

# Spory beats heart defect

**Doctors repair rare egg-sized hole in freshman's heart with surgery**

BY JULIA HANSEN  
Staff Reporter

Karyn Spory is lucky she cut her finger.

In September of her senior year of high school, freshman Karyn Spory cut her finger while slicing a lemon for her cheerleading squad's fundraiser. After fainting multiple times, both before and after she arrived at the hospital, the doctors decided to run tests to investigate further. What the test results showed was unbelievable.

"The doctors just kinda did a heart sonogram on a whim, and they found a hole in my heart the size of an egg," Spory said.

Spory was at Keokuk Area Hospital, a small Iowa hospital, but she was referred to cardiologists at the University of Iowa Hospital in Iowa City. More tests were run there, and Spory's cardiologists, Dr. Nick VonBergem and Dr. Benjamin Reinking, decided her condition required a catheter procedure to investigate the inner heart. Von Bergem said that with a catheter procedure, doctors insert long, thin, flexible tubes typically into an artery or vein in the leg. The tube is then sent up to the heart where heart pressure and oxygen in the blood can be measured, VonBergem said.

"What we thought she had on initial evaluation was an atrial septal defect, which is a hole in the top chamber of the heart," VonBergem said.

Once again, doctors discovered something unbelievable.

"Thank God they used the trach scope because they found out my pulmonary veins ran to the left side of my heart instead of to the right [where they are supposed to be]," Spory said. "It's kind of sci-fi-ish."

Spory said the doctors were amazed at her heart condition, pulling several specialists in to listen to the irregular sounds of her heart beating. The doctors told Spory she would need to have open-heart surgery to fix her heart defects.

"Just to see me at this age, progressing with that defect was absolutely amazing," Spory said. "When they came in and explained it to me, I was dumbfounded. It was a lot to take in."

Spory's open-heart surgery was set for Nov. 22, 2006. Spory said that during the month-long wait before the surgery, she experienced a range of emotions from anger to sadness and fear. Spory also said she felt guilty that she was worrying her family.

Spory said that throughout this time her family was extremely supportive, but it was her older sister Jennifer Wenke who held the family together. Wenke said Karyn remained strong throughout the whole ordeal and that she thinks there was a reason Karyn cut her finger.

"I think God had his hand in this," Wenke said. "I think she cut her finger for a reason. If she wouldn't have cut it, she may not be here with us today."

In an X-ray taken the day before her surgery, doctors found that the left side of Spory's heart was close to three times as big as it should have been and was pressing against her ribcage. They also found

that the right side of her heart was abnormally small and shrunken-looking.

During Spory's surgery, surgeons closed up the egg-sized hole in her heart and reattached the pulmonary veins to the right side of her heart using tissue from the back of her heart. Spory said the doctors told her mother they were amazed that while they were finishing the surgery and closing her up, they saw the left side of her heart shrink and the right side grow bigger. Three days after the surgery, she was discharged and allowed to go home.

"The doctor sat me down when they were releasing me, and he was like, 'I just want you to know that there is no medical explanation for you being alive,'" Spory said. "'You should have died before you were five,' so it was really a miracle. Obviously I'm meant for something, I'm just trying to figure out what."

During the next six weeks, Spory experienced both uplifting and challenging events. Spory said the outpouring of affection and support from her community, Wayland, Mo., was amazing. Because of her surgery, Spory was very limited in what she was capable of doing. Luckily, her mother was able to take six weeks off of work to care for her. Because her chest was so tender and fragile, Spory was not able to lie down on a couch or bed, so she spent her six weeks at home in a recliner in front of the television.

Spory returned to school in early January. By this time she had mostly healed and was ready to get back into the swing of things. She began cheerleading upon her return to school, only sitting out when she felt chest discomfort.

"It was kind of weird going back to school after being out for so long," Spory said. "Everyone was really warm and accepting. I was nominated for court warming queen, and I kind of joked that maybe I would get the sympathy vote."



Photo submitted  
Freshman Karyn Spory owes her mended heart to a minor cut on her finger. The discovery of the cut led to open-heart surgery to cure her rare condition.

Nearly a year and a half after her surgery, Spory has fully recovered. Her roommate at Truman is a friend from high school, so she knew of Spory's medical past, but Spory said when she first came to college she often caught her new friends looking at the scar on her chest. One evening at dinner she finally told her friends the reason she had the scar, and that it was OK if they wanted to ask her questions about it.

"I've actually grown to love my scar," Spory said. "My friend and I joke about how my scar is my extended cleavage."

Spory said that because of this ordeal she has become more appreciative of her family and has become more easygoing, letting things slide that used to upset her.

"I think I'm a better person because of it," Spory said. "You know, I kind of faced death and kicked its ass."

## Number of fifth-year seniors at University on the increase

BY STEPHANIE HALL  
Staff Reporter

Super senior — a joking term for some — is a reality for more and more students.

Less than 35 percent of students who attended four-year colleges graduated in four years, according to a 2006 study done by the National Center for Education Statistics. Even at Truman, the number of students who are proclaiming themselves fifth-years is rising.

Colin Coffman said that this semester he officially became a fifth-year student. Coffman said he took a semester off after his sophomore year and went to Japan for a couple of months.

"Now I'm [a] linguistics major," he said. "I started out physics, but high school didn't prepare me at all for that. [High school] just made it look cool."

Coffman said that after he dropped his physics major, he was unsure what he wanted to do and took electives his sophomore year. After his trip to Japan, he declared a linguistics major and said he credits his time in Japan to that decision.

"If you graduate within four years, you either bring a lot of credits in or take just your major classes," Coffman said. "If you have two majors or a major very different from your minor, you set yourself up to stay longer, even if it is only one semester."

Jim Kelly, Residential College Program advisor, is in charge of helping first-year students plan their class schedules, and he said he tries to get all class prerequisites covered.

"[Different] majors have a varied amount of required hours," Kelly said. "I think that is where we as advisers and RCP run into problems with the first year or two."

Kelly said it is important to have a four-year plan and know what courses are required for different majors.

"Those courses in the first two years can be fairly regimented to make sure that you are following that sequence of courses," he said.

After their first two years, many students settle into taking major classes, but this can be difficult if students declare their majors later into their schooling or haven't taken prerequisite classes, Kelly said.

"There are many of the disciplines that have put out suggested plans of core sequences for students," Kelly said.

Some majors have fewer interested students or fewer resources, preventing them from making all courses available every semester, Kelly said. Some of the less popular languages and visual communication are examples of majors that only offer certain classes at certain times of the year.

Dave Rector, University director of institutional research and budgets, deals with institutional research for the University, including graduation statistics. He said that in the class of 2003, 46.7 percent graduated in four years.

Although this number might seem low, it is one of the highest in the state. Truman graduated 78 percent of its students within six years, the highest in the state, according to Enhanced Missouri Student Achievement's study of six-year graduation rates. The closest runner-up was University of Missouri-Columbia with 76 percent. Northwest Missouri State had a 62 percent six-year graduation rate, and 58 percent

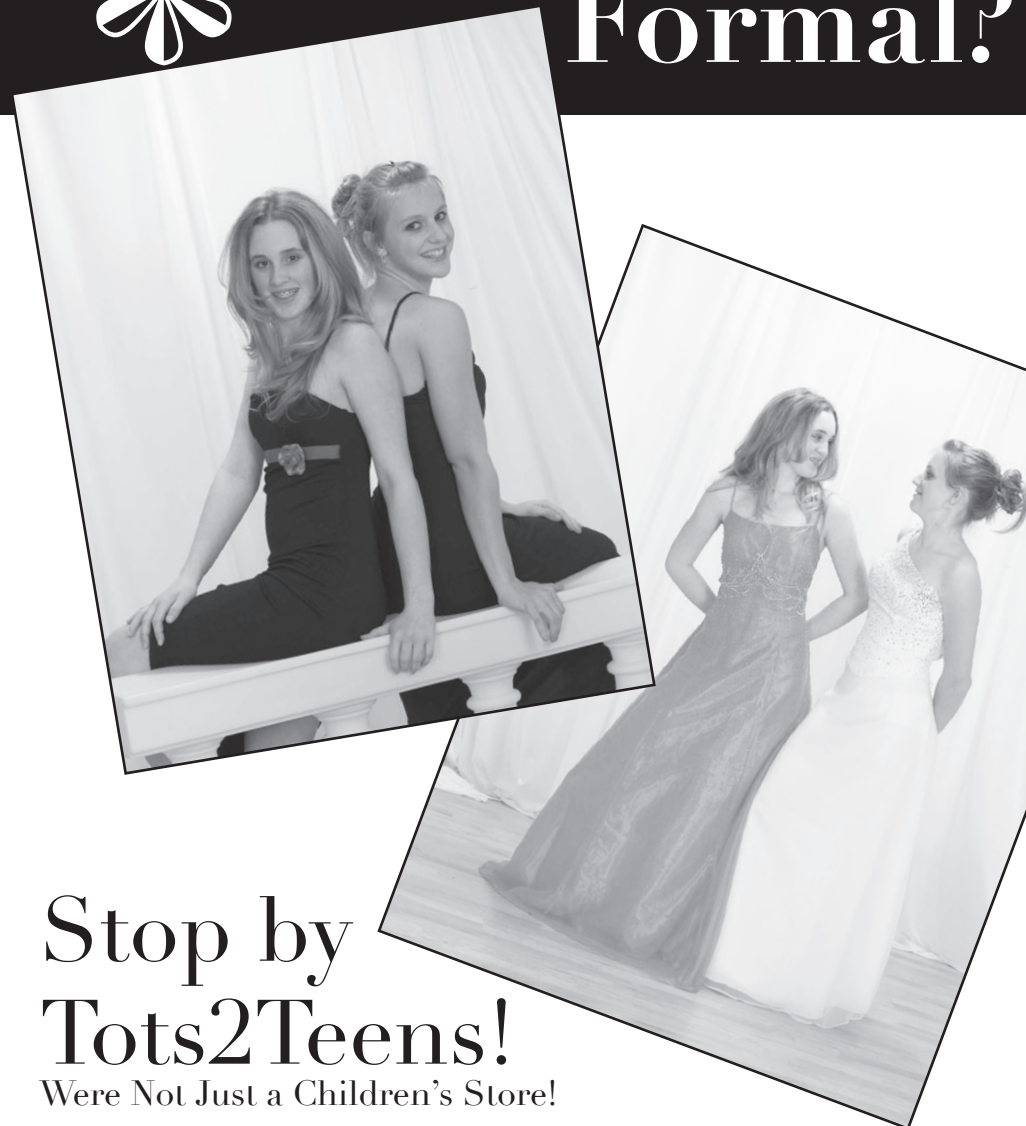
of Missouri State University students graduated in six years.

"If you look at a typical program, it takes 124 credit hours [to graduate]," Rector said. "If you are going to get out in purely eight semesters, you have to carry 16 credit hours a semester."

Many students only need one extra semester to graduate. Rector said that in December, several hundred Truman students graduated, and many of them fifth-year students who only needed an additional semester.

"Most students at Truman have a plus — something like going to summer school or attending a fall semester of the next year, [which] kicks you into this fifth-year category," he said.

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