

People

'HE'S A MIRACLE'

Bret Baier's son Paul needed two open-heart surgeries before he was 1. The Fox News anchor talks about pulling through a terrifying year **BY LIZA HAMM**

Paul Baier's first full day began blissfully. On June 29, 2007, friends and family arrived at a Washington, D.C., hospital and cooed whenever the newborn son of Fox News anchor Bret Baier yawned. They joked about how soon he'd play golf like his dad and decided he would grow up to be a ladies' man. "We were on cloud nine," Baier recalls. Then a nurse noticed Paul was a little pale. About 45 minutes later, after doctors had whisked the 6-lb. 12-oz. baby away for tests, everything changed. "It was the highest of the highs to the lowest of the lows," Baier says. His wife, Amy, explains: "He had five major things wrong with his heart. They made it very clear there was a chance we wouldn't be bringing this baby home."

Paul's condition—a hole in his heart, unusual coronary arteries, a pinched aorta and his main arteries switched around—caused the oxygen level in his blood to be dangerously low. Without surgery he wouldn't survive. Just 12 days after his birth, Paul endured his first open-heart operation, a five-hour procedure that his cardiac sur-



"We call him the ambassador because he waves at everybody," says Bret (at home in Washington, D.C.) about his son.



"Life is filled with a lot of doctor's appointments," says Amy. "But there's a lot of joy in between."



geon Dr. Richard Jonas calls "one of the top five most-difficult surgeries I've ever done" in his 25-year career. "The fact that a surgeon can operate on a walnut-sized heart boggles my mind," says Baier.

So does Paul's remarkable recovery. Now 19 months old, the toddler loves boogying to Michael Jackson's

Thriller and wreaking havoc with his toys. Having survived two open-heart operations and two angioplasties, Paul "always has a smile, is extremely active and *all boy*," says Baier, 38, who heads up the network's *Special Report* program.

But to arrive at this moment, Paul and his parents, who live in a spacious apartment in

D.C., became Intensive Care veterans. "We didn't even know where the Children's Hospital was, prior to this," says Baier. "Now I can walk there blindfolded and backwards." A couple of rituals helped them cope. Amy, 30, made sure that a fam-



Having been Chief White House Correspondent, Baier recently took over the nightly *Special Report* program.

ily member was always available to hold Paul during visiting hours. "I believed if we loved him enough," she says, "it would be part of the healing process." For Bret, reaching out to others made a difference. "Being back at work was extremely hard," he recalls. "I had to focus on the story of the day but kept drifting back to the image of Paul hooked up to all the machines." He started sending e-mails updating Paul's status, sharing his own mental state and asking for prayers. "Somebody at Fox sent the e-mail to a priest at the Vatican, who said a prayer in St. Peter's," Baier says. "We were getting hundreds of responses. I would read them to Amy and tear up." President Bush called the family on the day of Paul's first surgery; Bush's Press Secretary at the time, the late Tony Snow, e-mailed every day.

Last August the Baiers, and Amy's parents, donated \$1 million to the Children's National Medical Center to give back to the hospital that saved their son and raise awareness. (Although Paul's situation is exceedingly rare, some form of congenital heart defect will affect roughly 1 out of every 100 children.) "We really have found our cause," says Baier.

Because Paul's heart is still growing, he'll undergo at least 2 more surgeries within the next 10 years. Still, Dr. Jonas says, "he has every opportunity to do what a normal kid would do." Right now that means making mischief at home. "When Paul's doing something he knows he shouldn't, he looks at us and says, 'No, no, no!' with a big smile," says Baier. But a scolding doesn't seem likely. Says his proud dad: "He's reminded us how fragile life really is." ●