A Brother's Love

Hunter Gandee helped his brother in the most unusual way.

By Inez Prieto

Hunter Gandee carried his brother 57 miles to raise awareness for a disorder.

Imagine walking 57 miles. Sounds tough, doesn't it? Now imagine walking that distance while carrying your kid brother on your back. That's what 14-year-old Hunter Gandee did! Why? He wanted to bring awareness to a disorder that his brother suffers from.

Hunter's younger brother, Braden, was born with cerebral palsy. This is a muscle disorder that makes walking extremely difficult. Braden has to use leg braces, a power chair, or a walker to get around. The clunky gear often slows him down, and makes it difficult for him to play with other kids.

Taking Action

For years, Hunter watched Braden struggle. He was frustrated that more experts weren't turning their attention to cerebral palsy, and improving equipment for people who were affected by the disorder. He was also surprised to learn that very few people know about the disorder.

That's when Hunter came up with an unusual idea. He would carry Braden from his elementary school to a children's rehabilitation center, where Braden had a surgery scheduled. The journey would span 57 miles and take three days. "My goal was to attract attention and raise awareness for the disorder," said Hunter. "I wanted to show people the struggles that Braden has to go through daily."

The Long Journey

The journey kicked off on a Friday at Braden's elementary school in Lambertville, Michigan. More than 500 students showed up to support the brothers. Hunter was shocked by the attendance.

Braden Gandee must rely on walkers and other devices to get around.

"At first, I just wanted to get my friends involved," he said. "I had no idea it would be this big."

To make the long journey easier, 8-year-old Braden was secured to Hunter's back with a harness. In addition, rest stops were set up every three miles. There, physical therapists would examine the boys and stretch out their muscles.

Although the rest stops helped reduce fatigue, Hunter still felt a great deal of physical discomfort.

"I collapsed at the end of the second day because I was so tired," said Hunter. "My legs

were so sore but my friends, who were walking alongside me, picked me up."

The next day, with his friends cheering him on, Hunter was able to complete the journey.

The End of the Road

When Hunter and Braden arrived at the rehabilitation center, they were greeted by a huge crowd. News crews were also there to film the event—and more importantly—to explain to the public why Hunter was doing this. It seemed as if Hunter had succeeded in getting attention and raising awareness for the disorder.

"The walk was long and hard," he said, but worth it.

Braden couldn't be happier as well. "I think Hunter's crazy for doing this," he laughed. "But I really appreciate it."

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