

RAIGEN

Continued from Page 1A
 food and each other's company than worrying about Raigen's stomach pain.

"It's been a transition for me because my life with her has been limiting her food. Now, we can sit down for dinner and she actually eats her dinner and talks to us the whole time," Makenzie said. "Meals with the family are more enjoyable and relaxed than they used to be."

One thing Raigen was not excited about when she got home, however, was the sight of the pole — which the 3-year-old had appropriately named "Poley" — that once held up her bag of liquid food. Raigen had been on a liquid diet for months before the surgery, and hated the feeding tube that ran from her stomach, out of her nose and connected her to Poley, which was her constant companion, but now sits in the corner of her closet.

"We come home from the first surgery and she says, 'What is Poley doing here still?'" Makenzie said with a laugh. "I told her we had to keep him until we were in the clear. She doesn't want to talk to or see Poley ever again."

Although this time of peace and healing was a breath of fresh air for the Jesseph family, their next — and largest — hurdle was fast approaching. Raigen was to face her second surgery of the month on March 25.

This time, doctors would operate on her brain.

No more headaches

In addition to a lifetime of stomach pain, Raigen experienced splitting headaches that could not be explained by her gastroparesis diagnosis, so during her first hospital stay in December, doctors conducted an MRI

on the 3-year-old to check for brain tumors.

To Makenzie and Jaymes' relief, the MRI scan did not reveal any tumors in their Raigen's brain, but it did discover something else.

That day, Raigen was diagnosed with Type II Chiari Malformation — a congenital brain developmental disorder that pushes the bottom of the brain down into the upper spinal canal, causing pressure and blocking the flow of brain fluid.

Makenzie and Jaymes then realized their little girl would have to undergo brain surgery.

The day of her second surgery, Raigen was feeling more calm than she had before her first operation. Makenzie thinks this is because she had already gone through something similar with the pyloroplasty, so she wasn't as scared. Makenzie, though, was terrified.

"Jaymes handled it okay just because she did so well with the other surgery, but I had a lot of emotion, especially when they wheeled her out and left for the prep room," she said. "That's when it hit me and I just started sobbing. At that stage, there's nothing else you can do but pray."

The Jesseph couple and 10 of their family members spent four hours in the waiting room, consoling one another. Makenzie said for the first hour and a half, she couldn't think or do anything except cry.

But eventually, those four hours passed, and Makenzie and Jaymes entered the recovery room to check on their daughter together.

"There's just something about seeing your little baby like that..." Makenzie said, her words trailing off. "She looked pale, and she was still sleeping."

Raigen was soon moved

to a small room in the pediatric intensive care unit where only two people can visit at a time. Makenzie and Jaymes would switch out as each family member would approach the bed, give sleeping Raigen a quick kiss on the cheek or forehead, and leave.

In the PICU, only one parent is allowed to spend the night in the room, so the two decided Makenzie would be the one to stay. Luckily, an overnight room opened up down the hall, so Jaymes had a place to sleep nearby.

Makenzie said it was an extremely rough night for Raigen.

"She threw up all the time (as the nurses tried) to get her pain managed. There was no comfortable position for her, so we would sit her up or try to get her to sleep, but there was nothing that would make the pain go away for the first 24 hours," she said. "As a parent, you'll do anything to take your kid's pain away, and yet we couldn't. This was the worst we've ever seen it."

By 11 the next morning, Raigen was transferred to a new room in the post-surgical wing for her extended stay. Makenzie said once they arrived, it felt like they could finally breathe, relax and heal together as a family.

"The PICU was a tiny room. I felt claustrophobic there, and it made me feel more anxious," Makenzie said. "Once we transferred out, the room we got was like a little apartment. It felt like 'Oh, now we're home,' even though we were still in the hospital."

Over the next six days of Raigen's final hospital stay, friends and family did their best to make the healing process as warm and comfortable as possible. The room soon filled with balloons, cards and four new stuffed unicorns. Makenzie's



Photo courtesy of Makenzie Jesseph

Raigen rests after brain surgery at Sacred Heart Children's Hospital.

mom, Summerville resident Heather Way, even sewed Raigen her own hospital gown and robe — a purple garment featuring, of course, unicorns and rainbows.

"She had a huge unicorn balloon, and some star balloons — there were probably 12 different kinds. The first time she was admitted in December was when she started loving balloons," Makenzie said. "She stares at them and talks about them all the time. No matter what, we made sure to get some for her."

Makenzie said while their family members were supportive and offered a hand, it was not easy for them to see Raigen so weak after her surgery.

"Nobody really understood how much pain she would be in," she said. "Everyone struggled because she struggled. Raigen, through all of this, has really touched a lot of people's lives with her strength, resilience and her thought for people."

Through connections in La Grande, the Jessephs made friends with a family whose infant daughter, Haven, recently had open heart surgery. Raigen would pray and draw pictures for "Baby Shaven," as she calls her,

even while she was still healing from her own surgery.

"Even though baby Haven is younger, it reminded Raigen she's not the only one who has to go through this," Makenzie said, adding that knowing Haven's family has helped them all. "Unless you walk the journey of your kid going through this, sometimes it's hard to grasp the severity of it even though you still care a lot."

Next up: birthday parties, ballet and preschool

The day the Jessephs finally left the children's hospital, Raigen felt confused.

"She thought when she left the hospital she would be all better. She started crying (and said), 'But this is supposed to be gone,'" Makenzie recalled. "It's a lot for a little girl to process."

The past few weeks for Raigen have been full of playing cash register, watching "American Idol" and dancing with her mom, and eating whatever foods she can stomach. She has had a daily problem with nausea and vomiting because of the brain surgery, but Makenzie said the doctors advised her this is a normal part of the healing process.

"When they said it's a long, hard recovery, they did not lie," she said. "(Raigen is) going a little stir crazy because she's very social, so staying at home is becoming more difficult."

Makenzie said Raigen's halfway-recovery mark of six weeks is near her fourth birthday, so the family is planning a "big unicorn sparkle bash" at the end of May to celebrate her life and everything she's overcome.

"She said she wants a unicorn cake, to go to the park and swing and see her friends," Makenzie said. "She just wants to have fun again and have as many people around as possible."

By late summer, Raigen's 12-week recovery will come to an end, and it will be time for her to start preschool and go back to ballet, an activity she sorely misses. Makenzie said she is amazed by how strong her little girl has been through all of this pain before she even started school.

"I don't ever want to go through that again, and I don't want anyone else to go through that," she said. "We know God has big plans for her after having her walk through this at such a young age." ■

SCHOOL

Continued from Page 1A
 provide salary increases.

"We are still behind many of them (in terms of teacher salaries), but this puts us much closer," Justice said.

Terms of the contract call for the school district's base teacher salary to be \$34,839 and its top salary to be \$66,195 in 2019-20.

Teachers will also receive more money for health insurance premiums. The cap for what the district will pay for health

insurance premiums per month will jump at least \$40 each year of the contract. The total increase will be boosted to \$75 a month if the Legislature adopts a \$9.1 billion education budget for the 2019-21 biennium. The state's education budget for 2017-19 was \$8.2 billion.

The health insurance premium cap for the teachers' present contract, which expires July 1, is \$1,254 per month.

Justice said the new contract was designed so that it will expire after the first year of the 2021-23 biennium. This means that when the next contract is

negotiated the school district will know how much money it will be receiving from the state in 2022-23. He noted that it is difficult to negotiate contracts without knowing how much money the district will have to spend.

"We have had unknown numbers going into bargaining," Justice said.

Justice said another benefit of having a three-year contract is it gives the school district and its teachers more time to focus on other projects.

"I appreciate the staff entering into a three-year contract," he said. ■

Union County will begin our roadside spray program to control vegetation and noxious weeds that are encroaching on road shoulders and right of ways. In most locations, spraying will extend four to eight feet from pavement edges. Property owners who do not want herbicides applied near their property must sign an "Owner Will Maintain" agreement with the county which must be updated annually. The county will provide signs for the owners participating. Property owners wishing to participate can sign up for the "Owner Will Maintain" program at the Union County Public Works Department located at 10513 N. McAlister Road in Island City. Any questions, please call 541-963-1016.

GUNS

Continued from Page 1A
 Americans the right to bear arms.

"I support Second Amendment rights and I oppose anything that erodes them," Hansell said.

Phil Gillette, the sporting goods manager at Ace Hardware in La Grande, also opposes the storage requirement of SB 978. He said that keeping a gun in a locked house should be considered the equivalent of having it in a safe.

He added that holding gun owners responsible for crimes committed with their stolen firearms would be like charging a car owner with a crime if someone steals the vehicle and then is in an accident that causes an injury.

However, Penny Okamoto, executive director of Ceasefire Oregon, a Portland-based nonprofit that seeks to reduce gun violence via legislation, is a strong supporter of the storage requirement provision of SB 978.

"It will save lives — that is the bottom line," Okamoto said. "Unsecured firearms

are a primary reason there are gun deaths."

She said SB 978 would not only prevent guns from being stolen but also prevent tragedies by making it harder for children to access guns in their homes.

"It would help protect minors from accidentally being injured by guns, from unintentionally being shot at home," Okamoto said.

She also said it would make gun owners more careful when they take a firearm outside their residence.

"If a gun owner takes a firearm outside one a month, the person is three times more likely to have it stolen," Okamoto said.

She also said that making guns less accessible would reduce suicides. The Ceasefire executive director said at least 60 percent of suicides in Oregon are committed with firearms.

A major provision of SB 978 would allow Oregon retailers not to sell guns to anyone until they are 21. Presently, 18 is the minimum age at which anyone can purchase a rifle in Oregon and 21 is the minimum age for buying a handgun. Gillette opposes this provi-

sion of the bill, saying he believes retailers should be allowed to sell rifles to anyone 18 and older who they believe are responsible. Gillette takes his responsibility of selling guns seriously.

"I have the right to refuse service to anyone," he said. "I have to be responsible as a dealer."

He said he will refuse to sell a gun to anyone who smells of alcohol or appears to be under its influence. When he is suspicious about someone who wants to buy a gun, Gillette said, he escorts them out of Ace Hardware.

"I go by what I physically see — if it doesn't read right, then I'm not selling them a gun," he said.

He said that raising the minimum age for purchasing rifles to 21 would be out of line with other responsibilities people are given when they are 18.

"If we change the age to 21 then we should raise the voting age and the military service age to 21," Gillette said.

Rev. W. J. Mark Knutson of Lift Every Voice Oregon, a coalition of faith-based communities run primarily by volunteers

that advocates for safer schools, houses of worship and communities, likes the provision of SB 978 allowing retailers to raise the minimum age for buying a gun. Knutson said it is among the reasons Lift Every Voice Oregon supports the bill.

He said this provision, like all of SB 978, seems logical.

"It is a common sense law for safety," Knutson said.

He believes that support for SB 978 is strong throughout the state.

"It is not urban versus rural. It is all Oregonians together," Knutson said. ■

Storage Solution
 www.CountrysideSheds.com
 Countryside CCB #149931 SHEDS LLC
 "More Than Just a Shed"
Look at a Side-By-Side Comparison
 Rent-To-Own Self-Storage
 Ownership Option?..... YesNO
 Customization?..... YesNO
 Can I sell it when done?..... YesNO
 Moveable?..... YesNO
 Location?..... Your House... Across Town
 See our display lot at
 10102 S. McAlister Road Island City
 (541) 663-0246 or toll free (800) 682-0589
 Locally owned and operated for over 20 years

HAPPY BIRTHDAY
 Family and friends wish you a **Happy 94th Birthday**
 Richard Miller
 Keep mowing and going for years to come.

Reed & Associates for excellent service LOCALLY!
 An Independent Insurance Agency

 Medicare, Auto, Home insurance and Annuities
 Nicole Cathey 10106 N. 'C' • Island City 541-975-1364 Toll Free 1-866-282-1925 www.reed-insurance.net Kevin Reed