



## Brayden Parker, 9 years old

Diagnosed with left ventricular hypoplasia (malformation)  
and pulmonary hypertension

"In the minutes following his birth, Brayden needed equipment that your donations to Opération Enfant Soleil helped finance, including a pulse oximeter, ventilation device and oral probe. The stretcher and Isolette allowed us to quickly transfer him from Gatineau to Montreal in an emergency. All of this was made possible thanks to your donations."



Immediately after being born at the Hôpital de Gatineau, Brayden was taken into the intensive care unit. He was blue in the face, and his oxygen levels were low. An hour later, his mother was able to see him for the first time. However, as soon as Brayden was out of the incubator, he turned blue again. He was rushed to the neonatal unit at CHU Sainte-Justine, eight hours after his birth. His mom and dad followed the ambulance to Montreal. "I had to sign a release to leave the hospital to be with my son, even though I had just given birth," recalls Mandy, who still hadn't been able to hold her newborn baby.

During an ultrasound at CHU Sainte-Justine, doctors discovered that half of Brayden's heart hadn't fully formed. Brayden's parents were suddenly plunged into the fear of the unknown. Brayden was given medication to keep his heart strong until his first heart surgery, scheduled at just seven days old. It would take four open-heart surgeries, planned around his growth, to get his heart working.

His first heart surgery was a success. Brayden's return home went well, but his mom remained deeply concerned. "I kept checking to see if he was breathing and if he was blue in the face." Brayden had his second surgery at six months old, which also went very well. Brayden was almost four years old when he had his third heart surgery. However, this time there were complications. He had a high fever (41 °C) and a pneumothorax\* that required a drain. After several days in the hospital, Brayden and his family were finally allowed to go home. Brayden gradually got used to everyday life and started kindergarten.

At age six, Brayden began feeling lethargic and complained of headaches and heartaches. For over a year, he underwent numerous medical tests, which led doctors to discover that his heart was failing. They recommended a fourth surgery. If it didn't work, Brayden's only chance of survival was a heart transplant—a prospect that frightened his parents. The situation also had to be explained to Brayden, for whom it was difficult to accept.

## Little miracles don't happen on their own...

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The surgery was a success. However, his visible and invisible wounds didn't heal so fast. The constant fatigue and pain were too much for the little man to handle. Brayden's mental health began to decline, and he had a breakdown. He was afraid of being hurt, of having surgery again and of the doctors. Even changing bandages was unbearable. He withdrew into himself and refused to visit his beloved animals on the farm. All physical effort became very difficult for him (palpitations, shortness of breath). He had to be careful all the time and couldn't do what his friends were doing. He even had to stop taking karate class, which was too intense for him. "Why me, Mom?" he often asked.

Going back to school was difficult, and Brayden suffered from anxiety and depression. He had low self-esteem and difficulty learning. His mom and dad became distraught and decided to seek professional help for their little boy who "didn't like his life anymore." Brayden came to me one day and said, "You should have let me die, Mom," Mandy says.

Today, Brayden is rebuilding his life and is slowly regaining his footing thanks to those around him. He understands his strengths and accepts himself as he is. He attends a school where sports activities are encouraged. The prospect of a heart transplant is not out of the question, but Brayden is determined to move forward.

*"I want to help kids who are sick like me to not be afraid. They can get through the hard times." — Brayden*

**Mandy Gabie, Patrick Parker and Logan (4 years old)**

\* A pneumothorax is the presence of air between the two layers of the pleura (the thin, transparent, two-layered membrane that covers the lungs and lines the inside of the chest wall), resulting in partial or complete lung collapse.

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