

PANAMA

Caregiver Name: Ana Victoria

Age at Implantation: 8

Age Today: 8

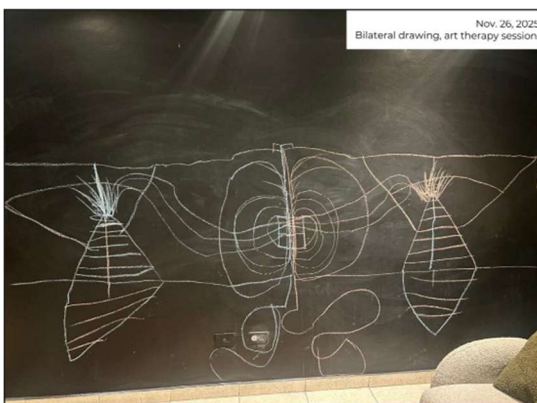
Becoming parents to a child who survived cancer changes you profoundly. It reshapes long-held beliefs and teaches you to live with perspective and gratitude, but also with constant awareness: knowing that some battles do not end when treatment does.

Our oldest son was diagnosed with hepatoblastoma as an infant. He received multiple rounds of chemotherapy, including cisplatin; a drug that at the time meant survival, but that gradually left a measurable consequence in the hearing tests conducted alongside his treatment: a mild to moderate sensorineural hearing loss in the high frequencies.

At that time, our priority was his survival. He went through the entire oncological treatment, hospitalizations, surgeries, and medications while supported by love. He moved forward. We celebrated remission and felt that the worst was behind us.

From his first year of life, he used hearing aids with regular monitoring and adjustments. For several years, they seemed to meet his needs. It was only last year, at age seven, that more noticeable changes emerged, first observed by his piano teacher. It became clear that sound discrimination was becoming more difficult, background noise was increasingly disruptive, and following conversations in noisy environments was growing more challenging.

New evaluations, repeated several times in the hope that there had been an error, confirmed what we feared; his hearing loss had progressed in the high frequencies, showing a pronounced slope on the audiogram. The damage had become profound and affected both ears. The medical explanation was clear: in some cases, cisplatin-related ototoxicity can progress over time, even when hearing levels appear stable for a period.



The greatest challenge was not only medical but understanding how to best support our son beyond his medical history. The decisions we had made were not easy, but they have been intentional and aligned with his needs.

It was during this process that something helped us see more clearly. In an art therapy session, our son was asked to create a bilateral drawing on a board. When he stepped back and looked at it, he pointed to the center and said, “these are my ears.” Then he pointed to the shapes on each side and added, “these are my hearing aids.” After a brief pause, he said, “they’re like erupting volcanoes; they hurt my ears.”

At that moment, we understood that this was no longer only about test results or percentages, but about how he was experiencing sound in his everyday life. That word ‘hurt’ revealed something we could no longer overlook. It helped us re-center the decision around him and moved forward from that place.

Our support has come from a combination of people and convictions: dedicated physicians, close family and friends, attentive teachers, and therapists who believe in his potential, and the belief that communication is one of the most essential ways to belong in the world.

Our son's achievements are not measured by his ability to discriminate sounds or pronounce words. They are reflected in his resilience, his curiosity, and his desire to participate and learn. Every step forward and every adaptation has been a meaningful victory.

When cochlear implantation entered the medical conversation, uncertainty followed. There was time for research, questions, and long conversations. Today, we have made a decision and see it as an opportunity to strengthen his communication, participation, and sense of belonging. This year, we have decided to proceed with cochlear implantation in one ear.

To other parents, we would say this: trust your intuition and the knowledge you build about your children. **Do not minimize symptoms or late effects. Ask questions, document, and seek allies. Early intervention and access to appropriate technology can change a child's trajectory.**



This story centers on one of our children, but it is upheld by our family of five, who have learned to support one another, adapt, grow in sensitivity, and move forward together. Our son's journey is what it is: difficult, beautiful and complex. It has been transformative and healing, and it has shaped how we understand growth, resilience, and care. **Difficulties leave a mark but also sharpens our ability to recognize what matters.** It is a reminder of how children grow and endure and how the world around them must continue learning how to support them.