

COURTNEY HICKMAN

THEN NOW

By Kate Parham

For most 11-year-old girls, life is about friendship bracelets, sleepovers, Lip Smackers and first crushes. For Courtney Hickman, life is about hospitals, feeding tubes and lung infections—or at least that's how life used to look for Courtney, who was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis at age 2 and has spent the majority of her life in the hospital. "Courtney has always been just like everyone else her age, except that she's always been held back by her illness," says Holly Hickman, Courtney's mother.

But in 2006 when Courtney's family went on Bert's Big Adventure, Courtney was finally able to feel like everyone else. "It was amazing," says Holly. "They treat you like royalty and every kid was different so nobody stands out or feels left out."

The Hickman's loved that BBA took care of everything, leaving their family only to worry about having fun. Their family made so many great memories and friends, some of whom they have kept in contact with over the years. "Nurse Cathy writes her constantly and comes to the hospital, and even Bert and Stacey come to visit pretty often, too," Holly says.

Originally from Buford, Ga., Courtney, Holly and her baby sister temporarily relocated to St. Louis in June of this year with the hopes that Courtney could get a lung transplant. After two months of separation from her stepfather and her 8-year-old brother, Courtney finally found a donor and received her lung transplant in August.

She has since made an incredible comeback. "Everything about her

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whole life has changed," says Holly. Courtney's lung function alone has increased from 24 percent to 70 percent, which allows her to do so much more. Holly beams as she describes how straight Courtney can stand up now and how much farther she can walk. "She had so much trouble breathing that she was always hunched over and she used to get exhausted after walking just 10-15 feet," Holly says.

But not anymore. Since the transplant, both Courtney's physical wellness and her mental health have drastically improved. "She thinks about the future now," says Holly. "She never did that before. She's really happy; she sings, she dances."

With three more months left to go in St. Louis, the Hickman's are in the best of spirits, consumed with joy in the revival of their daughter's life. It won't be long before Courtney is applying Lip Smackers on the way to a sleepover. ★



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