

# HOMEFRONT

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## CROSSING HEARTS

Brushy Creek family plays host to Chinese boy with heart defect

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Six years ago, a baby girl with a life-threatening congenital heart defect was born to Marshall and Julie Hammond. A pediatric heart surgeon in Austin, Dr. Kenneth Fox, repaired the defect years ago, and the Hammonds have since been enjoying watching their daughter, Crystal, live a normal life.

Seven years ago, a baby boy with a congenital heart defect was born in China to poor farmers. And for years, young Sun Keai has lived with the defect – a collection of four abnormalities – while his household brought in an annual income of no more than 5,000 Chinese yen – about \$730 – farming peanuts, sweet potatoes, corn and soybeans. His mother, distraught over Keai's diagnosis, later committed suicide.

But less than a month ago, the lives of the Hammonds and Keai crossed – brought about by forces outside that of their families and friends – and Keai stood outside Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, holding Marshall Hammond's hand. The boy was accompanied to the airport Aug. 29 to meet the Hammonds and their elementary-aged son, Reid, by only an American Airlines employee. His father, 42-year-old Sun Weiguo, and his teenaged sister, Sun Keping, remained in their rural Chinese village in Shandong, a coastal province in eastern China.

The group poses for an awkward photograph outside the airport – it is dark out as Julie looks left, Keai furrows his brow while staring blankly into the distance to his right and the rest look into the camera.

Airline representative Ron Harris, a backpack strapped to his back, looks tired but tries to smile.

The heart defect Crystal Hammond was dealt turned into a blessing for Keai earlier this month, as the Hammonds, Brushy Creek Municipal Utility District residents, played host to the boy while he was in Austin for surgery. Keai went under the knife Sept. 9 for a four-hour heart operation to correct his defect, known as tetralogy of Fallot or “blue baby” syndrome. Infants and young children with unrepaired tetralogy of Fallot often develop blue-tinged skin because oxygen-poor blood is being pumped into the body.

Later that week, Keai was recovering at Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas. He remained in good spirits, despite dealing with tubes inserted to keep fluids from building up around his lungs.

The Hammonds were diligent about having someone there with him at all times, helping the boy's mood much, said Alison Meador, representing the Austin-based HeartGift Foundation nonprofit that helped Keai receive the surgery he needed.

“It's been a real good experience for our whole family,” said Julie Hammond of their experience as HeartGift hosts. “We feel it's a great way to give back after having almost lost our daughter.”

“We are incredibly grateful to have Crystal with us today,” Marshall Hammond said. “As parents of a child who would otherwise not have survived childhood, we can understand how meaningful it is to Keai's family that he can be healed. It really sends a



Courtesy photos

**(Top) Sun Keai, host dad Marshall Hammond, host brother Reid Hammond, American Airlines representative Ron Harris and host Mom Julie Hammond meet at the Austin airport recently. The Hammonds live in Round Rock.**

**(Right) Keai receives a visit from Ronald McDonald at Dell Children's Medical Center.**

message of hope to his community back in China.”

On Sept. 19, Keai was released from the hospital. He was recovering at the Hammond home earlier this week.

For the Hammonds, playing hosts to children awaiting surgery is becoming a frequent experience. This was the fourth time they did so, having previously hosted a girl from Belize, a girl from Cameroon and another boy from China. The children commonly stay with them for about six weeks before returning to their home countries.

Since his daughter's surgery, Marshall has become a member of the HeartGift board of directors. His involvement

with the group began soon after Crystal's operation, when Marshall spoke to a doctor about HeartGift.

“We thought it sounded like a neat thing to be involved in,” said Julie.

Keai received his surgery for free, but it would normally cost around \$120,000, HeartGift officials noted.

The organization works with Fox and his colleagues at Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgeons, Capital Anesthesiology Associates and Children's Cardiology Associates to provide the surgery at no cost to the patients.

In 1999, three friends came up with the idea for HeartGift. One of them was Dr. John D. “Chip” Oswald, who in 1998 played a role in



heart operations performed in Austin on five children from Kosovo.

Oswald is now chairman of the HeartGift board of directors, which includes co-founders Ray Wilkerson and Jim Hoover.

“Part of what I enjoy about HeartGift is the exposure to other cultures,”

said Dr. Fox. “Sun Keai comes from a culture very different from our own. If all goes as planned, we will learn something about him and his background, then send him home to live a full, healthy life. Hopefully, he will return with an appreciation for our culture as well.”



## Black Gold lands on blackland prairie

county's cotton crop the year before. Cotton production from 1924-25 fell from 106,000 bales [second in the state] to 16,000 [75th]. The wells on the Fause farm yielded up to a dozen barrels each per day at a depth of just 150 feet, a small output but at a very shallow depth, making the venture profitable. J. V. Edwards and Hoxie Ladd of Austin joined with H. H. Goldman of San Antonio in leasing 4,000 acres in Palm Valley. The Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad ran right past the properties, so that the whole operation was convenient and marketable. People drove by every evening for months to watch the activity, with representatives of the major oil companies following with keen interest. Edwards, Goldman and C. V. Lansberry of Round Rock incorporated the Williamson County Development Company to sell the oil to market at \$1 per barrel. The activity was fast and furious for months, but the oil companies eventually focused on larger fields near

Kilgore and Odessa. Over the years, Williamson County has produced 9 million barrels of oil, which ranks it 170th of 254 counties. There are still derricks pumping south of Taylor and Thrall, and though the oil boom never stuck in Williamson County, it testifies to the bounty and variety of resources found in the acreage below.

### SEPTEMBER IN ROUND ROCK

**1869:** Captain Alonso de Leon establishes routes from New Spain to planned missions in East Texas; El Camino Real [The King's Highway] crosses rivers at present San Antonio, Bastrop and Navasota, while El Camino de Arriba [The Upper Road] crosses Brushy Creek and the San Gabriel River.

**1848:** The first school in Williamson County is established at Moss' Spring on Lake Creek, just west of Round Rock.

**1850:** U. S. Census reports the population for Williamson County as 1,568.

**1867:** Greenwood Masonic Institute, a college in Old Round Rock, opens for its first year of classes.

**1876:** The *Burnet Bulletin* reports that Round Rock has 600 inhabitants.

**1889:** The Reverend J. P. Phipps arrives to assume his duties as professor of ancient and modern languages at the Round Rock Institute; also, a thunderstorm ends a 60-day drought.

**1890:** While some school districts in the county vote against 10-cent tax assessments for school improvements, Old and New Round Rock vote 113-18 to impose a 20 cent school tax for every \$100 of property.

**1897:** Bradford Brothers' gin at Round Rock burns, along with 200 tons of cotton seed and 3,000 pounds of bagging; the total loss is over \$10,000.

**1915:** The school board decides “the study of Latin will no longer be compulsory, but left to the option of the student and parent”; also, Professor B. F. Russell organizes Round

Rock High School's first athletic association.

**1921:** A hurricane moves ashore and floods Central Texas; Thrall is inundated by 38 inches of rain in 18 hours [more than a year's average rainfall in less than a day]; 215 people are killed in the flooding [92 in Williamson County alone]; it is the deadliest flooding in state history and property damage surpasses \$19 million [more than \$300 million dollars today].

**1938:** The Columbia radio network (CBS - local station KNOW) features a tribute to Round Rock and its retail storekeepers on the Wrigley's Gum program.

**1950:** Mr. and Mrs. Louis Henna establish the Texas Baptist Children's Home.

**1987:** The Moving Wall, a smaller-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C., spends a week in Round Rock.

– Compiled and written by Bob Brinkman for the Round Rock Leader