

Jack Stapleton

"My son lost half his brain"

In May 2004, Tamara Stapleton and her 4-year-old son, Jack, were cruising on an 18-foot motorboat when the unthinkable happened: Jack, who was wearing a life vest, tumbled off the front deck. Stapleton cut the motor and dove into the water, where she discovered Jack unconscious and covered in blood—his head had been split open by the boat's propeller. "I was in shock, struggling to hold his head above the water," recalls Stapleton, who lives in Atlanta. Fortunately, a man in a nearby boat jumped in and pulled Jack back onto the deck, and another boater then rescued Stapleton, who'd fainted.

"When Jack came into the E.R., the left side of his skull was shattered and half of his brain was gone—

nobody expected that he would live," says Gregory MacKay, M.D., chief of plastic surgery at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. "The pediatric neurosurgeons performed a skin graft to cover the shreds of his scalp, and they gave Jack drugs to induce a coma so he could rest. Then we all just had to wait and hope."

After a week, Jack came out of the coma. By mid-June, he was breathing on his own, and by the end of the month he was responding to voices with a smile. After four long months, Jack was ready to come home, but he was not the same little boy. His entire right side was paralyzed, and the language center of his brain had been literally destroyed.

Jack's fragile brain was covered by only a thin layer

of skin and needed to be better protected in order to heal. Dr. MacKay worked with a company called Medpor to create a synthetic cap to replace the missing piece of Jack's skull. It was rigid enough to protect his brain but also porous, so that the tissue and blood vessels from his scalp could grow into it. "Nothing exactly like this had ever been done before," says Dr. MacKay.

Jack has made huge progress since having the cap implanted in August 2005. His brain is actually growing back—and he can walk and speak in complete sentences. "We never imagined that he'd come this far," says Stapleton. Adds Dr. MacKay, "Children are unbelievably resilient."



after

before

brilliant
surgeon



Gregory MacKay, M.D.,
director of the craniofacial
program and associate
chief of plastic surgery at
Children's Healthcare of
Atlanta-Egleston.