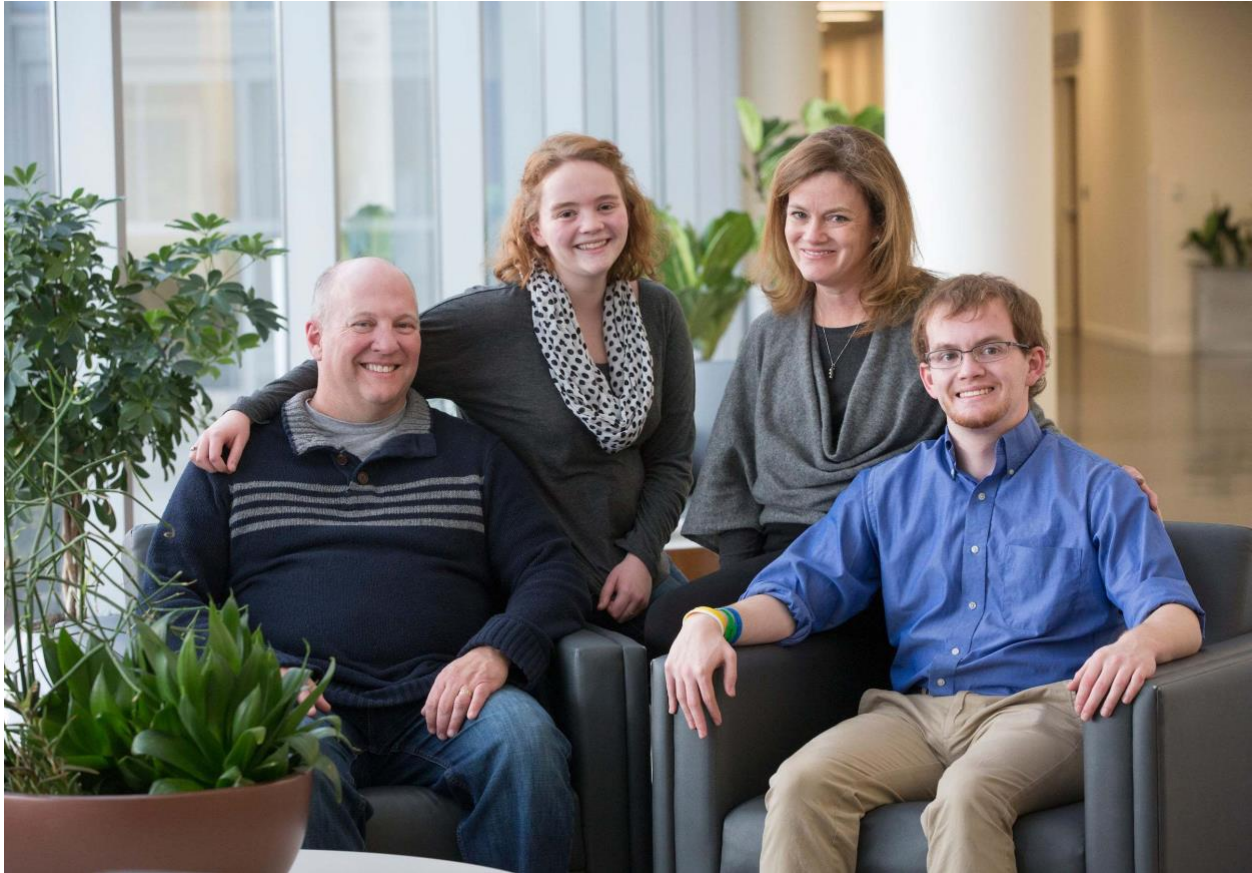


A Heartfelt Connection Four Years After a Tragedy

“I don’t cry when I come back here anymore,” Shannon Brewster says, directing a smile toward her son, Matthew. Her husband, Bill, and daughter, Amanda, give her a knowing look. They’ve all shed tears here, at Indiana University Health Methodist Hospital. But on this day, there’s more joy than sadness; more hope than despair.

It was just over four years ago, in December 2012, when their lives changed forever. Like any other family, the Brewsters of South Bend, IN, were gearing up for the holiday season. Matthew, then 17, was a nationally-ranked fencer on the local fencing team and was busy researching universities. Amanda was still in middle school, and the oldest daughter, Madeleine, was just beginning college.

Matthew was showering when it happened. He called for Shannon from the bathroom, and, thinking it was odd that her teenage son needed her help, she hurried in. There, she found Matthew hunched over in pain, saying he felt as if he were being kicked in the head. Shannon yelled for Amanda, who dialed 911. Matthew began seizing and then went completely rigid.



What happened next was a terrifying and exhausting ordeal. Physicians at the local emergency department thought Matthew suffered a massive aneurysm, but it was later determined a dissection of his right vertebral artery – also known as a tear in one of the arteries feeding the brain. Unable to relieve the pressure on his brain, the physicians needed to seek alternative hospitals to help Matthew.

Frightened and knowing that the clock was ticking, Shannon and Bill elected to send Matthew, via helicopter, to IU Health Methodist Hospital, a choice they later realized saved his life. A team of neurosurgeons, nurses and therapists began working on Matthew immediately, but the outlook was grim. They moved forward with a surgical procedure to alleviate the swelling, which carried significant risks. That surgery was followed a week later when he did suffer an aneurysm.

While physicians were honest with the family that Matthew may never return to his “normal” life, they never gave up hope on his potential for recovery. For weeks, he remained in a coma.

Today, Matthew looks and behaves like an average college student. A little studious, a little serious, but behind the thoughtful appearance, there lurks a wry grin and an earnest gratitude for the care he received at IU Health Methodist Hospital. While he still works to correct his speech, Matthew walks, drives, works out, and does most of the things any other young man his age would do.



Matthew says that's just always how it's been, with both of his parents. "Growing up, whenever I needed help on homework, I went to one of them. A lot of times it was my mom, and regardless of how hard it was, she always knew the answers."

The family returned to IU Health Methodist Hospital the last week of 2016. Matthew, on a holiday break from college, visited the doctors, nurses, therapists and caregivers who gave him back his life. He was surprised to find that, even with a full head of hair and a healthy amount of extra pounds, they all still recognized him.

"One thing I was impressed by is this: when I was here, I had no hair, I wasn't moving or talking, and then [today]... every single person remembered me. Dr. Leipzig was so excited to see me, and I was like, 'How do you recognize me?!' This place is pretty great."

And that's the kind of caring the Brewster family has come to expect from the team at IU Health. Both Shannon and Bill agree that the patient-focused

attitude and the respect shown to the family made an enormous difference in Matthew's recovery. Bill points out that everyone on the staff acted as an equal, and that when it came to the best course of treatment, everyone's opinion was heard and counted.

Now, the Brewsters are hoping to help other families like theirs. Through Methodist Health Foundation, they are supporting new technology that will be used in the Neuro Critical Care Unit to ensure that all caregivers have access to all of a patient's information in one easily-accessible location.



Before the end of their visit, Amanda pulls out a scrapbook she and her sister made during Matthew's recovery. The photos are still hard to view. There are scars and there are struggles, but more than anything, there's hope. There's love, from the friends, family and caregivers who showed unwavering support

throughout the process. And most of all, there's Matthew's strength, his willpower and his determination, shining through.

Photos: (top left) Brewster Family; (top right) Matthew pictured with his care team; (bottom left) Matthew connecting with Dr. Leipzig.