

AJ Salazar

Not many little sisters get to say they saved their older brother's life. But Brianna Salazar can tell people she did it on the day she was born.

Doctors diagnosed then 4-year-old A.J. Salazar with a very aggressive form of leukemia that required a bone marrow transplant. No one in his family was a match, and a search of the national database could not find a compatible donor.

Roxanne Salazar, A.J.'s mother, was seven months pregnant at the time, leading the little boy's doctors to propose an idea: transplant of stem cells from the baby's umbilical cord blood. The Salazar family was fortunate; Brianna's umbilical cord blood was a match. After her birth in March 2000, physicians collected 55 cubic centimeters of cord blood and injected it into A.J.'s veins.

"That was enough to fight the leukemia," Roxanne says happily.

Roxanne and her husband, Amado, say although the agonizing ordeal is behind them, they will never forget the medical miracle that saved their son. "What a blessing a cord blood bank would be for other parents of sick children, and what a blessing for us that I was pregnant when A.J. was diagnosed. Donating cord blood is the good thing to do. That can change everything for a family with a sick child."

Today, teenager A.J. loves to play football. "It's very emotional," says Roxanne "thinking back to when he was first diagnosed. I didn't know if we'd ever be able to see this with A.J., and to see him now, he's come a long way."

