

Surgeons save little boy's axed finger

By OSKAR ALLEY and KAREN HOWARD

TWO-YEAR-OLD Dannevirke boy Ryan Walker is tough — he can raise a smile only days after his big brother severed one of his fingers in a gruesome accident.

Ryan still has all his digits because of quick work by his mother, Cherie, and Hutt Hospital's plastic surgery team.

Big brother Braden, 7, severed one of Ryan's fingers with an axe at the family home on Wednesday.

But thanks to the latest technology he is expected to make a full recovery.

Left-handed Ryan had his left index finger severed and two others were left "half-dangling".

Braden was hoping to impress his parents by chopping some wood to help stoke the fire at their home in Dannevirke. He used an axe kept hidden in a shed. Ryan, as the keen baby brother, may have been helping Braden put wood on the chopping block when the axe fell.

Ms Walker, who had checked on the boys 10 minutes earlier, said she knew something was wrong when she heard screaming and shouting.

"Braden came running in saying Ryan had been cut and then in he came. He was missing a finger so the first thing I did was go and find the finger . . . it hadn't gone far, it was still by the chopping block."

Ms Walker, the mother of four boys, called an ambulance and put Ryan's severed finger in the fridge, wrapped in a cold, wet cloth.

Ryan was taken to Palmerston North Hospital and then transferred to Hutt Hospital, where he had emergency plastic surgery at 9pm.

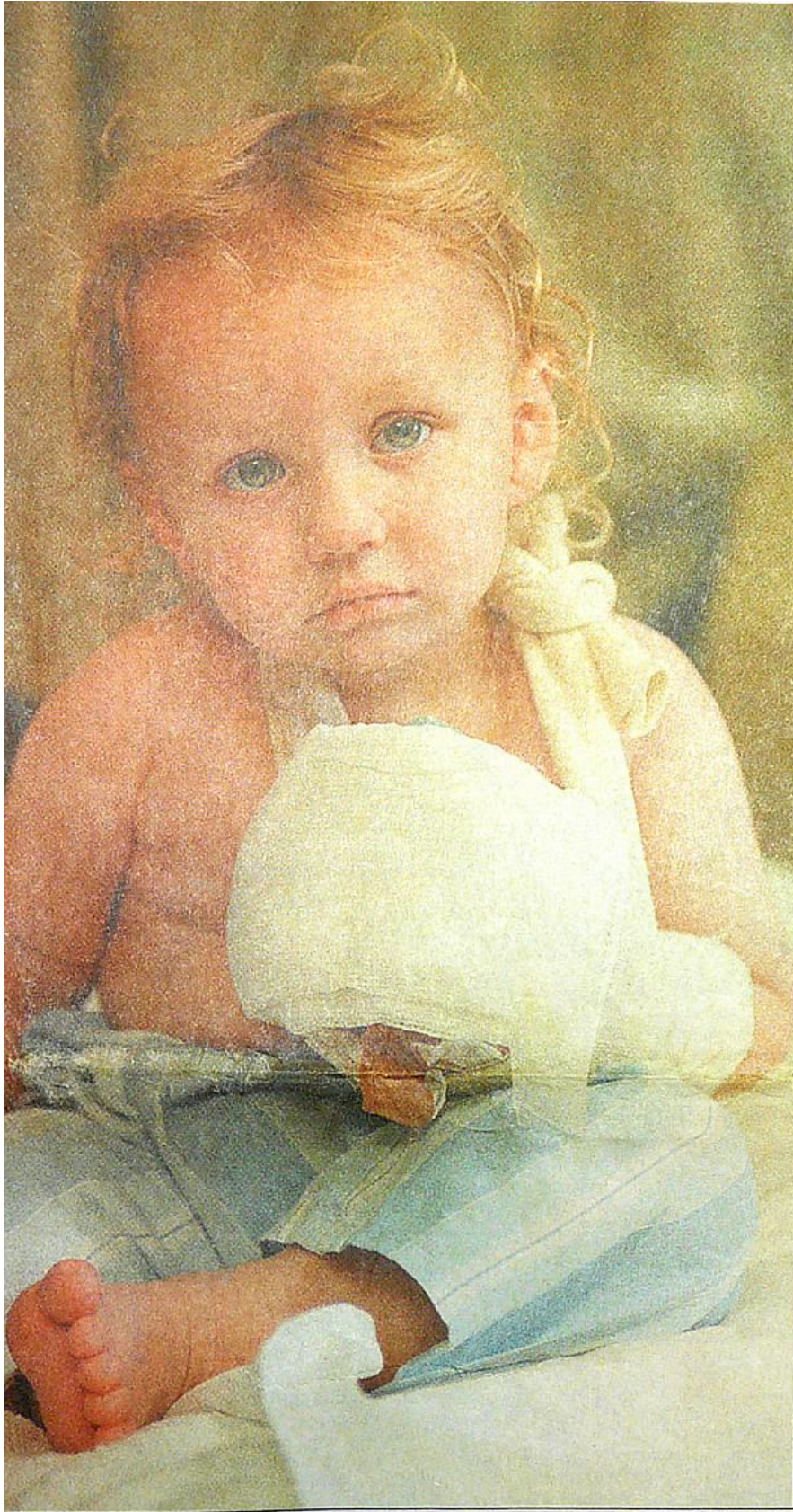
Senior registrar Charles Davis and Regu Villanayer spent five hours using microscopic surgery to repair the damage.

Dr Davis said the tendons on the two dangling fingers were repaired and wires were inserted into the fingers. Using a microscope that magnified Ryan's hand, the surgeons reattached his index finger, using thread thinner than a human hair to rejoin the surrounding arteries.

Ryan is believed to be one of the youngest children in New Zealand to successfully have a finger re-attached using the surgery.

The prognosis? "Well Ryan doesn't smoke [which can restrict the flow of oxygen-carrying blood to the fingers] so we're expecting a complete recovery," Dr Davis said.

Ms Walker said she was delighted. "When the doctors came out of surgery and said it went well I was just so relieved. I didn't want Ryan with that sort of injury at his age."



Ryan recovers in Hutt Hospital

ANTHONY PHELPS