

## The brave little cowboy



"Brandt, here at age four," was a bundle of energy," recalls his dad, Mark. But soon after this photo was taken, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor.



But even that couldn't steal Brandt's joy. Here, at six, he's riding his tricycle just 24 hours after surgery!



And with the help of loved ones—like his best buddy, Grandpa Ray—Brandt focused on just being a kid.

## A scary chapter

But the cancer returned, and Brandt, here with friends, had to endure more surgeries.



While in the hospital, Brandt knew he could die—but his biggest worry was, How can I tell other sick kids to keep on fighting?



"I want to write a book," Brandt told his dad, here on a ski trip. So Mark called the Make-A-Wish Foundation.



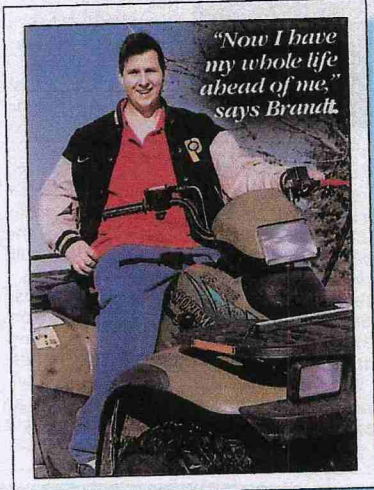
## Inspiration Scrapbook

# "Just keep belie

If you were granted a single wish as a child, what would it have been? To meet a movie star? Take a trip to Disneyland? Not teenage cancer survivor Brandt Yardley. His was to make a difference by sharing his story. Here it is . . .

In another place, it might have been a child's dreamland: Legos and Matchbox cars, even a pinball machine with flashing lights.

But it was a hospital playroom, and in the middle stood two little boys. "How



"Now I have my whole life ahead of me," says Brandt.

old are you?" one asked.

"Eight," Brandt Yardley replied. "Be glad you're not 12," his new friend declared. "No 12-year-old has ever had his brain operated on and lived."

At first, Brandt laughed; it must be a joke. Then, looking into the other boy's eyes, he realized it wasn't.

But as terrifying as his future seemed, Brandt would find his experience had its share of blessings, too—like wishes come true . . .

Brandt was almost four when his parents, Mark and Patricia, noticed him stumbling through their Beaver, Utah, home. Concerned, they took him to the hospital for an MRI.

"Your son has a oligodendroglioma-astrocytoma brain tumor," the doctor said. The size of a golf ball, it was star-shaped, rare and dangerous.

Cancer? Patricia sobbed as Brandt underwent surgery to remove the tumor. Two days later, he was zooming his tricycle up and down the hospital halls.

"Take him home," the doctor laughed at Brandt's spirit.

But just after his sixth birthday,

Brandt's tumor returned. And now, at eight, he'd had his third brain surgery. Each time, he bounced back, but his head was left fuzzy—inside and out.

Brandt rubbed his hand over the stubble and thought about how his friend, Michael, had shaved his own head so he wouldn't be alone. That was cool. But the other kids in class were reading chapter books, and Brandt still had to sound out simple words. Plus, radiation treatments left him so weak he could barely write his name.

"Why do I forget everything?" he asked his doctor. "I'm a second-grader now, and I can't read or add!"

"I know it's tough," Dr. Walker replied, "but you're still a lucky boy."

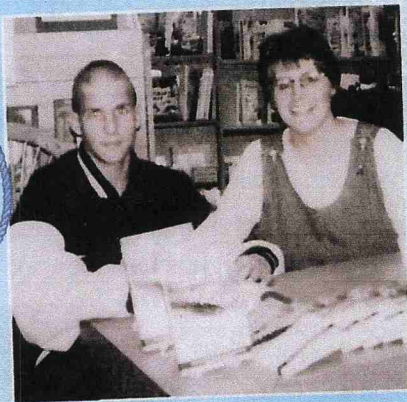
Lucky? Brandt wanted to scream. I feel dumber than a dead rat!

But now, as Brandt lay in his hospital bed, that other boy's words echoed in his ears. No one over the age of 12 . . . Please, God, he begged, let me live!

But just in case, Brandt needed a plan. If I'm up in Heaven, he wondered, how would I let people down here know I love them? How can I make other kids

"A book will last," Brandt told Lorraine

## A wish granted



Before long, Brandt was writing his book with his "wish-maker," writer Lorraine Thompson. "One thing I've learned is that you have to have something to believe in," he told her.

Brandt even shared his story on the radio! And when Brandt's *Wish* rolled off the presses, he was thrilled—and Lorraine was awed. "He taught me so much about courage and faith," she says.

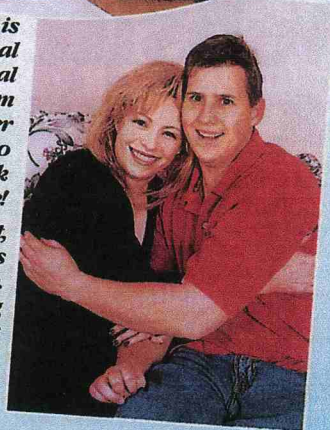


## Back in the saddle



Today, at 17, Brandt is cancer-free, a typical teen with a very special message. "Be your own hero," he tells other kids. He even hopes to write another book with Lorraine!

But for now, Brandt, here with his mom, is too busy just living life. "Never stop making wishes," he tells everyone. "Because when you least expect it, they come true!"



# ving"

"Of course, I'll do it," Lorraine replied, and soon met Brandt.

"Howdy," Brandt greeted her, trembling with excitement. He'd never met a real-live author!

"Why a book?" Lorraine asked. "You could've gone to Disneyland." Noticing Brandt's cowboy boots, she added, "You could've met Garth Brooks."

Brandt smiled. "Those things would happen, then poof," he said, pointing to the six-inch scar over his left ear. "But a book will last."

But because Brandt's ordeal had caused memory loss and paralysis of his hand, writing would be hard to accomplish alone. So every week, as he and Lorraine sat at the computer, he poured his heart out, telling Lorraine how much his family meant to him—like his best buddy, Grandpa Ray. "He was even there when I got my first haircut," he told Lorraine.

And, over ice cream, Brandt shared his deepest fears: *I keep having the same dream of a voice saying, "Your tumor's back..."*

Sometimes, they'd have sleepovers, Lorraine scribbling Brandt's stories way past midnight as he sketched his favorite things—4x4s, a field of

dandelions—for each chapter.

*One thing I learned about chemo is that you have to have something to believe in. Without my family, my friends and this book, I would have given up. A friend of mine could tell when I didn't want to live anymore. She'd pass me in the hall and say, "Keep believing," like a secret code.*

Moments like that humbled Lorraine—she could see Brandt was making a difference in her life. So many little things used to bother her—a sink full of dishes, the needle of the scale springing up. But it wasn't as important to be perfect as it was to be loved, Brandt was teaching her. To be happy.

God put Brandt in my life for a reason, she realized.

The day Brandt had his medication port removed, Lorraine was there. His tumor was gone—a year of treatment was over.

"Hasta la vista, chemo!" he hooted. "Congratulations!" Lorraine beamed. "How does it feel to have all of this behind you?"

Brandt grew quiet. "What's behind me?" he wondered. And suddenly, Lorraine realized that Brandt's cancer experience would always be a part of him. He could die, she cried, and yet he hasn't let that hold him

back. What a lesson in courage!

One morning, Brandt's *Wish* was published. "It's warm," Brandt beamed, hoisting the first copy above his head like the Olympic torch.

Brandt turned to Lorraine. "I couldn't have done it without you!" he cried, handing Lorraine a copy. "Keep this in a special place."

"I will," she promised, tapping a finger to her heart.

Today, 17-year-old Brandt remains cancer-free. "You're a walking miracle!" his doctors marvel as Brandt continues to sell his book, donating part of each sale to the Make-a-Wish Foundation to help other kids' wishes come true.

Someday, Brandt even hopes to write a second book, with Lorraine as his editor. Until then, he's busy planning his future. "I want to go to college. Or I might join the Air Force," he says. "I want to get married and have kids. I want to visit England, where my ancestors came from. If I go with Grandpa Ray, I imagine him telling stories every place we go, like how Robin Hood saved everybody."

Once Brandt gave a talk at a school, and one of the kids asked if he had a hero. "Yes," he told him. "Me. That's my job: to be my own hero. And that's your job, too. You can be your own hero. Just keep believing."

—Elizabeth Holzemer  
with Kristin Higson-Hughes

*One by one,  
we can be the  
better world  
we wish for.*

Kobi Yamada

Do you know someone who has overcome great setbacks or challenges in their life? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: Inspiration, *Woman's World*, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.