

# A CHRISTMAS STORY

By LARRY STEIDLE  
*Of The Beacon*

**DEPOE BAY**—Meet Tatum and Sophia Boyer of Lincoln Beach, now aged four and three years old. If you're lucky enough to visit them at the home of their parents, Brian and Laura, you'll see two young girls at play, laughing, sharing inside family jokes, interacting with their parents and older siblings Everett and Abigail and horsing around with their massive albino St. Bernard, Auggie.

But if you look beneath the surface, you'll find that Tatum and Sophia suffer from a rare genetic disorder that most of us have never heard of before. Their condition is known as Alpha I Antitrypsin Deficiency, Alpha I being the short version. The condition often leads to liver and lung failure, and a number of cancers can result as spinoffs of the primary disorder.

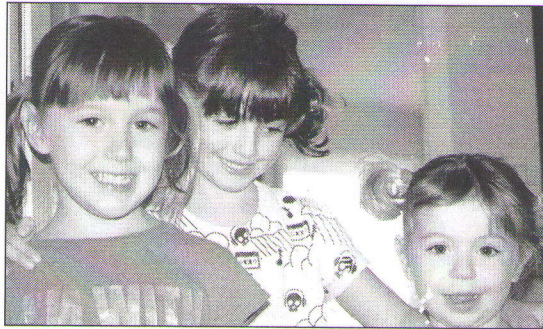
Alpha I hit Sophia first. She underwent a liver transplant on Christmas Eve 2006 by pediatric transplant specialists in Seattle. By January 2008, she was battling rejection of her new liver and was hospitalized from March until June. Because the

fight against rejection is fought by suppressing the body's auto-immune system, her parents had to don full surgical garb to be with her in her quarantined room. She has been home since then but must use five potent drugs daily to continue the fight. Right now, she is stable—not better but no worse.

Meanwhile, Tatum recently underwent tests in Seattle. When the results are in, the Boyers expect her to be reassessed at Stage 3, time for a liver transplant of her own. Stage 4 is terminal. She is also currently experiencing lung problems, asthma and a general shortness of breath. As the lung problems are an extension of a diseased liver, Sophia does not have that trouble because she got a new liver.

The girls' life-threatening conditions exact a heavy toll on Brian and Laura. Brian says he looks to Laura to give him strength. He readily admits that he is not equipped to cope with his daughters' conditions. There is no shame in that.

To date, Sophia's medical tab is around two million dollars, and the family's insurance cap of \$100,000 was eclipsed a long time ago. The Boyers are now



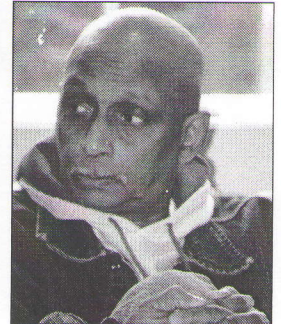
**THREE SISTERS** — Tatum, Abigail, and Sophia Boyer put on happy faces for the camera at their Lincoln Beach home. Abigail does not have Alpha I, but is a carrier

enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan, but exactly what OHP will or will not pay for is not clear at this time. The illnesses have severely crippled the Boyers from an economic standpoint that it is now a constant struggle simply to put food on the table and keep the utilities on. They are in desperate need of financial assistance.

Several plans to raise money are in the works. After the first of the year, Depoe Bay Mayor Jim White plans to take the point on fundraising efforts by any means possible,

including the establishment of a tax-exempt status to accept cash donations. Those interested in helping right now can make gifts of up to \$10,000 per year by making a deposit into the Boyer Medical Fund, established at the Lincoln City branch of Bank of America. You can donate at other B of A branches by referencing the account number, 485004954036.

The holiday season ushers in a sense of joy, hope and a lifting of the spirit to more noble causes than any other time of year, even in these troubled



**TO THE RESCUE** — Depoe Bay Mayor Jim White will head the fundraising efforts for the Boyers after the first of the year. Photos by Eric Messersmith

times. If you can find it in your heart, please help the Boyers any way you can this year. Tatum and Sophia are counting on you.

*To learn more about Alpha I, its effect on children, organ donation and updates on Sophia and Tatum, visit these websites: [www.alpha1kids.org](http://www.alpha1kids.org), [www.alpha1.org](http://www.alpha1.org), [www.donatelifenw.org](http://www.donatelifenw.org), [www.caringbridge.org/visit/sophiabayer](http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/sophiabayer).*