



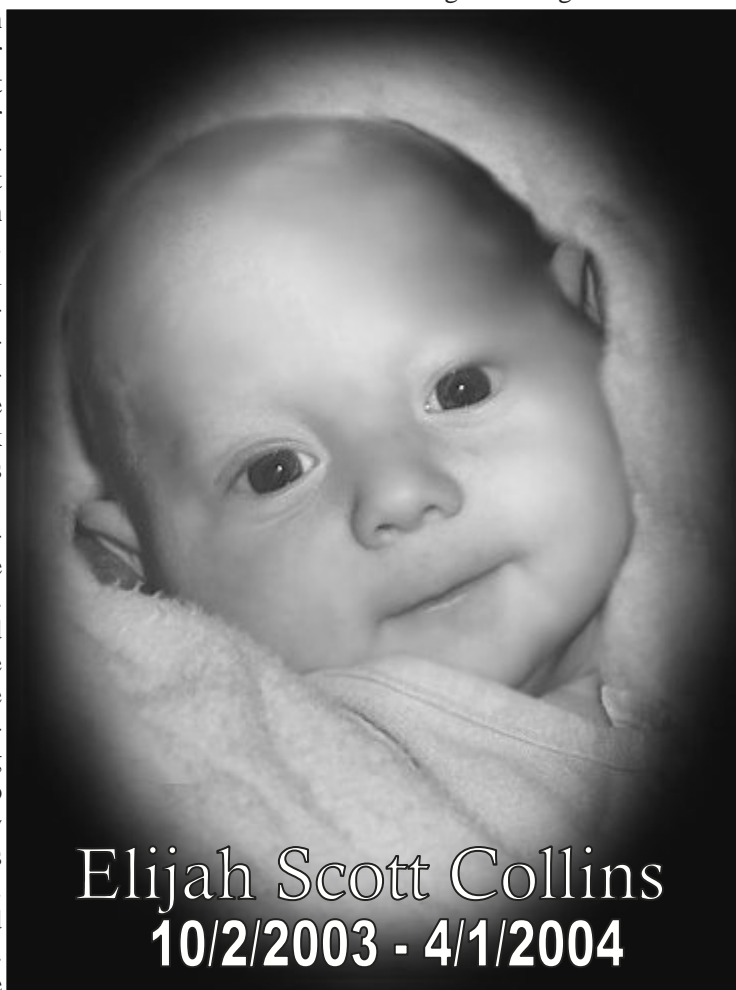
# SHATTERED DREAMS

## Elijah's Fight

My life was perfect. My loving husband and I had been married for 24 years. We had two wonderful sons. Randy who is 23 and Brandon who is 9. What more could a person want? I thought I could never be happier until I found out that I was expecting another little boy. We were all overjoyed. The pregnancy went good until the seventh month when I started bleeding badly. When I arrived at the hospital they decided to do an emergency C-section. I had a condition called placenta abruption which put me and the baby at risk. All I could think about was if my baby was going to be okay.

Elijah Scott Collins entered this world with the sweetest cry I'd ever heard. Our world revolved around him from that moment on. He stayed in the NICU for three weeks because he was a preemie. Finally we got to bring him home and he seemed to be a perfectly healthy baby except for some reflux issues that he eventually outgrew. Christmas came and we had great family time together. (We had no idea this would be our only Christmas with Eli.) About a week after Christmas I noticed that the right side of Eli's ribcage seemed a little

firmer than the left side. After a quick trip to the pediatrician I was reassured that it was only muscle. The following week Eli started running a low grade



Elijah Scott Collins  
10/2/2003 - 4/1/2004

fever and was very pale. He was acting like his belly hurt and the gas drops wasn't doing anything. I was very concerned

that something was going on, so we took him to the Emergency Room. I told them about the symptoms he was having and I requested that they do an abdominal x-ray. They abdominal x-ray was denied but instead they did a chest x-ray along with blood work, urinalysis and a spinal tap. He was put on IV fluids and admitted. I kept telling them that I had a gut feeling that something was wrong inside his belly but they said everything was fine. On the third evening a God sent nurse by the name of Kim Ayers came on shift. When she came to Eli's bedside she immediately looked at me and said, "How long has he had this mass?" Finally someone else saw what I knew was there all along. Within 30 minutes from her arrival Eli's abdomen was x-rayed and we were told that he had a mass and we would have to do a CT scan to know exactly what all was involved. After the scan we learned that it was a liver mass and it measured 4x5 inches. Keep in mind that Eli was 3 months old preemie and weighed only 9 pounds. We were in total shock. This was our little boy.....surely this mass can be safely removed.

They sent us to the nearest children's hospital to receive a proper diagnosis. There we were told that this mass was probably Hepatoblastoma. Then they used the word CANCER. Don't tell me my baby has CANCER, that doesn't happen to babies. They told us that if it was Hepatoblastoma that there is a 80% chance of it being malignant. Wait a minute now your saying my baby probably has Malignant Cancer. I think at that moment it felt like the world was crashing in on us. We were told that if Eli had any chance at all he needed to be transported to a place where they specialize in pediatric liver cancer. He was given his first of soon to be 18 blood transfusions and sent to Cincinnati Children's Hospital.

When we arrived at Cincinnati they started repeating tests. Finally we were told that the mass probably was Hepatoblastoma but we couldn't be sure until we did a biopsy. Two biopsies later they were still leaning toward Hepatoblastoma. At a later date after sending tissue samples to St.Louis the true diagnosis was made. Eli had Extrarenal Rhabdoid Tumor. After reviewing the CT scan the surgeon told us that this mass was inoperable at this point and Eli needed chemotherapy to try

to shrink the mass down small enough so it could be safely removed. They put a central line into Eli's chest so he wouldn't have to be poked so much with needles. We were then moved to the hem/onc floor where we were welcomed by a warm and friendly staff. It was there we met Dr. Lars Wagner who was in charge of Eli's treatment. His compassion overwhelmed us. He truly cared about our child and his outcome. He was very honest with us about Eli's condition and told us that the CT scan showed that the cancer had spread to his lungs, which meant Eli had about a 20% chance of being cured. We knew we served a God who was able to heal Eli and that was our daily prayer.

Eli spent the next three months going through 3 rounds of chemo, tpn, lipids, blood and platelet transfusions, feeding tubes, iv fluids, ct scans, ekg, echo, gfr and hearing tests. Throughout it all he never lost his desire to nurse his Mommy. That was his favorite thing to do. He also enjoyed wagon rides down the hall with Daddy. Eli really was a true Daddy's boy, he was crazy about his Daddy. He was very close to his brothers and was spoiled to Brandon rocking him. The staff was amazed at how such a little baby was fascinated by watching television. His favorite shows included The Wiggles, Spongebob and Jerry Springer. He took a very special interest in a PA named Jennifer Garrett. He would just squeal when she came in to check on him. I think he sensed her warmth.

It was there in that hospital room in Cincinnati where my baby first discovered his hands. All of his firsts took place there in that room. Like when he was looking at his self in the mirror and discovered he had a voice. He let all the staff know about that. I recall the first time he laughed out loud....I was making a really loud squeaking noise and it was making him laugh so loud. I was loving it and I didn't care who heard us.

After the third round of chemo Eli received another scan that revealed more bad news. The cancer was growing more rapidly and it had spread to his lymph node. Dr. Wagner told us Eli's chance of survival is getting slimmer because he is now resistant to the chemo. After talking with Dr. Wagner and the surgeon we decided that going in to do a resection of the liver was Eli's only chance. If they could get the bulk of the tumor out that would buy us time to find another chemo regimen that might work. We were aware of the complications that could arise during and after surgery but this was our only hope. We couldn't just give