





# Interview with Surgeon, Dr. Karla Christian

## By: Melissa Marti



**D**r. Karla Christian attended college and medical school in Seattle, WA and completed the first half of her general surgery residency there before coming to Vanderbilt. At Vanderbilt, she finished both her general surgery residency and cardiac surgery residency. Dr. Christian is currently practicing at Vanderbilt and is in her ninth year as a surgeon.

Dr. Christian was kind enough to take time to answer some of our questions.

(parts of interview paraphrased)

*Q: Why did you decide to become a surgeon and why did you choose heart surgery?*

*A: I like working with people. In heart surgery, I work as part of a team. I enjoy the interaction with my colleagues as well as the people I care for. It also provides a challenge on a daily basis and is unpredictable*

*Q: What kind of training/schooling is involved and where did you receive your training?*

*A: Of course, a college degree is required. After that, I went to medical school for 4 years in Seattle, WA followed by a 5-year general surgery residency of which I completed half in WA and half at Vanderbilt. Then I spent a year in the lab. After that, I finished a 3-year cardiac surgery residency at Vanderbilt.*

*Q: What did you do in the lab?*

*A: I studied wound healing and operated on rats. During my time in the lab, I found out how hard it is to do good research. I also discovered that I enjoy the clinical side of medicine and that I prefer working with people as*

*opposed to doing research.*

*Q: How long have you been a surgeon?*

*A: I am in my ninth year.*

*Q: What do you enjoy most about your job?*

*A: The interaction with people and the daily challenges.*

*Q: What particular area of this field interests you most?*

*A: I like all aspects of children's cardiac surgery. I guess the procedure I am most noted for is the repair of what they call AV canal defects. I have a lot of success with that procedure. This success is probably because the man I trained under was especially skilled at repairing AV canal defects and he was able to pass that on to me.*

*Q: What area would you like more emphasis placed on and why?*

*A: I would like to see more effort put into discovering the causes of congenital heart de-*

*fects. I would like to be able to better identify risk factors and to help parents understand why their child has a heart defect. Right now, we have not identified what causes most of the defects and it appears to be random.*

*Q: What do you think every parent should know about CHDs?*

*A: They should know that it was nothing that they did; that most defects can be corrected with medications or surgery; that there can be future pregnancies and they can have children with normal hearts.*

*Q: What resources are available for non-local patients?*

*A: Housing through the Ronald McDonald House is the biggest support that we provide. Discount motel rates are also available for those times when the Ronald McDonald House is full. I wish we could do more for families in the way of meal vouchers and other services. I realize that it is very difficult for a lot of families to incur these additional expenses.*

## Le Bonheur Cardiac Kids Camp June 22-27



**L**e Bonheur Hospital hosts Cardiac Kids Camp for one week every summer. The camp is designed for children ages 8-18 with cardiac-related diagnoses. Campers participate in nature hikes, fishing,

swimming, softball, volleyball, rope courses, crafts, track and field activities and healthy living education. Nurses, physicians, cardiovascular technologists, volunteers and former heart patients serve as counselors for the camp.

Cardiac Kids Camp participants come from all over the Mid-South. The camp is held at Lakeshore United Methodist Campground in Eva, TN.

Saving Little Hearts is pleased to work with Le Bonheur Cardiac Kids Camp. We hope that the

Knoxville area children going to the camp this summer will enjoy every minute of this experience.

Thanks to all the support and donations. We are hoping to send 5-10 local children to the camp this summer. With every donation more and more children will get to enjoy this experience.

Applications for this years camp are due May 1, 2003. To receive an application call Karin at (865) 748-4605.

### Congratulations

- Dr. Michael Liske joins the staff at Vanderbilt University beginning April 1, 2003. His new office number is 615-322-7447
- Dr. and Mrs. Michael Damron celebrated the birth of their second child, Paige Elizabeth, March 3, 2003.
- Mr. and Mrs. Chris Smith were married on March 28, 2003



# A Mother's Story

## By: Melissa Marti



Adam in NICU, only a few hours after birth

When we found out that we were having our third boy, we thought that we had everything figured out. Nothing could surprise us. We had been raising boys for nearly 5 years.

Adam was born at 3:00 p.m. on May 9, 2002 and when he arrived we were faced with the unexpected. Immediately after birth, Adam took in one breath and did not exhale. He turned blue and limp. We were frightened. The nurses quickly revived him and a neonatologist came to examine him. Shortly after her exam, she ordered an echocardiogram because she heard a loud heart murmur. She said that it was probably a functional murmur and that this test was precautionary. However, after what seemed like an eternity, she told us that Adam has a heart valve deformity and that Dr. Michael Liske, the pediatric cardiologist was on his way. We did not

know at the time how important this doctor would be or what a special place he would have in our hearts.

When Dr. Liske arrived, he gave us the news. We were totally unprepared for what he told us.

Dr. Liske came equipped with a simplified drawing of a heart that showed the location of Adam's heart valve deformity and it accompanying defects. He told us that Adam has Ebstein's anomaly and that he would likely need surgery in the first 10 to 14 days of life.

He described a single-ventricle heart operation that has been a common "fix" for Ebstein's. With this procedure, Dr. Liske said that Adam may not live to age 2, but if he made it to that milestone, he would most likely only live to age 20. Dr. Liske also mentioned a surgeon in Oklahoma who was having limited success with a valve repair but he was unsure if that was the avenue to pursue.

We went from feelings of excitement about the birth of our son to feelings of devastation and uncertainty. I was in tears. Why didn't we know about this before Adam was born? Why didn't we know more about congenital heart defects? No one had ever

even mentioned the possibility to us. We felt like we were alone.

Adam remained in the hospital's NICU for 16 days following his birth and to everyone's surprise, steadily began to improve. He was released on May 25. Dr. Liske decided to follow him clinically until he displayed symptoms at which point surgery would be necessary.

In September, his symptoms began to worsen and Adam had what we had hoped to be his only open-heart surgery in Oklahoma City on October 28, 2002.

Since the initial surgery, his condition has again deteriorated. Adam is scheduled to have another surgery at the Mayo Clinic this summer.

Since Adam's birth, we realized that a whole world that we were unaware of exists. There are thousands of families who are raising children with heart defects and they too are facing similar challenges. Some children have lost their battle with heart defects. Although we still face many uncertainties, we have a new appreciation for what we do have and we realize how fortunate we are to have our son with us.



Adam after his first surgery

## Support Group

Meetings are Held at the Baptist Eye Institute William Bailey Conference Room

- \*\*May 6, 2003 6pm to 8pm
- June 3, 2003 6pm to 8pm
- July 1, 2003 6pm to 8pm
- August 5, 2003 6pm to 8pm
- September 2, 2003 6pm to 8pm
- \*\*October 7, 2003 6pm to 8pm
- November 4, 2003 6pm to 8pm
- December 2, 2003 6pm to 8pm

\*\* This meeting will be in a different location. Call 865-748-4605 for info

## Good Sports Help Saving Little Hearts

Saving Little Hearts is honored and excited to be affiliated with the Tennessee RiverHawks and the Knoxville Summit. We look forward to an exciting football season.

Saving Little Hearts will be selling footballs at all of the Tennessee RiverHawks home games. The RiverHawks are graciously donating half of the proceeds to Saving Little Hearts.

The Knoxville Women's Football Team, Knoxville Summit, is also allowing Saving Little Hearts to raise money at their

home games. At the Knoxville Summit home games, Saving Little Hearts will be selling beach balls and half of the proceeds will go towards programs sponsored by Saving Little Hearts.

For more info about the Knoxville indoor football team, the Tennessee RiverHawks call 865-637-200.

For more info about the Knoxville Women's football team, the Knoxville Summit call 865-455-4461.

Come support these local football teams and Saving Little Hearts!

- April 19 TN RiverHawks
- April 19 Knoxville Summit
- April 26 TN RiverHawks
- May 3 TN RiverHawks
- May 3 Knoxville Summit
- May 17 Knoxville Summit
- May 31 TN RiverHawks
- June 14 Knoxville Summit
- June 20 TN RiverHawks
- July 5 TN RiverHawks

## Upcoming Events

- April 1-12, 2003: T-Shirt Sale by UT Sororities and Fraternities
- June 21, 2003: Bowl-a-thon at Western Plaza Bowling Lanes on Kingston Pike, Knoxville TN
- February 7, 2004: Annual Dinner and Silent Auction at Club LeConte, Knoxville, TN



## Saving Little Hearts

5629 Barineau Lane  
Knoxville, TN 37920

Phone: 865-748-4605  
Email: info@savinglittlehearts.com

Helping children with  
congenital heart defects



Saving Little Hearts

Check us out on the web at  
[www.savinglittlehearts.com](http://www.savinglittlehearts.com)



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## How You Can Help

### Participate in an Event

- Dinner & Silent Auction
- Bowl-a-thon
- CHD Awareness Campaign

### Sponsor an Event

There are many types of sponsorship available. Please contact Karin Coulter at 865-748-4605 if you are interested.

### Make a Donation

Donations can be made by using the form below and mailing it to:

Saving Little Hearts  
5629 Barineau Lane  
Knoxville, TN 37920

### **Contributions Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contribution Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Please notify us if your donation is in memory of or in tribute to someone you know, who has fought a battle with congenital heart defects. We will mail a card, acknowledging your honorary donation.

**A receipt for tax purposes will be  
mailed upon request.**

If you have any questions please feel free to contact us at: (865) 748-4605