

Beat: Health

HARLAN THE LITTLE AUSSIE FIGHTER

Living one day at a time

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USPA NEWS - Knowing there is absolutely nothing you can do but pray, parents Steven and Bec Atkinson decided to “Love a little harder”. “When we give Harlan, who is only eleven months old a kiss goodnight, we pray he won’t stop breathing. Do we have the right to be upset?”. said Bec “ We dont know.”

“When doctors told us on August 31st last year that we were the proud parents of a healthy boy , we felt our lives were moving in a positive direction after our eldest daughter Bella Marie was diagnosed with Intellectual learning disabilities, auditory and sensory processing disorders. We are now awaiting an autism diagnosis.” Said Steven. A short while after the Atkinson’s bought Harlan home to meet sister Bella Marie now eight ,brothers Rhory three and Clay just five , Harlan had his first epileptic seizure. Racing Harlan to the Hospital in Esperance (a small country town on the southern coast of Western Australia). They soon discovered that if they wanted Harlan to survive another month they had no choice but to urgently move to Perth. A few months into renting in Perth and they were told by their landlord that the house they lived in was now sold and they needed to move. Steve and Bec explained to me how they lived from hotel to motel whilst looking for a house and at times sleeping in their car . “ Harlan was diagnosed with neurological issues in April , then diabetes and it’s just been a backwards slide in his health since then.” Said Steven . I could see the tears mounting in his eyes , a frustrated father feeling hopeless and alone.

Now ratepayers and homeowners living in Perth eastern suburb of Hilbert they will travel to the Royal Perth Hospital anywhere from once a week to three times a week depending on appointments with the different departments they are under . Steven said,“we’ve just been home our first solid 3 weeks with no hospital admissions since January.” Steven lives with ‘Type 1’ diabetes , Harlan is insulin dependant . Researchers still don’t know what causes this auto-immune reaction. It’s not linked to modifiable lifestyle factors. There is no cure and it can’t be prevented. Steve and Bec explained how due to the time it takes to get regular blood work back in regards to Harlan , they have opted to send blood to researchers at the University of Exeter Medical School , England. Steve said he did this because he frankly got sick of hearing excuses from the Royal Perth Hospital Childrens Ward like ‘we are waiting for the new hospital’, ‘looking for a cure’ or ‘we dont have a neurologist at the moment.’ Telethon, Western Australia’s largest childrens hospital fundraiser has now raised and distributed over \$179 million in donations, providing much needed financial assistance to children’s hospitals and research facilities across Western Australia.

“Harlan now faces a grim recovery and a lifetime of pain but with help from family and friends (who are helping each week to pay for his medical bills via a fundraising page), we are just getting through” said Bec. “We have had amazing support from Hon Julie Bishop MP and Health Minister The Hon Sussan Ley MP.. A simple task of walking out of our house with Harlan involves bringing enough drugs and medication to fill a shopping trolley , knowing which drugs to administer and what to do leaves us both awestruck at times,” said Bec. Working away from home was no longer an option with Steven giving up his full time job as a mechanical fitter in the mines to provide the full time care needed for his children. Together with his wife Bec he deals daily with daughter Bella Maries multiple intellectual disorders while awaiting results of possible “Autism”. Clay only five has scoliosis, psoriasis and food allergies. Rhory aged 3 is healthy. Optimistic about what the future holds for the “Atkinson’ family they held each other closely and explained how they are still “happily married’ though all this adversity and talked about how others with healthy children should value “quality time’ with their kids more. When asked by other mothers about Harlan and his medications Bec simply tells them , “ It’s a Harlan thing.” I spent over 5 hours getting to know the Atkinsons , we laughed , we watched Harlan struggle with Hypoxia to breath, we spoke of the unfairness of lifes stumbling stones. Nelson Mandela once said ,“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.” .. Namaste.

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