

"When we got to Cleveland, I felt so much better because they had the OR waiting," Matthew said. "[The doctors] showed me exactly what was going on. ...He's the first doctor, Doctor Rosseli and his team, that I ever trusted."

From there, Forrest went into immediate open heart surgery, and three days later, on February 27, Daniel was airlifted to the Cleveland Clinic where the doctors would perform the same exact procedure on him, not knowing that he also had an aortic aneurism until he was in surgery.

For Forrest and Daniel, freaking out during this time was not an option, and amidst all of the chaos, they were able to stay calm.

"What else can you do?" Forrest said. "I mean, if you're going to die, you're going to die, it's not like you have control over it."

### After:

Though they weren't personally afraid, both boys said that when it came time for surgery, what they were most worried about was each other. Once the surgery was complete, both boys spent 18 days in the hospital recovering and dealing with unexpected complications. For Dan, he said this was one of the toughest parts of the process.

"I woke up and [thought,] 'I'm just glad to be alive,'" Dan said. "[Then,] you just think of everything you can't do. I got really depressed in the hospital because they said that I would only be there for five to seven days and I didn't have that many complications, so every day they just kept on saying that [I] had to stay another day. I was just so excited to get out once I got out. ...Once you leave the hospital, it's just the greatest feeling knowing that you're getting better and you can finally start doing normal stuff."

Coming home, according to Forrest, was his lowest point throughout his experience.

"[My lowest point] was probably when I got home, because the

medication was kind of wearing off," Forrest said. "Sleeping in general with all of this is just really hard; you have a lot of chest pain, and you want to go to your side sometimes and then you can't. You're just staring at the ceiling [thinking.]"

Now, both Forrest and Dan continue to work towards a full recovery by going through rehab and attempting to gradually build back up to their normal, active selves.

Unable to go into the Marines and the Army because of their conditions, both boys plan to work towards a career that will help save lives.

Because of this experience, Kathy said that their family has been able to come together in support of Daniel and Forrest, and that it has brought the entire family closer to one another. For Daniel and Forrest, leaning on their family and laughing through it all has helped them the most, and, according to Forrest, staying calm, even when faced with death is the biggest thing he has learned.

"I learned [that things] happen," Forrest said. "It's out of your control."

## THE MILITARY MINDSET

James Nosek | Staff Writer

Daniel and Forrest Theiss have hearts of soldiers.

The two boys have had aspirations to join the military since they were young children growing up in New York. Daniel, who wanted to join the Army, and Forrest, who always dreamed about being a U.S. Marine, developed a passion to serve their country in one of the branches of the military.

But unfortunately—as they found out this year—their hearts aren't healthy enough for any military service.

Forrest, who was already enlisted in the Marines, was discharged after he received a letter from the Military Entrance Processing Station, which informed him that he wasn't eligible for service anymore. For Daniel, he wasn't enlisted in the Army yet, but he said he saw the letter his brother got in the mail and realized that the Army was out for his future career path.

When Forrest read the discharge letter, he said he was sad initially, but eventually faced the reality of the situation, the way a marine would.

"At first I kind of wanted to just throw [the letter] out or torch it," Forrest said. "[But] the

Marines are different, you just don't feel emotion, and you move on."

Daniel also remained laid back about being discharged from the Army, but he said it took a little more time to soak in the situation.

"It was a little bit harder for me," Daniel said. "But when I saw the letter, I was thinking about it, and it was for the best."

Up until his surgery, Forrest has always shown off the attitude of a Marine, Kathy said, but there was one day in particular that has stuck in her mind.

On the same day Forrest was rushed to the hospital for his emergency surgery, he finished his normal day of school and disregarded the possibility of dying so he could drive to Lebanon and turn in his Marine discharge papers.

"I wasn't thinking about death," Forrest said. "I was like 'screw it,' my sergeant has been waiting for like two weeks, and I'm fine right now. I was thinking 'If my arm gets numb, I'll just drive with my other arm.'"

