

## Life-changing treatment has Cat purring at life again

at Chennell's grandmother, Lila Johnston, wept when asked how it felt to see Cat play like a normal 8-year-old girl. "Your heart just explodes into crying," she said as she paused to gather herself. "It's just so hard to put into words. It's amazing."

Everyone who comes into contact with Cat walks away with a smile. She's beautiful, articulate and witty. Just one chat with her and you think you are talking to a mini adult. For all the glow that Cat brings to everyone she touches in her life, her hopes of survival from primary pulmonary hypertension were once dim. The disease had already claimed Cat's mother's life in May of 2006.

In March, Cat, who said she wants to be a teacher and surgeon, received a heart and double-lung transplant.

"Being at Shands and waiting for those heart and lungs was really scary," said Cat, who was hospitalized at Shands Children's Hospital from May of 2008 until April 2009. "Because I don't know what's going on, I'm a kid. It is very, very scary. I'm just a kid and we don't know what's happening, and I have to get cut open. It's so scary."

The surgery was a success. Jay Fricker, MD, University of Florida College of Medicine pediatric cardiologist and Cat's physician, said things look positive. He said she has normal lung function, and he is "very pleased with her course."

"She is a delightful child with this vibrant personality," Fricker said. "It is great to see her doing well."

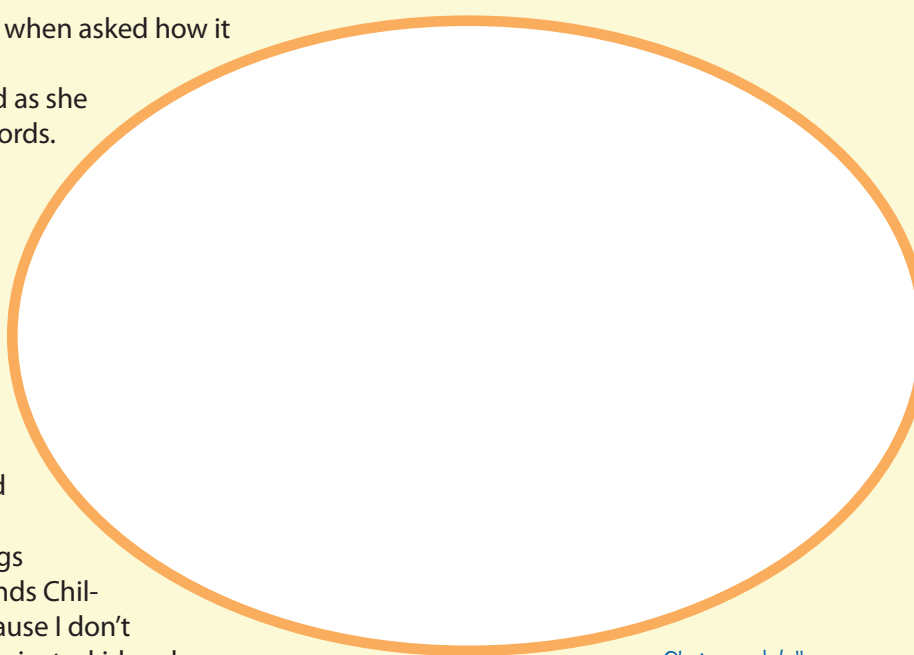
Johnston says the difference is astounding. Before her transplant, Cat had difficulty at school just walking from class to class. She used to have to wear an oxygen mask at night and receive medication intravenously. Eventually her condition worsened to where she was forced to wear the mask constantly.

Johnston remembers that first time during their 344-day stay when Fricker permitted them to leave campus for a good time.

"The day before we were discharged, Dr. Fricker said we could have a day pass," Johnston said. "I took her to the movies to go see Hannah Montana: The Movie. Cat loves Miley Cyrus and there was hardly no one at the theater because the movie had been out for two months. She jumped, she danced, she did everything. She was just bouncing around. It was just wonderful seeing her so happy."

And as for Cat, she is now just working on being a normal 8-year-old girl.

"Things have been a lot better for me since the surgery," she said. "I have a lot more energy. I just feel like I'm all new."



Chris Wells, a radio host from WKTK 98.5, holds Cat Chennell on her lap while she sings on air during this fall's Shands for Kids Radiothon. The Radiothon raised more than \$209,000 for Shands kids.

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