

# Drue Hammond

BY CHRISTI MARSICO

Currently trying to ride his bike without training wheels, Drue Hammond has the endurance of a champion.

This 5-year-old will be starting kindergarten this fall. He loves airplanes, sports and his big brother and younger sisters, who along with his parents, Mike and Janis Hammond, have been with him through some very tough times.

"It's like he grew up really fast," Mike said.

"He is very serious about life, and he needs to know the agenda."

When Drue was 2-1/2, he had a series of three substantial falls that occurred within a 1-1/2-month time.

During that time, the toddler also had more trouble than usual with walking and had to hold on to the wall for support. He also started vomiting almost every day.

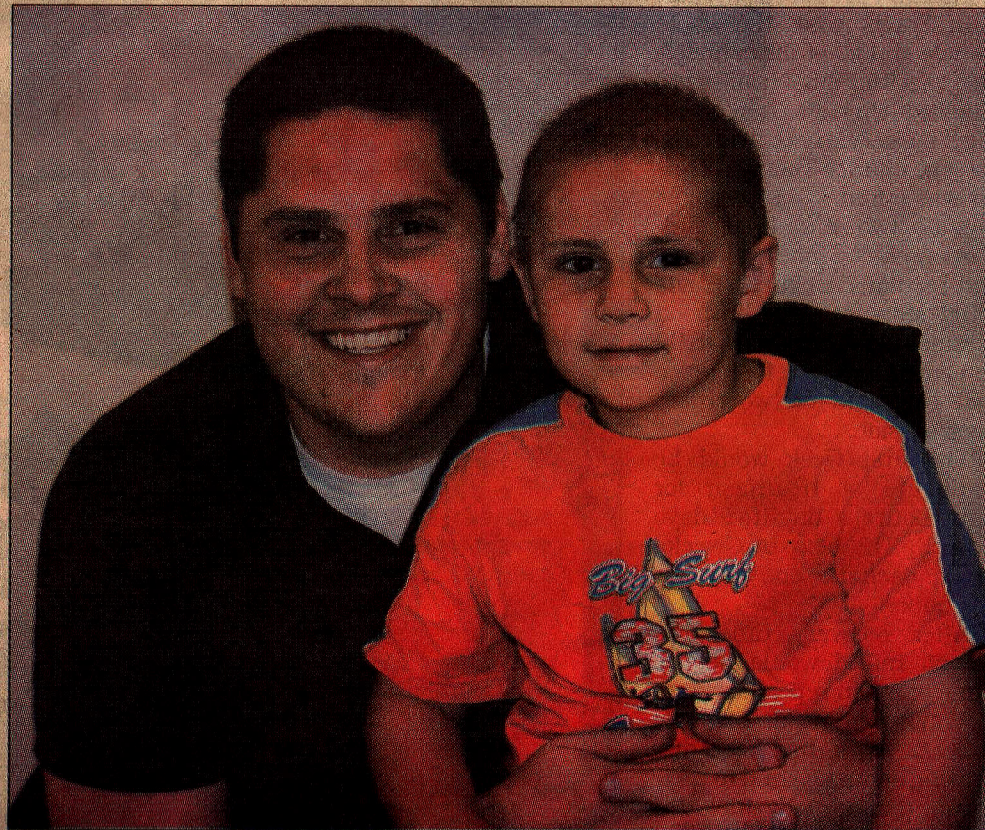
Concerned that he had a severe concussion, Drue's parents took him to Dr. David Ellbogen, who scheduled a CT scan the following day.

On Feb. 9, Drue's parents were told that their son had medulloblastoma. It's a malignant brain tumor that begins in the lower part of the brain and can spread to the spine or to the other parts of the body.

According to the National Cancer Institute, childhood medulloblastoma is a disease in which benign (non-cancer) or malignant (cancer) cells form in the tissues of the brain.

While brain tumors are the leading reason for cancer deaths in children, the cause is unknown.

After the news, Mike's initial reaction was shock. He felt like he was out of his



*Mike Hammond feels his son Drue is a modern-day miracle.*

body and thought Drue wasn't going to make it.

His mother, Janis, eight months pregnant at the time, couldn't react, noting that it was a "numbing experience."

Within one day of learning Drue's diagnosis and without saying goodbye to their other children, Mike, Janis and Drue packed their bags for a week and were Life Flighted to Denver.

However, the week turned into six months for the Hammonds, who stayed

mostly at Brent's Place, a housing facility for children with cancer and their families.

Mike noted that staying at Brent's Place made a huge difference, because if Drue got sick, he would die.

That made it obvious they needed to live in a clean environment like Brent's Place provided.

Drue had a stage 4 cancer growth, which was sitting on his brain stem and with the possibility of running into his

spinal fluid. The toddler had brain surgery once.

Surgeons weren't able to get all of the cancer during the operation, so Drue received high and low doses of chemotherapy.

According to Mike and Janis, the surgery caused Drue to regress into a newborn state, which is medically referred to as postoperative mutism.

"It was like his brain was really reset," Janis said.

"His first word was the first word he said as a baby."

Drue is learning to walk and talk again. And his parents noted the six times he had to go through chemotherapy was the worst part of the experience.

Today, Drue is doing well, having regained the majority of his motor and cognitive skills. He has had a clear diagnosis for the past three years.

And even though the youngster will need once-a-year check-ups for the remainder of his life, his family believes their prayers have been answered.

"The first time we saw Drue smile is when his brother, Sloan, came to the hospital to see him. Then we knew our little guy was still there," Mike said.

The Hammonds acknowledged the good support system they had, including their friends, family and faith and especially Jason's Friends and Brent's Place.

While noting the hardest part of not knowing why it happened, the Hammonds think their family is in a good place.

"Anytime you survive an experience like this, your family gets stronger," Mike said. "You become a family that takes a lot more to be broken."