

# ANGELMAN

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told her before revealing Hayden’s diagnosis. “He told me what she has is not life threatening. It will not shorten her life span.” That wasn’t the case. While it wasn’t the disorder itself that took Hayden’s young life, it was a component of the condition that only affects 1 in 15,000 children worldwide. Still unfamiliar to many in the medical community, AS is a neuro-genetic disorder characterized by severe intellectual and developmental disability, sleep disturbance, seizures, jerky movements, frequent laughter or smiling, and usually a happy demeanor. People with AS also produce an abundant amount of saliva, Kimball said

“Her pediatrician in Duluth prescribed a medication to stop the drooling,” Kimball said. “The insurance company and I were battling back and forth because technically she needed to be 3 years

## Mark your calendar

The walk to raise money for Angelman syndrome research is set for 1 p.m. May 16 at Smokey Bear Park. Participants must register from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the park prior to the event beginning.

old for them to cover the medication.” But Hayden would never take the medication. On Aug. 22, 2014, Kimball answered a phone call no parent ever wants to receive. On the other line was Kimball’s husband, Kyle. He had just called 911. He couldn’t wake Hayden up from her nap and she was being rushed to the hospital. Tears welled in Kimball’s eyes as she recalled the worst day of her life.

“She aspirated on her own saliva in her sleep,” she said. “I fell to the floor when they told me she was gone. It’s awful.”

**Raising awareness**

The tragedy left Kimball and her family feeling broken. A house once full of Hayden’s bright smiles and laughter was a suddenly dark and quiet.

“She was just so perfect in every way,” Kimball said. “Even when Hayden was having a bad day, she was happy.”

Through the grieving process, Kimball has decided no parent should suffer the pain she is feeling. “I need to do something about it,” she said.

In an effort to bring awareness to AS, Kimball is partnering with the AS Foundation for a walk in International Falls to raise money for research.

Scheduled for May 16, the walk will start at Smokey Bear Park and end across town at Kerry Park. Participants will need to register at Smokey Bear Park anytime from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and the walk will begin at 1 p.m., Kimball said.

“I’m doing this to honor my daughter, but to also bring awareness so that what happened to her

doesn’t have to happen to someone else,” she said.

Awareness could be the key. According to the AS Foundation website, because of its genetic relationship to autism and other disorders, many researchers believe that curing Angelman syndrome will lead to cures for similar disorders. Research is on the cusp of potential treatments to reverse the debilitating symptoms of the syndrome.

“Sometimes you have to take a step back from the great big things and focus on the little things,” Kimball said. “With more research and awareness, doctors won’t have to Google Angelman syndrome to find out more about it.”

**Knowing more**

AS is often misdiagnosed as cerebral palsy or autism due to lack of awareness. Hayden fell into that category. Kimball said she struggled for almost a year for answers as to why her daughter had developmental delays.

“Doctors told me she’d catch up, but I knew something was just off,” she

said. “By 12 months, she still wasn’t walking or crawling. She could get around, but not like she should have.”

The other personality feature Hayden had was she was always happy. Too happy, Kimball said.

“Don’t get me wrong, I loved having a happy baby,” she said with a smile. “But she was just excessively happy.”

After a Duluth pediatrician diagnosed Hayden with cerebral palsy, Kimball said she wasn’t convinced.

“Her brain scans came back normal, so I didn’t understand how they could tell me she had something that was caused by abnormalities in the brain,” she said.

A pediatric neurologist then took on Hayden’s case. After several tests, all the factors pointed to Angelman.

“He explained it was the chromosome and it was a deletion or a mutation of that chromosome,” Kimball said. “A second test showed she had both the deletion and mutation.”

**Team Hayden**

Kimball said most “Angel children” never walk and will have very limited verbal skills. She admitted to being angry and frustrated she’ll never get to see if Hayden could have defied the odds.

“I have no doubt she would have walked,” she said. “It’s really hard to go through this.”

But planning and organizing the walk event is helping.

“I am proud of this community and I know people are going to want to help,” Kimball said. “So far, the response has been so wonderful and I’m excited to see what we can do with the walk. We have formed Team Hayden to get her story out there to share with others.”

Donations will be put toward research, but people have the option to select how their donations are disbursed, Kimball said.

“I’m just so grateful of everyone in advance,” she said. “We are gonna beat (Angelman syndrome). We need our angels here, with us.”

# DUO

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going through a massive renovation. Cook is quick to note her husband helped the hospital at which they previously worked to renovate its operating rooms. Wooll brings that knowledge and experience to RLMC, where he’s provided input on how to renovate the surgical facilities at the hospital.

“Eric’s really brilliant at that stuff, I know nothing about who to contact to purchase new equipment or what we even need,” Cook said. “As far as the sterilization processes and all that stuff, he’s run that before, so he’s a great asset.”

Wooll’s high level of skill and experience made the decision to fill their need for a general surgeon and a first assistant a no-brainer, Odegaard said.

“After we discovered Eric was highly skilled and experienced in a variety of surgical specialties and they’ve worked together as a team for many years, we believed the value of that relationship, coupled with our need for a talented first assist in our growing surgery program, made it a much easier decision,” Odegaard said.

Their previous rebuilding situation in Colorado wasn’t as open or well-received, Cook said. The hospital staff there resisted change, she said, while the community wanted to move forward.

“Everybody was very excited, but not the workers,” Cook said. “It’s hard to say why, it’s a different culture.”

In International Falls, however, she said both the RLMC staff and the community are open to all the improvements at the hospital, and are helping the facility progress into the future.

**History**

Cook and Wooll have been together for four years, and have been married for the past year. But their story began much earlier, as the two grew up together in Alpena, Mich.

A small town of a little more than 10,000 people on Michigan’s Lower Peninsula, Alpena is where Cook and Wooll got to know each other growing up. Wooll’s mother was friends with

Cook’s neighbor, she said, so the two spent a lot of time together as kids.

“He would come over there to visit, there were kids in that house, too, so then we’d all play together,” Cook said.

Wooll is four years older, though, so the two weren’t in school together, Cook said, and it was difficult to stay connected as they grew up. They fell out of touch after going away to college, but reconnected when they returned to Alpena to begin their careers, and have been working together since 2008.

Cook said she grew up wanting to be a doctor, but that wasn’t the case for Wooll. He began working as a welder and construction worker, he said, until he was laid off and went to nursing school.

One reason the two have been able to work well together, and to balance their personal and work relationships, is their long history of friendship. Both said being friends before dating and getting married has led to their easygoing, familiar connection.

That connection has shown through the potentially thousands of surgeries the two have performed together, Cook said. But for her, one surgery in particular stands out.

Before Cook and Wooll started dating, and before she knew if “he even had any interest in me,” Cook said she performed a surgery on a 57-year-old man and discovered colon cancer. This was early in her career, she said, so she wasn’t sure how she was going to break the news to the patient.

Faced with the tough situation of telling someone they have cancer, Cook said she got some reassurance from Wooll.

“Eric said, ‘You know, we have to do this for 30 more years before we retire,’” Cook said. “And I said, ‘We’ And he said, ‘Yeah.’ And I said, ‘OK.’ He had decided, and finally clued me in.”

Their strong connection means their relationship is nothing like the melodramatic relationships playing out on medical TV dramas like “ER” and “Grey’s Anatomy.”

“I used to watch ‘Grey’s Anatomy’ until I went to the

OR, and realized how different it was,” Wooll said. “I’m like, this is such horsecrap.”

**Connection benefits**

Their strong relationship plays a large role in their success in the operating room, Cook said. The two have a close connection, and often know what the other is thinking during surgery.

“If you think about someone you work closely with, or someone you spend a lot of time with, you get to know how they think,” Cook said. “So it’s a very easy exchange of opinions and information, which is awesome during an operation.”

It’s almost like a surgeon having two brains, Cook said, and she often doesn’t even have to ask for instruments, as Wooll is predicting her needs.

In a tense, potentially high-stress operating room, Cook said she excels at keeping a level head. Her low ego isn’t typical for most surgeons, she said, but when someone needs to take charge in the operating room, she’s the one to do it.

“If decisions are to be made, they’re to be made quickly, and there’s got to be someone in charge, of course I’m in charge,” Cook said. “I play a good captain of the ship.”

Having a close relationship with someone during that situation makes everything a bit easier, Wooll said.

“If all hell’s breaking loose, who do you want with you?” Wooll said. “The person you trust the most.”

While some might struggle keeping their personal and work relationships separate, Wooll said they’re very professional and haven’t had an instance where the two have clashed.

“We leave work at work, and home is home,” Wooll said.

**Local draw**

Cook and Wooll are both from a small town and love the outdoors, so coming to International Falls has been a perfect fit, Wooll said. The Falls International Airport also makes for a convenient trip to see family back in Michigan, Cook said.

The couple has also been impressed with the local representation of “Minnesota nice,” Wooll said. During their interview visit,

Cook said the couple went undercover to ask local people what they thought of the area and the hospital.

“We spent like a day or a day and a half going around to different businesses just checking out the people, doing like secret shopping,” Cook said. “Asking them about the hospital, would they have surgery there, stuff like that, not telling anybody who we were.”

What they discovered, Cook said, was a local attitude that was receptive, not resistant, to change.

“People were very receptive and ready for change,” Cook said. “And very positive about the change that was being proposed.”

“They’re just ecstatic that they wouldn’t have to drive for something as simple as a colonoscopy,” Wooll said.

They lived in a bigger

city before, Wooll said, but the lifestyle just wasn’t for them. They enjoy the benefits of a small town, like shorter commutes, a slower pace and patient attitudes.

“We like the small towns,” Wooll said. “We’ve been in big towns, it’s not the same.”


“We like it quiet, we like it peaceful,” Cook said. “The lifestyle is easier here, people are patient, and they’re just happy to talk to you.”

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# BOARD

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made in February appointing Quay Whitbeck to the county Board of Adjustment. Commissioners were told Teddy Frederickson had not intended to resign from the board.

Environmental Services Director Dale Olson also told the board concern has been voiced about the legality of using a telephone when a quorum of the members cannot be present and whether

alternates members could be appointed.

Commissioners said they wanted a legal opinion about the use of conference calls to meet quorum requirements before acting on the request.

Mike Wellcome provided information about the Voyage Forward project during the public comment portion of the meeting.

Wellcome encouraged commissioners to visit the Voyage Forward website at [www.voyageforward.org](http://www.voyageforward.org) and to sign up there for automatic reports.

The board also:

- Appointed Karen Lorenzen to a five-year term on the Housing and Redevelopment Authority Board to fill a vacancy due to the retirement of Marlys Fraley-Hanson as recommended by the HRA.
- Agreed to schedule at the March 31 board meeting an evening committee session to be held in Northome where commissioners can discuss issues with members of the city council.
- Canceled the March 24 county board meeting.