

# Perseverance



## Family battles blinding eye condition

When Liliana Vujic's parents were first able to gaze into their newborn daughter's eyes, it should have been a joyful moment, something they had waited three long days to experience.

Born nearly a month early, Liliana's arrival hadn't exactly gone according to plan. She was whisked away to spend the first three days of her life in the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit. It came as a shock to her already-overwhelmed parents when Liliana first opened her eyes, and they noticed that something was different.

Instead of clear, her eyes were cloudy. Liliana had been born with the blinding eye condition Peters Anomaly.

Immediately, the Vujics swung into action. They took Liliana to an ophthalmologist. Then got a second opinion, followed by a third and a fourth.

**"Coming to terms with the unknown was a lot to handle," recalls Liliana's mother, Kimberly. "I remember crying on a park bench outside the hospital."**

She and her husband, Bobby, listened to what the doctors had to say and did research on their own, but the information they found was limited.

They selected Dr. Elmer Tu, from the University of Illinois-Chicago, as Liliana's cornea specialist.

He performed surgeries to make the most of what little vision she had, and then, when she was four, performed a cornea transplant in her weaker eye.

"The Illinois Eye-Bank is thrilled to be able to work with surgeons such as Dr. Tu to provide tissue for pediatric patients," says Diane Hollingsworth, the Eye-Bank's Executive Director.

*The Vujics, from left: Grandma Jill, Liliana, father Bobby, brothers Matea and Luka, mother Kimberly, and grandpa Rick.*

"Receiving a cornea transplant during childhood can dramatically increase a child's chances for lifetime success."

In addition to Liliana's medical treatments, the Vujics sought early intervention services through the state of Illinois, starting when she was just six months old. Her overall health was good, but her blindness was taking a toll on her development. While other babies her age would happily lie on their bellies and swat at objects in front of them, Liliana's limited vision prevented her from enjoying this type of activity.

"There was no motivation for her," Bobby explains.

Bobby and Kimberly also found support from other parents — at a playgroup for children with disabilities and through The Chicago Lighthouse and the Illinois Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments.

Today, 8-year-old Liliana is a happy, well-adjusted, outgoing girl with a bright future ahead of her. With a special contact lens and glasses with a slight bifocal, her vision is 20/200 in her better eye, but she doesn't let that slow her down.

At school, she's on the honor roll and excels at spelling, thanks to her great memory. She also plays baseball and basketball, and takes singing lessons with her friends.

Liliana never lets anything hold her back from what she wants to accomplish.

**"'Perseverance' is one of her favorite words," says Kimberly.**

