

Collin,

On Christmas Eve Bambi Thomas, 24, gave birth to her daughter, Ellie, at McKay Dee Hospital in Ogden. But before she could hold her newborn, something went wrong. Doctors transferred Ellie to intensive care and flew Thomas to LDS Hospital. Ellie survived and was soon released while Thomas stayed connected to a large heart pump for several weeks. She was diagnosed with postpartum cardiomyopathy, an uncommon form of heart failure that happens during the last month of pregnancy or up to five months after giving birth.

Thomas is now out of the hospital and is the first person in the Intermountain West to pilot a prototype portable heart pump (the size of a small piece of luggage.) Now she waits for a heart transplant as she and her husband, Danny, raise their newborn and battle with unexpected medical expenses. The donor list is long and complex and many die before receiving life-saving organs.

This will be a point-of-view story that will show the fight a small family endures while waiting for a donor. My plan is to tell the story from Thomas's perspective, from the time Ellie was born all the way to the heart transplant and then into the adjustment period. I think we can get the hospital on board so we can access the OR for taking photos of the transplant. I would need to be on-call and it might make sense to adjust my schedule so I'm available to get to the hospital at a moment's notice. We would have to keep distant travel off my schedule for a few months. I would need several hours a week over the next six to 12 months, depending on how long it takes for Thomas to get a donor. We can run this in the daily paper and produce a multimedia audio slideshow with graphics for the web.

We can include a sidebar explanatory piece on the technology behind the prototype heart pump and its projected availability. This project could also fall into a public service category that generates awareness about the complex issues surrounding organ donation. Many people don't donate because of misinformation leading to a shortage of qualified donors and the donor system is complicated and sometimes leads to missed opportunities.

Alan