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# Family finds silver lining among clouds

## Despite financial, medical setbacks, San Diego couple enjoying season of miracles

By Pam Kragen (/staff/pam-kragen/) 8:03 a.m. Dec. 20, 2014



Taisei Takayanagi, 8, smiles as he plays the keyboard with his parents Hattie and Ty Takayanagi at their Carmel Mountain Ranch home. Taisei hit his head after he fell out of his booster seat when he was 10 months old and caused severe brain damage. He hasn't been able to walk or talk since. — *K.C. Alfred*

From the outside, things may seem bleak for Ty and Hatsuho Takayanagi.

Since Ty was laid off from his job of 20 years last spring, the Carmel Mountain Ranch couple have depleted their savings and are struggling to cover the medical bills for their severely disabled 8-year-old son, Taisei.

But the Takayanagis greet visitors with a smile and say they're living in a season of miracles. Although doctors warned them Taisei would never have a normal life, they see signs of progress every day. And their joy has been compounded since Thanksgiving, when a local charity surprised them with a handicapped-accessible van, as well as a pile of Christmas presents for Taisei and his 4-year-old sister, Hana.

Their positivity is an inspiration to Linda Van Kessler, who with her husband, Charles, cofounded the Encinitas nonprofit Passion 4 K.I.D.S. (http://passion4kids.org/meet_taisei.html) (short for "kids in desperate situations").

"They never give up, they never lose hope. They're the most resilient people in the world," Van Kessler said. "I'm humbled to be around them. When you think you're having a bad day, you see how they're coping with life and it puts things in perspective."

The Takayanagis lived a storybook life until the day of Taisei's life-changing accident in 2007. Ty, who was born and raised in Los Angeles, went to work after college in the products marketing division for Sony Corp. That job took him to Tokyo in the early 1990s, where he met his future wife, and in 2000 Sony led them to North County, where he worked at in the company's computer division in Rancho Bernardo. Six years later, the couple welcomed their first child, Taisei.

One morning while Hatsuho was clearing the breakfast dishes, 10-month-old Taisei kicked his foot hard against the table leg and tumbled from his booster seat. He hit the right side of his head against a sharp corner on the wood chair and passed out. Flown by helicopter to Rady Children's Hospital, he had brain surgery and spent six weeks in the ICU. A neurologist told the couple their son had suffered severe brain damage and would never walk or speak again. He couldn't hold up his head, couldn't control the trunk of his body, had to be fed through a tube in his abdomen and was virtually blind.

"It just devastated us," said Ty, 45. "Up until then, we had lived a pretty normal life. Then everything changed overnight."

But another doctor offered the couple a window of hope. "He said 'brains are a miraculous part of the body. They can be improved, if you just believe in yourself,' " Ty said.

After a period of grieving, Hatsuho said she became determined to heal her son. She devoted herself full-time to his care, educated herself on brain injuries and consulted with specialists in both traditional and alternative medicine. The couple used their savings to cover their portion of the $150,000 hospital bill, then paid out of pocket for holistic treatments in cranial massage, neurofeedback, oxygen therapy and reflex training. They read to Taisei daily to teach vocabulary words and Hatsuho spent all day, every day taking him to school, doctor appointments and doing therapy at home.

His progress has been glacially slow, but they are thrilled with how far he has come. Today, Taisei can sit up without support, grasp items and play a keyboard with his right hand and swallow a few ounces of food. He responds with a shout to words like piano, toy and cheese, and he clearly expresses emotions — particularly laughter, lots of laughter.

"He's a very happy boy and he has a great personality," Ty said.

Money was tight, but they were getting by. Then in April, Sony closed its Rancho Bernardo division, laying off Ty and more than 300 others. Ty, Hatsuho and Hana were able to file for COBRA coverage, but their premiums have tripled since April. Taisei is insured through Medi-Cal, though it covers only a limited number of physical, occupational and feeding therapy visits and pays for only some of his medical supplies.

The family resisted asking for outside help until one day in early November Hatsuho saw a TV report about "Baby" Izaiah Wallis, the disabled Vista toddler whose family has been helped over the years by Passion 4 K.I.D.S.

She sent the charity an email, and just two weeks later the Van Kesslers showed up on the Takayanagis' porch with county Supervisor Dave Roberts, who had provided a $20,000 grant to buy the family a used lift van. The Van Kesslers brought in a brain specialist for a consultation, then last week they hosted a Christmas party where employees from Petco showered the children with gifts.

Hatsuho, 43, said she's been overwhelmed with the community's generosity and can ask for nothing more. But Van Kessler said she has set up a fund through passion4kids.org to help get the family back on their feet. She'd like to raise money to cover their mortgage payments for a year, and she'd like to help with the $8,550 tuition to a reflex therapy camp Jan. 16-25 at the Bahia Hotel. The family attended the Masgutova camp last year and credit it for many of Taisei's recent improvements.

Ty said he and his wife know their son will never fully recover, but they're committed to helping him reach his full potential.

"We want him to be normal and play baseball and soccer like any ordinary boy," he said. "Every bit of progress we make gives us the courage to move on."

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