



Hunter at Three

When told of Hunter's fatal illness our hopes and dreams were shattered, but God continues to reveal to us the overwhelming blessing that He has given us through Hunter's life.

Knowing in our hearts that Heaven is the ultimate Home, the fear of losing Hunter at any time has faded over the past few years. Our energies have been refocused towards living life instead of just simply preserving or extending it.

Turning three was a huge step for Hunter. In one year he went from being a cute little baby to being a big boy! Not only did his overall appearance change dramatically, but his charming personality started to surface. With the birth of baby sister Camryn, in June of 1999, Hunter had to change roles. He was no longer the baby of the house, he became the big brother.

Communication has been an ongoing exciting challenge for all of us. We have come to realize that Hunter wants to communicate with us in all things. In the past we didn't think he was physically or mentally able to respond to any type of request or question. Boy, were we wrong! Hunter lets us know when he wants to reply, "yes" by intentionally blinking his eyes. We have learned through practice with patience, that Hunter can tell us what he wants, if we just ask him. He wants to make his own decisions and tell us what he wants or doesn't want and what he likes or dislikes. When he comes down to watch his morning movies, we ask him what he wants to watch. Usually it's "Stuart Little", "Little Bear," or "Franklin". When he has some free time we ask him what he wants to do - go for a walk, read books, go swimming (at Grandma's house, of course) draw and color, school time or snuggle - and he tells us.

Instead of giving him a choice, we made the choice for him. Now we leave it up to him. He lets us know. How awesome!



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We have started investigating communication devices and computer options, so that we can further help Hunter communicate. Eventually we hope he will actually talk in full sentences through computerized voice response. Just as God promised, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We know where Hunter gets his strength. Hunter's weight has stayed about the same ranging anywhere between 20 and 22 pounds. However, he is growing so tall. He was measured on his 3rd birthday and is 33 inches long.

Physical and occupational therapy have been increased to six hourly sessions a week. We are planning to increase physical therapy to two-hour sessions, because he has been responding so wonderfully to his therapy. Hunter is now able to enjoy belly lying and his Tri-stander. The Tri-stander has actually been a treat for all of us. Hunter tends to show off while standing in his stander by pulling his head forward and holding his head up all by himself. It's amazing how determined he is.

Another one of Hunter's favorite activities is playing the small portable piano. We place both of his hands on the keys and when he's ready to play he pulls his arms back and plays a tune. You can tell that he is really concentrating on each movement. Every time he plays a key we clap and praise him. He loves it!

When it comes to story time and school, Hunter is so smart. In addition to teaching him the alphabet and numbers we try to quiz him to see what he has learned.

Winter 99/Spring 2000 was an eventful season for Hunter. When Grandma and Aunt Dodi planned Hunter's schedule, he was exposed to many new adventures, like checking out books at the Attica Library with his first library card, shopping at Wal-Mart, swinging on swings at the playground, the aquarium, the zoo, and petting horses at the farm; just to name a few. He was on the go!

Hunter's favorite place (besides home and Grandma's house) is the horse farm. Hunter



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made a very special friend this year - a beautiful dark chestnut brown horse named Bambi. Their friendship is so incredible and real. Whenever you mention Bambi's name or show Hunter pictures of her, he gets so excited. Bambi is generally a pretty bold and sometimes frisky horse. However, when Hunter is in her presence she is gentle, calm and obedient. It is so beautiful to see them together.

Another big change for Hunter in 2000 was his feeding system. We decided for a number of reasons to go from the G-tube (a tube where both medicine and food go into his stomach) to the JG-tube (a tube where medicine goes directly into his stomach and food directly into his small intestine.) This change has made a world of difference in Hunter's life. Reflux aspiration was one of Hunter's biggest problems that caused him to suffer from pneumonia many times. However, with his new JG-tube the risk of aspiration has greatly decreased. In fact Hunter has only had pneumonia once this year and he very seldom refluxes. Another benefit to the JG-tube is Hunter's increased playtime. With the G-tube, Hunter spent half of his waking hours waiting to play because of this feeding schedule. Now he can be moved anytime and fed anytime and anywhere. This frees him up to do more exercise and lots of fun activities.

Hunter is an amazing teacher. We have learned more about kindness, gentleness, patience, God's grace, and love from him, than any other person we know. God is not finished with our Hunter Boy. We believe he still has a lot more to teach us, and many more lives to touch.