

JEREMIAH

9 YEARS OLD
HILO, HAWAI'I ISLAND

"More than anything, I saw my son's resilience. He was the one who taught us how to be brave. He has been holding us up as an 'ohana."

- Leilani, mom



Our family lives on Hawai'i Island. Before our son **Jeremiah** was born, I stayed on O'ahu at Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children, where he was hospitalized in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for seven months. About six weeks before he was born, the doctors noticed that Jeremiah was smaller than expected and began weekly monitoring. It was a very difficult time—I had to be away from my husband and our two older sons, Joseph and Kawika, who were just 9 and 11 years old.

At 34 weeks, during a routine checkup, doctors noticed something was wrong with Jeremiah's heartbeat. That Monday afternoon, they told me he had to be delivered right away. My husband, working in Kohala—about an hour from the airport—rushed to O'ahu but arrived 30 minutes after Jeremiah's birth.

Jeremiah weighed just two and a half pounds. A week later, my husband returned home to work and care for our sons while Jeremiah and I remained at the hospital. When Jeremiah was 10 days old, I went to his bedside, hoping to finally nurse him for the first time. But the nurse gently told me that his belly looked swollen. An emergency X-ray was done and my husband was told that Jeremiah needed emergency surgery. Since it was spring break, he brought our boys to O'ahu so we could all be together. During surgery, doctors discovered volvulus—a dangerous twisting of the intestines—and removed more than half of Jeremiah's small intestines. After many months in the NICU, Jeremiah finally came home in October 2016.

When I first learned he'd need a feeding tube, my heart sank. It was a mix of fear, grief, and guilt. Fear of the unknown. Grief, because I was terrified to place the tube in his nose if it came out. And guilt, wondering if I somehow failed him, even though I knew deep down that wasn't true.

I quickly realized that feeding a child through a tube isn't just about nutrition—it's about trust, patience, and acceptance. It's about learning a new language of care. I had to grieve the loss of "normal" and then redefine what our normal would look like. More than anything, I saw my son's resilience. He taught us how to be brave. He has been holding us up as an 'ohana.

At 9 years old, he has been diagnosed with pediatric feeding disorder, failure to thrive, ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, mild hearing loss in both ears, and mild vision impairment.

But none of that has stopped him from being Mr. Aloha. He has a smile that lights up the room—and it's wonderfully contagious! With a playful sense of humor and a big heart, he loves chatting with friends and grown-ups alike. He enjoys playing with cars and video games like Roblox and Farming Simulator with his dad. He's always curious, always learning, and always trying his very best. But what he loves most of all is when his whole family is together—laughing, talking, and simply enjoying each other's company.



No ko mākou 'ohana e noho ana ma ka mokupuni 'o Hawai 'i. Ma mua o ka hānau 'ia 'ana o kā mākou keiki kāne 'o Jeremiah, ua ho 'okomo 'ia au ma Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children ma O 'ahu no ka mea ua 'ike nā kauka he 'u 'uku a 'e 'o Jeremiah ma mua o ka mea i mana 'o 'ia, a ho 'omaka lākou i ka nānā 'ana i kēlā me kēia pule ma O 'ahu. He wā pa 'akikī loa ia—pono au e ka 'awale mai ka 'u kāne a me kā māua mau keiki kāne 'elua, 'o Joseph lāua 'o Kawika, he 9 a me 11 wale nō.

I ka 34 o nā pule, i ka wā o ka nānā ma 'amau, ua 'ike nā kauka he mea 'ino i loko o ka pu 'uwai o Jeremiah. I kēlā ahiahi Pō 'akahī, ua ha 'i mai lākou ia 'u e pono e hānau koke 'ia 'o ia. Ua holo wikiwiki ka 'u kāne, e hana ana ma Kohala—he hola ho 'okahi mai ke kahua mokulele—i O'ahu akā ua hō 'ea 'o ia 30 minuke ma hope o ka hānau 'ia 'ana o Jeremiah.

Ua kaumaha 'o Jeremiah he 'elua a me ka hapalua paona wale nō. Ua noho 'o ia ma ka Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) no 'ehiku mahina.

I ho 'okahi pule ma hope o ka hānau 'ana o Jeremiah, ua ho 'i ka 'u kāne i ka hale e hana a mālama i kā māua mau keiki kāne i ka wā e noho ana 'o Jeremiah a me a 'u ma ka haukapila. I ka wā he 10 mau lā o Jeremiah, ua hele au i kona moe, me ka mana 'olana e hānai iā ia no ka manawa mua. Akā, ua ha 'i mālīe mai ke kahu ma 'i ia 'u ua 'ōpu 'upu 'u kona 'ōpū. Ua kauoha 'ia kahi x-ray pilikia.

Ma hope koke iho, ua ha 'i 'ia ka 'u kāne e pono 'o Jeremiah i ka 'oki pilikia. No ka mea he wā ho 'omaha pua, ua lawe 'o ia i kā māua mau keiki kāne i O'ahu i hiki iā mākou a pau ke hui pū. I ka wā o ka 'oki 'ana, ua 'ike nā kauka i ka volvulus—he 'ano 'ino o ka wili 'ana o nā 'ōpū--a ua hemo lākou i 'oi aku ma mua o ka hapalua o nā 'ōpū li 'ili 'i o Jeremiah.

Ma hope o nā mahina he nui ma ka NICU, ua ho 'i mai 'o Jeremiah i ka home i 'Okakopa 2016.

I ka wā mua a 'u i a 'o ai e pono 'o ia i ka paipu hānai, ua kaumaha ko 'u na 'au. He hui pū 'ana o ka maka 'u, ka 'eha, a me ka hewa. Maka 'u i ka mea 'ike 'ole 'ia. 'Eha, no ka mea ua maka 'u au e ho 'okomo i ka paipu i kona ihu inā puka mai ia. A me ka hewa, me ka no 'ono 'o 'ana inā ua hā 'ule wau iā ia, 'oia ua 'ike au i loko o ko 'u na 'au 'a 'ole 'o ia he 'oia 'i 'o.

Ua 'ike koke au 'a 'ole wale nō ka hānai 'ana i ke keiki ma o ka paipu e pili ana i ka hānai 'ana—e pili ana ia i ka hilina 'i, ka ho 'omanawanui, a me ka 'ae 'ana. He mea e a 'o 'ia i ka 'ōlelo hou o ka mālama 'ana. Ua pono ia 'u e kaumaha i ka lilo 'ana o ka "ma 'amau" a laila e ho 'oholo hou i ka mea e like me kā mākou ma 'amau. Ma mua o nā mea āpau, 'ike au i ka ikaika o ko 'u keiki. Ua a 'o mai 'o ia iā mākou pehea e kia 'i ikaika ai. Ua pāpa 'a nō 'o ia i ko mākou 'ohana.

I kona makahiki 9, ua 'ike 'ia 'o ia me ka ma 'i Pediatric Feeding Disorder, Failure to Thrive, ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, loa 'a pū kekahi ka lohi 'ōlelo iki ma nā pepeiao 'elua a me ka lohi maka iki.

Akā, 'a 'ole i ho 'opau ia i kona 'ano 'o Mr. Aloha.

Loa 'a iā ia kahi mino 'aka e ho 'omālamalama i ke lumi—a he mea ho 'opunipuni maika 'i nō! Me kahi mana 'o 'aka 'aka pā 'ani a me ka na 'au nui, makemake 'o ia e kama 'ilio me nā hoa a me nā kūpuna pū kekahi. Makemake 'o ia e pā 'ani me nā ka 'a a me nā pā 'ani wikiō e like me Roblox a me Farming Simulator me kāna makuakāne. 'O ia mau manawa makemake nō, a 'o mau, a ho 'ā 'o mau 'o ia i kona maika 'i loa.

Akā, 'o ka mea āna e aloha loa ai, 'o ia ka manawa e hui pū ai kāna 'ohana holo 'oko 'a—e 'aka 'aka, e kama 'ilio, a e hau 'oli wale pū me kekahi i ka wā like.

