



Scott Newport and his son, Evan.

# Woodworking, giving to others helps one parent cope with child's diagnosis

By Scott Newport

*It's strange how you first realize how ill your child really is.*

It's when other parents with sick children in the hospital don't know the names of all the doctors on the floor of the Neo Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and you do. Maybe it's when the medical staff never give you a discharge date.

It wasn't until our son Evan was eight months old that we started talking about hospice and the proposed date of discharge. I think it took five different target dates until he could finally come home. Evan is diagnosed with Noonan's syndrome.

How could I thank those on the medical staff for helping to keep Evan alive? A card didn't seem enough. These folks spent countless hours away from their own families just

to help us. Since I hadn't been working much over the first month of Evan's life, a pricey gift wouldn't work either. "Hey," I thought, "Maybe I could make them something. I'm a carpenter. Surely I can come up with something nice to build."

The next morning after my morning NICU visit with Evan, I scanned my little wood shop. The only material available for the project was some leftover wood from a set of oak stairs I recently built for a customer. This flawed, unacceptable piece of wood had been discarded and placed in the trash container.

I picked each piece of wood out of the trash container, set it on my workbench and determined I could make six small stools. I knew these stools had to be built with fine precision. I would use the finest woodworking techniques and the finish on them would be like fine linen. Even though the wood was not perfect, I would make sure the final outcome would be treasured for generations to come. I began to realize that the wood was like my son. He isn't what society considers 'perfect' but he is still a pretty great kid. As I started to build the stools, a whole new meaning was attached to the wood projects. Not only were they a gift of love to those who helped us keep Evan alive, but they also represented so much more.

As I gave the six wooden stools constructed of discarded, imperfect wood to the six NICU doctors, I explained to them the meaning behind the wood. The doctors were deeply touched. Before I could hand out the last stool, one of Evan's nurses told me how she was also touched by the story of the wood. I made another batch of wooden gifts for the nurses as well. By the third round of building, I had created some end tables and small organizer boxes.

The projects continued for nine months and became part of my therapy for coping with a son who is terminally ill. I felt if Evan died, my projects would leave a legacy for

Evan I could be proud of. Every morning before work I would spend about an hour working with the 'imperfect' wood. The mission became so well known I began receiving calls from people who would offer me leftover wood from building projects or demolition jobs.

Evan finally did make it home, but his prognosis was only two years. I'll never forget the meeting where we signed a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order and were told, "Children like Evan usually don't live past two years of life."

I didn't stop building. I became involved in Internet support groups and started sending the wood to other parents and to children with special needs. Each and every time I would tell the recipient about the wood and how it related to Evan and their own child. I would even go to some of Evan's doctors and ask them if they knew any child like Evan who would benefit from the furniture.

One day, a friend of mine called and told me about a woodworker's store that went out of business. The store's owner was selling off all the leftover wood. There were rows of shelves with wood on stacked to the ceiling. I knew the wood left behind had been rejected by others.

"I will take it all," I said.

When I returned to my shop, I started to sift through the many species of wood. I found some sycamore with a design in its grain—the finest design I had ever seen—and I immediately decided this would be the wood I would use first.

It didn't take me long to figure out why this was so special. Sycamore—'sick or more.' Although our children are sick or have special needs, there is so much more about them. **EP**

***Even though the wood was not perfect, I would make sure the final outcome would be treasured for generations to come. I began to realize that the wood was like my son.***