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A SEAL's Journey: Never Give Up

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A SEAL's Journey: Never Give Up

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He's a hero.

He has a depth of spirit, he has his grandfather's (Pops) "fire and spit" and an awful lot of his grandmother's grit and determination. He also carries a good dose of loyalty and a zest for life. And I think there was a reason why this young man was born on June 6 - the anniversary of one of the greatest battles the world has ever seen: he would fight his own battles.

Elliott John (his Pops' Barney's middle name was John) is a Navy SEAL. Well, officially he has now served his tour in the Navy. But the way I figure it, once a SEAL, always a SEAL. As he once explained it to me (the cleaned up this version) "we're the baddest of the bad." He served SEAL team 5 – and was a combat medic and a sniper. He was good – darn good.

In November 2006, Elliott and his team were in the Al-Anbar province of Iraq. He was serving as a sniper overwatch for a Marine patrol when he was fragged by a grenade. When his teammates evacuated him to a nearby quick reaction force vehicle, one of those darn IED's (improvised explosive device) exploded. He was wounded again. Twice in

one day.

Among his injuries, his left leg had two massive fractures, his arm was broken, and he lost most of his blood. He suffered traumatic brain injury and was burned over 60 percent of his body from the phosphorus in the bomb.

He would remain in a coma for four weeks. He had no recollection of being taken to the local combat hospital. No memory of the flight to Landstuhl, Germany where he would be stabilized for transport back to the states. No memory of being airlifted to Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio. He woke up in Texas, surrounded by family.

What he woke up to was a reality filled with pain, healing, surgeries, more pain, and more healing. Never quit.

He would undergo more than 60 surgeries. He had skin grafts to his hands and legs. Reconstruction and repairs to his left leg and right arm. Never quit.

Surgeries. Infections. Then the decision no one wanted to think about. His leg was so badly damaged he helped make the decision to amputate. Still more surgeries, more setbacks. Never give up.

Along the way, he had a “SEAL team” of his own here in Dexter – praying for him. Men and women who only remember him as a young boy with a big grin – the apple of his grandparents’ hearts – they were his team. They prayed for him, they remembered him.

His other SEAL team was there, too. These tall, athletic



young men stood by Elliott no matter what. They were there for him. They encouraged, they prodded, they teased, they fought for him. I have seen them – in their dress blues – pick him up in his wheel chair and carry him lovingly up a hill to his sister’s grave site. They would do anything for him. That’s what family does. They, too are my heroes.

Never give up.

In November 2009, he showed the world he still had the grit and determination – as if anyone doubted. He flew to Chicago, and thanks to some help from U.S. Congressman Jo Ann Emerson (who cut the red tape), he climbed all 103 flights of stairs to the top of the Willis Tower (formerly named Sears Tower). He had a team of SEAL brothers there then, too, as well as his dad, brother, older sister and three nephews.

And he had a team of prayer SEALS in Dexter, too. The women in Verna Godwin's Sunday School Class at the First United Methodist Church prayed for him every step of that incredible journey.

Never give up.

Never, ever give up.

Now, this weekend before his birthday he marked another milestone. On Sunday morning he completed a marathon on an adaptive bike. Along with 32,000 runners and 65,000 spectators, Elliott completed the Rock 'n Roll Marathon in San Diego. His dad was there. His sister was there and running her first race. His wife was there, and those SEAL brothers, too.

Never give up.

He said it himself for a Navy magazine a few years ago: "Don't ever, ever, ever give up hope because there is a light at the end of the tunnel. No matter how far, dark, and dismal it may appear at times, it is there. You just have to have a little bit (no, maybe a WHOLE LOT) of patience and faith in yourself. You alone will have to get up and take it for yourself.

He's my hero. Happy birthday, big boy!

Elliott John Miller is the son of former Dexter resident Joe Miller, the nephew of SMT editor Annabeth Miller, and the grandson of the late Barney and Marie Miller of Dexter. Elliott and his wife April are expecting their first child in September, giving the writer her fourth great nephew.

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