

Within the week, David's mom, Leone Nunley, had to make the critical decision about whether to perform a highly invasive brain surgery or allow David to pass away naturally. Though she had no doubt heaven awaited her son after death, Leone chose the operation, and a neurosurgeon removed the anterior five-and-a-half centimeters of brain mass from David's temporal lobe—his speech center. "I wouldn't blame you if you discontinued life support entirely," the doctor told Leone. "His brain has been significantly deprived of oxygen."

Despite the surgeon's harsh assessment, Leone had cause for hope. Her best Christmas gift that year was given by David—she asked him to wipe his mouth with a napkin and, after several tries, he did it! In fact, there were many small victories of this nature. But Leone never was able to convince others of the progress she saw. The director of the only rehabilitation center in Yakima rejected David as a candidate for treatment when he failed a one-minute evaluation by not responding to basic commands. "I wouldn't put one more dollar into that boy," she said, listing his condition as a "persistent vegetative state."

But Leone wouldn't buy it. She'd heard him say, "Mama." She'd felt him squeeze her hand. Something was going on inside of her son's brain. During the decade that followed, she fought a rigorous battle with America's health care system, insurance bureaucrats, and various medical personnel.

The Budget Rehab Center

In the end, she cleaned out her garage and set up a "budget rehab center" for David with a huge banner proclaiming, "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31). That's where the story gets interesting.

No less than 30 volunteers from the neighborhood showed up five days a week for four years straight to help her with a technique called "patterning." This method, which was pioneered by Glenn Doman of the Philadelphia Institute for Human Potential, takes the patient back to early childhood where he relearns to crawl and then to walk.

Jacqui Wonner organized the volunteer "patterners" into teams of five, and kept up with all of their busy schedules year after year. Bill and Joy Campbell showed up every week to move David's arms and legs. Chet Dire read the Bible to David once a week for seven years; he and his wife also worked on a patterning team. And there was Leone's husband Dale, who married her when she was a single mom with three little boys. Though David is not his biological child, Dale has poured out his life for him unreservedly. So committed were the volunteers that Leone actually received a phone call one night from Glen Laney who explained, "I'm going to have to have a kidney taken out, but I won't miss more than two weeks of patterning."

Their collective tenacity, sweat, and love paid off, and David began to improve. But David wasn't the only one rewarded by their hard work. "It was finally something we could do,"