've never experienced it and none of my family members have had it. What is asthma?

Travis

Actually, it's like shortness of breath - they do a good job on some of the commercials where they show, like, a fish out of the water and gasping for air - regardless of how much oxygen you're trying to take into your lungs. Your bronchioles are all closed up. Therefore, you're not able to take quality breaths as you and I could. So, he has a rescue inhaler that he takes when he needs it.

Scott

What does an inhaler do?

Travis

It will open up the bronchioles to allow oxygen to get into your lungs and to breathe like you and I would.

Scott

So, someone with asthma needs to have an inhaler with them all the time?

Travis

Yeah, they both had it with them all the time - it was just a natural thing for them in this part of their life.

Scott

You just get used to it.

Travis

Sure.

Scott

Can you tell us a little bit about Brandon? Who was he as a person? Can you, kind of, just describe him?

Travis

He was a very caring young man. He loved to smile and was always happy. He loved hanging out with other kids. His mom had a daycare where kids would just flock down.

Scott

So, you get to interact with those kids a lot, then?

Travis

Right. As for hobbies, he loved to work with his hands - woodworking. He would help me work on cars, if need be - changing the oil and doing things like that. He didn't care about school so much.

Scott

But that's not really unusual, right?

Travis

No, it's not. I knew that he was more into hands-on than, maybe, schoolwork. He loved music. We just started going to concerts the last couple of years, and that was kind of our thing. Metallica was our last concert. So, we had a great time and a very memorable moment.

Scott

I think I saw a picture of you guys at that concert.

Travis

Right. So yeah, he loved to do all sorts of things. I mean, he did some bowling and baseball for a while. Then, after this came about, I learned more and more about him as a person at school and stuff like that. I learned that he was very well-liked by teachers and that he was never afraid to help out others. Hearing those stories gave me another perspective of who he was at school because when I asked him how school went, it's just, "Yeah, you know... just same old." He doesn't share that kind of information. I have to hear that from others. So, I learned even more about it myself afterward, which kind of sucked because that took this to learn that.

Scott

Did he ever talk about what were his hopes, dreams, and what he wanted to do after school?

Travis

The best way to describe Brandon was... when it came to being something, I always kind of joked about it with him, "Do you know how long that takes to do that? Let's say you want to be a doctor. You don't like going to school man. You got a lot of years of schooling there. There's no catalog of what you want to be in life that you get to pick from. Whatever you want to do, you have to put hard work into it, be passionate about it, and get through it." He talked about various things. He was one of those guys where, one week, he wanted to do this and, next week, he wanted to do that - it varied. I mean, it could have been from a police officer for a while. He also said that he wanted to work with needy kids, which I was very impressed with for a kid at his age.

Scott

Yeah, to have a heart for helping other people.

Travis

Right. Which, kind of, goes hand-in-hand at the end of the story.

Scott

Let's talk about what happened on that day. He had an asthma attack. He had asthma attacks before.

Travis

Correct.

Scott

I guess we should set the scene here for the listeners as far as your family arrangement. I understand that you and Brandon's mother, **Becky**, have divorced.

Travis

Yeah.

Scott

Okay. So, Brandon and Aaron live with Becky and their stepfather, **Chris**.

Travis

Correct, yup.

Scott

Then, you married Wanda?

Travis

Correct.

Scott

So, this happened at their home. Who was there when it happened?

Travis

It was just Aaron.

Scott

So, there were just the 2 of them at home.

Travis

Yeah.

Scott

Okay. Can you just take us through what happened that day?

Travis

I guess, prior to it all taking place, things were fairly normal. They wanted to get something to eat. They picked something up at the restaurant that they chose to go to, brought it home, and had supper - nothing out of the ordinary. Then, Becky and her husband wanted to go run a quick errand - that was right around 7.30 - 8.00 o'clock, so to speak. After they left - they had been gone for, probably, about 10-15 minutes - Becky received a phone call from Aaron, saying that Brandon was having troubles. Naturally, she did whatever she could to get back to the house and called 911. I believe Aaron had also tried to call 911. I suppose, he got disconnected from the commotion or whatever. Either way, 911 was being called from either one of them as it went down.

They're teenage boys. They were in their own room - they have separate rooms - and are usually on a gaming device, on headsets, and different things like that. So, when Brandon was having problems breathing, he yelled for air and said that he was having problems. I'm guessing it must have been something he hadn't experienced before because, normally, he would look for

his inhaler and go and get it wherever he had it, but he yelled for Aaron. Amazingly, Aaron heard him. Aaron got his inhaler and gave it to him. He took his inhaler but it wasn't working. They have a nebulizer as well - which also has the same medication in a breathing machine - to get better quality medication into the system. By the time it was all set up, Brandon already knew that something was going on differently. At that point, he was struggling to take a breath and just pushed it away. That's when he collapsed and stopped breathing.

Scott

And Aaron was still the only person there with him...

Travis

Right. Yup. That's when Aaron called his mom. They called 911. Aaron started performing CPR on him as soon as he knew that he wasn't breathing and did so until the paramedics got there.

Scott

By the time they arrived, he was already unconscious.

Travis

Yeah. Aaron was kind of amazing through the whole thing. I've been in a similar situation years ago and I froze at that moment. Fortunately, I wasn't home alone and had other guidance. Over here, he kind of took over and knew what he had to do. Amazingly, he was never CPR-certified - his brother Brandon and his mom were. He had been at CPR courses before but he never took it. He was just there with them and observed what they were doing but never took it himself - I guess that hit him a lot just. His mom and stepdad weren't very far away from where their house was, so they were able to get there just as the paramedics got there. His mom was hysterical, obviously. You hear things but you don't comprehend them until you see them. She was hysterical with Aaron. Aaron told her, like, "Mom, I got this" and continued doing what he needed to do. Paramedics got there shortly, took over, and then took them to the hospital.

Scott

Aaron sounds pretty amazing.

Travis

He is very amazing. I couldn't be more proud of him. I was very scared of how he would take going through this whole process.

Scott

That's one of the questions I want to ask you later, so we'll definitely follow up on that. I've had the same conversation with some of the other people whom I've interviewed on the show, who've been through extremely unusual situations. Regardless of the training that you've had, you never know how you're going to react in an emergency situation until it actually happens. That's when you find out that, obviously, Aaron is one of those people who is able to react calmly and just do what needs to be done.

Travis

Yeah, As I said, I would have never expected a 14-year-old to do what he did. I mean - I'm just proud of him for doing what he did.

Scott

So, Brandon was taken to the hospital and...

Travis

Yeah, he was en route at that time. That's when I got the phone call from his mom. She was upset, obviously, and told me briefly that Brandon had an asthma attack and was taken by an ambulance at that point. I live about 40-minutes away from where they're at. So, I got in the car and jetted to the hospital that they were going to in Bismarck. Part of me was frustrated because I don't know the protocol of how they determine which hospital they go to. The hospital that they took him to does not have a pediatrics unit. When they got him there, they assessed him based on his history. In my mind, they may have been wasting time, but I also understand that they're trying to eliminate the possibilities of what else could have taken place.

Scott

You mean they thought that this may have been something other than an asthma attack?

Travis

Well, they did come to us and tell us that he didn't overdose on something. Brandon doesn't have a history of doing anything like that. In my mind, I think they wanted to eliminate it instead of just going off of what we're saying because he had his inhaler and nebulizer there. They did check for other things - to me, some of that time was wasted on it. But I'm not a doctor - that's not my profession.

Scott

Yeah, they have protocols that they need to go through. The interesting thing too, though, is that they might have to go through this and they would have a parent saying, "No, of course! My kid doesn't do drugs." But some parents don't know that their kids do.

Travis

Yeah, there's a conversation between Brandon's mom and Aaron while this was going on too, "Is there anything that he's been doing?" Aaron's like, "No, Mom. I would say something if that is the case."

Scott

So he went to that first hospital and then...

Travis

Yeah. He was there for probably a couple of hours. As we all know, the airway is very important. By the time they got him hooked up to things there, they had to transport him to the next hospital. So, they need time to arrange and go through whatever they needed to do to get that lined up.

Scott

The bureaucracy...

Travis

Yeah. So, then, they took him to the second hospital, which does have a pediatrics unit. We were able to go and see him in the emergency room at the first hospital. I did my damndest to prepare for what I was going to see at this stage because I had been there before - taking him to the ER when he had problems with breathing due to asthma. Usually, when it happens, the nebulizer isn't helping much - you could just tell that he was struggling to breathe. A lot of times, he may have pneumonia or something like that too, because they also get that pretty quick. The

steroids also helped to open up that airway and get rid of infection and stuff, too. He was just laying there and hooked up to a lot of machines. I tried preparing myself for that, but I can't. At that point, I was optimistic that we'll get this figured out. When they realized that he needed to be transported and took him over there to the second hospital, it took them quite a while to get him situated in his room and hooked up. Then, they did their own testing to, I suppose, gather their own information along with the other information that they had been given from the other hospitals as well too.

Scott

Probably, a lot of that was duplicated...

Travis

It could have been, yeah. The night seemed like forever. It was probably around 8.30 PM when we saw him at the first hospital. By the time we got to see him at the second hospital, it was super late - it was probably midnight by the time we got to see him there. We had family there. Both sides of our family are very involved with the kids - aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. So, we did get to see him then. After he was pretty much stabilized and we were waiting on more tests, it was late night already. Pretty much everybody except the parents was still there - it was about three 3.30 AM on the 14th of June.

The nurse came out and said, "We just did some tests. He needs a pediatric neurologist." I'm just like, "Okay, so what's the problem here?" I live in a town and we, kind of, have 2 cities - there's a river that separates us. Together, we have probably 100,000 - 120,000 people, so 2 hospitals are not small by any means. So, I was taken up, "Pediatric neurologist?! What's the problem?" She's like, "We don't have one." I'm like, "So, now what?" She was like, "Well, we need to fly him out." I knew this whole thing is serious, but getting to this level of seriousness is taking it to a whole different level. I never ever expected that I have to fly my child somewhere to get the proper care. They told us that there wasn't a pediatric neurologist in the state of North Dakota. Then, we had somebody on Facebook who tried to correct us saying that there's one in Grand Forks. I don't know if there's one but, clearly, it wasn't the facility that need to see Brandon because they did a test at the second hospital and confirmed that he needed a pediatric neurologist - they communicated with an actual pediatric neurologist from Washington DC who looked over his tests on the computer, I guess, and verified that. So, that's what he needs. I thought to myself, "Are you kidding me right now? You have to speak with somebody in Washington, DC to figure out that he needs to go somewhere?" I was just mind-blown. When I think of kids being involved in car accidents, you wouldn't have a pediatric neurologist in case of a head injury. Are you telling me that every child has to be flown out? I learned so much about the lack of care for children in the area where we live. That's one of my other big things for parents who have kids - know what your facilities have and what they're capable of having. So yeah, I woke up Brandon's mom because she and her husband were staying in, like, a family room at the hospital. I woke her up and said, "Hey, they want to fly Brandon out. We need to decide where we want to take him." We chose the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota - they're pretty much the top hospital in the United States.

Scott

World-famous. Yeah.

Travis

I didn't understand how big and great they are because even though they're 450 miles away, I heard people go into Rochester all the time for this and for that. So, to me, I didn't grasp how special the place was. I guess, when it comes down to it, I was very fortunate that it was an option for us because of the results that came out of this hospital. I wouldn't have wanted to go anywhere else. That was something I know I can go to sleep at night knowing that we did everything possible for him, and I know that that facility did everything possible for him as well.

Scott

So he went there that night? When did he fly?

Travis

Yeah. As I said, it was about 3.30 AM when I was told that he needed to fly out. I asked how fast can they get him out of here, and they told me that if everything goes right, he can be out of here in the next 3-4 hours, and that they would allow one parent to go with him. I had no problems with his mom going. If she was going, I would pack a bag quickly, try to get there as soon as possible, and try to be there when they got there or, at least, shortly afterward.

Scott

So you would just go to the airport and take the next flight?

Travis

Well, I actually drove. It's about a 7-hour drive from where we live. I had other arrangements. I had to drive in that direction anyway to where I live to get clothes and pack a bag. I got 2 dogs and was trying to arrange for somebody to take care of them because I knew it was going to be a while before I would be back. So, my wife and I got in the car and just started driving. I was probably 45-minutes away from Rochester when I got a phone call from his mom saying that there wasn't any room on the flight for her - they had too many doctors' equipment. His male flew their plane to Bismarck, so she was hysterical again, and I felt horrible.

Scott

Because you had already left and driven 6-7 hours... she could have come with you if you'd known that.

Travis

Right. Exactly. Yeah. I don't know if she would have been able to leave Brandon's sight either because we wanted somebody with him at all times - we don't want to leave him alone - so I would imagine somebody in the family would have probably stayed with him. She and her husband could have been leaving at the same time as we did too. So, other arrangements could have been made. I was crushed knowing that now I'm 45 minutes away and he had actually gotten to the airport at, like, 11.30 AM. So the 3-4 hour timeline didn't really go as planned. It's about a 2-hour flight with their plane from Bismarck to the Mayo Clinic. So, as I said, I actually beat him there by 45 minutes and was there when he got there. I mean, I was happy that I was there.

Scott

Right, you're still with him.

Travis

Yup. Even though nobody was with him on the flight - that was out of our hands. So yeah, we got to the Mayo Clinic and I was greeted by a doctor there. She was amazing. I was nervous as

I could be because this severity was on a whole different level for parents to think, "Why am I here? Why is it this bad?"

Scott

And you've had no sleep all-night either, right?

Travis

I had actually been up since 5.30 AM, Thursday morning - that's the time I would get up for work. We got the phone call at 8.30 PM that evening, were at the hospital until the wee hours of early Friday morning, and then jetted. My adrenaline was running so much that sleeping is the last thing I could think about even though my body wanted to shut down.

Scott

Right, your brain was going 100 miles an hour.

Travis

Exactly. Yeah. So, we got there. As I said, the staff there was phenomenal. My first question, obviously, was, "Is he going to be okay?" They basically, kind of, told me that there's nothing that they see, as of now, that would indicate that he wouldn't be okay - just to remain optimistic - until they can gather information and get a better evaluation of what's really going on. At that point, I was still very hopeful and thought that this might be a long road to recovery or that things may be a little different, but we would still have Brandon. So, in my mind, Friday afternoon was when he got proper care.

Scott

When did Becky arrive?

Travis

I think they probably got there about 7.30 PM that evening. The whole time, I've been giving her updates as things have been going on throughout the day. In my eyes, things were actually looking good throughout the day - I was giving her good feedback. They were already starting to slowly wean him off of certain medications. So I was like, "Well, that's gotta be positive." They were telling me, like, "It is good that we don't have to keep giving different things to stabilize him. He stabilized and we were able to take away certain things."

Scott

Was he conscious during this time? Could you talk to him?

Travis

Not at all. He never did come conscious this whole full time. We just stayed by his side and gave them updates. I was giving them great updates. I didn't ever want to give them false information to make it sound like it's going better than it is because I wouldn't want that either. I would just want to know the truth of what's going on. Honestly, I thought things were going in the right direction. Every once in a while, he would cough - they would tell me that that is a part of the brain's signs that he was still able to make those breathing motions. There are certain things they do look out for if there's a head injury or brain damage, so it was very comforting to know that there was still that hope and possibility of recovery. Whatever the recovery is, the end result was that we would have Brandon.

So, they got there and did a shift change at the hospital. We were, kind of, expecting that they were going to let him rest for a day or two before they would do anything drastic to him. So, we thought there would be, at the very least, like, a calm couple of days of letting his brain heal before they did anything, kind of, drastic to do any other further tests that would, maybe, put more stress on him. When they did a shift change - we weren't really prepared for the plan that they had - the doctor who came in said, "Well, right now, he's on medication to help prevent him from having seizures." They believed that he may actually had 2 seizures along the way because of the lack of oxygen, so they said, "What we need to do is we need to take that medication away so that we can get a proper EEG rating. What that does is it measures the brainwaves - the activity that's going on in the brain. When we take it away, it should take about 6 hours for there to be any signs that he hasn't had the medication. So, there should be about a 6-hour window before we would even know anything." So, they took the medication away from him. Then, like, 20 minutes later, he had a seizure. We took it very hard because we weren't prepared for what they're gonna do.

After having a conversation with the doctor later on that evening and asking him why they did what they did, I have a better feeling about it now. At that time, we were all very upset because we felt that they rushed into it. Later, the next evening, he did explain to us, "Nothing that we did harm Brandon. We needed to know what was going on with Brandon in order to treat him effectively. Without having that information, they couldn't have done the next step. Otherwise, we were pretty much just prolonging it. It wouldn't have mattered if it would have been the next day - the results prior were going to be the same as how it took place." Later that evening, we had a pediatric neurologist come in - his bedside manner was horrible. I think he was just doing his job and doing it well. He didn't have that bedside manner on how to present something. Basically, he had the meeting with the family right there and just pretty much said that Brandon was brain dead.

I was going, "Are you kidding me right now?! When I got here earlier, we went from being optimistic. Now, you're gonna throw in 'brain dead' at us?!" We were all hysterical. I asked him, "How do you know that?" He went, "Well, they never know exactly how much brain damage there is until they do an MRI. Based on the different tests and the results that they got back other than the MRI at that point, I think that the other doctor doesn't know or didn't want to sugarcoat it." However, when you talk to the next doctor, they're like, "We don't know until we do the MRI for sure." So, our emotions were on this roller coaster from being optimistic to being 'brain-dead'. The next doctor came in and said, "We don't know for sure until we do an MRI." So, your hope goes up a little bit more. We were just exhausted from the ups and downs. I mean, I'm all for honesty but, in my opinion, the neurologist that came and talked to us could have come across a little bit differently.

Scott

Do you think that, maybe, he was trying to manage your expectations? If he, kind of, gave you the worst-case scenario and it turned out to be not that bad, maybe that would have been better?

Travis

Possibly. I don't know. However, at that point, our families were there in Bismarck - I think Becky's mom and dad were there as well. So, at that point, I was like, "Do I call my folks? Do I need to have them come here?" I asked him plain and simple, and he said, "Yeah, you do." I couldn't make that call. So, he actually called my mom himself. Then, when I talked to her afterward, she said that I couldn't have been more cutthroat. I mean, even if you know the truth

of what's going on, there's a way of explaining and revealing that to somebody in a little bit more of a compassionate way. I know bad news is never great to hear, but there's still a better way of dropping the bomb, so to speak. So, at that point, we had family come in - this would have been Friday evening when this all took place. They wanted to get him stabilized again in the next couple of days to do an MRI on that following Monday. So, that Saturday and Sunday were pretty much quiet. Nothing was really changing. Sometimes, he would get a fever or stuff like that, but everything was pretty much well managed. He was stable. So, we were basically just waiting this whole time for Monday to come so that they would do the MRI.

Aaron was there. I was trying to keep my life with him somewhat normal - taking time with him to just, kind of, getaway. They had, like, a lounge there where they had foosball and stuff like that. So, we'd break away in the evening and hang out there for a few hours just to try to have some normalcy and also help him to know that, "Hey, we're still here for you, too." But it just seemed like he was in shock the whole time. He was always worried about everybody else. Like, "Dad, it'll be okay. Mom, it's okay. It'll be fine." He was very optimistic. He never had that breakdown moment until, probably, that Saturday when Aaron and I were in the lounge. We just, kind of, sat at a table and just started talking. I said, "How are you doing? It's okay to let it out. Cry or do whatever you got to do. If you're mad, it's okay. You can tell Dad. We all understand that this isn't easy and it's definitely not easy for you either." It wasn't until then that I finally got him to break down on me. As a parent, you never want to see your child having to break down and being emotional. At that point, I was actually kind of happy that he was coming out, somewhat, in a weird way. I mean, as I said, you don't want to see your child crying or anything like that but, at that point, he needed to let some of this frustration out.

Scott

It was the healthy thing to do...

Travis

Yeah, exactly. Finally, he went, "Dad, I need to tell you something." Usually, if Aaron's got something to say, he'll tell you and doesn't hold much back. That's just the way he is. So, when he started that whole line, I was like, "I better be prepared for what he's gonna tell me because, obviously, he's been hiding something." He was like, "Before Brandon went down and stopped breathing, he told me that he loved me. Dad, I think he told me because he knew that he wasn't coming back." So, I thought, "Holy cow... How have you been able to have the intelligence to pick up on that and to keep this in?" That showed me that he had seen something in Brandon. Then, he goes, "Dad, we can't tell mom. She can't handle it." I said, "Okay, I won't tell mom until you're ready." It wasn't until the MRI. They did the MRI on Brandon and they took us to a conference room with all these images up on the screen that they had there - it was just the parents, Becky, Chris, Wanda, myself. Aaron was not in there.

There was probably a staff of, like, 15 doctors and nurses who were in there. There was also a care team there. Believe it or not, the neurologist that Friday evening who didn't really have the bedside manner wasn't involved in any of this - I think we had made it aware that we weren't happy with how he, kind of, presented things. They showed the difference between a normal brain and Brandon's brain and showed that there was very little activity left. At that point, I had already, kind of, believed that was the result. I wanted it to be wrong, but my conversation with Aaron and a few things that the neurologist said that Friday evening, kind of, set in at that point. One of the doctors was doing different tests to test the depths of the brain before we went into the MRI meeting - I was at the bedside watching what he was doing. He was very good at explaining to me what he was doing without telling me the results. He was very honest with me

as he was doing the different tests. Even though you're unconscious, if you put, like, a cotton swab towards the eye, the eye will still have a reflex regardless of where you're at, but there wasn't. They did other a couple of other tests and he wasn't responding either. At that point, I looked at him and he said, "I'm sorry." Then, I knew.

So, we went into the meeting and they revealed that was the case. So, we got down to the point of, "How do we tell Aaron?" We felt it was best to tell him with other family members who were there. Some of the doctors had cleared out, so it wasn't so intimidating when he came into the conference room. I said, "Well, I think it's important that everybody knows exactly what he's gone through." That is the point when I told everybody about his conversation with Brandon, so the care team also knew what he has inside of him and what he's been keeping in. Of course, he and his mom were there. I told her, "He didn't want you to know because he didn't want to put any more stress on you." I didn't think there was a dry eye in the room when I told everybody that. When we brought him in and told them, and the staff there is something that they just are amazing. And a small example is

We didn't want Aaron to have the survivor's guilt of, "I could have done more. Why was it him? What did I do wrong?" They're like, "Had he not done what he did, Brandon wouldn't have made it to where he is today. We wouldn't have gotten the extra time with Brandon and Brandon probably wouldn't have been able to donate either. So, because of his acts, even though Brandon wanted to donate, he may not have that option if Aaron did not do what he did to get him to where he was at and be at the facility that he was at as well. So, that's how we presented it to him. He was upset, but he took it very well. As I said, I couldn't imagine being in his shoes doing what he had to do in that split second as a 14-years-old - I can probably say that I don't know if I would have been able to respond the same way as he did. So, that's what got us to that point.

Of course, we were asked if we wanted to donate. Brandon recently had a conversation with his mom. He had seen the donor part on her driver's license, so he asked what that was about. She explained to him, "If something were to happen to me, I give them the 'okay' for me to be a donor. They can donate my organs to other people." Brandon's response to that was, "Why wouldn't everybody do that?" She explained to him that not everybody is comfortable with that and everybody's got different beliefs about that. He was like, "If I have my license, I'll be a donor." So, I don't ever want to think that there was a bigger plan for him because I don't want to think that way, but it's hard to not think that there was a better and bigger plan for him in life. I couldn't be more proud of him because what he did in his lifetime is more than I could ever do for him. It's hard to be upset about that.

Scott

Does knowing that some good came of it help you get through this?

Travis

Absolutely. If I didn't think of those things - the possibility of hearing his heartbeat someday - it'd be easy to shut down.

Scott

What was he able to donate?

Travis

He donated his heart, which went to a 59-year-old male. Somebody said that his dad or grandfather was able to live a longer life and experience things that he possibly wouldn't have. The heart only got a 4-hour survival rate outside the body, so the process of lining up all the donors, having them set up, and making the arrangements for all of that to take place was crucial. Then, his liver went to a 10-year-old girl, which was the one that hit me the biggest. I have nothing against anybody that's older, including those my age - I've lived life - but a 10-year-old child hasn't had the opportunities that, maybe, a 59-year-old gentleman or me, myself had. So, it hit me hard when I see the 10-year-old girl had gotten his liver. Then, I believe a female had received his pancreas and a kidney - I don't remember her age. Also, there was another person who had received his other kidney. On top of that, he donated bone tissue and we thought that it was, like, a bone marrow type of thing. Actually, they can freeze the bone tissue for up to 5 years and he could help hundreds of people over that period of time - it's incredible. If a child has a cleft palate, they can they use that to fix that. So, there are numerous things that they can do with the bone tissue. So, not only did he affect the four recipients of his organs, but the bone tissue will continue to do things for people for, at least, 5 years or however long until that's gone.

Scott

So, a lot of Brandon is still living on...

Travis

It is. He didn't officially on paper pass away until that Wednesday evening - I think it was 8:34 PM. Going through the donating part of this was a learning experience in itself for us as a group. When you watch TV, you would see somebody in a motorcycle accident or whatever, and they would take and say, "Well, this one person wanted to be a donor. We're going to donate this to this person over here across the hallway." It doesn't work that way, especially, for a juvenile. After they consider that you have no more brain activity, they do another test after 12 hours - the same test - to check the depths of the brain to confirm that there is no activity going on there. After that 12-hour period, an adult can declare, "Okay. They're officially cleared to donate." With Brandon being a juvenile, there are actually 2 12-hour tests. So, you have to wait another 12 hours and a different doctor has to do it, so it gets dragged out for quite some time. Then, once those tests are done and confirmed, then they can start the process of finding donors. That process can take a little bit depending on what Brandon's blood type is - his blood is O because I'm an O- whereas his mom is O+. With an O blood type, he's a universal donor to anybody. So, obviously, it was a lot speedier process to find batches of people that needed it and to make arrangements to fly doctors or patients in.

They had a team of people there who were working with us and the recipients. Once they found everybody, we're given an 8-hour window of when they will take Brandon down to the operating room. Once we knew that we had 8 hours with him - it had been Friday evening around 8.00 - 8.30 o'clock - we said our final goodbyes to him and walked him to the elevator that takes him to the operating room - that was the last time we've seen him. The staff in the facility itself - it didn't matter if it was a nurse, the valet driver downstairs - were amazing people. The best way I can explain to you is the hospital itself is magical. They definitely do a personality test with all their nurses and doctors for the most part. We were there with Brandon - he got there on a Friday - and, basically, said our goodbyes on a Friday when he went to the elevator. So, we were there for a week, but it felt like we were there for, like, a couple of months. In that short amount of time, doctors and nurses became like family. People and nurses that were on call came back that evening to say goodbye to us and to Brandon. Even though he was declared 'passed

away', they were still giving them baths and talking to him. It just showed the compassion that they had in their jobs and treated him like he was still there.

Scott

I think, being a person first and a medical professional second makes such a huge difference.

Travis

Yep. We asked them several times, "How do you do your job? How do you do this?" They said, "There are certain things that are hard, but we learned a lot from working with kids. We have also seen kids do amazing things where the outcome isn't always like this." So, there are times when it's rewarding and keeps them going.

Scott 1

Well, they also know that part of what they do is making this experience not as bad as it could have been for you.

Travis

Right. That's what I said. I said, "Considering the outcome of this, you guys made this experience a whole lot easier. This whole thing - from asthma to donating and care in your town - has opened my eyes to a lot of different. My biggest thing is letting people know and be aware of that. So, be aware. If you don't do your homework or ask the right questions about a particular disease or asthma, you're not gonna get the right answers. So, be more focused and aware of what you can do and educate yourself as best you can.

Scott

Be proactive.

Travis

Exactly. I don't want any other families to have to go through this. If it saves one person or one family from not having to go through this, then it's a success, to begin with.

Scott

Aaron has asthma as well. How has he, kind of, processed this after seeing what his brother with asthma gone through? "Well, I have asthma too." What does he think of this?

Travis

He doesn't talk about it. We've comforted him enough to know that we're doing everything that we possibly can to prevent this from happening to others. He knows that we're being proactive and all that.

Scott

You're definitely better prepared now than you were before, right?

Travis

Right, which sucks as a parent, because you feel like you've already failed once - that's hard to live with. But with him, sometimes, he's a little bit more honest. I think he got to the point where he got used to it a lot. When he thought he was having a problem, it may have been more serious than what he led out to be. I think it's just how the person adapts, like, "This is my normal." I don't know if he was having more problems than he was leading out to be - he didn't appear to be. Also, you build a tolerance - kind of, like, a pain tolerance. I would imagine that,

after 16 years of doing this, his breathing tolerance was probably higher than what yours or mine would be - that might have been his new normal. It just got to a point where he would come to us and be like, "I've used my inhaler twice today, and this is not getting any better." We talked to him about it and we're just, "Hey, if you think you're having any problems, you need to let us know so that we can be on it instantly."

Scott

Are you hesitant to leave Aaron by himself now?

Travis

All the time. I could tell that he was getting annoyed by it because his mom said that she's like the helicopter parent and was like, "I feel, like, I can't go and do an errand now without thinking that something could happen to him at home by himself." Then, we played the scenario, "What if Brandon would have been home by himself? It could have very well happened easily. We were just fortunate that he was not home by himself." I saw him every other weekend. On Wednesdays, I have Aaron in the evening. It's damn hard to let them go. Everything was different when I dropped and picked him up at home - it was not Brandon and him. It's hard because this took place on a Thursday and I dropped him off on Wednesday night at their mom's, and I told Brandon and Aaron that I'd see them on Friday.

Scott

Because it was your weekend.

Travis

It was Father's Day weekend too, so that won't be the same either. Things are definitely different. Each day, I act as if Brandon is still with us and may talk to him spiritually. I have a thing right now. When I go visit him, obviously, the grass and stuff where he's buried were torn up, so I brought in some black dirt and grass seed and filled it all in to make it look nice. If it's not daily, every other day, I would take water up in jugs, put it in a watering can, and water his grass just to show that he's not forgotten. Just because he's not physically with us, doesn't mean he's not part of my daily life.

Scott

He always will be.

Travis

Yep. The other day, I had cleaned out, like, his toothbrush. I didn't want him to think that throwing out his toothbrush was something easy to do. I felt horrible for doing it. And it's just things like that, that it feels like. I just don't want him to feel like I'm moving on.

Scott

That's part of getting through it. I've heard the phrase, "After a loved one has passed, something can happen and you can be ambushed by grief, like, even weeks or even months after that." That sounds like one of those situations.

Travis

Yeah, it does. It sneaks up on you. It doesn't matter if it's a song that comes on the radio. Pictures have gotten a little better at certain songs - we had certain songs that we liked together. Then, certain things happen that you feel, like, "Is he there with you?" So, you try to take that all in as well. Well, he's big into Batman. Aaron and I were paying for something and I

gave him a \$10 bill and I got some cash back. Earlier in the day, I gave Aaron a couple of dollars to do something and he was, "Dad, did you just see what's on this dollar bill?" I said, "What's that?" He went, "Someone drew Batman as the face on the dollar. I think we should keep it." So, we did. So, it's little things like that do pop up.

Scott

You never know when something like that is going to come up either.

Travis

Yeah, exactly. The other day at work, I was specifically taking a picture of something. One of his favorite movies is "Fast and Furious." At where we live, there's a gentleman who had done his car like the green one in the very first Fast and Furious movie - it was one of Brandon's favorite cars. I went to take a picture of this particular thing and that car was going by the street, but I didn't even notice that when I took the picture. It wasn't until later that evening when I showed Wanda, that I went, "You got to be kidding me!" She was like, "What's that? There's that green car that's in the background." There's, like, one in the whole town. So, certain things like that make me hold on to that he's there. My biggest thing is that I haven't dreamed about him yet. I just want to know that he's okay. I heard other people who have dreamt about him and I'd get, kind of, upset because why am I not dreaming about him? That's my biggest thing - I just want to know if he's okay.

Scott

You've been seeing a psychologist to help you process through this - I think Aaron did as well. How has that helped?

Travis

Well, I had been seeing my psychologist and it happened to be the same one Brandon was seeing too. A lot of teenagers went through hell these days. I just wanted to know if he didn't feel comfortable talking to mom and dad - if he did, I wanted to make sure he could talk to somebody else about it and built a relationship. Amazingly, Brandon had been seeing him for, like, the last 3 years. I had been seeing him for that, so he actually became very connected with us.

Part of our routine every Wednesday is to go and see his psychologist as well. Aaron came to me and said, "Does Brandon still have his appointments?" I said, "Well, yeah. He got his appointments. But obviously, he's not going to be going to them." He's like, "Do you think I can take over Brandon's appointments?" I said, "Absolutely." So yeah. Right now, I'm hoping that they can build a relationship like what Brandon and he had. He already knew him, so it wasn't like Aaron was going to a complete stranger. It was easy because Aaron offered to go - I think it was because it was something that Brandon did that helped him as well. That's another one of those moments where I was just proud that he was willing to take that without me even having to suggest it. So, yeah, we've been doing that. Actually, he was just there this past Wednesday. I guess that he's doing well. I don't know how he does it. I even asked him, "How do you do it?" He's, like, wanting to ask me the same thing. It was just like, "I'm just proud of you. I just want you to know that if you do need to talk, don't hesitate. We're all going through a shitty thing right now."

Scott

Aaron seems like he has the insight and maturity of a much older person.

Travis

He went from 14 to 40 years old - that's the best way we could explain it. I hope it doesn't rob him of the way he feels in his childhood.

Scott

That's got to be part of what helps you know that you got to keep going because you got to be there for him.

Travis

Absolutely, yup.

Scott

Thanks so much for your time. For several people, it's a sad and happy story because of what he was able to do.

Travis

Right. That's what I also hold on to.

Scott

Thanks for listening. My goal for each episode is to bring you people and stories that you just won't find on other podcasts. If you'd like to discuss this episode or previous episodes with other listeners, you can do that at our private Facebook group at [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook). I hope to see you in there! And if you'd like to support the show, you can do that at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/support). And I'll see you in two weeks, when we'll once again be asking the question, What Was That Like?