

A Parent's Worst Nightmare: How My Daughter Nearly Died from Asthma

as told by Kandy Blankartz

The year was 1996. The place was our hometown, Mobridge, South Dakota. It was a very windy day in April, a day I'll never forget.

My daughter, Darcey, who was 17 years old at the time, was a junior in high school. She was a pretty girl with blond hair and blue eyes, and she was very outgoing and friendly. She wanted to be in everything at school. She was full of life. On this day Darcey had been having trouble with her asthma all day but she wanted to go to work anyway, to her job at Hardees. She was so dedicated she even took her nebulizer with her.

On her way to work she stopped over at her boyfriend's and there was cat hair all over the house. Along with having other allergies, Darcey was allergic to cats. She suddenly didn't feel well and in just a matter of seconds, she was turning blue and then went into a full respiratory arrest.

Her boyfriend called the ambulance. When the ambulance came they got her breathing back again and wanted to lay her back on the stretcher but she said she couldn't. It was at that time she lost consciousness. The ambulance driver said Darcey was conscious the whole way to the hospital – but we found out later that she didn't remember a thing.

By time I got to the emergency room they had been working on her and were bagging her. *“Bagging” is when a respiratory therapist uses an ambu bag, a plastic device, about the size of a small football, to squeeze oxygen-rich air into the lungs of a person who cannot breathe on their own.*

They called for the flight helicopter to transfer Darcey to a bigger hospital in to Bismarck, North Dakota, but because of the wind they couldn't fly so we went by ambulance. That's over 100 miles away! I was sitting in front with the driver on that ride, not knowing what was going on in the back, how Darcey was doing, if she had died or what was going on. All the time the paramedics were taking instructions from the doctor in our town. With the wind as strong as it was it seemed like the ambulance was hardly moving. The ambulance was old, the battery was almost dead, and the brakes were going out. Would we make it to the hospital in time to save Darcey?

We finally got to Bismarck and the paramedic said Darcey wouldn't have made it if they had to go any further. Once she was settled into the ICU, I could see that Darcey was struggling so hard, trying to breathe and not understanding what was going on. It was awful. I couldn't believe this was happening! The pulmonologist there had to give Darcey something to get her to sleep and also gave her medications to temporarily paralyze her. They hooked her up to a ventilator. Every so often the medication would wear off and

she'd wake up and make motions to tell us she wanted a paper and pen. My girlfriend gave her the paper and pen and Darcey wrote, "Am I going to die? Where is my boyfriend? Where am I?" As a mom going through this, it was the most terrifying thing I could ever imagine. But, after what seemed like forever, after being in the ICU for almost a week, my daughter recovered completely. Thank God and the good doctors there!

Darcey went on to graduate from high school and then took four years of college to become a Respiratory Therapist in 2001. I said before that Darcey is full of life, if she wants something she goes after it, and nothing can stop her. Darcey went on and received her degree in nursing from the University of Minnesota in December of 2008 and wants to someday become a Certified Nurse Practitioner (CNP). Her family doctor called me sometime later, a few years after this happened, and asked me if she had any brain damage due to lack of oxygen. Well, I don't think so! That's all he wanted to know.

Darcey was one of the lucky ones. Our story turned out great! But we still have to be careful. I have two daughters with asthma. It's in our family, big time. Asthma goes way back to my great-grandfather. We've been checked for Alpha-1, but they say we don't have it.

Through all of this we've learned for sure that asthma is a life threatening illness. People need to take it seriously and take their asthma controller medications to keep asthma from flaring up. Darcey says, "Follow closely with a pulmonologist and do not put off getting treatment. Asthma can kill!"

Please – listen to Darcey, a girl with asthma; and listen to me, her mom. Learn from our experience and don't let this happen to you! I came so close to losing my daughter that terrible windy day in 1996, but she beat the odds and she made it. Not everybody does. After this was over I hoped to God I would NEVER have to go through this ever again. And I hope that someday – someday soon – nobody else ever will.

Kandy Blankartz has asthma and COPD and can be reached at puffmama@westriv.com.
For more information on asthma and COPD, visit <http://www.breathingbetterlivingwell.com>.



Kandy Blankartz and her daughter, Darcey



Darcey