

# CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

## 'I have a heart! I have a heart'

### Eduardo Montoya, 13, receives a heart transplant

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Eduardo Montoya, it's time for your haircut. Finally.

You see, the 13-year-old seventh-grader from Roselle refused to chop his locks until he got the new heart he needed.

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**Eduardo Montoya's parents, Eduardo and Claudia, visit their son after his heart transplant.**  
*(Rich Hein/Sun-Times)*

#### PHOTO GALLERY



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"I like my hair long and shaggy," he joked one day last month. "It's the newest style."

Eduardo was born with a congenital heart defect. He had three open-heart surgeries in the first years of his life. Days before he turned 5, he got a pacemaker.

Five years passed before a routine checkup revealed his coronary arteries weren't growing at the same rate as his heart. With no other options, on Oct. 24, 2006, Eduardo's name was placed on the list of those in need of a donor heart.

He started the current school year in a wheelchair because of concerns that walking the hallways of Spring Wood Middle School in Hanover Park would overtax his weak heart. He couldn't run for fear of a heart attack.

On Sept. 27, Eduardo told his parents his chest hurt. They took him to a suburban emergency room, and he was transferred to Children's Memorial Hospital. He's been there ever since.

He didn't look sick when he went to the hospital. But his heart was a barely ticking time bomb.

He passed the time with the help of visits from his sister, Daniela, 14, and brother, Juan, 10, in a hospital room barely big enough for him and Juan to unfurl dueling lightsabers.

His parents and siblings spent Christmas Eve sleeping in a hospital conference room to be near him. Thanksgiving dinner was at the hospital, too.

Eduardo has been tutored there, had music lessons and art therapy. Still, his hospital stay wore on him.

In March, asked if the prospect of transplant surgery was scary, Eduardo didn't hesitate. "No, I'm not scared," he said. "I want to get it over and done with."

On April 4, after more than a year and a half on the waiting list, Eduardo finally got the news he'd been waiting for.

"I have a heart! I have a heart!" his mother, Claudia Montoya, recalls Eduardo shouting.

His recovery thus far has been smooth and swift. Ten days after the surgery, on the day he turned 13, Eduardo was transferred from intensive care back to a room on the fifth floor. He can't wait to go home.

First, his doctors plan an intermediate step -- to nearby Kohl's House, where organ recipients can be close to the hospital while they continue their recovery. He's set to move there this weekend.

Once he's back home, there will be new challenges, including the risk of infection or rejection -- things he can't help but think about.

"It's like we don't know what's in store for us because everything is new," Claudia Montoya said. "We are used to Eduardo with a heart problem. Now, he doesn't have a heart problem, but different things can go wrong."

Still, the family is hopeful. So is Eduardo. He'll have some new surprises waiting for him at home, like a freshly painted bedroom in the colors of Colombia, his parents' birthplace. There'll be familiar faces, too -- including, soon, his own.

Said Mom: "He's going to go back to his old hairstylists."

*Kara Spak*

### **How to become an organ donor**

To join the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry, visit [Lifegoeson.com](http://Lifegoeson.com) or call (800) 210-2106 and put your name on the confidential list, which is only released to organ and tissue procurement personnel and medical examiners after all lifesaving efforts have failed.

Gift of Hope, an Elmhurst-based non-profit, also answers questions about organ donation and gives information on how to become an organ donor at [Giftofhope.org](http://Giftofhope.org)