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## The Growing Brilliance Of Brady's Smile

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Smiles can do so much for an individual, regardless if you are the giver or the receiver. When someone smiles at you, they perceptibly see or feel something they like about you, and that makes you feel special. The person smiling obviously has some joy they wish to share, and it is apparent in their smile. Little Brady Blaine Hinton was a smiling angel while on earth. His parents and every single individual who came in contact with him knew this by his *smile*.



Brady Blaine Hinton.  
Photo courtesy of Annie  
and Matt Hinton.

Brady was born on March 16, 2006 with a multitude of severe, complicated conditions in every major system of his body. In an effort to live a peaceful life, Brady endured seven major surgeries (including open heart surgery and a kidney transplant), almost a dozen additional invasive procedures, and spent nearly six months of his life in an intensive care unit (ICU). Through all that this little human spirit had to endure, he had an unstoppable smile that went from ear to ear. It came through at the most difficult times and put things into perspective for people. Brady and his mom and dad, Annie and Matt Hinton, expressed to people that regardless of what you're up against, there is still a reason to celebrate and that happiness is a choice.

Brady left the world on March 16, 2008, two years to the day from when he entered it. His parents are sure he his smiling down on everyone from heaven as one of God's younger saints. After hearing Brady's story, I am sure, too.

What amazes me most about Annie and Matt Hinton is how much they've accomplished in such a short time as they were coping with the acute grief of losing their two-year-old son. They made a decision to honor Brady's life and spirit by creating the non-profit organization called Brady's Smile. Their passion for their cause is palpable. One of the things that Annie and Matt said that keeps resonating through my mind is people keep telling them to "start small, as they have no experience in developing and running a non-profit organization." The Hinton's answer to this is that they have "big goals." They say, "...anything else would be an insult to our beautiful son."

Annie and Matt developed the four programs of Brady's Smile from their experience of life in the ICU with Brady. After reaching out to other ICU parents to learn of their personal experiences, the Hintons devised a list of valuable items that they include in "Brady's Smile Comfort Bags." Many items may seem very basic, but basic things are often forgotten about in an ICU—a late night snack, a notepad to keep track of the countless test results and doctor's notes, personal care items when parents don't leave the hospital for days or even weeks at a time and are unable to shower—basic things that are commonly taken for granted. The bags are customized for either the NICU (neonatal intensive care unite) or the PICU (pediatric intensive care unit), as most NICUs don't allow food. The Hintons say that this program requires a huge amount of dedication and support to be successful, but they are confident the comfort bags will help achieve their goal of making ICU life easier for families.

"Brady's Smile Blankets" is the foundation's second program and provides homemade fleece blankets to babies and children in the NICU and PICU. While Brady was in the hospital, he received a fleece blanket from an ICU nurse. Annie and Matt would bundle Brady up in it every night. He truly seemed more comfortable in that material, snuggling in it, and rubbing it against his cheek. The foundation wants to provide this comfort to other sick little ones, as well. The last two programs of Brady's Smile include "MICU," short for Music in the ICU, and "Meals by Matt and Annie." Every time the Hintons think about Brady, the two things they want their son remembered for is his beautiful smile and his love of music. The MICU program provides crib side CD players with soothing music that is exceptionally soothing. The "Meals by Matt and Annie" program provides monthly homemade meals to the parents, families, and caregivers of children in the ICU. Matt and Annie know firsthand how important it is for parents to stay healthy so they can be there for their child.

By visiting the Brady's Smile Web site at [www.bradyssmile.org](http://www.bradyssmile.org) , you can learn more about their programs and how to help. The average cost of a comfort bag is \$7.00 - \$10.00, so even a small donation will provide a bit of comfort and ease to the exhausted parents of a very sick child. Brady's Smile has partnerships with hospitals in Connecticut and Philadelphia and is working tirelessly to include more in that list. Annie and Matt's passion, fueled by their enduring love for their son, drives them to do big things for little ones in need.

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*Amy Elizabeth Alexander, an EP contributing editor, currently lives in Upstate New York, next door to the horse farm on which she was raised. She's enjoyed living all over the country but says there is no place like home! Over the last few years, she has begun inspirational speaking, which she truly enjoys and has also written her first memoir entitled, Life At Breakneck Speed. If you'd like to read more about Amy and her non-profit foundation, check out her Web site at [www.spinaltimes.org](http://www.spinaltimes.org) .*

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