Interstate flight . . . to save a life!

by Paul deParrie

"Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck the flower, safety."

—SHAKESPEARE

Portland, OR — Ryan Nguyen's life was imperiled from the start.

Some have likened his journey to slaves being spirited across state lines to freedom; others, noting the Christmastime events, harken back to a much older story where the Babe of Bethlehem was whisked across the border to Egypt scant steps ahead of Herod's murderous hordes.

Born on October 27, 1994 at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane, Washington, Ryan began life at a disadvantage. He was six weeks premature, suffered kidney failure, brain damage, and allegedly suffered frompartial paralysis.

This did not prevent his father, Nghia Nguyen (pronounced, Neeah Win), from strutting like a proud father, and mother Darla from cradling his head softly.

It also did not prevent certain "compassion facists" from plotting his demise.

The first sign of trouble was when the Catholic hospital's staff elected to remove Ryan's ventilator without the parents' knowledge or consent. When it was discovered, staff members said they were only trying to determine if the little boy could breathe on his own. Ryan was again hooked up to the ventilator.

It was at this point that hospital staff began to make noises to Nghia and Darla about "letting Ryan go."

Dr. Priscilla Hancock, Ryan's primary physician, told the couple that the boy would "contaminate society," a remark later acknowledged under oath by Hancock. She also told the parents that they "already have a son anyway" so they could afford to "let this one go."

Nghia knew there was real trouble.

"They're not really giving him a chance," he explained about Sacred Heart's doctors. "They're choosing to terminate him."

Thus began the search for another hospital which would help Ryan live. Sacred Heart made a cursory stab at the effort by calling the University of Washington hospital in Seattle, but, in speaking with Dr. Abner there, presented the worst possible picture of Ryan.

But Ryan's parents contacted hospitals in Kansas City, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and other places. Each time, Sacred Heart would present "selected" documents on Ryan's condition presenting an almost hopeless case.

Oregon Health Sciences University's (OHSU) Dr. Nancy Binder was interested in Ryan's case when she spoke to his father, but soon changed her mind when Sacred Heart physicians talked to her.

"Sacred Heart wouldn't help at all," said Ryan's father. "If I know anyone that wants to die, I will recommend Sacred Heart."

But in the midst of all the search, on November 9, Sacred Heart, without parental knowledge or consent, took baby Ryan off the kidney dialysis machine so crucial for his survival.

A second search began — a search for an attorney.

Referred by another attorney, the Nguyens contacted Spokane's best-known pro-life attorney, Russell Van Camp. Immediately, Van Camp filed papers in Spokane County Superior Court.

The hearing to enjoin the hospital to reconnect dialysis took place on November 21. OHSU's Dr. Binder, solely upon the selected records sent her by Sacred Heart, sent an affidavit and prepared to fly to Spokane to testify that little Ryan should die.

"There has never been a baby in the world's medical literature with this many problems, born this small, born this young that made it to transplantation," said Binder referring to the fact that Ryan would have to remain on dialysis until he was tow years old before qualifying for a kidney transplant.

But Van Camp and the parents prevailed. Judge Richard Schroeder issued an emergency order on November 22. Ryan had been without dialysis for 13 days — a feat impossible if he had no kidney function as Sacred Heart asserted.

But hospital officials, angry at the court order had decided to wait until the next day to hook up Ryan to the machine, so attorney Van Camp personally appeared at the hospital with the order and demanded instant action. He got it.

Above: Mother holds Baby's hand just days after his safe arrival at Portland, Oregon's Emanuel Hospital. Credit: Cathy Ramey