



Appleton
Fox Cities
Wisconsin

October 27, 2008

ViewFinder: Appleton parents share daughter's battle with brain cancer

By *M.P. King*

Post-Crescent photojournalist

One of little Hailey Meltz's doctors thinks the volume of her inoperable brain tumor has decreased by 20 percent. Hailey has also gained some much-needed weight. Her parents, Brian and Shannon Meltz of Appleton, share a guarded optimism.

<http://www.postcrescent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080325/APC0803/80221182> target="new">**Slideshow:** Hailey Meltz still fighting

They know that 2-year-old Hailey, at just 22.2 pounds, is still substantially underweight. They know that the tumor, while perhaps a bit smaller, is still there.

They're in for the long haul. The saying "it's a marathon, not a sprint" takes on a whole new meaning.

"There's no end in sight," Shannon says. "That's the part where it gets difficult."

To keep up the fight against Hailey's cancer, called pediatric low-grade astrocytoma, the Meltzes have been making the two-hour drive to weekly chemotherapy appointments in the special procedures clinic at the American Family Children's Hospital in Madison.

There, she receives a chemotherapy treatment through a port in her chest. The port is an implanted device that includes a catheter, making it easier to draw blood and give direct injections of medicine into the bloodstream.

Brian says that it's the preparations for the treatments — sticking needles into Hailey's port and pulling sticky medical tape from her skin — that are the most challenging parts of the day.

Scared and crying, Hailey sits restlessly, usually on Shannon's lap. Brian and Shannon restrain her and try to calm her so a nurse can prepare Hailey for the treatment.

"You can hear in her voice and in her cries and seeing her face, how distressed she is," Brian says. "She looks at you like, 'Why are you letting this happen to me?'"

"I don't envision a moment where I'll ever get used to that. That's the thing that tears the most at me.

"Can we maintain this? Yes. We will, because we have to. We have no choice."

Once the drugs begin dripping through the IV, Brian and Shannon can get back to keeping Hailey happy. For Hailey, the ensuing hours are spent as a normal child — coloring, watching "The Wiggles" on DVD, and playing peek-a-boo with Dad — except for the fact that she's tethered to bags of powerful medicine.

The Meltzes wait an hour once the treatment is over to make sure Hailey doesn't have any severe reactions to the drugs. At home, Brian and Shannon will expect Hailey to have a few days of nausea, vomiting and decreased appetite — side effects that make Hailey's weight deficiency even harder to deal with.

"You worry about things like organ function and brain development and the fragileness of her body," Brian says. "She's skin and bones and muscle, but no fat."

Meanwhile, the Meltzes focus on what they can control. They are helping raise money for the PLGA Foundation, which hopes to fund a multimillion-dollar, multi-institutional study of the specific type of tumor afflicting Hailey.

Brian estimates the family has raised well over \$30,000. He and Shannon say they are very appreciative and proud, but realize much more needs to be done.
