



The Littlest Soldier

Heroes, The Ellis Family

Brayden Ellis is like any other child. He is playful, cheerful, and full of wonderment at the world around him. Despite all the similarities Brayden and his family share with the typical American family, there are some major differences. The Ellis family has a battle on their hands, both at home and abroad.

Brian Scott Ellis and Michelle Lynae Perkins were married on October first of 2006. One day before Brian, an E5 Sergeant in the United States Army, was to ship out to Operation Iraqi Freedom, he and Michelle got some devastating news. Brayden was diagnosed with Bilateral Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH), a condition that has rendered him blind. As Brian was shipped across the globe to fight in Iraq, his wife and son began their fight at home. Michelle started on her long journey toward finding the help needed to give Brayden the same

quality of life his father was fighting for in a far away land. For us, for his country, for all of the principles we hold near and dear to our hearts as a nation, Brian continues to be in harm's way even as I type this story.

Back home, Michelle and Brayden have found a procedure that can restore Brayden's sight and give him the opportunity for a normal life. The procedure, involving stem-cell use, is not currently permitted here in the United States. Brayden and his family must travel to China for the pricey procedure totaling \$40,000, not including the expense of travel or basic necessities for their trip. "One of the hardest things to deal with is that Brayden doesn't smile when he sees you, or wave to you when you walk in the room" says Michelle. Michelle has made many friends in the military who are helping her through this, but it is Brian

who remains her "rock." "He is an amazing father and husband. If I didn't have him to calm me down, I would be stressed to the max every day." Amazing indeed. Far away from home, surrounded by the despair of a nation in turmoil and on the front lines of a major military conflict, Brian still acts as the emotional support for his family. The character and courage displayed by the Ellis family is among the most inspirational stories I have had the pleasure of witnessing in my lifetime. While we sit comfortably in our easy chairs, reading in the warmth of our homes and offices, the Ellis family struggles to "get through the day."

Everywhere I go, including my own home, I see a resurgence in the unity of America. The stars and stripes decorate homes all over my neighborhood. I see signs and banners that say "support our troops." People honk their horns as they drive by demonstrations, cheering for the men and women who give their time, their hearts, and in many cases, their lives to our country. This is an opportunity for all of us to help a family who has given so much to us. The Ellis family needs you. They need me, and everyone who will listen to their story. They need their community to support them as they have supported us. In their time of need, we are asking for any donations, any size, in any denomination. Local businesses, like Wendy and Rob Chadwick of Arca Ink, have already given so much. They have not only brought this story to the attention of Success Magazine, but to the community they share as well. For that, I thank them and all who have attended the dinners and made donations. Donations can be accepted by Bank of America under "Brayden's Battle for Sight" or send a check or money order to "Brayden's Battle for Sight" 207 Judy Lane #139, Copperas Cove, TX 76522. Will we stand by idle while our littlest soldier fights this battle alone, or will we join in and do more than honk our horns? I know what I will do. What does your heart tell you to do?