

Boy saved when friend of family sees the big picture

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Photo evidence of tumors led to removal of eye

It's hard to keep up with 2-year-old Jake.

He runs around the Moore family Cougar Gulch home, quick to share his toys and show off his dad's elk antlers to visitors.

He launches a small basketball through a kid-sized hoop.

After cheering for himself, he picks up the ball and says, "You try it."

"He's a special boy," says his dad, Jason Moore. "He's active and very intelligent for his age."

To an outsider, it appears that Jake is unaware he's missing his right eye. It was surgically removed Nov. 29.

Like many proud parents, Jason and Shannon Moore keep photo albums of their sons, 2-year-old Jake and 8-week-old Jared.

Each picture of Jake shows a happy, playful child.

Last month, a friend was bothered by the tiniest detail that reoccurred in a few snapshots. She noticed Jake's right eye reflected white in some photos taken with a flash.

"She used to work for an eye doctor," Jason says. "She said we needed to have it looked at."

Shannon took Jake to an optometrist, whose "face just dropped" as he examined the boy.

He urged the parents to take Jake to Seattle for immediate treatment.

"It's crazy how one day life is normal and the next is upside down," Jason says.

Jake's retinoblastoma was diagnosed on a Friday.

The parents spent the weekend researching the eye cancer on the Internet.

One in 20,000 children suffer from retinoblastoma, according to the American Optometrics Association. Left untreated, it is almost always fatal. With early diagnosis and aggressive treatment, the survival rate is over 90 percent.



Courtesy photo

This photo of Jake Moore, taken about a month ago, shows an unusual white reflection in the boy's right eye, while the normal "red-eye" effect is visible in his left eye. A family friend noticed the photo and urged Jake's parents to have his eyes examined. The boy's right eye was removed Nov. 29 after a pair of cancerous tumors were diagnosed.

"We were terrified about what we were up against," Jason says. "We were a wreck and he was sensing that. We decided to be strong."

The Moores faced their most difficult decision -- whether to have their son's eye removed or attempt to save it. Jake had two advanced tumors in his right eye, but his vision in the eye was still good.

A couple of doctors said there was a 30 percent chance they could save the eye by freezing the tumors through a "cold laser" procedure.

But the tumors were advanced to the point that Jake would have to undergo intense chemotherapy and radiation if he kept the eye. There was also a chance that the procedure could damage his vision, anyway.

Removal of the eye would reduce the chance of the cancer coming back.

The parents decided the odds were greater that Jake would be cancer-free if the eye was removed.

"We ended up having it done at Deaconess Medical Center in Spokane," Jason says.

Jake was on his feet and himself again in a few days.

"He does grieve for the eye," Jason said. "He knows it's missing and says he's sad. We're still trying to figure out how to explain it to him."

Shannon flips through a photo album. In most photos Jake looks normal. But several show the whitish-green reflection where there should be the normal red-eye.

"It seems so obvious when we know what to look for," she says.

But Jason doesn't want others parents to rely on photographs.

He said parents should know about an early diagnosis program championed by former president Jimmy Carter. Under the InfantSEE program, participating optometrists conduct free eye exams to look for retinoblastoma, amblyopia (sometimes called lazy eye), and nearsightedness.

Children ages 6 months to 1 year qualify for the program, which started last summer.

Despite Jake's skill with the mini-basketball, Jason says Jake still has a way to go to adjust to having one eye.

"He bumps into things and trips," Jason said. "He has no depth perception. They say he will learn it."

Doctors think they got all of the cancer.

"As of now, there's no chemo, but it's hard to breathe easy," Jason said.

It will be another six to eight weeks for genetic tests to see if Jake is susceptible to other cancers. There's always a chance the cancer will return in the other eye.

Jake and baby Jared will both have eye examinations every three months until they are 5 years old.

Jake will have to grow up with safety glasses to protect his remaining eye.

He will also go through a series of prosthetics as he grows.

The Jake Moore Fund is set up at Washington Trust Bank in Coeur d'Alene to help offset the family's ongoing medical expenses. Contributions can be made at any Washington Trust branch.