

He can see clearly now

Operation corrects Angleton boy's vision

By DAVID EMSWILER
The Brazosport Facts

ANGLETON — Matthew Saenz was tired of being harassed at school for looking a little bit different. The 7-year-old had been through the doctor mill, and his parents, Mark and Alicia Saenz, had all but given up hope of seeing their son's eyesight corrected.

His problem, referred to medically as strabismus, is commonly referred to as crossed eyes. The malady, caused by a misalignment of the eye-controlling muscles, had been with the Angleton boy since birth.

"It was bad," the Northside Elementary School student said in a somber tone. "Because when I went to school people told me that my eyes were crossed."

Matthew, a baseball and soccer player, has a sensitive nature and the harassment was sometimes devastating for him to handle.

"By nature he is real sensitive. And when he would practice, some of the kids would get on him about his eyes," said Mark Saenz, who helps coach the teams his son plays on. "But you know kids are generally cruel and they say what is on their minds."

IRONICALLY, MATTHEW doesn't view the past problem as a bad one — medically speaking. Matthew said he could see fine.

But his mother thinks differently. She said her son probably compensated for the problem for so long that he thought he was seeing correctly.

"No, it was bad," she said. "I think maybe he saw double and he thought it was normal. Because after the surgery he told me 'I see a lot better.'"

The surgery Alicia Saenz referred to was performed at Angleton-Danbury General Hospital in November by eye surgeon K. Broderick Stolte.

Stolte said it was important for the family to correct the problem as early as they did because strabismus can lead to a vision-threatening condition called amblyopia, or lazy eye.

There was nothing, however, that the Saenz family would have liked better than to have had their son's vision corrected sooner than it was. And there was little they did not try to do to correct the problem.



Matthew Saenz, 7, eyes a baseball in Angleton.



DAVID CORTNER / The Facts

Matthew Saenz, 7, sits between his parents, Alicia Saenz and Mark Saenz, at their home in

Angleton. Saenz was born with a misalignment in his eye-controlling muscles.

Operation

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The family lost count of the number of glasses that have been prescribed to Matthew over the years. AND THEY eventually grew tired of being given information about Matthew's nose — of all things.

"They (doctors) told us that the only reason he looked so terribly bad was because of his nose. Because it wasn't totally developed," Alicia Saenz said. "And so we put it (surgery) off and put it off."

When Matthew was five, he underwent his first extended surgical procedure in Houston.

"We had taken him to (a doctor) ever since he was 18 months old," Mark Saenz said. "We had been taking him there for years. And he started out with a pair of glasses, then another pair of glasses, then another pair of glasses."

And then we took him to Houston where (a doctor) did surgery with another doctor. But (his eyes) looked the same. So basically what we did is throw that money away. We got nothing out of it."

Though the operation did not turn out well, one good thing did come out of Houston which eventually helped Matthew — advice. An eye doctor there suggested the family go to Stolte, whose office was just a few minutes' drive from their home.

"THAT'S THE strangest thing about it because it is right here," said Mark Saenz, a Dow Chemical Co. operator.

"She said 'You can come up here to do the surgery, but the best is right there,'" Alicia Saenz said, referring to advice that was given by the Houston doctor.

Though a straight 'A' student, Matthew did have

"The only thing we had problems with is he wrote backwards sometimes," Alicia Saenz said. "And he read backwards. It could have very well been (as a result of the eye problem). But he reads fine now."

And he plays fine as well.

Matthew recently slammed two triples to help his T-Ball team in a victory. He said sports seem easier now that his eyes have been corrected.

The decision by Mark and Alicia Saenz to have Matthew undergo the second operation was a test of courage. While having to accept total responsibility for whatever happened, Stolte was upfront about the procedure.

BUT STOLTE'S confidence and willingness to answer all the questions the family had convinced them to try once again.

The questioning wasn't only from the adults, either.

"He (Stolte) took the time to sit down with Matthew and answer every question that he had," Mark Saenz said. "Matthew even asked him if he had the credentials to do this. I mean, he sat down and showed Matthew all of his diplomas."

The operation, which lasted four hours, was very involved, the family said.

Stolte explained to the family that he detached undeveloped muscles and pulled them back so they were straight.

"It was kind of spooky," Mark Saenz said.

"It was a scary situation," added his wife.

"It wasn't scary for me. I was asleep," Matthew