

# 'what I did for my summer vacation'

## Kansas teen chooses Barrow for family trip

by Catherine Menor



Barrow Neurological Foundation supports Dr. Robert Spetzler's research into ruptured aneurysms, such as the one Zeke Hensley suffered when he was just an infant.

Most families plan their summer vacation around a trip to Disneyland or the beach. Not the Hensleys of Arkansas City, Kansas. Jason and Lynn Hensley and their two sons, Zeke, 14, and Austin, 4, planned their trip this summer around a stop at Barrow Neurological Institute.

It was Zeke's idea. He wanted to meet the man who saved his life 14 years ago—Robert Spetzler, MD. "He wouldn't be around if it weren't for Dr. Spetzler," says Jason.

### A shaky start in life

Zeke's saga began when he was just three months old. The infant was nursing from a bottle when suddenly he stopped breathing for a short time. Physicians at a local hospital could find nothing wrong and advised against taking Zeke to a hospital in Wichita. But Zeke's family was so concerned that they signed an against-medical-advice form, and the infant was taken by ambulance to Wichita.

After several weeks of hospitalization, physicians there discovered the cause of Zeke's symptoms—an aneurysm in the infant's brain stem.

A cerebral aneurysm is a weak spot in the wall of an artery in the brain. This weak spot can gradually enlarge, producing a balloon-shaped defect. As the aneurysm enlarges, the wall further weakens and can eventually rupture, spilling blood into or around the brain.

### Surgery called very risky

In Zeke's case, the hemorrhage was extensive, and blood had penetrated deep into and around the brain. The child would survive only if the aneurysm was eliminated, thus preventing further bleeding.

The surgeons in Wichita were hesitant to operate. The location of the aneurysm and Zeke's young age made the procedure very risky, they said.

They recommended that the Hensleys consult one of two neurosurgeons—one in Texas or Dr. Spetzler in Phoenix. Jason asked them, "If he were your child, who would you send him to?" Their answer was "Barrow."



Top, Jason, Lynn, Austin and Zeke Hensley. Bottom, Zeke shortly after surgery at Barrow in 1992.

Zeke underwent brain surgery on Sept. 25, 1992, when he was just one month old—a very young age for this procedure. The Barrow team made an incision across the infant’s skull and maneuvered down to the aneurysm, which was located deep in the brain at the base of the skull. Dr. Spetzler eliminated the aneurysm by placing a clip across its base. Aneurysm clips remain in place permanently.

Zeke tolerated the complex surgery remarkably well and returned home to Kansas one week later.

### Celebrating July 4th in Arizona

The Hensleys spent this Fourth of July driving from the Grand Canyon to Phoenix. The next day they met Dr. Spetzler in his office at Barrow.

“He was a baby with an aneurysm that had burst,” Dr. Spetzler told Zeke’s parents. “It was an extremely life-threatening condition.”

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Robert Spetzler, MD

Then, showing Zeke a model of the brain, Dr. Spetzler said, “Your aneurysm was in a very difficult location, here in the brain stem. It was like a tire with a weak spot.

“There are three things that contribute to a good outcome. Youth and getting rid of the problem are two things, but a lot of it has to do with your ability to recover, and that varies a great deal from one person to the next. You were very lucky, and I’m proud of you.”

### Now a top student

Jason and Lynn told Dr. Spetzler that they are very proud of Zeke, too. His middle school nominated him for the Outstanding Student Award for 2006 and presented him a President’s Education Award for academic excellence. Zeke excels in math, ranking among the top 20 in Algebra 1—despite the fact that the aneurysm was removed from the area of the brain associated with math skills. The teen hopes to be a meteorologist some day, a perfect vocation for a kid who has always been fascinated by Kansas’ trademark tornadoes.

Zeke has undergone two eye surgeries in the years since he was at Barrow. He was successfully weaned from anti-seizure medication two years ago. His parents report that his last EEG was clean.

There were plenty of smiles in Dr. Spetzler’s office on July 5. After all, patients with extremely difficult conditions like Zeke’s are what Barrow is all about. ■